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Nationalism and Multi-Dimensional Identities: Ba'ath Propaganda During the Iran-Iraq War

Jennie Matuschak
jim014@bucknell.edu

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**Nationalism and Multi-Dimensional Identities:
Ba'ath Propaganda During the Iran-Iraq War**

By

Jennie I. Matuschak

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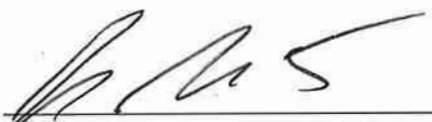
Advisor: Mehmet Döşemeci



Co-Advisor: Beeta Baghoolizadeh



Honors Council Rep.: Tristan Stayton



Department Chairperson: Ann Tlusty

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Despite what they may say, my family knows little about the Middle East, Iraq, or Saddam, and they didn't really help with the creation of this thesis. But, I feel as though I should say thank you to them for supporting my education. This, among other things, wouldn't be possible without them.

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~

There is, after all, a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and the will to dominate for the purposes of control and external dominion.

Edward Said

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Abstract.

In this thesis, I examine the content of and mechanisms of disseminating propaganda originating from Saddam Hussein's regime during the Iran-Iraq War. This research specifically looks at how and why the regime targeted Iraqi Shi'as during the war, and how that contributed to the ways in which the regime engaged with rhetoric. Moreover, this thesis attempts to make sense of the diverse, and sometimes seemingly opposing, amalgam of the rhetoric's subject matter and methods of circulation. More broadly, it speaks to the difficulty of fostering an environment that can produce patriotism and lead to the construction of a strong national identity within the context of war and sectarianism. Overall, the research of this thesis contributes to a general understanding of how authoritarian regimes in particular can both exploit and be vulnerable to the existence of complex, multi-dimensional identities. In conclusion, this work hopes to accompany already existing literature aimed at replacing narrow, Western-centric, Orientalist views of the Middle East with more holistic, well-informed, and authentic considerations.

Note on Transliteration.

Transliteration in this thesis has attempted to be kept as simple and consistent as possible. The system of transliteration used is according to the *International Journal of Middle East*, but I have eliminated diacritical and long vowel markers. Arabic names and geographical names that have been translated into English were kept as such to make it easier for the general reader.

Introduction.

Most Americans stopped caring about Iraq a long time ago. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the ensuing Western media frenzy covering it spoke of Iraq as if it were an abstract, enigmatic political construct rather than a home to nearly 17 million people. Discussions on Iraq within American academic and political spheres seemed entirely engrossed in the country's relationship with the U.S. and its instability as a result of American intervention. Many of these conversations embraced flawed Orientalist conceptions of the Middle East and framed Iraq as an unstable vacuum of chaos that lacked its own agency. Others contextualized Iraq as beset by nearly a century's worth of Western imperialism, dating back to Great Britain's formation of the country. This framework that considered Iraq only in relation to the West stuck with me, as well as the somewhat abrupt disregard for the country after the United States' initial invasion. In recognizing this, I chose to study Iraq as itself and for itself, to understand more about and provide an analysis of a country that has been riddled with dangerous inaccuracies and overgeneralizations. Although Iraq has been impacted significantly by the burdens of imperialism, it exists far beyond that. In fact, working to grasp the nuances of elements, such as tensions and realizations of identity, more internal to the country not only proved more interesting, but it also helped to more broadly extract the core issues of viewing the Middle East as a static monolith, which Western circles often reproduce. Therefore, I decided to research Saddam's relations to his own state and people rather than those to foreign, and typically Western, countries.

While reading up on Saddam's time in power, his variance in propaganda stood out noticeably. Throughout the early beginnings of the research process, I found instances in which Saddam would simultaneously invoke language from Iraq's Mesopotamian past while proving

his descent from Islamic legacies. In a similar way, his regime would stress the ideology of pan-Arabism while later encouraging Iraqis to honor the innate superiority of their national identity. In diving head first into a sea of research, I sought to make sense of this expanse of propaganda that on the surface appears as an unstructured political and ideological jumble.

Given that the Ba'ath regime consisted of mostly Sunnis, who comprised the minority of the total population, state-sponsored propaganda was directed primarily toward the Shi'as and the Kurds.¹ Because the height of Saddam's radical shifts in ideology and rhetoric appeared during the war against Khomeini and his Islamic revolution, I chose to look specifically at the government's efforts to reach and impact Iraqi Shi'as.

This thesis stands on the shoulders of seminal works on Iraqi history, the Iran-Iraq War, and Saddam Hussein's cult of personality. Phebe Marr, Charles Tripp and Yitzak Nakash have constructed thorough and detailed historical explanations of the context of Iraq leading up to the Iran-Iraq War, all of which have influenced the way this thesis frames the conflict as it relates to Saddam's propaganda. Amatzia Baram's two books, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* and *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'ath Iraq from Secularism to Faith*, reference artwork, posters, cartoons, poems, newspaper articles, and tapes that recorded upper-level meetings within the Ba'ath regime. They separately discuss the Mesopotamian history and Islamic legacies the Ba'ath regime incorporated into its propaganda. Rather than keeping these themes of rhetoric divorced, this thesis works to synthesize and combine them into one space, and make sense of how they functioned together. Similarly, Ofra Bengio's analysis of the content of Ba'ath propaganda, which relies on primary sources such as newspaper articles and official government documents and speeches, outlined the origins of

¹ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 98.

rhetoric steeped in both pan-Arabism and Iraqi superiority. This left space for this thesis to investigate how and why they intermingled. As for methods of dissemination, existing literature only discusses these elements as accessories to the propaganda's content. Few secondary sources have prioritized or dedicated whole sections to the rationale behind and effectiveness of the rhetorical vessels themselves. While the works of Amatzia Baram, Eric Davis, and Joseph Sassoon outline various sites within Iraqi society that state-sponsored propaganda attempted to infiltrate, they do not hone in on the various *ways* in which that propaganda appeared. Therefore, this thesis gives considerable attention to both synthesizing and analyzing the regime's dissemination methods. Additionally, Joseph Sassoon, Lisa Blaydes, and David Palkki pieced together information from government documents and tapes in order to construct accurate statistical work on Iraqi society during the war. In considering this research, this thesis attempts to go a step further by seeking to tackle how Iraqi Shi'as received Ba'ath propaganda. Lastly, Benedict Anderson, Partha Chatterjee and E.J. Hobsbawm postulate conceptually on the complexities of nationalism; the work of this thesis meets these theoretical explanations with the historical case study of Iraq during the 1980s.

