

# *Identity Contrived*

*Consistent Non-Alignment in a State's Governing Base and Promoted Identity:  
The Case of Iraq*

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*Submitted in fulfillment of requirements for the University Honors Program,  
American University  
Spring 2008  
University Honors in International Studies*

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*The fractured nature of the Iraqi state is nothing new to students of Political Science and the Middle East. Indeed, shortly before his death, King Faisal, the first king and founder of the state lamented, “my heart is full of sadness and pain because, to my mind, there is no Iraqi nation in Iraq as yet.” What has not been studied, however is that state formation in Iraq has often been based on the contradictory fact of a differential between the promoted identity of the state – be it pan-Arab, nationalistic, or Iraqi-Arab centered - with the actual power base on which the state rests. This trend, though noted throughout the Hussein era, has been portrayed as an aberration to his regime and lacking precedence, when in fact, since the revolutionary era, an irreconcilable dichotomy has been maintained between the governing base and the promoted identity of the state. In doing so, the state disenfranchised, while at the same time emboldening, traditional institutions or identities which served as an alternative basis for social identity for citizens outside the ruling-base of the state. Because of a lack of clear and maintained basis for common socialization, and the failure to form an inclusive base, the state lacked domestic legitimacy.*

## Introduction

That the “fractured” nature of the Iraqi state is not a product of the 2003 US invasion is not new to students of Political Science and the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it is a reality originating with the very establishment of the state under the Hashemite monarchy following the Treaty of Versailles. Far from being the model state, Iraq is perhaps the quintessential example of what political scientists call the ‘state-nation,’ reversing the widely-held belief that nations precede and create states.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, while admitting the country’s fragility, authors and scholars on Iraq have discussed the ruling elite’s composition and relationship to one another, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Zubaida, Sami. “The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 2 (May 2002): pp. 5-15

<sup>2</sup> See Zartman, William. “Putting Humpty-Dumpty Together Again.” in *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict*. ed. David Lake and Donald Rothchild. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press (1998): 318

promoted identity and ideology of Baghdad, in isolation. The effects of these two variables combined have not been explored to any great length.

As a result of both Gulf Wars and constant American foreign policy interest in the country, a glut of literature has developed about the Iraq, especially with an emphasis on the draconian nature of the Ba‘thist state. Explanations for Hussein’s methods of rule and the internecine violence of Iraqis have often been deflective, laying blame to Hussein’s personality and style of rule, rather than seeing Iraq as a state lacking solidarity irrespective of other factors. Concentrating on the individual of Hussein, rather than the society as a whole, might explain the predicted trajectory of a free and welcoming Iraq following an invasion by American government officials and popular opinion prior to the actual military campaign.<sup>3</sup> Other authors have emphasized American support for the autocratic regime as a causal factor in creating the disunity of Iraq today.<sup>4</sup> Further, those which discuss the history of Iraqi politics do so without either explanatory or reflective observations, and have paid little attention to analysis of the period following the revolution until the rise of Hussein, and the influence such government may have had on Iraqi society.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, domestic instability in the region (including Iraq) has been based on claims of foreign intervention.<sup>6</sup> Over all, there is little done explicitly on the nature of Iraqi politics since 1958.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example: Makiya, Kanan, “Republic of Fear,” which does not at all address sectarian cleavages within Iraq; Coughlin, Con. ”Rose, David ed. “Inside Iraq,” a collection of Essays, all are focused on the Ba‘thist, or remarkably, the early Islamic era, in explaining divisions within Iraq, there is no in depth discussion on discussing Hussein’s rule as a continuous, albeit hyperbolic, flow of Iraqi history; also, “Saddam’s Iraq,” does discuss the progression of the Iraqi state, but in a thematic progression from the perspective of sub-sections within Iraqi society, with no discussion of the ideology of the state;

<sup>4</sup> Lando, Barry “Web of Deceit,” discusses Hussein as a product of CIA intervention and business interests.

<sup>5</sup> Eppel, Michael “Iraq from Monarchy to Tyranny,” discusses the development the political development in Iraq throughout its history, discusses the power balance in the post-58 period in struct political/rationalist terms; this is also true of Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett’s “Iraq Since 1958,” which also Marr, “A Modern History of Iraq;” and Tripp, Charles, “A History of Iraq,” used at length in the paper, take this approach.

<sup>6</sup> Gause, Gregory F. “Sovereignty, Statecraft and Stability in the Middle East.” *Journal of International Affairs* 45, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 441-469

Since the 1958 Revolution, successive governments have often tried to promote a more stable national identity, with an envisioned Iraq that would bring into the fold disenfranchised populations. However, this has also been done along side more exclusive identities, often expressed in Sunni or Arab terms, which in turn disenfranchised large portions of the population. Ideologically, these proved to be contrived and unconvincing because the ruling elite continued to be of a minority, in either ideologically or in sectarian terms.

This has led, evidenced explicitly since the fall of the Ba‘thist regime in 2003, to the continuity and even development of alternative, sub-national identities, with Iraq divided into militant sectarian, tribal, and ideological factions. Clifford Geertz directly observed that in states with a weak and unconvincing history of civil politics, where the state fails to adequately provide for basic needs, “primordial attachments tend [...] to be repeatedly, in some cases almost continually, proposed and widely acclaimed as preferred bases for the demarcation of autonomous political units.”<sup>7</sup> What distinguishes the weak nation from the strong is when identities of class, region, occupation, “are virtually never considered as possible self-standing, maximal social units, as candidates for nationhood;” they are not political.<sup>8</sup>

Further, Charles Tilley, in discussing contention between various groups and states in Europe and the development of the modern democratic nation-state, stresses that the prevalence of ‘embedded identity,’ i.e., attachment to a particular household or clan, “restrain[s] their followers from independent political participation,” and is most often utilized in the course of vengeance or feuds. This contrasts what he labels ‘detached identities,’ which lack the totality of embedded identities, and are often characterized by single stranded relations, such as to one’s secondary school or profession. Because it lacks a sense of essence and the completeness of

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<sup>7</sup> Geertz, Clifford. “Primordial Ties,” in *Ethnicity Oxford Reader*. ed. Anthody D. Smith and John Hutchison. New York: Oxford University Press, (1996): 43

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

one's socialization into society, detached identities, Tilly asserts, foster the notion of citizenship.<sup>9</sup> Combined, these two theorists seem to suggest a cyclical and mutually reinforcing state of immobility in the establishment of a national identity is the most salient. We can then deduce that only in a state where the needs of *all* citizens are represented, will a salient Iraqi identity subsume all others.

In describing state-sponsored identity in Iraq, all encountered texts took an instrumentalist argument – one of elite manipulation. This is not surprising considering that the Iraqi state lacked any precedence, and would require the support of national leaders. However, in formulating their identity, the political elites' end goal was not with a view to the creation of a homogenous Iraq, but with the aim of maintaining a current regime's hold on power, which prevents legitimatization of the state from occurring. Dawash notes this process when he remarks on the multiplicity of identities in Iraq from which elites could exploit,

“Not only the ethnic, tribal, and sectarian loyalties, but also the transnational identities of Arabism and Islam have competed with Iraqi identity. Thus an Iraqi citizen could profess a strong Shi'i loyalty, while identifying himself with some clan or tribe, and still have a sense of being an Arab and/or Muslim. The existence of such overlapping loyalties has adorned the Iraqi ruling elites countless opportunities to define and redefine the country's identity in accordance with their political interests and the dictates of policy at a given time.”<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Tripp states that the goal of Iraqi leaders since the state's founding “has been to ensure that their account – and their account alone – of Iraq should triumph and become both the prism

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<sup>9</sup> Tilly, Charles. “Contention and Democracy in Europe, 1650-2000.” Cambridge University Press, New York, New York (2004): 60-61

<sup>10</sup> Dawisha, Adeed. “Identity and political survival in Saddam's Iraq.” *The Middle East Journal* 53, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 554

through which all Iraqis must see their country and the measure used to judge its rulers.”<sup>11</sup> To do this, Musawi states, the state has sought to retain a monopoly on information, “not only engag[ing] in prioritizing knowledge, but also in manipulating it, reinventing traditional formations, and asserting and proliferating power.”<sup>12</sup> This creates a situation where mistrust of the state is reasonable since, by definition, it is not to represent all citizens.

