



Power Tightly Grabbed in Hand: Saddam Hussein's Position in Middle East Politics, His International Profile, and the Three Factors that Supported Him Remain in Power

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Abstract. Saddam Hussein would no doubt be one of the most brutal dictators in the modern era by cold-heartedly allowing executions of innocent people and starting wars in order to enhance his presidency and his full control in power. Although he did so many things to be condemned, he surely gained a lot of supporters for his contributions to Iraq. What has intrigued the author of this article to write on, is the question of how Saddam Hussein remained in power after he got to become the absolute political leader of Iraq. To do this, it will have a discussion on the relative importance of the three factors, and some other discussions with a background around the topic beforehand. Both traditional politics and modern political science analyze him as a figure to be an Iraqi politician that violates the universal value and basic rules of humanity. Through a comparison between a western scholar's profile and his native followers, It is argued that his support from those Sunni Arabs is only temporal and limited, his doom that resulted from his violation of human rights and universal human values is inevitable. The profile that western scholars made upon him was a bit ideological, however, the support he gained to consolidate his authority was far more blinded.

Keywords: Saddam Hussein · Iraq · Dictatorship · Kleptocracy

1 Introduction

Saddam Hussein was understood as a total villain in the post-war international relationship, the trend of anti-terrorism, and middle-east geopolitics. That picture of him was not only due to the Iran-Iraq War and Gulf War but also because his crimes were revealed by the international world. His numerous human rights abuses, arbitrary killings, and bloody nature ask for a background understanding of the international image of Saddam Hussein. Born on April 28th, 1935, Saddam Hussein had been a notoriously well-known political leader, and when people talked about him, the terms “tyrant” and “terrorism” are very easily heard. And Saddam Hussein clearly made himself remarkable by making all sorts of acts. Saddam Hussein was the president of Iraq from 16 July 1979 until 9 April 200 and died by capital punishment in 2006 according to the Execution of Saddam Hussein [1]. However, even though the general comments on Saddam are negative,

Saddam still gains positive comments and a great number of supporters, that when he got executed, several protests were held against execution [2]. Saddam Hussein is no doubt a controversial person. It is also no doubt that he is a person with a lot of wise strategies and strong abilities [3, 4]. It could be seen in many areas, but this article will analyze one of the most significant stages of his life, which is, how he got his power and remained absolute power in his hands. Becoming a dictator is not an easy thing, so it is very worth investigating how Saddam successfully became one. Also, the other reason for the significance of the article is that throughout history even till now, similar things can be seen. It is not limited to the political leader of a whole country, superior power can be seen everywhere, not only the power of controlling a nation but also the power of controlling an organization. The person who wants to remain in his/her power needs to do grounded work to enhance his/her status. And the work done, is defined as pillars of support in politics. By doing this article, it can somehow create a reflection for people of similar will to remain in absolute power.

Hussein was among the most condemned figures by post-war scholars. Saddam Hussein has been one of the most condemned figures by post-war scholars. Most scholars and media certainly condemn him for his brutal killings of innocent people or any possible threats. For instance, Saddam Hussein executed his son-in-law and second cousin Hussein Kamel al-Majid after betrayed Saddam Hussein for years. Saddam's other family members were also isolated from "powerful, high-profile political positions" and were kept away from public attention, also a means that Saddam Hussein used to avoid any threat to his political position from within his family. However, economically he had been making a positive influence on Iraq in general. Also in the education of females and other areas, he had made positive contributions, which will be deeper talked about in the following paragraphs.

Despite those possible praises for him, What might be the most influential description for him comes from John F. Burns who criticizes that he suppressed several violent and suppressing movements, particularly Shi'a and Kurdish movements which sought to overthrow the government or gain independence, respectively, and maintained power during the Iran- Iraq War and the Gulf War. He ran a repressive authoritarian government, which several analysts have described as totalitarian, although the applicability of that label has been contested. Saddam's rule was marked by numerous human rights cases of abuse, which according to western scholars, include an estimated 250,000 arbitrary killings and bloody invasions of neighboring Iran and Kuwait [5]. Even if modern scholars said that what had been initiated by the United States of America is an invasion, the crimes of Saddam's authority and his government were still tremendous. All he has done is depicted in the narrative of the triumph of democracy. As most scholars held that in the year 2003, a coalition if it has to be bearing a more justified name rather than a pseudo-United Nations title, led by the United States invaded Iraq to depose Saddam. The former United States President George W. Bush and the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair erroneously, if to say an error can be easily forgotten in the name of fighting for freedom, accused Iraq of possessing dangerous weapons of mass destruction and having ties to al-Qaeda. It is then, through the outcome of the invasion, Saddam's Ba'ath party was disbanded and the country's first democratic elections were held [6]. The war is unjust since its excuse is manipulated and false. There is no other title but

an unjust war and there is no defense for Saddam either. To use the expression "first democratic elections", the confidence and feelings of justice from the western world are both proud and arrogant. The violent tyranny of Saddam's figure provided all that happened reasons.