This thesis fits humbly next to such influential works because it is able to synthesize the research conducted within already existing literature, specifically the types of Ba'ath propaganda and mechanisms of espousing it, and attempts to interpret and understand them as they relate to one another. Although Eric Davis briefly recognizes the need to make sense of the amalgam of Saddam's propaganda, no entire piece of work dedicates itself to pursuing a big-picture examination of Ba'ath propaganda in an effort to analyze why conflicting and ever-changing rhetoric occurred or could be viewed as advantageous.

There is little research and few studies, statistics, and official documents that outline the effectiveness of the regime's Shi'a-targeted propaganda. This thesis would benefit greatly from the administration of greater interviews of Iraqi Shi'as who lived through the war that center specifically around the Ba'ath regime's propaganda. In addition, the acquisition of more first-hand accounts, either written or oral, on how major Shi'i communities responded to Ba'ath rhetoric would serve to strengthen the conclusion of this research.

In mapping out the trajectory of this thesis, Chapter 1, entitled "Setting the Stage: Origins of Propaganda & the Socio-Political Context of the 1980s," works to provide the reader with background on elements of Iraqi society and identity of particular interest to the Ba'ath regime's propaganda. It also outlines the socio-political context of Iraq leading up to the war with Iran as well as a brief historical sketch of the Ba'ath party's evolution in Iraq, ending with Saddam Hussein's introduction to politics and his acquisition of power. Chapter 2, "Themes & Goals of Propaganda: Redefining Iraqi Identity," analyzes the research done on the recurring themes within Ba'ath propaganda, primarily highlighting the state's manipulation of pan-Arab, Islamic, and Mesopotamian ideologies and shared collectivities. Doing so stresses how the Ba'ath regime re-defined Iraqi patriotism during the war period, as well as how Saddam Hussein's leadership transformed into a cult of personality, which ultimately depicted him as the embodiment of what it meant to be an Iraqi. Following this examination of the content of state-sponsored propaganda will be a discussion of the mechanisms by which such propaganda was disseminated, which comprises Chapter 3, entitled "Faces & Spaces of Dissemination." More specifically, Saddam was able to create and/or assume control over schools, festivals, archaeological reconstructions, publications, naming campaigns, art, media, and official government speeches in an effort to fill every crevice of Iraqi society with Ba'ath propaganda.

Lastly, this thesis will conclude with a section dedicated to Shi'i reception of rhetoric and will provide an understanding of how government's realize, exploit, and defend themselves against the multi-dimensional identities of their subjects.

This thesis was originally driven to answer whether nationalism supersedes an individual's allegiances to other identities. Throughout my time researching, however, I noticed that this normative question does not consider the complex nature of existing within multiple diverse communities that both overlap and oppose one another. Also, given that my research focused on the use of state-sponsored propaganda, it became clear that a much more interesting question would instead lie in parsing through the ways in which the state realizes the presence of multiple, and at times contradicting, identities within their populations. Thus, this thesis seeks to more broadly understand how the existence of these multiple identities can on the one hand make the state more vulnerable, but on the other help it survive.

Chapter 1. Setting the Stage: Origins of Propaganda & the Socio-Political Context of the 1980s

Saddam was the last leader in a long line of Iraqi Ba'ath party rule. In certain aspects, he continued and mimicked the work of his predecessors. At other times, he fundamentally departed from the policies and ideologies of their administrations. In recognition of this, this chapter will look at the Ba'ath party ideology and the attitudes of the state toward minority groups, particularly Shi'as. In addition, this chapter will consider the international context throughout the 1970s and 1980s, particularly the Islamic revolution that absorbed Iran. Providing background of Saddam's early years in power will work to explain both his rationale behind entering into the war with Iran as well as that behind his regime's war-time propaganda. Within his propaganda, Saddam relied on two major themes to bolster his rhetoric, that of geography and borders, and religious and ethnic diversity between Iran and Iraq. This chapter will engage in a discussion on territorial disputes over the Shatt al-Arab River and the major Shi'a-shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala as well as the religious and ethnic differences between Iran and Iraq. These details become important later, as Saddam's regime manipulated the historical origins of both of these elements in order to justify his aggression as well as push a specific narrative of Iraqi identity.

Although separated into their individual sections, it must be understood that no one of these elements single-handedly caused the outbreak of the war. Also, this chapter does not seek to suggest that the existence of these components made conflict inevitable; instead, this chapter attempts to provide a historical amalgam of the components that drove Saddam's propaganda campaign.

I. Historical Trajectory of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq

Saddam's early beginnings as president of Iraq proved his devotion to the basic Ba'ath party principles of pan-Arabism and secularism. By understanding the ideologies that had particular influence on the Ba'ath party as well as the party's historical trajectory within Iraq, we can later grasp the surprising degree of change that occurs within Saddam's propaganda as a result of his desperate attempt to better relate to Iraqi Shi'as during the war.