This lack of historical precedent, though, is not sufficient to explain instability of a Middle Eastern state. Linda Layne, in discussing the “negotiation” for identity in Jordan, argues that stability within this equally nascent and heterogeneous state has been maintained because of government efforts to “unify and integrate individual tribal identities into one broad tribal identity” through symbolism.<sup>13</sup> That is, the ideology of the national government has not been opposed, but has actually incorporated, traditional, sub-state identities, with the king assuming the role of a tribal *sheik*. In the case of Iraq, governments since 1958 have tried similar “negotiations,” but at any time, have excluded significant portions with both its *de jure* ideology and the *de facto* composition of the government.

Similarly, in the case of Egypt, the promoted ideology of the state changed dramatically from Nasser to Sadat, without the regime itself crumbling.<sup>14</sup> Under Nasser, Arab Nationalism and socialism had been the promoted ideology of the state, while Sadat “re-traditionalized” the society.<sup>15</sup> Sadat inserted into the constitution the now famous Article 2, making Islamic Sh‘aria the basis for all legislation.<sup>16</sup> Further, Sadat’s “Open Door Policy” altered Egypt’s international

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<sup>11</sup> Tripp, Charles. “A History of Iraq.” Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. (2000):1

<sup>12</sup> Musawi, Muhsin J. “Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict.” Tauris, New York (2006): 43.

<sup>13</sup> Layne, Linda. *Home and Homeland*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press (1994): 138

<sup>14</sup> Though Sadat was assassinated, it was by an Islamist, who if anything, could gain from policies enacted under Sadat.

<sup>15</sup> Hinnebush Jr., Raymond A. *Egyptian Politics Under Sadat*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (1985): 112

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 114

orientation towards the West and increasingly liberalized the country's economy.<sup>17</sup> These two variables led to the reshaping of the opposition. However, it did not lead to violence on any mass scale, Baker describes the majority of opposition to the regime motivated not by ideological affinities, but increased economic hardships.<sup>18</sup>

What then makes Iraq unique? In the aforementioned case of Jordan, heterogeneity in population was kept in check by an all inclusive ideology. In Egypt, changes in ideology were relatively smooth because it did not greatly disenfranchise large portions of the population, and existed in a society that is largely homogenous and has a strong sense of national consciousness. In this paper, I argue that state formation in Iraq has often been based on the dichotomy between the promoted identity of the state – be it pan-Arab, nationalistic, or Iraqi-Arab centered - and the actual power base on which the state rests. In doing so, the state disenfranchised, while at the same time emboldening, any traditional institution or identity which served as an alternative basis for social identity for citizens outside the ruling-base of the state. Because of this, the national government's legitimacy was constantly challenged because of the necessity to maintain primordial identities' saliency.

### Framing of Argument

As I will discuss, it becomes especially difficult to determine whether the friction is based on ideological, sectarian/ethnic, or tribal cleavages and motivations. At any given time the composure of the state has been based on at least one of these divisions. During the rule of President Abd Karim Qassem, the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was instrumental in supporting the continuity of the regime to prevent Arab Nationalist/ pan-Arab influence (ideological). In practical terms though, this often enacted along sectarian lines since disenfranchised populations,

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<sup>17</sup> Baker, Raymond William. "Sadat's Open Door: Opposition From Within." *Social Problems* 28, no. 4 (Apr., 1981): 378

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 382



such as the Shi'a and Kurds, were sympathetic to both Qassem's Iraq-centered rhetoric and the ICP (sectarian). In the later regimes, including the Ba'th, rule was based *de facto* on kin arrangements (tribal), while promoting a secular and Arab Nationalist state (ideological), both of which disenfranchised the Kurds and elements of the Shi'a community (sectarian/ethnic). The causal impetus for the friction, before the revolution, is too convoluted to be discussed here. This does not impede my observation, since however they manifest themselves, the cleavages emerge out of an inability for the state to consolidate its identity over the people.<sup>19</sup>

### Methodology and Arrangement

The paper is arranged in chronological order of the regimes that have ruled Iraq since the 1958 revolution. Within each section are sub-headings detailing the power base and arrangement of the regime as well as the promoted identity. Following this are two cases which demonstrate how the politicalization of sub-state groups formed in response to the lack of an inclusive state structure and policies.

### Case Studies of Regimes of Iraq

In 1958 Iraq experienced a revolution along the same pattern as many states in the Middle East, by the military. From the time of the ousting of the monarchy until the official ascension of Hussein to the position of President, Iraq was ruled successively by leaders in the armed forces. Before the revolution, Iraq had been ruled by a constitutional monarchy, under the contentious rule of the Hashemites. Though Iraq was ruled by a Sunni King, power had been dispersed relatively throughout the various sects, with societal cleavages based more on class than sect or ethnicity, with power largely based in the hand of large estate owners.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For an in depth look at the inconsistencies of the British Mandate, see Toby Dodge. "Inventing Iraq." New York: Columbia University Press (2003).

<sup>20</sup> Haj, Samira. *The Making of Iraq 1900-1963*. Albany: State University of New York Press (1997): 32

The logic for not including this period in the time frame of study is that generally it did not conform to any asserted observation, and was organized by a different form of politics – a semi-Constitutional Monarchy with nascent democratic institutions, similar to Egypt prior to the 1952 revolution. Further, the ruling elite was not based on ideology or tribal affinities, but was largely class-based, with the wealthy landowning elite – whether Sunni, Shi‘a, or Kurd, dominating parliamentary politics, conforming more to the norms among nation-states.

### The Qassem Regime

Following the revolution, the central power struggle within Iraq was between Qassem and ‘Aref, with the former garnishing leftist support for official backing, and the latter Arab-Nationalist. For the remaining 10 years, until the second Ba‘thist coup, disputes and power would largely be fought between these two political mantras, conspicuously without any Iraqi-Nationalist strong-armed faction. However, Qassem, more so than any other Iraqi leader, consistently proclaimed a willingness to promote at least the idea of an Iraqi nation. This likely has to do with his personal background, which was as diverse as Iraq. Qassem was born the son of a working class Arab Sunni carpenter and a Shi‘a Kurd mother, known colloquially as a Fai’li.<sup>21</sup> He thus had within his family line all three of Iraq’s major sectarian populations – that of Sunni, Shi‘a, and Kurd. Indeed, Batatu describes Qassem’s “political inclinations” as being an “Iraqist with an active sympathy for the poor.”<sup>22</sup> While Tripp writes, “whether through family background or upbringing, Qassem was particularly sensitive to the diversity of Iraq’s population and thus to the need to encourage some sense of national community if Iraqi politics were not to be continually plagued by inter-communal suspicions and resentments.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 151

<sup>22</sup> Batatu, Hanna. *The Old Social Classes*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press (1978): 811 Table 42-1

<sup>23</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 170

Following the revolution though, Iraqi unity was not on the agenda of the major ideologies, with the main political cleavages seeking to incorporate, in the long term, Iraq into large political groupings. An early contender on the left, and one that had a potential to push for greater internal Iraqi unity, was the National Democratic Party. The party had its roots in the calamitous political culture of the 1930s, but quickly disintegrated due to poor organization and the lack of paramilitary backing. Thus, within the populous, military, and intelligentsia, there was virtually no organized top-down support for a nationalist cause, which at any rate had little resonance in the minds of Iraqis.<sup>24</sup>

### **Alliance with Communists**

Qassem's eventual alliance with the communists seems in part out of a common belief in social welfare and in part out of a tactful political coalition. Of the two major ideological strands within the army following the '58 revolution, the Arab-Nationalists were the first to directly challenge Qassem's leadership. 'Aref, who had been appointed Deputy Prime Minister, met with UAR President Abdel Nasser in Syria, ostensibly over cooperation in case of a counterrevolutionary scenario not long after the revolution. During this meeting, he supposedly likened Qassem as the 'Naqib of Iraq,' referring to the senior general who was widely regarded as a conservative force in Egyptian politics following the 1952 Egyptian revolution.<sup>25</sup> Seen as a threat, Qassem arrested 'Aref on charges of attempting to assassinate him, later commuting a death sentence to life imprisonment. Later opposition came from the Arab Nationalist Rashid 'Ali in December 1958 in an attempted coup, and the last straw of Qassem with Arab Nationalists was an attempted coup from the Mosul garrison.