So this article will first give the literature review on challenges dictators face, Iraq as a modern country, the introduction of the Ba'ath party, and the three factors relatively. Then It will make a cross-over discussion on two questions: of the three factors in his maintenance of power, which is more important and which is more controversial in modern political correctness as well as by his appropriateness often demonized by western scholars, are there some possible misunderstandings in the narrative of Hussein? Then finally It will wrap up the article with a conclusion through some comparative discussions. It is argued that Although Saddam surely did some good things for the country, he is more famous for his brutal killing of party members and other people. His support from those Sunni Arabs is only temporal and limited, his doom that resulted from his violation of human rights and universal human values is inevitable. The profile that western scholars made upon him was a bit ideological, however, the support he gained to consolidate his authority was far more blinded.

2 The Western Schools' Narratives

As Saddam Hussein is well-known as a brutal dictator, there should be some introductions about the dictator as a kind of political leader. So a dictator is generally defined as "a political leader who possesses absolute power" [7]. It means that a dictator would not allow any other ones to own the power, and a dictator has to have the security of power. There are several characteristics of modern dictators that they have in common. One is that they usually suspend elections and civil liberties. Naturally, as they will keep their power and highest position as long as possible, some dictators may even change the election policy to extend their time length of the presidency. Another major characteristic is that they tend to repress their political opponents. This is also very natural because other political opponents could be one of the biggest threats to their presidency. After all, if their political opponents are also experts in gaining people's attention and support, the dictator would easily lose his.

The political system or structure is certainly the key to whether a person can become a dictator in the modern era. Dictatorships are often seen in states with a dominant party [8]. For instance, Iraq before Saddam was already controlled by a single party, which was the Ba'ath party [8]. It would be much easier and much more possible to dominate the power. And adversely, that is the reason why we never see dictatorship in America, because it would not exist if the country's politics is separated into two parties. There are several means that dictators commonly use as well, which will be talked about later on as there is a high repetition of which Saddam Hussein adopted. There is a form of dictatorship that is called benevolent dictatorship, which is more positive. Instead of using the power in an abusive way, benevolent dictators are using their authoritarian power to do good to their people and it usually maximizes efficiency. However, although Saddam had surely done severally good things during his presidency, he generally seemed like a brutal tyrant and used his political power just for his subjective

interests. The author identifies that the most threatening factors to a dictator would most probably be his political opponents and his people, the dictators have to be very discrete about the actions of these people, even if they have to do things against humanity like killing.

Modern Iraq generally has a very chaotic and rather turbulent history. After World War I, Iraq was “passed from the failing Ottoman Empire to British control”, and the Kingdom of Iraq was “established under the British Mandate in 1932”. “In the 14 July Revolution of 1958, the king was deposed and the Republic of Iraq was declared”. After the Republic of Iraq was established, the Ba’ath party started a coup and finally took power in 1968. Saddam Hussein took power in 1979 and maintained his presidency until 2003 during the American invasion of Iraq. And Saddam Hussein, naturally, is part of the Ba’ath party. The Ba’ath party in Iraq is called the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party founded in 1951 by Fuad al-Rikabi. It had been underground from 1963 to 1968 but took the power of the Republic of Iraq from 1968 to 2003, including Saddam’s presidency. After the 2003’s American invasion of Iraq to tackle Saddam’s policies, a new Iraqi government was established.

3 Ba’ath Party Purge, Utilization of Secret Police, and Kleptocracy

Now there are three factors that this article is going to mention, the three factors that contribute most to Saddam Hussein’s remaining in power for more than two decades. The three factors are Ba’ath party purge, utilization of secret police, and kleptocracy. Although there are other means suggested that Saddam had also used to remain his power, those three factors were rather more prominent and major. Ba’ath party purge is a public massacre of the Iraqi Ba’ath party members on 22 July 1979, after 6 days after his arrival to the presidency of the Iraqi Public [8].