The major foundation of the Ba'ath (Resurrection) Party can be characterized as the unification of all Arabic-speaking countries into one Arab state as a way to promote the ambitions of all Arabs and restore their success and glory.² The concept of pan-Arabism notably grew between the 1920s and 1940s. As a secular movement, it consisted of a variety of different religious groups that were unified in their resistance to colonialism and their belief in the collective strength of all Arab countries.³ The Ba'ath party in particular originated in Damascus during the 1940s emerging from the lectures of teacher Michel Aflaq. Aflaq's students contributed to the transformation of the ideology into its own party, and eventually it merged with the Arab Socialist party in 1953 and began to dominate Syrian politics.⁴ This new Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party emphasized a common Arab history, and with that the ultimate dissolution of separate states and instead the unification of Arab people into a single pan-Arab state. The party also showed traces of other contemporary political ideologies. There were hints of socialism within some of the party's original principles, for instance the party's adoption of

² Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 15.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 9.

terminology such as “class struggle” and “popular democracy” drawn from Marxism.⁵ Fascism, popular globally throughout much of the interwar period was not referred to directly, but it clearly influenced the formation of the Arab Ba’ath Socialist Party. For example, al-Hizb al-Qawmi al-Arabi, one of the early members of the party, wrote that “the Arabs have one sole leader [*za’im*], who expresses the potentialities of the Arab nation as a whole, represents them and expresses them in the best way.”⁶ These concepts of Ba’ath ideology were first introduced in Iraq in 1949 by Syrian students studying in Baghdad. However, it was not until the 1950s that this philosophy gained a legitimate following within the country.⁷

i. Early Government Alienation of Shi’as

To understand Shi’i alienation in Iraq, we must start some decades before the existence of the Ba’ath party. Large populations of Shi’as existed within Iraq primarily as a result of Arab tribes that migrated from the Arabian peninsula during the 18th and 19th centuries, and settled in southern market cities such as Najaf and Karbala, and converted to Shi’ism.⁸ Additionally, for many years Persian Shi’as enjoyed privileges in Iraq as a result of the Ottoman’s inability to maintain authority over its empire as well as the existence of significant Shi’i religious shrines. More specifically, during the final years of the Ottoman Empire, Persians in Iraq were granted a special citizen status whereby they could continue to keep their Persian citizenship but live within Ottoman boundaries.⁹ Numbers of Shi’as in Iraq also increased with the emergence of

⁵ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba’thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 115.

⁸ *Ibid.* 14.

⁹ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi’as of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 17.

mujtahids, or religious scholars who assumed high levels of authority within the Shi'i religious community.¹⁰ By the constitutional period of the Ottoman Empire, Shi'i *mujtahids* had centralized their leadership, restored legal schools, and grew political and religious activist groups so much so that they began to seriously influence politics in Iraq.¹¹

Despite some of these advantages that allowed the Shi'i community in modern-day Iraq to grow, Shi'as under Ottoman rule faced discriminatory and often paradoxical policies. The Shi'as posed a difficult challenge to the Ottomans; on the one hand, the Ottomans needed the *mujtahids* to mobilize their greater Shi'i communities in order to achieve greater unification and therefore improved stability. On the other hand, however, the Ottomans were concerned with the growing legitimacy *mujtahids* were acquiring among Iraqis, as well as their close association with general religious affairs in Iran.¹² In addition, the Ottomans utilized Shi'i resistance to strategically escalate opposition against European powers, namely the British. Yet at the same time, doing so only increased the popularity of the *mujtahids* who emerged as leaders of these resistance campaigns and also equipped Shi'as with the know-how and techniques of opposition that could endanger Ottoman power.¹³ This power struggle continued into the British mandate of Iraq beginning in 1921.

By 1932, the British granted Iraq its independence as a result of powerful resistance from both Shi'as and Sunnis. However, in an effort to ensure its projects in Iraq could continue, the British installed King Faisal, a so-called British puppet who worked closely with Western

¹⁰ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹² Selim Deringil, "The Struggle Against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter Propaganda" (*Die Welt des Islam: International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam*, Vol. 30, 1990), 347.

¹³ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 58.

powers. Faisal, a Sunni Muslim himself, filled his administration almost exclusively with Sunnis.¹⁴ He passed a series of legislation that prohibited foreign nationals, which directly restricted Persians with special status in Iraq from participating in certain jobs and trades.¹⁵ Through such reforms, Faisal stunted the growth of Shi'i influence and political involvement within Iraq. It should be said here that in any case, regardless of specific ethnicity, religion, or geographical location, creating a new independent nation out of a diverse populace would have been a challenge. However, the lack of integration of Shi'as coupled with the legacy of Ottoman discrimination against them complicates this particular case. The blow to the dynamics of Iraqi Shi'i culture continued after the fall of Faisal. In fact, the alienation of Shi'as was perhaps most prominent during the era of the Ba'ath regime.

The relationship between the Ba'ath regime and the Iraqi Shi'as became damaged as a result of four major issues: competition over influence of the Iraqi population, the process of secularization, the seclusion of Shi'as from mid-level and high ranking positions within the government, and eventually the relationship between Iraqi Shi'as and Iranian conservatives at the beginning of the revolution. The hostility between Iraqi Shi'as and Sunnis, however, should not be regarded as a primordial clash resulting from religious ideologies that inevitably could not intermingle. The tension and exclusion of Shi'as from Iraqi politics developed from a history of discrimination, isolation, competition and resistance throughout decades of wavering power dynamics. As a result, many Shi'as, especially the frustrated younger generations, ascribed to the

¹⁴ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 77.

¹⁵ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 102.

Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) during the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁶ This developed not necessarily as a result of Shi'i devotion to communism; rather, Shi'as turned to communism because the entities they opposed, the British and the Ba'ath, ascribed to capitalism and socialism. Therefore, communism emerged as an avenue of resistance. Since the onset of the Ba'ath regime, the spread of communism threatened leaders and created distrust of Shi'as. This only functioned to worsen the lack of Shi'i representation within Iraqi politics. Under the leadership of President Abd al-Karim Qasim in particular, Iraqi Shi'as were excluded from the state as a result of legislation passed that clashed with their ideologies as well as their daily lives. More specifically, Qasim promoted the secularization of politics and supported radical left-leaning policies that conflicted with the more religious Shi'as.¹⁷ Qasim also passed land and tax reforms that disproportionately affected Shi'as, since most of them were landlords and merchants or derived their income from religious taxes.¹⁸ After Qasim's overthrow in 1958, Sunni dominance of the Ba'ath regime's highest positions increased sharply.