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<sup>24</sup> Marr, Phebe. *The Modern History of Iraq*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press (1985): 159-161

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 161

On the March 6, 1959, Sunni army commanders led by ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Shawwaf, launched a revolt with the support of wealthy Sunni families who had little to gain from Qassam’s socializing policies in the northern city of Mosel. Choosing a rally organized by the ICP and its partisans to launch their coup, the garrison commanders arrested many leaders. However, the 250,000 supporters of Qassem at the rally, including communists and Kurds, overpowered the Shawwaf’s battalions, who themselves were also backed by tribesman from the Shammar tribe, composed of Sunni Arabs. That the Mosul revolt was as much about sectarianism as ideological association is evidenced in communist support (at least at the time) from Mosul’s Kurdish and Christian communities, underscoring the fact that pan-Arabism was almost solely perceived as a Sunni Arab venture in Iraq.<sup>26</sup> Following the revolt, the subversive commanders were executed and replaced with officers of communist sympathies.

With obvious opposition from Arab nationalists, Qassem relied heavily on the communists’ support (though this would seemingly contradict his nationalist rhetoric). The ICP, though, were not ardently Marxist-Leninist, but more pragmatic, favoring a general policy of social reform.<sup>27</sup> The party was then able to ally with the self-proclaimed leader, and the period of 1959 to 1963 saw the height of communist influence in Iraq.

Communists were then able to significantly impact the affairs of the regime. In 1958, Qassem, under ICP insistence, rescinded the Tribal Disputes Code, which placed tribal members in a separate judicial system.<sup>28</sup> They were additionally able to protect their influence with paramilitary backing, creating the Popular Resistance Force, a civilian militia, in 1959. Communists were also appointed to three additional cabinet positions in July 1959 following

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 162-163, Op. Cit. Tripp 156

<sup>27</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 154

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 170

attacks on the Mosul garrison. Internationally, closer ties during this time were forged with the USSR, while the rift between Qassem and Nasser widened.

However, it must be emphasized that a majority of ICP support was weak and untested. The party remained small, and much of its influence came as a result of Qassem's offer to play a central role to counter Arab Nationalist pressures. Marr estimates that the communist party was composed of no more than 25,000 registered members in 1959, most of untested allegiance.<sup>29</sup> The rest of support came from sympathizers, the general left, or minorities. Their strength came in the existence of an armed wing, which was able to martially impose Qassem's regime over Iraq. However, it must also be mentioned that because of the predominance of extended family as the base social unit, one member of the party was likely to garnish 10 or more sympathizers, drawn from his family, to public events.

A large portion of ICP support came from Kurds who "formed a good base of support for the Communists," with the Kurdish Democratic Party at the time allied with the ICP.<sup>30</sup> Recognizing this, to celebrate the first anniversary of the revolution, the ICP announced a rally in Kirkuk, which had a substantial number of Kurds, and additionally, as the center of Iraq's oil industry, contained a large concentration of workers, whom the communists sought to politicize for support. Intended to intimidate conservatives, the rally turned bloody as Kurdish mobs killed a number of Turcoman, which composed the city's elite, underscoring again the sectarian nature of politics. This affair, however, caused the communists to fall out of favor with Qassem, who sentenced 'Abd al-Qadir Isma'il, the ICP chairmen, to three-month imprisonment, and banned the ICP's newspaper for nine months.

### **State Promoted Identity Under Qassem**

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<sup>29</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 166

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 165

Qassem though was no internationalist, despite his alliance with the communists. He endeavored to create an Iraqi nation, and an Iraqi identity modeled on the Western notion of citizenship. To accomplish this he sought to draw from Iraq's past Mesopotamian empires as a basis of unity. Qassem adopted the Akkadian Sun Sign as the national emblem and the Star of Ishtar as the central element in the Iraqi flag.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, at a parade commemorating the first anniversary of the revolution, a picture of Qassem with a message linking the leader to the ancient Assyrian God of Dumuzi served as the initial float.<sup>32</sup> Speeches linking Iraq to these civilizations also became common accompaniments to political events. However, these symbols and expressions had little resonance with contemporary Iraqi society, who no doubt found the imagery foreign, unIslamic, and unconvincing.

Further, Qassem initiated a social reform scheme which included increased rights for women, land transfers and *de facto* nationalization of the oil industry.<sup>33</sup> Under Qassem, the section of Baghdad known today as Sadr City was founded to provide cheap housing for recently migrated Iraqis from the countryside, then known as Medina al-Thuwra (Revolution City). At the time, the new neighborhood became a hotbed of Communist Shi'a support for the regime.<sup>34</sup> Qassem also nearly doubled the education budget, dramatically increased the spending on housing, and, for the most part, reversed the expenditures on agriculture and industry, the former being the economic bedrock of the monarchy.<sup>35</sup>

Qassem's reliance on marginal or minority groups greatly disenfranchised a majority of the Arabs. Additionally, as I will expanded upon later, his support for the ICP and his push for land reforms lost him the support of religiously devout who considered communism's perceived

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<sup>31</sup> Baram, Amazia. "A Case of Imported Identity: The Modernizing Secular Ruling Elites of Iraq and the Concept of Mesopotamian-Inspired Territorial Nationalism, 1922-1992." *Poetics Today* 15, no. 2 (1994): 301

<sup>32</sup> Ibid 302

<sup>33</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 169-175

<sup>34</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1978, 983

<sup>35</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 250-251 Table 9.1

association with atheism as destructive to society and held land reform to be contrary to Islamic Law, which values private land ownership.<sup>36</sup> Qassem then became internationally ostracized when, following Kuwait's independence, he called for the sheikdom's return under Iraqi sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> For legitimacy, the President drew upon the Iraqi-nationalist myth that linked Kuwait to the *villayat* of Basra, and therefore (naturally) to Iraq. This policy, in the end, had an adverse effect on Iraq's reputation, alienating the country from the wider Arab community, which criticized Qassem, and failing to unify the Iraqi population with him.

Despite being out of favor with the regime, the communists continued to tactically support Qassem until he was ousted in 1963, with the Popular Resistance Force fighting in the streets of Baghdad against the Ba'thist coup. It was with this support, and that of key military personnel, that his rule was able to continue. In emphasizing Iraqi nationalism, he disenfranchised much of the officer corps, dominated by Nasserists and Ba'thists, requiring his regime to rely on communists and support from minorities like Kurds. From 1961 onward, with the commencement of a Kurdish war, Qassem's control was tenuous, the President "unpopular with every class, community, or grouping of the population."<sup>38</sup> The government was without a base, though few people felt "unrestrained hatred" towards it, which allowed the regime to carry on. Indeed, Batatu describes Qassem's rule as only waiting to fall since 1961.<sup>39</sup>

Recognizing Iraq's diverse population and the lack of any unitary ethnicity, Qassem's Iraqi identity was based in *jus soli* principles modeled on the territory of the three Ottoman provinces of Mosel, Baghdad, and Basra, while historical justification was centered on the power and influence of ancient Mesopotamian empires. As a predecessor to Hussein, he was the first to call for Kuwait's reestablishment into Iraqi sovereignty following its independence from the

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<sup>36</sup> Dann, Uri. *Iraq Under Qassem*. London: Praeger (1969): 358

<sup>37</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 165

<sup>38</sup> Op. Cit. Dann 356

<sup>39</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1978, 993

British in 1961.<sup>40</sup> Although perhaps the most genuine advocate for transcending sectarian bonds in Iraq and seeking to buttress against the underlying fascism which characterized pan-Arab sentiments in Iraq at the time, Qassem ultimately marginalized the majority of the population, including the politically and militarily astute. Further, his social reforms, which challenged both tribal and ecclesiastical powers, proved central in launching religious groups as a political force.