On this day, Saddam summoned all the Ba’ath party members, and some of them were called out for trumped-up charges and were taken out and killed. The public massacre act was merely supported by Saddam’s words: “There are people in this room that are opposing my leadership”. Eventually, it created a bizarre spectacle of feigned loyalty among the remaining members. The event marked the 24-year absolute power of this dictator [9]. The purge was notoriously well-known because it was a complete massacre of innocent people. But also in another way, it is very effective as well, as it is only a few days after Saddam became the president. In this way, Saddam showed his absolute power and was a life threat to anyone who had even a slight will to challenge his presidency. The timing was very well-done because the effect on the other party members would be greater as compared to times later. The second factor was the use of the secret police. The secret police were also largely used during Saddam’s presidency. To ensure that his people were in full control, secret police undercover was important. The secret police were very private, and it was entirely comprised of members of the tribe and family that are bound by blood and oath of loyalty to Saddam Hussein. Kleptocracy is defined as corrupt political leaders involving in bribery or dishonest practices, which Saddam Hussein also used. In his interpretation, he stole resources from the entire nation. He did so by nationalizing the natural resources of the whole country: for instance, oil, gold, and natural gas. Nationalization means to a dictator the full control and management rights to the economy.

Apart from what Saddam Hussein had done, western scholars profiled him in another way. That is the political psychological analysis. Political analysis proved a leader as a failure, while psychological research profiled one as a butcher with no regard for human nature. However, it is a claim that we should not look at things on the surface. Saddam surely had done brutal things such as starting the war, but on behalf of the Iraqi people, he was also doing his job as the highest political leader. If we think about the situations at that time and in that circumstance, we may be able to understand his actions [10].

4 Discussions on Saddam Hussein's Political Features

After going through very detailed information around the topic, here comes a discussion about: the three major factors in Saddam Hussein's maintenance of power, which is more important, and which is more controversial in modern political correctness? In the author's opinion, the existence of the secret police is the answer to both the questions: yes, it is believed that the use of the secret police is the most effective means of the three, and not explicitly seen in the modern era as it is very politically incorrect. The use of secret police can be seen in nearly every dictator's presidency.

As the dictators are very discrete about any new changes or any underground coup organization, for instance, the secret police are crucial to use, because it is very hard to detect who works for the secret police. In comparison, although the other two factors could be effective, one of them was just a one-time thing, and the other one could only have a great effect economically. Saddam Hussein used secret police to detect and trace the threatening political party members and allowed them to implement assassinations. People generally have immense pressure and fear with the existence of secret police around because there is seldom trust built between people. Citizens are afraid to talk about any sensitive issues about the government. They can be caught by the secret police to be investigated and questioned at any time. And naturally, in modern countries, we seldom see internationally open countries that still have secret police on the record, because as the world is more inter-connected, the form of authoritarianism and dictatorship could be heavily condemned and criticized because of its ban on personal freedom and serious violation of human rights.

However, as mentioned earlier, although Saddam had done so many things wrong, there should be a reason that he still gained a large number of supporters. Some say that Saddam had granted a lot of female rights after he got his presidency, with "females often occupying important government positions". Additionally, Saddam contributed greatly to the country's economic growth. During the 1970s when he was the secondhand commander to a weak president (Ahmed Al-Bakr), he started dozens of large projects around infrastructure construction of expressways, power lines, and social services. And because of its geographical position, the oil boom in the neighboring countries "generated garish consumption and commission billionaires" [4]. Other good things he has done are, for instance, his attention to young generations' education, making going to school compulsory, which caused a much greater number of girls and women to go to school and received an education.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has been through several comparative and detailed information about the topic of three factors that Saddam Hussein adopted during his presidency to remain his absolute dictatorship. Two main questions are involved in the understanding of Saddam Hussein and his consolidation of power. For one is that of the three factors in his maintenance of power, which is more important, and which is more controversial in modern political correctness? Another would be that by his appropriateness often demonized by western scholars, are there some possible misunderstandings in the narrative of Hussein? Although Saddam surely did some good things for the country, he is more famous for his brutal killing of party members and other people. His support from those Sunni Arabs is only temporal and limited, his doom that resulted from his violation of human rights and universal human values is inevitable. The profile that western scholars made upon him was a bit ideological, however, the support he gained to consolidate his authority was far more blinded. The maniac and illusion of power cannot in both practices and ideologies, stabilize the geopolitics of middle-east.

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