Iraqi Shi'as faced discriminatory policies leading up to the Ba'ath party's acquisition of power. Unfortunately, many of the Ba'ath leaders reproduced these same type of policies, and continued to surround themselves with elite Sunnis or close family members. Due to the Ba'ath regime's make-up of almost entirely Sunnis as well as its staunch devotion to pan-Arabism, demands for Sunni-Shi'i equality were often perceived as sectarian, and thus portrayed as not in line with the regime's principles. Not only were simple grievances from Shi'i communities not

¹⁶ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 132.

¹⁷ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

met, but the venues for making such grievances heard were inaccessible.¹⁹ Therefore, throughout the Ba'ath party's leadership, Shi'as continued to be isolated from political and economic opportunities, and were confronted with a lack of representation that urged them to rely on their respective communities rather than any government entity.

ii. Saddam's Ba'ath Party Predecessors

The Ba'ath ideology rose in popularity in Iraq throughout the 1950s, expanding notably during President Abd al-Karim Qasim's rule between 1958 and 1963.²⁰ This was primarily due to his disregard of the growing momentum accompanying the pan-Arab movement, his support of communist reforms, and his inability to establish an electoral system or permanent constitution.²¹ By this point, the Ba'ath party not only consisted of a few hundred members but also had a framework comprised of various ranks and positions.²² As a result, the Ba'ath Party in Iraq infiltrated the government by way of a coup d'état, commonly referred to as the 14 Ramadan Coup, which overthrew Qasim's regime in February of 1963.²³ Ba'ath members swiftly established a bureaucratic structure for their new government, which placed Abd al-Salam Arif as president and Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr as prime minister and the party's civilian leader.²⁴ However, ideological disparities between older and younger members impeded progress. In addition, there were disagreements over appropriate foreign policy, specifically

¹⁹ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 90.

²⁰ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 12.

²¹ Lorenzo Kent Kimball, *The Changing Political Power in Iraq* (Robert Speller & Sons Publishers, Inc., 1972), 105.

²² Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 108.

²³ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 116.

²⁴ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 167.

regarding relations with Arab nationalist President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and how to interpret the United Arab Republic.²⁵ Amidst these challenges, Arif banned the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party from participating in government and dissolved the National Guard; he saw both groups as a threat to his attempt to secure full control over Iraqi society.²⁶ The party cleavages that plagued his regime were only exacerbated by Shi'i resentment; this came as a result of prime minister al-Bakr's expulsion of thousands of Shi'as to Iran in the late 1970s citing their "Persian connection."²⁷ After his death, Arif's brother, Abd al-Rahman Arif, was elected president. The regime of Arif the second was ephemeral and faced similar challenges as both his brother and Qasim, notably the lack of any type of overarching nationalism, which provoked widespread resistance among a variety of groups within Iraq.²⁸ The continuation of incompetent governing and sentiments of distrust from Iraqis who felt unrepresented by the erratic changes in leadership created somewhat of a power vacuum. This ultimately abetted in the creation of circumstances conducive for Arif's overthrow in 1968 by young, disgruntled military officers.²⁹

The ousting of both Arif brothers reinstated the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party as the dominant political group in Iraq. After a brief period of internal competition among party members, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, previously the prime minister, became the recognized leader of the coup and president of the country.³⁰ Despite its originally volatile base at the time of the

²⁵ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 119.

²⁶ Lorenzo Kent Kimball, *The Changing Political Power in Iraq* (Robert Speller & Sons Publishers, Inc., 1972), 144.

²⁷ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 137.

²⁸ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 133.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁰ Lorenzo Kent Kimball, *The Changing Political Power in Iraq* (Robert Speller & Sons Publishers, Inc., 1972), 114.

coup, Ahmad's regime centralized power throughout the 1970s by establishing a strong command economy and reorganizing the military. The regime also initiated a reign of terror that relied on a secret police, conspiracy trials, and the neutralization of the army to ensure loyalty from the inside and obedience from the outside, namely among disgruntled Shi'as.³¹ In addition, the Ba'ath party in Iraq, similar to the party's existence elsewhere, relied on personal and familial ties; subsequently, the strongest support for Ahmad's presidency came from his hometown of Tikrit.³² In accordance with this, Ahmad appointed his relative and fellow Tikrit native as the full-time organizer of the military wing of the Ba'ath party; this relative was Saddam Hussein, who ultimately became Ahmad's closest aid.³³ Unable to consolidate clashing views within his administration as well as unite together various portions of his population, al-Bakr's regime acted to stagnate progress and perpetuate the state of turmoil within Iraq.³⁴

The Ba'ath movement as it existed in Iraqi politics was neither a monolithic nor static set of principles, which meant that the direction of the party depended on the perspectives, strategies, and concerns of the individual ruler. This concept becomes important later when discussing how Saddam initiated such stark ideological transformations of Ba'ath rhetoric that focused both on Islam and Iraqi excellence instead of solely secularism and socialist pan-Arabism. Furthermore, the relationship between the Ba'ath regime and Iraqi Shi'as illustrates the growing discontent among Shi'as that festered for centuries. This partially explains why this specific demographic was of prioritized concern within the Ba'ath regime during the war period.

³¹ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 140.

³² *Ibid.*, 139.

³³ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 109.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

iii. Saddam's Journey to Presidency

Saddam's rise to power within the Ba'ath party and eventually within the highest ranks of Iraqi government allows historians to understand how his preliminary political involvement shaped his leadership after he advanced to the role of presidency. This section is primarily concerned with the uncompromising devotion to pan-Arabism and secularism seen throughout Saddam's early years in politics, which he divulged from quite radically after settling into his position as president. Additionally, tracing through Saddam's advancement within the Ba'ath party highlights his obsession with control and power, which will later help to qualify his preoccupied demeanor, specifically toward Iraqi Shi'as during the war period.