### The Tribal Regimes of the 'Arefs and the Tikritis

Much has been said about the use by Saddam Hussein of his kin in the upper echelons of power in the post-1968 Iraqi state. This has widely been described in a derogatory manner, and as a sign of the regime's inherent weakness and anachronistic character. While instrumentalist motivations of trust are proximate causes of Hussein's reliance on tribes for support, this policy was not idiosyncratic to the Ba'thist regime of Hussein. Nor was this policy necessarily of his own desire, but it is in fact an inseparable part of the society of Iraq that transcends, underpins, and at times, even undermines, ethnic or sectarian loyalties. Since the British Mandate was imposed on the region, creating the state, tribal or regional sentiments have served as the backbone of more governments than any other power base, reflecting the salience of this identity to the population and character of the state.

### Tribal Identity under the British and Hashemites

Prior to British intervention, it generally can be argued that the social structure of what is now Iraq was organized outside of the cities, which were technically of Ottoman and Mamluk dominion, or in the south, which were not sectarian or ideological in any sense. Ottoman decentralization left large swaths of the country under the control of tribal confederations,

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<sup>40</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 165-166.



creating a number of feudal-like states, where loyalty to the tribe was the strongest association of an individual.<sup>41</sup>

During the British occupation following World War I, officials, influenced by a romanticism which emphasized a purity and egalitarian nature to tribal society, favored the tribesmen at the expense of the urban and sedentary population.<sup>42</sup> Having had contact with Ottoman officials was seen as contaminating the innocent and trusting personality of tribesman. In British opinion, the Ottomans had imposed an inefficient standard of land distribution and accumulation of agriculture, fostering a corrupt society, and acting as stalwarts of backwardness.<sup>43</sup> The developments on jurisprudence under the Tazimat were marginalized.

In contrast, the tribes were viewed as organized in a loose and primal form of democracy, with the egalitarian ideal of the most worthy man serving as a sheik being the fulcrum of this model. The British believed it offered the best domestic power structure to cultivate and develop into a modern democracy, which would lead to the creation of a modern liberal nation. Power was thought to reside almost solely in the sheiks, who were in turn viewed as being in their position as a result of being the most able to lead, and strength of character.<sup>44</sup> In ostracizing the educated,<sup>45</sup> the British were essentially seeking to frame society anew, cleansing it of its educated population, with those seen by British as touched by urbanity, capitalism, and privilege able to serve their country best by keeping silent and staying away from power. Here we see the

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<sup>41</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 19-20

<sup>42</sup> Op. Cit. Dodge 53

<sup>43</sup> Dodge notes that this opinion was largely based on applying the British domestic experience on Iraq, where Tudor estate owners were largely seen as being the opponents of democracy and representing opposition to modernity. The Ottoman educated elite, who while residing in Baghdad were (similar to Egypt) functioned much as a landed aristocracy.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 73

British promoting a process of development that mirrors a Platonic perspective in recreating society.<sup>46</sup>

Toby Dodge notes that these policies, similar to French actions in Morocco, actually empowered far beyond tradition the authority of local leaders to their population:

“In trying to impose policy through the authority of the sheikh – an authority considered conceived of as consensual – the British inadvertently but radically changed the nature of the sheikh’s actual relation to the rest of Iraqi society. The irony was that the dominant, conservative British discourse of realism transformed Iraqi society in strikingly radical and “modern” ways. A romantically conceived “premodern” figure was used as a conduit for rational administrative methods, successfully imposed [...].” Finally, as we shall see, through the modern coercive technology of air power.”<sup>47</sup>

However, in using the tribal peoples as the basis for a modern state, the British were presenting themselves with a paradox of the meaning of citizenship. Aside from the fact that the notion of a civil citizenship was foreign both to town dwellers and tribesman, the homogenous ideal of universal and equal liberty and civil nationalism contrasted with the tribal identity which the British were helping to foster, which saw members of other tribes as a quintessential ‘other,’ rather than “us.” Further, the British image of the tribes was of the nomadic Bedouin, though, by independence only a small percentage of the population remained nomadic, “the bulk of the settled population of the country [...] was tribally organized and retained tribal mores and customs.”<sup>48</sup>

### **The ‘Arefs**

In post-revolutionary Iraq, perhaps more than any republican Arab state save Syria, tribes or kin groups have remained central to the organization of the country. While Qassem did not utilize tribe networks, and if anything, in coordinating with leftist groups, directly opposed them,

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<sup>46</sup> See Plato. *The Republic*, Book III.

<sup>47</sup> Op. Cit. Dodge 83

<sup>48</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 12

the two post-Qassem “dynasties” of Iraq – that of the ‘Arefs and Tikritis – have relied on patrimony and nepotism to ensure their rule. Interestingly, these two ruling groups can trace their access to power based on supporters of the Arab Revolt and Faisal during World War I; they were part of his original court in Damascus and originally hailed from what was then Baghdad province. The ‘Aref brothers, for their part, shared kin ties to a number of these *Sharifian* officers. Ibrahim ar-Rawi, Jamil ar-Rawi, Rashid al-Khawjah, Jamil al-Wadi, and Shakir al-Wadi were all *Jumailahi* Ottoman officers, who after supporting the Arab revolt served in high ranking positions such as ministers of Defense, Communications, and Justice under the monarchy.<sup>49</sup>

‘Aref initially came to power in a military coup which overthrew the short-lived first Ba‘thist state which lasted for nine months in 1963. Though backed by Nasserite elements within the military, ‘Aref placed his kin in positions of power. Tripp describes ‘Aref as shifting towards an ‘Iraq first’ program.<sup>50</sup> This cannot, though, adequately describe his ideology or his base of power, which were more patrimonial in nature than nationalistic. Though Salem ‘Aref did often times speak to Arab nationalist sentiments in contrast to Qassem, he relied heavily on his tribe, the Aj-Jumailah, who were located west of Baghdad, around Ramadi.<sup>51</sup> In achieving power, he utilized kin networks in his November 1963 coup of General Tahi Yahya and Brigadier Hardan al-Takriti. He appointed his brother, ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Aref, to act as his chief of staff for the military, and also to command the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>52</sup> The head of Military Intelligence went to Colonel Nayef Ruzzaq, also a fellow Jumailahi.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1978, 322-323

<sup>50</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 182

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 176

<sup>52</sup> Op. Cit. Marr. 190

<sup>53</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1978, 1034

To hold his power, ‘Aref formed the now infamous Republican Guard to directly serve his interests, rather than the state’s, to buttress any attack by the army against him. To safeguard against any possibility of disloyalty, the elite corps became composed almost entirely of his tribesman, under command of a kinsman from the al-Jumalia tribe, who were organized in the 20<sup>th</sup> brigade, which he himself had led during the ‘58 and ‘63 revolutions.<sup>54</sup> At the helm of this brigade, he placed Colonel Sa’id Slaibi, who was also a kinsman, and a close friend.<sup>55</sup> The wisdom of relying on his tribe proved fruitful when Slaibi successfully fought back a coup attempt against the regime when ‘Aref was outside the country.<sup>56</sup> Tripp notes that “the guard supported him not because of any political program, but simply for who he was, a member of their own clan [...] in return [...] they received privileged treatment and special access to resources.”<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, in a way, the regime of Salem ‘Aref was more sectarian in nature than Iraq under Hussein. Whereas Hussein appointed Shi’a and Kurds to various ministries, under the first ‘Aref, the RCC was composed, save one Kurd, of Sunni Arabs. And following a coup attempt from Nasserites, he relied entirely on kinsmen for support.<sup>58</sup> Reflecting this outlook was the popular joke that ‘Aref’s regime rested on “a minority of a minority,” referring to reliance on a small portion of Arab Sunnis.<sup>59</sup> This in part helps explain Nasser’s reluctance to engage seriously in talks of union, though for ‘Aref, attempts on amalgamation were little more than publicity campaigns as well.

Following the death of Salem ‘Aref in a helicopter crash in 1966, his elder brother, Rahman ‘Aref, was elected chairman of the RCC, which continued to dominate decision making

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<sup>54</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 176

<sup>55</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1978, 1027

<sup>56</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 182

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 183

<sup>58</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1978, 1034

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 1032

in the country. Though he kept much of his younger brother's inner circle, resting on an uneasy position, 'Aref did diversify power to Shi'a, Kurds, and other tribal groups.<sup>60</sup> In 1968, however, 'Aref's government would be overthrown, with the fifth column coming from the very fabric the brothers had empowered in order to maintain power: their kinsman, the officers Nayef, Daud, and Ghaidan, in coordination with Ba'thist elements.<sup>61</sup> Nayef himself was a member of Aj-Jumailah tribe, and the other two were from the same region, near Ramadi. In happier times, the younger 'Aref had even described Nayef and Daud as brothers.<sup>62</sup>

### **Ideology Under the 'Aref Brothers**

The 'Aref brothers emitted a pan-Arab ideology in Iraq that was far from genuine. They did not mirror any of Qassem's use of a timeless Mesopotamian identity for the legitimacy of the Iraqi state.<sup>63</sup> Salam 'Aref allowed the Nasserites free reign in Iraq under his rule, similar to that enjoyed by the communists under Qassem.<sup>64</sup> Seeking to emulate Egypt's Arab socialism, 'Aref initiated, with Nasser, several policies meant to be a precursor to an eventual merger with the U.A.R. Like Qassem, 'Aref set about on a nationalization scheme, placing the banks and industries under state control in 1964.<sup>65</sup> However, this was done under the ideology of Arab socialism, promoted by Nasser, rather than under a framework of Iraqi nationalism. On the whole though, these policies were hollow, with neither party too anxious to invest much trust in the other. 'Aref "had few illusions [...] about the strength and reliability of ideological solidarities."<sup>66</sup>

### **The Rule of the Ba'th 1968-2003**

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 1065

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 1073

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 1073

<sup>63</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1994, 302.

<sup>64</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1978, 1031.

<sup>65</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 193

<sup>66</sup> Op. Cit. Dodge 177

Much has been discussed on the use of tribal and regional affiliations to support the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein. Most popular work has focused on the brutality of his regime, and the diverse network of blood and regional ties used. Like all previous Iraqi governments, however, the dichotomy of a support base contradicting notions of universalism has furthered this contention.

In 1968 Ba‘thists, led by General Hasan al-Bakr, overthrew the government of Salem ‘Aref, as discussed. Bakr was kin of Hussein, with both being Tikritis from Albu-Nasir tribe, Baijat sub-lineage and Talfah family. Previously a weak tribe, the Albu-Nasir were actually helped by the establishment of the Iraqi government under Faisal.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the prevalence of Tikritis in the armed forces can be explained in a sociological progression. The creation of the Iraqi state had upset much of the local economy, which relied on ship construction, cutting the town off from many of its buyers on the Mediterranean. The subsequent rise in unemployment caused many youths to immigrate to Baghdad, and there, become able to receive an education. The initial contact for the Tikritis within the armed forces was Mawlud Muklis, who has served Faisal as one of his Sharifian officers during the revolt. Though from Mosul, Muklis’ father was Tikriti, and was related through kinship ties to Hasan al-Bakr, the Ba‘thist General, and later president.<sup>68</sup>

In one sense then, the coup of 1968 can be seen as one tribal grouping replacing another. Indeed, that Tikritis were so central to the regime has led Batatu to state that their influence is “so critical that it would not be going too far to say that the Takritis rule through the Ba‘th party, rather than the Ba‘th party through the Takritis.”<sup>69</sup> Though there are differences between the

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<sup>67</sup> Batatu, Hanna “The Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi Revolutions.” Lecture. Georgetown University Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 25 January 1983.

<sup>68</sup> Sakai, Keiko. “Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly.” in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*. Ed. Feleh Abdul-Jabar and Hosham Dawod. London: Saqi (2003): 139-140

<sup>69</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1978, 1088

power structure and ideology of Iraq under Bakr and under Hussein, to be discussed below, the overall tendency is one of consolidation of power into smaller, more closely-related kin groupings until we arrive at a regime where power is vested in the hands of one man and his immediate family, his *bayt* if you will. Baram comments upon this trend when he states that under Bakr, debates within the RCC group were “substantial, and sometimes acrimonious,” however, “Hussein has concentrated in his own hands near absolute power.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Ba‘thist Ideology and History in Iraq**

The fundamental ideology promoted by the two governments and the party who controlled the bureaucratic structures of the state was the Ba‘th. Ba‘thism is a distinct trend of Arab nationalism, with the founders of the ideology being Michael Aflaq, a Christian, and Salah al-Din Bitar, a Muslim. The original idea of Ba‘thism was to appeal across confessional lines to unify Arabs in a way that does not have the connotation of a foreign import like communism. Central to Aflaq’s conception of Arabism was that it is a primordial fact, existing before Islam, created out of supposed uniqueness of Arab identity and its cohesion, with common identity being based on a shared language.<sup>71</sup> For the Ba‘th:

“Arab nationalism is both nationalist and Arabist. [...] [It is] Arabist in the sense that it has a continuous unbroken national history that extends through the various ages and civilizations. Another characteristic of its Arabness which ensured the continuity in its natural history was the Arabic language which itself encompasses mutuality of thought, principles, and ideals.”<sup>72</sup>

Aflaq sought to reconcile the secularism of the nation state and Islam by proposing the idea of Mohammed as an Arab Prophet above all else and seeking to convert Islam into a secular

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<sup>70</sup> Baram, Amatzia. “The Ruling Political Elite in Ba‘thi Iraq: 1968-1986.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 4 (Nov., 1989): 450

<sup>71</sup> Makiya, Kanan. *Republic of Fear*. New York: Pantheon Books (1990): 195

<sup>72</sup> Aflaq, Micael. “fi-sabil al-ba‘th.” Quoted in Samira Haj. *The Making of Iraq*. Albany: State University of New York Press (1997) 90

Arab ideology. It must be emphasized that Arab nationalism is inherently a non-universal ideology;<sup>73</sup> at its most liberal extent, it would only include Arabs and *mozarab*. In the case of Iraq, at minimum it would exclude Kurds, Turcomen, and Assyrians. As with other ruling parties, the Ba‘th Party in Iraq was dominated by Sunni Arabs.<sup>74</sup> Prior to its taking power, the ideology became particularly influential to the military in Iraq.

### **Base of Power under the Bakr**

Though the official line of Baghdad was Arab-Nationalist, the makeup of the government seemed to come straight out of an anthropology textbook, following closely the segmentary model of tribes.<sup>75</sup> The Ba‘thist regimes of al-Bakr and Hussein relied, as did the ‘Aref’s, on tribal and kin groups. Though about half of the civilian members of the Ba‘thist party during the first regime were Shi‘a Arab, the National Council of the Revolutionary Command’s military members, in whom the power truly lied, were entirely Arab Sunni.<sup>76</sup> In the period of 1968 to 1977, when Hasan al-Bar was president, the ruling RCC was composed entirely of Sunni Arabs, save one Arabized Kurd,<sup>77</sup> with roughly half of the members hailing from Tikrit.<sup>78</sup> Under Bakr, Tikritis accounted for between 33 and 60 percent of the RCC.<sup>79</sup>

However, unlike the ‘Aref’s, the Ba‘thist regime faced numerous internal power struggles which increasingly relied on more intimate and distinguishable relations than region or tribe would allow. As time progressed “both Bakr and Hussein were anxious to reduce military

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<sup>73</sup> Op. Cit. Makiya 78

<sup>74</sup> Initially, the Ba‘th Party in Iraq had large Shi‘a membership. This can generally be taken as a coincidence however, since the early party was small, and many members were simply personal friends of the party’s first Secretary General, Fu‘ad al-Rakabi. After the Ba‘th first attained power in 1963, no Shi‘a members held real power. (See Farouk-Sluglett, Marion and Peter Sluglett. “The Histiography of Modern Iraq.” *American Historical Society* 96, no. 5 (Dec., 1991).

<sup>75</sup> See Eickelman, Dale. *The Middle Eastern Reader: An Anthropological Approach*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall (1998): Chapter 6.