Saddam peripherally participated within the Ba'ath party during the 1950s and was specifically invigorated after the 1958 coup d'état of King Faisal, especially when many Ba'ath members realized that Qasim would pursue an inward-looking approach that emphasized communist elements rather than that of pan-Arab unification, which those who had initiated the coup originally wanted. Although still technically a junior member of the Ba'ath party, Saddam was very involved in oppositional activities in an effort to bring down Qasim; his arrest in 1958 particularly enhanced his political reputation within Ba'ath circles.³⁵ Upon release, Saddam participated in the failed assassination attempt against Qasim in October of 1959, citing his concern over Qasim's deviation from Arab nationalism in favor of communism. After, Saddam fled to Syria where he was officially inducted as a member into the Ba'ath party at the rank of "supporter."³⁶ As discussed earlier, the familial and personal ties permeated the structure of the

³⁵ Said K. Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: Politics of Revenge* (Bloomsbury Books, 2000), 44.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

Ba'ath hierarchy. After withdrawing from the political resistance scene, Saddam married his cousin Sajida Talfah, which proved a socially and politically strategic move considering Sajida was closely related to then-prime minister Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr.³⁷

By the time of the 1968 coup d'état, which elevated Ahmad to the role of president of Iraq, Saddam and Ahmad had developed a close relationship based not only on their personal ties but also on their shared support for Ba'ath principals, particularly pan-Arabism and secularism. Ahmad became somewhat of a mentor figure to Saddam, while Saddam proved useful through his organizational skills and strict demeanor.³⁸ Because at this time Saddam had no military training, his primary way to advance within the Ba'ath party was through his relationship with Ahmad. Upon Ahmad's rise to the presidency, Saddam still had little experience and was only in his early twenties, so Ahmad assigned Saddam the informal role of Deputy Secretary General in which he essentially functioned as the internal security czar and developed a new and extremely expansive security apparatus.³⁹ Although still occupying a secondary role within al-Bakr's administration, Saddam steadily began to advance his career; he was later appointed to the new Regional Command, which worked at the national level to elect the party's congress.⁴⁰

At this point, Saddam arguably started his campaign to consolidate power. First, he ensured he was Ahmad's only second-in-command; he coerced the dismissal of Prime Minister Abd ar-Razzaq an-Naif as well as Chief of Staff Faysal al-Ansari alongside eight other divisional

³⁷ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 144.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁹ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 120.

⁴⁰ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 149.

commanders who were then replaced by “more loyal” Ba’ath members.⁴¹ By the mid-1960s, these programs of removal alongside the increasingly close relationship between Saddam and Ahmad led to Saddam’s seizure of control over the National Security Bureau of the RCC, better known as the president’s personal security force tasked with collecting intelligence on political and religious resistance groups.⁴² Within his new roles as both head of the Ba’ath party and the official security services of Iraq, Saddam had the authority to check both internal and external threats.⁴³ In recognition of this, Saddam initiated an operation in which he encouraged all party members to essentially spy on each other in order to mitigate any potential defection. To further ensure devotion within the party, Saddam promoted individuals from the same communities and with similar backgrounds as both himself and Ahmad to some of the highest government positions.⁴⁴ Realizing the army was his biggest threat for influence as well as the only arm of the regime capable of overthrowing the administration that he had ultimately come to dominate, Saddam convinced Ahmad to relinquish control of the military.⁴⁵ It must be mentioned again here that Saddam still had no military training or experience, yet eventually he formed his own Popular Army that naturally was under his own personal authority. This clearly emphasizes how kinship networks and tribal connections allowed Saddam to bypass the party and the military, allowing him to expand and preserve his power over an array of institutions which he technically never should have controlled. By 1968, Saddam was promoted to the rank of vice president,

⁴¹ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 120.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴⁴ Said K. Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: Politics of Revenge* (Bloomsbury Books, 2000), 84.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

marking the true onset of his goal of carving out a position for himself in which only he controlled all sections of Iraqi society.⁴⁶

By the mid-1970s, Ahmad began to retire from his active political role and cede most authority to Saddam due to both his growing illness and contentment with a more ceremonial rather than functional role; this gradual shift was undoubtedly influenced by Saddam's ambitious nature. By 1977, the party, the intelligence organizations, and even several ministers who traditionally reported directly to Ahmad, took orders from Saddam.⁴⁷ Since Saddam was now seen as the "strong man" of the Ba'ath government, the policies and agreements that were implemented during Ahmad's presidency, such as oil nationalization, negotiations with the Kurdish population, agricultural programs, educational reform and discussions with Iran, were all realistically under the command of Saddam. Through continued campaigns of terror and forced dismissals of government officials perceived as disloyal, Saddam procured a monopoly on government power over ultimately the entirety of Iraq. In 1979, Saddam forced Ahmad's resignation and became president. After his acquisition of the presidency, he only strengthened his secret police and accompanying terror campaigns. In particular, Saddam's regime would seem to randomly pluck out "terrorists" from Shi'i communities that endangered the Ba'ath, execute or arrest them, and then evict their families or remove them from their jobs.⁴⁸ These types of targeted operations left Shi'i communities weak, afraid, and unable to trust Saddam's regime. Saddam also immediately began eliminating those who posed very real or perceived

⁴⁶ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 209.

⁴⁷ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 151.

⁴⁸ Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 218.

threats to his leadership.⁴⁹ After the execution of hundreds of senior party officials and military officers, Saddam seemingly expunged any resistance within his inner circle and more broadly the entire regime.

Saddam's journey throughout Iraqi politics illustrates both his ambition and obsession with authority. This helps to show how his propaganda campaign mimicked his preoccupied demeanor, which resulted in the need to fill every aspect of Iraqi society with Ba'ath propaganda. Also, illustrating Saddam's initial devotion to pan-Arabism and secularism is necessary to grasp how during the war, the content of his propaganda shifted radically.

II. International Context

At the beginning of Saddam's presidency, a variety of external factors impacted his foreign policy and eventual decision to wage war with Iran. For one, the Soviet Union and the United States, the two major superpowers invested in the Middle East, were distracted by their own issues. The Soviet Union was bogged down in Afghanistan fighting off the *mujahidin* while simultaneously trying to quell resistance from Poland.⁵⁰ In the United States, the Carter administration was responding to a hostage crisis at its embassy in Iran, which ensured that any aggression toward Iran would likely be overlooked by the American government. Because of these circumstances, the Ba'ath government predicted that an invasion of Iran would not warrant opposition from any global powers. Furthermore, negotiations between Israel and Egypt were underway at Camp David. These discussions resulted in the Camp David Accords, which

⁴⁹ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 87.