<sup>76</sup> Op. Cit. Battau 1978, Table 52-1, 969 and Table55-1, 1004-1007

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Table 58-2, 1086-1089

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 1085

<sup>79</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1989 Appendix 1, 473



influence in politics and to prevent the military Ba‘thists from taking over the government,” even against kin.<sup>80</sup> First, Bakr enlarged the RCC, which served as the real base of power, in 1969 to 22 members. This reduced the military component to less than 1/3. Next, the other two military leaders of the 1968 coup, General Hardan al-Tikriti and General Salih Mahdi ‘Ammash, were eventually made irrelevant. In 1970, they were forced to resign from the RCC.<sup>81</sup> Hardan was later assassinated in 1971 and ‘Ammash was appointed Ambassador to Moscow, destined to irrelevancy. Over the course of 1973 and 1974, Bakr and Hussein removed numerous military and senior Ba‘thist leaders, filling their ranks with their personal sycophants and cronies.<sup>82</sup> Thus, even though Hardan and ‘Ammash shared the same regional affiliation as Bakr, they were not related to the president. Hardan, along with Tahya Yehya, were of the al-Shaya’isha tribe.<sup>83</sup>

Bakr notably utilized the al-Shawis family to serve in the government; they were related to him on his mother’s side.<sup>84</sup> At various times under Bakr, members of the family held positions such as Minister of Justice, member of the National Progressive Front, and the presidencies of Baghdad and Basra universities. In 1969 Husayn Hayawi, a Ba‘thist and a member of the Albu Nasir Tribe was appointed to head the air force.<sup>85</sup> Under the Ba‘th, the Republican Guard became dominated by Tikritis and members of the Albu Nasir tribe, similar to how it had been stacked with members of the ‘Aref’s tribe under their rule.<sup>86</sup> To allow the façade of pluralism, Bakr created the National Progressive Front, which allowed for the ICP and Kurdish Parties to have some government portfolios.<sup>87</sup> However, the non-Ba‘thist elements had no real power, with

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<sup>80</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 215

<sup>81</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 198

<sup>82</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 216

<sup>83</sup> Baram, Amatzia. “The Iraqi Tribes and the Post-Saddam System.” Washington, DC: Brookings Institute (July 8, 2003).

<sup>84</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 228

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 213

<sup>86</sup> Op. Cit. Dawisha 563

<sup>87</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 227

the ICP only agreeing to join after being essentially arrested into being complicit or risking extermination.

### **The Power Base of Hussein**

Hussein relied on a similar power structure to Bakr, increasingly narrowing the scope of relations for positions of power to include only very close kin. Though power did not officially transfer to Hussein until 1978, he had become the real power behind the throne in the mid-1970s as the aging Bakr grew ill.

Being a pragmatist, Hussein regarded the interest of the Iraqi Ba'th party as paramount, and was opposed to opening extensive ties with Syria, since it would potentially undermine the fragile rule in Iraq.<sup>88</sup> Under the leadership of Hussein, the state gave off the appearance of incorporating non-Sunni citizens into the power structure. By including Shi'a and Christians into the ruling establishment, the regime narrowed "the very problematic gap between the party's pan-Arab theory and its practice."<sup>89</sup> At the level of Regional Leadership, Shi'a in official positions increasingly approached their proportion of the population, being particularly strong in the south of the country.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, under Hussein, Tikriti representation in the RCC sank to no more than 11 percent.<sup>91</sup>

Power at the national level was based on many general levels of relation to Hussein, ranging from nuclear to extended, and significant positions were placed under the command of close kin. Though Hussein did not practice the ideal form of marriage, to his patrilineal cousin, he did marry his matrilineal one, Sajida Tulfa.<sup>92</sup> His regime especially relied on his matrilineal

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<sup>88</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1989, 452

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 464

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 457

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 473 Appendix 1

<sup>92</sup> Dawod, Hashem. "The 'State-ization' of the Tribe and Tribalization of the State: The Case of Iraq." in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*. Ed. Feleh Abdul-Jabar and Hosham Dawod. London: Saqi (2003): 120

side, since his father is dead. His brother-in-law and cousin, Adnan Tulfah, served as Minister of Defense. Additionally, his half-brother, from his mother's second marriage, would serve in a notable post as Chief Judge (Barzan Hassan). Hussein also made use of his patrilineal cousins to balance the predominance of his mother's family; Ali Hassan al-Majid, served for a time as Minister of Defense. Up until his ouster, members of Hussein's *fakhid* or lineage additionally played a major role in his government. He also used the two other circles of Tikritis of more distant relation, as well as regional tribes from the 'Sunni triangle,' the Juburis, 'Ubaidis and 'Azzawis.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, that the regime was essentially based on tribal linkages caused Hussein to worry about legitimacy. In an attempt to hide this facet from being so obvious, in 1976 he made it an offense for public figures to use names where their tribal or regional affiliation would be apparent.<sup>94</sup>

### **Ideology Under the Bakr**

Upon assuming power, and the instability and violence that characterized the coup, the Ba'th sought to portray themselves as representative of all Iraqis, evident by Communique No. 1 of the Ba'th Party following its assumption of power, which stated that the party rejected tribalism, along with racism and religious sectarianism as substitutive of Iraqi unity.<sup>95</sup> Ideologically though, the Ba'th under Bakr overwhelmingly promoted Arab nationalism. "Under no other regime and movement was the negation of the Iraqi identity stronger than under that of the Ba'th," Baram noted.<sup>96</sup> 'Aflaq continued to provide the front of official Ba'thist credo to the Iraqi state, remaining Secretary General of the Ba'thist National Command at least until 1980. A popular army was also created to specifically defend the party (as opposed to the national army,

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. Dawod 121

<sup>94</sup> Op. Cit. Dawasha 563

<sup>95</sup> Baram, Amatzia. "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-1996." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (Feb 1997): 1

<sup>96</sup> Baram, Amatzia. *Culture History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq 1968-89*. New York: St. Martin's Press (1991): 131

which protected the state).<sup>97</sup> In the early 1970s, when a peace agreement with the Kurds seemed imminent, Mesopotamian identity was introduced in order to “satisfy, on an ideological level, Kurdish demands to be treated as equals.”<sup>98</sup> However, after the Kurds revolted in 1974, the ancient empires became solely associated with Arabs, creating a “pan-Arab Mesopotamian identity.”<sup>99</sup>

### **Ideology Under Hussein**

Iraqi nationalism under Hussein can be characterized as schizophrenic and inconsistent. Throughout his rule, the government constantly promoted the seemingly contradictory images of Iraq as an Arab, Islamic, Tribal, and Mesopotamian state. Each claimed to speak of the country’s essence. However, each was promoted opportunistically, at diverse times and under different circumstances.

Hussein promoted an Arab identity during the Iran-Iraq war in order to incorporate Shi‘a and not open himself up to wide Iranian penetration. As a foil, he juxtaposed Arabs to “racist and resentful Persian Iranians.”<sup>100</sup> Alternately, he invoked an Islamic identity when the US managed to gain the support of numerous Arab countries to liberate Kuwait.<sup>101</sup> For example, he characterized the Saudis as un-Islamic for allowing the presence of foreign troops on the same soil as the two holy cities.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, during bombing campaigns throughout the war, he cast the perpetrators as a Christian and atheist “other.” However, Islamist rhetoric dropped from the regime’s mantra as quickly as the campaign ended.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 226

<sup>98</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1991, 21

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Op. Cit. Dawisha 557

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 459

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 460.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 562.

Following the 1991 Gulf War, with his power ever more uncertain because of revolts in the Kurdish north and Shi'a south, Hussein began to play up Iraq's tribal identity, because many Iraqis, across ethnic and sectarian lines, had tribal affiliations; it would also help buttress Shi'a opposition. The Iraqi people, the President affirmed, "have become a single tribe [drinking] from a single cup."<sup>104</sup> Sunni tribesmen (and not all of them) became the only segment of the population who did not oppose him, and in return he lavished them with patronage.<sup>105</sup>

Pervasive throughout the rule of the Ba'th, then, is the irreconcilable dichotomy between tribal and kin rule, and multifarious political identity. Far from being avant-guard, however, the Ba'th were simply repeating the utilization of kin ties for their ideology.