⁵⁰ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 190.

ultimately relinquished Egypt's position as leader of the Arab world given that to many Arab states, Egypt abandoned the Palestine question for an alliance with Israel and the United States. This clear diminishing power of Egypt tapped into Saddam's ambitious nature.⁵¹ At the same time, Khomeini's movement began to alienate Gulf Arab states and other nations consisting of predominantly Sunni Muslims.⁵² Saddam saw this estrangement of the Gulf states as an opportunity to spread Ba'ath ideology, which could ideally counter the religious currents rippling from Iran. Moreover, Saddam recognized this as a chance to gain a larger following in the Gulf, which would potentially offset the powerful Saudi Arabia and its legitimacy rooted in religious ideologies that clashed with those of the Ba'ath party.⁵³ These conditions provided a conducive context for Saddam to achieve his regional aspirations. With a revolutionary Iran that possessed little international support, Saddam capitalized on the disruption of regional power dynamics in order to carry out his goal of becoming the superior nation of the Middle East.

i. Oil Interests

Oil contributed largely to the competitive rivalry between Iran and Iraq, and acted as both a motivator for Saddam to invade as well as material for his propaganda during the war. The discovery of oil in Iran and Iraq took place in the early 1900s and became an essential economic interest for both countries, especially after the withdrawal of direct European imperial control. In Iraq, the first concession for exploration and production of oil was granted in 1925 to the Turkish

⁵¹ Stephen R. Grummon, *The Washington Papers/92: Iran-Iraq War, Islam Embattled* (Praeger Publishers, 1982), 11.

⁵² David D Palkki et al, *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978 2001* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 129.

⁵³ David D Palkki et al, *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978 2001* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 129.

Petroleum Company, later renamed the Iraq Petroleum Company, for a period of seventy-five years.⁵⁴ British, French and American petroleum companies began directly investing in Iraqi oil. As Iraq's interest in its oil industry grew, it entered into the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960 and the Iraq Petroleum Company nationalized its oil sector in 1972.⁵⁵ Quite timely was the explosive discovery of oil the following year.⁵⁶ As a result of the expansion of the oil sector, the Ba'ath regime invested in developing the country's infrastructure and technology as it related to oil exportation. Iraq began to develop a reliance on oil revenues in order to maintain the Iraqi economy's prosperity and survival of the Ba'ath regime. This dependency put added pressure on territorial rights over the Shatt al-Arab River, which was essential in that it provided the most efficient connection to the global market.⁵⁷ More specifically, this waterway acted as the major source of exportation of oil and importation of oil equipment.⁵⁸ With this in mind, although both oil and the Shatt al-Arab were strategic staples of the Iraqi economy, neither were sole catalysts of the war. Rather, both were manipulated and exaggerated as a way to justify aggressive action on behalf of Iraq.

On the other hand, in Iran, after oil was discovered in 1908 the country experienced several decades of economic decline. This only worsened with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi Shah's irresponsible mismanagement of funds, the reduction of oil output, the lack of skilled workers,

⁵⁴ Abbas Alnasrawi, "Economic Consequences of the Iran-Iraq War" (*Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1986), 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁷ Thom W. Workman, *The Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 103.

⁵⁸ Richard Schofield in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 41.

and most notably the wave of unrest affiliated with the 1979 revolution.⁵⁹ Also, the ensuing hostage crisis in particular led to the freezing of Iranian assets worth billions of dollars in the United States as well as broader international sanctions.⁶⁰ This proved detrimental to Iran since its economy relied almost exclusively on its oil sales as its source of foreign exchange earnings. Iran's most important location for oil reserves was arguably the port at Khuzestan.⁶¹ Its vast amount of oil and key function as Iran's principle refinery compelled Saddam to be particularly interested in acquiring it. In addition, Khuzestan contains a large Arab population, which Saddam capitalized on as a way to prove rightful ownership over the port, leading to the renegotiation of the 1975 treaty.

Growing competition between Iran and Iraq over the domination of the global oil market added heightened pressure between the two countries. Iran followed Saudi Arabia as the second largest OPEC producer for years, but was replaced by Iraq in 1979 given the economic instability the revolution generated and Iraq's modernization of its oil industry in the early 1970s.⁶² By this point, the majority of Iraq's economic relations with other countries, particularly those in the West, were by way of oil exports, while Iran's stronghold in the industry was slipping. Because of this reality, many researchers such as Claudia Wright view Saddam's desire to destroy Iran's oil reserves and transportation routes as Iraq's initial impetus for going to war.⁶³ Although this claim accurately points to the gravity of the competition over oil at this time, particularly

⁵⁹ Abbas Alnasrawi, "Economic Consequences of the Iran-Iraq War" (*Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1986), 4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶¹ Will D. Swearingen, "Geopolitical Origins of the Iran-Iraq War" (*Geographical Review*, Vol. 78, 1988), 3.

⁶² Abbas Alnasrawi, "Economic Consequences of the Iran-Iraq War" (*Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1986), 7.

⁶³ Claudia Wright, "Implications of the Iran-Iraq War" (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 1980), 286.

between Iran and Iraq, it's over-reaching in that it glosses over a variety of other factors present within the international context.

In the context of the Iranian revolution and rise of Saddam within the Ba'ath regime, the significance of oil should not be perceived as solely an economic strategy. Saddam believed that the continual flow of oil money into Iraq could contain opposition, especially Shi'i resistance groups, through the rise and advancement of the middle, capitalist class.⁶⁴ Amidst the revolution in Iran and the instability that plagued its economy, Saddam saw an opportunity to capture and stabilize oil revenues as a way to prove regional hegemony but also to financially appease Iraqi Shi'as who felt mounting frustration with the Sunni-dominated Ba'ath regime.

ii. The Iranian Revolution

Several internal and external conditions fostered an environment of instability that provided Saddam with a strategic opportunity to take offensive military action against Iran, which Saddam believed would prove supposed Iraqi superiority. For one, the Iranian Revolution, especially after the collapse of the Iranian government, was perceived by Saddam as fraying and losing momentum, as all revolutions do.⁶⁵ The revolution did in fact create a power vacuum resulting in chaotic disarray with little centralization or authority. This lack of consolidation of power diminished the strength, morale and discipline of the Iranian army. The assassinations of high level officers in the military and police only exacerbated this, and resulted in the crumbling

⁶⁴ Richard Schofield in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 104.

⁶⁵ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 139.

of Iran's security apparatus.⁶⁶ This growing instability in the late 1970s created the impression that Iran was weak, vulnerable, and unprepared in the case of an escalation of conflict.

Although the revolution created instability and undermined Iran's strength, the overall message of the revolution, which demanded the revival of Shi'a Islam into politics, endangered the secular Ba'ath regime. Saddam worried that Iraq's large Shi'i population would connect closely with Khomeini's ideology, putting his own his regime at risk. This fear was not unwarranted, as the rise of Khomeini's popularity seeped into Iraq; prominent Iraqi Shi'i religious leaders began explicitly calling for the overthrow of Saddam and mass demonstrations of support for Khomeini erupted in southern cities such as Najaf.⁶⁷ Saddam even conjectured that the main goal of the Iranian Revolution was to hurt Iraq, saying in a private meeting that "Iran has planned animosity for us from the beginning, as if the change [Revolution] that took place in Iran was designed with the intention to be against the interest of Iraq..."⁶⁸

Despite the chaos amidst the revolution, Iran still encroached on Iraqi society in more direct ways as well. Khomeini would explicitly defame the Ba'ath regime in his speeches: "the Iraqi people must get rid of the claws of this gang...the Iraqi Army must rise up...the war that the Iraqi Ba'ath wants to ignite is a war against Islam."⁶⁹ The trend of discrediting the Ba'ath party by arguing that Saddam's policies threatened Islam was a staple within Khomeini's rhetoric. For example, after Saddam ordered the expulsion of citizens of Iranian origin from Iraq, Khomeini

⁶⁶ Stephen R. Grummon, *The Washington Papers/92: Iran-Iraq War, Islam Embattled* (Praeger Publishers, 1982), 9.

⁶⁷ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 139.

⁶⁸ David D Palkki et al, *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978 2001* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 129.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

asserted that “the inhumane Iraqi Ba’ath regime has forced thousands of Muslim brothers and sisters to leave that country in the most disgraceful manner on charges of being Shi’ite Muslims and opposing the bloodsucking regime of Saddam Hussein.”⁷⁰ These bold statements only intensified the animosity between Saddam and Khomeini, and further challenged Saddam with increased upheaval in the southern Shi’a-majority communities.

Another aspect that proved jeopardizing to Saddam’s regime was the expansive and reciprocal network between Iranian clerics who advocated for the overthrow of Saddam’s regime and major Shi’i Islamic groups in Iraq, such as the Islamic Revolution Struggle of Iraq, the Islamic Movement of Iraq and the Islamic Revolutionary Army for the Liberation of Iraq, to name a few.⁷¹ This relationship was built on radio broadcasting and the mutual circulation of both Shi’i Iranian and Iraqi lectures and discourse. As a result, this provided constant infiltration of revolutionary rhetoric and techniques into Iraq as well as first-hand accounts of the discontent felt by Iraqi Shi’as into Iran.⁷² Additionally, Khomeini had relationships with revered, high-ranking Shi’i clerics in Iraq such as Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who was perhaps the most influential Shi’i scholar in Iraq throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s. al-Sadr and Khomeini’s relationship started by exchanging general messages on faith, but soon evolved into discussions of effective strategies to galvanize Iraqi Shi’as against Saddam.⁷³ Consequently, al-Sadr sparked constant demonstrations in correspondence with Khomeini’s declarations against the Ba’ath government during the year of 1979. Throughout these demonstrations and lectures,

⁷⁰ Ibid., 141.

⁷¹ Thom W. Workman, *The Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 96.

⁷² Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba’thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 140.

⁷³ Ibid., 140.

al-Sadr characterized the Ba'ath ideology as un-Islamic, and most importantly issued *fatwas*, or authoritative Islamic interpretations, that forbid Muslims to be members of the Ba'ath party. Moreover, he granted the right to suspend *sharia* rules if it was in the name of purchasing arms or participating in resistance against the Ba'ath regime.⁷⁴ In response to this, Saddam put al-Sadr under house arrest, since to him this blatant opposition among Iraqi Shi'as coupled with clear Iranian intrusion into Iraqi society endangered Saddam's leadership and aspirations. This led him to eventually pursue more aggressive action.

In response to the outbreak of Iraqi Shi'as who followed Khomeini, the Ba'ath regime intensified its campaign targeting political criticism. More specifically, it punished those who joined an alternative political party with execution, and exiled those who engaged in any type of political opposition.⁷⁵ Ironically, these campaigns acted to undermine the regime, since such harsh crackdowns further incited Iraqi Shi'as, making them more receptive to the revolutionary propaganda from Iran that the Ba'ath regime was trying to obstruct.⁷⁶ By persecuting Iraqi Shi'as, especially religious students and the *ulama*, who were specialized scholars of Islam, the Ba'ath regime indirectly reinforced solidarity between Iraqi and Iranian Shi'as.

Although the Iranian Revolution generated instability and vulnerability due to the lack of centralization of political and military bureaucracies, the intensity of Khomeini's message and the Iraqi Shi'i community's identification to it proved dangerous to Saddam's regime. The communication networks between Shi'i Iranians and Iraqis, Khomeini's direct rejections of

⁷⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁷⁵ Thom W. Workman, *The Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 81.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 81.