### The Opposition: Encouraged Non-Statist Identities

Since the revolution, Iraq has been ruled by regimes promoting contradictory identities, with tactful support of minority sects, ideologies, or institutions. Additionally, since Qassem, socialism has been a centerpiece of the ideology of those governing the country. These policies have caused and shaped the discourse which emerged from the two segments most disenfranchised by Baghdad – the Shi'a and the Kurds. The discriminating policies from Baghdad not only determined that these two communities would be disenfranchised, but indeed molded the manner in which each community conceptualized its own identity, placing its identity in opposition to the other.

### Shi'a

A Shi'a Iraqi political identity is a fairly recent construct, with the notion of a separate identity, composed of Arab in culture and Shi'a in religion, not previously found in the region.

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<sup>104</sup> Op. Cit. Dawisha 565

<sup>105</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1997, 10

That said, this allegiance can largely be explained as rising from perceived Shi'a ostracism under the Sunni-lead Iraqi state, particularly exacerbated in the post-Revolution period.

The preeminence of Islam as a social institution in Iraqi society is also fairly recent construction. In 1947 there was an average of only one religious institution, including mosques, for every 37,000 persons. This is largely due to the relatively recent acceptance of a sedentary lifestyle by the country's inhabitants, who were largely tribal and nomadic until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>106</sup> Estrangement from the government in the south dates to Iraq's founding. King Faisal, upon touring the south of his new country in 1933, remarked, "The Shi'i 'ulama have no connection with the government and are at present estranged from it, particularly inasmuch as they see the Sunni 'ulama in possession of funds and properties of which they are deprived, and envy, notably among the religious classes, is something well known."<sup>107</sup> Formerly, tribal sheiks would serve the dual function of religious leaders, with mosques created on an ad hoc basis, from, for example, a multi-purpose tent. Additionally, itinerant preachers would travel the countryside. Further, as has been widely pointed to, among the Shi'a, a number of prominent tribes only converted to the sect in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, making their conviction less than complete, and their allegiance suspect.<sup>108</sup> The newfound urbanization of Shi'a following World War I allowed, for the first time, observance of orthodox religiosity among formerly tribal people. This however came in concert with the increased secularism of educated Shi'a (in part due to Qassem's alliance with communists).

However, the creation of a modern, centralized state, for the first time, disallowed Shi'a from escaping oppressive Sunni domination, from which they were largely able to avoid during the Ottoman era. This has, over the last several decades, created animosity towards Sunnis

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<sup>106</sup> Batatu, Hanna. "Shi'i Organizations in Iraq: al-Da'wah al-Islamiyah and al-Mujahidin." in *Shi'ism and Social Protest*, Juan Cole and Nikki Keddie ed. New Haven: Yale University Press (1986): 186

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 189

<sup>108</sup> Batatu, Hanna "Iraq's Underground Shi'i Movements." *MERIP Reports* (January 1982): 3

which has come to be couched in religious-sectarian terms. The two largest Shi'a political-religious groups have been the al-Dawa al-Islamiyah and al-Mujahidin, who, to varying degrees of direct progression, remain the two largest Shi'a political parties in post-Hussein Iraq. Both claim ideological inspiration from the late Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr.<sup>109</sup> No other party has taken on as much significance among the Shi'a in developing a religious sense of self in the past 50 years as the al-Dawa Party. There seems to be confusion as to when the party itself was founded. Baram contends that al-Dawa was founded in 1959 by sons of the Grand Ayatollah Musin al-Hakim.<sup>110</sup> Hakim himself was known to be fiercely anti-Communist, considering the political ideology incompatible with Islam.<sup>111</sup> However, this does not mean he entered into the political realm. Shi'ism has traditionally been apolitical, with the religious establishment preferring to remain outside of the state. Ayatollah Abu-l-Qasim al-Khu'i, the chief Marji in Iraq, neither endorsed nor criticized the regime of Saddam Hussein.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Grand Ayatollah Musin al-Hakim was also a supporter of Shi'a quietism in the 1950s, though his sons differed from his traditionalism.

The Dawa movement was initially started to counter the rise in prominence of communists in the Qassem government. Specifically, its leaders objected to communism's atheism and the proposed land reforms which Qassem began to undertake.<sup>113</sup> Initially, Dawa was a civil society movement designed to prevent the spread of atheism among Iraqi Muslims, largely staying outside the political realm.<sup>114</sup> Batatu cites three possible origins, one of which

<sup>109</sup> Op. cit. Batatu 1986, 182

<sup>110</sup> Baram, "The Radical Shi'ite Opposition Movements in Iraq." Ed. Sivan, Emmanuel and Menachem Friedman. *Religious Radicalism and Politics in the Middle East*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press (1990), 96

<sup>111</sup> Op. Cit. Dann 303

<sup>112</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1982, 3-5

<sup>113</sup> The fact that religion is only of recent salience to Shi'a is underscored by the fact that the ICP has a large Shi'a membership. Further, the those who benefited from Qassem's developmental schemes, in the Media al-Thurah (now Medinal al-Sadr) were Shi'a and Shi'a even in the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf were supporters of the movements (see Batatu 1986, 184)

<sup>114</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1990, 96

aligns with the aforementioned account, and another which suggests a contrasting genesis, being founded between 1957-58 by Shi'a ulema who had grouped themselves under the leadership of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr.<sup>115</sup> On its own account, according to the party's website, its founding closely conforms to the account given by Baram.<sup>116</sup>

Al-Dawa rejects any synthesis of Islam and Arabism. Baram believes this to be a direct reaction to Ba'thism and the movement's close ties to the Iranian republic.<sup>117</sup> This has led to a rather Islamist tendency, which has led al-Dawa to criticize Hussein's enemies in Syria, due to the secular nature of the regime. Increasing attacks against the movement by successive governments though, caused the movement to politicize. During the Iran-Iraq war, the movement largely took the side of Iran, though it often portrays itself as pan-Islamic rather than strictly Shi'a.<sup>118</sup> Throughout the reign of the Aref's and the Ba'th, Al-Dawa remained largely underground. The party was influenced much by the Iranian Revolution, and for much of the 1980s, al-Dawa was labeled a terrorist organization by the West. The party bombed the ministry of planning in 1982.<sup>119</sup> Further, it was implicated in the 1983 bombings of the American and French Embassies in Kuwait, along with other attacks.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, one of the supposed masterminds of the attack, Jamal Jaafar Mohaamed, sentenced to death in absentia, is now currently an MP in Iraq.<sup>121</sup> The party has proved to be resilient and continues, if not in name, to be a prominent political force in Iraq. Iraqi Prime Ministers Nuri al-Maliki and Ibrahim al-Jaafari are both lifelong al-Dawa members.<sup>122</sup> And the former subversive organization is now the second largest component of the ruling United Iraqi Alliance.

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<sup>115</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1986, 191

<sup>116</sup> See [islamicdawaparty.com](http://islamicdawaparty.com) & "History"

<sup>117</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1990, 100

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1986, 182

<sup>120</sup> Murphy, Caryle. "Bombs, Hostages: A Family Link." *Washington Post*, July 24, 1990

<sup>121</sup> Abdul-Zahra, Qassim "US Probes Embassy's Bombings in Kuwait." *Washington Post*, February 6, 2007

<sup>122</sup> "Da'wa Party (political party, Iraq)." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed 12 March 2008.



The other prominent Shi'a paramilitary group which challenged the regime is what Batatu calls the Mujahadin, which formed in response to the Iranian revolution in 1979. The Mujahadin later joined with al-Dawa to form the Supreme Counsel of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq.<sup>123</sup> Today, with al-Dawa' leaving the counsel following the US invasion, the Mujahdin have essentially morphed to be synonymous with the SCIRI.

### The Kurds

The history of the Kurds in Iraq is one of contention. Unlike the Shi'a, the Kurd's opposition to the Iraqi state on sectarian grounds pre-dates the revolution. Further, though urbanization brought Sunnis and Shi'a together in Baghdad, this was not true for the Kurds, who did not experience a demographic shift.

The Kurds seem to have been in constant revolt against Baghdad, whether under the British, the Monarch, or following the revolution. Indeed, Marr describes the Kurds as "the Achilles' heel of all revolutionary regimes" in Iraq.<sup>124</sup> With the end of World War I came the first fighting with the Kurds. Seemingly an opportunist, Sheik Mahmoud Barzanji would have a tenuous relationship with the British, from leading revolts to cooperating with the British in an effort to check Turkish incursions, which claimed the former *villayat* of Mosel.<sup>125</sup> Again, from 1931 to 1932, Ahmed Barzani, the elder brother of the later leader Mustafa Barzani, led a revolt against the central government.<sup>126</sup> Fighting again flared up in 1943, this time under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Op. Cit. Batatu 1982, 199

<sup>124</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 284.

<sup>125</sup> Jwaideh, Wadi. *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press (2006): Chapters 10 & 11, pp. 160-202.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 219

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 24

Though Gunter mentions that records of a people called the Kurds go back to the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, when the term was applied to Persianized tribes,<sup>128</sup> “only in the 1960s did the Kurdish movement in Iraq begin to take on characteristics of a genuine nationalist movement,” with previous revolts throughout the 1920s and 1930s described as tribal affairs.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, Edgar O’Balance states that following World War I, “tribal loyalty was greater than the urge for Kurdish nationalism.”<sup>130</sup> And Tripp describes the actions of both Sheik Mahmud and Ahmad Barzan as “parochial, depending on local tribal support, or on networks of Sufi brotherhoods.”<sup>131</sup>

In 1961, Mustafa Barzani, who many credit with formulating Kurdish nationalism, decided to revolt, despite initial support from Qassem, after the KDP (along with all other political parties) lost their license. This revolt can be distinguished from past confrontations in that in addition to tribal forces backing Barzani, educated nationalists defected from the army and fought against the government.<sup>132</sup> Following the coup, ‘Aref sought peace in Kurdistan, and agreed to a ceasefire with Barzani. However, peace remained tenuous, and it became clear to ‘Aref that his desire for Arab Nationalism and unity with Egypt would cost him calm in the north.<sup>133</sup> Barzani was unwilling to accept the ambiguity of a ceasefire in face of the possibility of Iraq’s union with Egypt, which would potentially have him facing the strongest military in the Arab World, and lacking any guarantees to Kurdish autonomy, by 1965, after renewed armament care of Iran, the cease fire had broken down.<sup>134</sup> After significant military victory though against Iraqi forces, Iraq, under Prime Minister Bazzaz, offered the Kurds a genuine plan for autonomy

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<sup>128</sup> Gunter, Michael. “The Modern Origins of Kurdish Nationalism.” in *Kurdish Identity: Human Rights and Political Status*. ed. Charles MacDonald and Carole A. O’Leary. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press (2007): 5

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>130</sup> O’Balance, Edgar. *The Kurdish Struggle, 1920-94*. New York: MacMillan Press, (1996): 13

<sup>131</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 64

<sup>132</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 178-179

<sup>133</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 178-179

<sup>134</sup> Op. Cit. Marr 198-199

in 1966. However, the settlement was never implemented, being very unpopular with Arab-Nationalist elements in the military, and was to be one of the justifications of the Ba‘th for their coup.<sup>135</sup>

Fighting again started in 1968 with the eruption of fighting, despite Bakr appointing three Kurdish ministers.<sup>136</sup> In March 1970, Hussein and Barzani agreed to the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous region, allowing for significant autonomy, including authority over local affairs.<sup>137</sup> In 1974, however, after the collapse of agreement between Ba‘thists and Barzani, revolt ensued again.<sup>138</sup> The next year, the Kurdish establishment split between the two factions that exist today, those of Barzani and Talabani.<sup>139</sup>

In 1975, the completion of the Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq, in which Iran agreed to cease all support for Kurdish rebels, allowed the government to consolidate authority in the north.<sup>140</sup> In order to ensure that weapons could not be smuggled into the northern part of the country, Hussein then created a no man’s land of 10 to 20 kilometers between Iraq’s international borders in Kurdish regions, forcing many to relocate, and destroying villages.<sup>141</sup> Additionally, as is well known, Hussein instituted a policy of Arabization in Kurdish regions, moving many Arabs, especially Shi‘a, north with enticements of cheap housing and jobs.

In 1983, Iraqi Security forces rounded up and killed an estimated 8,000 men and boys belonging to Barzani’s clan.<sup>142</sup> Further, in 1987, Hussein began a military campaign called *al-Anfel* (spoils of war), including the use of chemical and biological weapons against Kurdish

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 199.

<sup>136</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 199

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 200

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 202.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 203

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 202

<sup>141</sup> Freij, Hanna. “The Iraqi State, the Opposition, and the Road to Reconciliation.” in *Kurdish Identity: Human Rights and Political Status*. ed. Charles MacDonald and Carole A. O’Leary. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press (2007): 124

<sup>142</sup> Op. Cit. Tripp 243

populations under the directorship of Hussein's cousin, 'Ali Hasan al-Majid.<sup>143</sup> Roughly 80% of all villages were destroyed, and nearly 60,000 people were killed.

It becomes evident then that the Kurds have fought with the central government since Iraq was established as an entity following World War I, mainly fighting against Arab domination, be it in nationalistic or tribal terms. Since the 1958, offers of peace have been little more than empty gestures, disillusioning Kurdish trust in the regime, and alienating the minority from any association with Iraq. With the development and fermentation of a separate Kurdish identity, the Kurds will likely embrace a fully Iraqi identity. The actions of the post-1958 regimes have made salient to the Kurds, the need for internal unity against an Arab other centered in Baghdad.

## Conclusion

I have shown that in Iraq's governing history, ideology and the reality of the composure of the regime have not aligned. As a whole, the Middle East is a region of conflicting and multi-layered loyalties. At its root though, it is not the multidimensional nature of identity that distinguishes the American or Egyptian from the Iraqi. Americans have alternative identities – to religion, to ethnic group or country of origin, profession, region or state. What differs is that alternative identities are, by and large, depoliticized and subsumed by the national identity. In the case of Iraq, a genuine national identity has been promoted very rarely, and disingenuously. An institutionalized hypocrisy was enmeshed within the Iraqi state.

In outlining the factors which help bring about nationalism within a society, Anderson rests his argument on the dual pillars of increased literacy and the expansion of administration and bureaucracies; “the interlock between particular educational and administrative pilgrims provided the territorial base for new ‘imagined communities’ in which natives could come to see

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 244-245

themselves as ‘nationals’.”<sup>144</sup> With these two developments of the modern state, people come to see themselves in relation to multitudes whom they would otherwise never have any form of contact or awareness about. That it is on a mass, and not simply an elite scale, is key. Evidence from Iraq can be seen as both conforming and conflicting with this claim. As mentioned, under Hussein, at the level of Regional Leadership, Shi‘a in official positions in the government increased, with Sunnis integrating into the professional urban classes<sup>145</sup> and Tikriti and Sunni domination within the RCC declined.<sup>146</sup> However, Shi‘a in administrative and governing positions were located predominantly in the south.

Anderson’s independent variable, though, would require that Sunnis and Shi‘a be distributed throughout the country, irrespective of religious orientation. Because Sunnis (especially tribesmen outside of Baghdad, who were the backbone of the regime) rarely ever had Shi‘a in positions of authority over them, and Shi‘a in the south did not interact with Sunni administrators in a power dynamic that asymmetrically favored the Shi‘a, it is unlikely Anderson’s postulations can be asserted.

This is of course to say nothing of the Kurds, who certainly were not incorporated into and distributed throughout the bureaucratic apparatus. The end result is that Iraqis have been unable to perceive themselves as “living lives parallel to those of other substantial groups of people,” who while never meeting, conceive themselves as similar; according to Anderson, is the fundamental fact which enables nationalism.<sup>147</sup> This is not to say that an Iraqi sense of identity did not develop and possibly become salient among many citizens of the state, but that because of a lack of full integration, impossible in a government based on tribal relations, other identities were able to be maintained as politically salient.

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<sup>144</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso (1983) 140

<sup>145</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1989, 457; Marr 284

<sup>146</sup> Op. Cit. Baram 1989, 473, Appendix 1

<sup>147</sup> Op. Cit. Anderson, 188

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