Saddam's leadership, and the close relationship between Khomeini and al-Sadr pushed the Ba'ath regime to fear for its legitimacy and survival. Moreover, Saddam's brutal terror campaigns aimed at squashing criticism only drew Iraqi Shi'as closer to Khomeini's revolutionary rhetoric, which meant Saddam had to initiate a new program not based in fear but in the power of nationalism.

iii. The Decision to Invade

Although researchers have analyzed the context as well as statements and policies made by both Iranian and Iraqi officials in the period leading up to Iraq's invasion of Iran, the most invaluable resources to consider are recorded private meetings between Saddam and his senior Iraqi decision-making groups such as the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the cabinet (Council of Ministers), and informal advisers. These recordings were recovered, transcribed, translated, and published after the United States invaded Iraq. When examining these transcripts, it's clear that the historical legacies and stereotypical caricatures of Saddam constructed by Western media that cast him as entirely irrational, blindly ambitious, and imprudent in his decision-making, especially when it came to his military policy, are erroneous. At least in the period leading up to the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam demonstrated a realistic and pragmatic disposition and sense of direction as it related to acknowledging Khomeini's reach to Iraqi Shi'as.⁷⁷ He did not underestimate the magnitude of Khomeini's leverage and influence within Iraq, and admitted on several occasions that Khomeini had transformed himself into a symbol

⁷⁷ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 148.

and was systematic in how he spread and maintained his power.⁷⁸ Even despite some of Saddam's more controversial policies and speeches leading up to the war, it was understood that he must be cautious because upsetting Iraqi Shi'as would only encourage their connection with Khomeini's message. Moreover, Saddam was aware of the close relationship between Khomeini and al-Sadr, and most importantly al-Sadr's strict obedience to Khomeini's wishes. Therefore, Saddam recognized the level of accessibility Khomeini had to the Shi'as of Iraq. Saddam's caution was apparent in his initial hesitance to launch any offensive aggressions against Iran, warning that Iraq could and would not "be dragged into war with Iran at this period of time" because doing so would prove violent, expensive, and ill-planned.⁷⁹ During the early months of 1980, Saddam believed Khomeini's popularity and his connection to Iraqi Shi'as was still too durable, even if Iran's military and political institutions became unstable as a result of the revolution.⁸⁰ Saddam calculated that Iraqi Shi'as needed to be controlled and Khomeini's voice muffled before any invasion, despite Iraq's military preparedness to wage a formidable attack. Like many of the members within his cabinet, Saddam agreed a serious clash with Iran within the next few years was inevitable, but he stood by the method of inflicting the most damage on Iran through covert missions rather than starting a war.⁸¹ Saddam made the sound decision to monitor the progression of Khomeini's movement in hopes that Iran's growing instability would halt his momentum. In the meantime, he brought together his advisors to analyze Khomeini's potential next steps.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 149.

⁸⁰ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 150.

⁸¹ Ibid., 148.

Saddam also saw the importance of analyzing and appeasing the concerns of Iraqi Shi'as as a way to mitigate Khomeini's influence over them. He tasked his cabinet members with obtaining a better understanding of Shi'ism as well as the general grievances of Iraqi Shi'as in order to discern their connection with Khomeini.⁸² Additionally, Saddam ordered his comrades to read Khomeini's book, The Islamic Government as well as staple books of Shi'ism, such as Wai al-Zaylani's Islam Without Schools.⁸³ Moreover, his cabinet members investigated how the Ba'ath government could implement policies centered around fostering Iraqi nationalism as a way to loosen Khomeini's grip on Iraqi Shi'as. In doing this, Saddam believed his regime could potentially, through the consolidation of a national identity informed by Ba'ath ideology, resolve some of the problems of the Iraqi Shi'as. Even if Saddam did not maintain this sort of calculated demeanor throughout the entirety of the war, it's important to understand his original judgment of the escalating situation with Iran.

On September 16, 1980, Saddam, his RCC and members of the Ba'ath Regional Leadership met to discuss Iraq's ambitions and concerns regarding Iran.⁸⁴ This meeting followed one of Saddam's most relentless elimination operations in which hundreds of senior party members and military officers were executed on the count of disloyalty. Now that he had secured his position as president and therefore sole ruler of Iraq, Saddam perceived attacks on Iraq as attacks on himself personally, and therefore judged Iran with less rational, thoughtful consideration and instead with a more emotional response.⁸⁵ With his acquisition of total power

⁸² Ibid., 150.

⁸³ Ibid., 150.

⁸⁴ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 151.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 152.

and a cabinet consisting of only yes-man followers, Saddam's ambitions to become leader of the entire Arab world were magnified, and to him within reach. In early September of 1980, Saddam met with his advisors and agreed to send an ultimatum to Iran demanding the remittance of two territories promised to Iraq under the 1975 Algiers Agreement, which as a whole allowed both Iran and Iraq to share the profitable Shatt al-Arab River.⁸⁶ With these changes in demeanor as well as the conditions within Iraq and the international context outlined above, the day after this meeting Saddam delivered a public speech to the National Assembly in which he formally abrogated the 1975 Algiers Agreement.⁸⁷ Saddam did not cite a legal justification for leaving the agreement, but instead argued that Khomeini had been given considerable time to return certain territories to Iraq, the rightful owner. Saddam asserted that the situation "necessitates that we regain it [land] with blood and weapons."⁸⁸ In accordance with this statement, Saddam began pouring his military towards the Iranian border in hopes of reclaiming the lands Saddam believed belonged to Iraq. As a result of this heightened aggression, on September 22, 1980 Saddam sent troops into Iran at four major points on their shared border.⁸⁹ In doing this, Saddam escalated the rivalry between the two countries in an attempt to achieve his ambition of attaining regional superiority.

iv. General Phases of the War

⁸⁶ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq At War* (I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1988), 29.

⁸⁷ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 151.

⁸⁸ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 151.

⁸⁹ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq At War* (I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1988), 30.

The international context as it related to Iranian-Iraqi relations pushed Saddam to not only change his demeanor in leadership but also to ultimately attack. Saddam's invasion characterized the first phase of the war, which extended until March of 1982, during which the Iraqi army's footing in Khuzestan started to weaken.⁹⁰ Although Iraqi forces initially moved quickly into central and southern Iran, its advances stopped short of most major cities.⁹¹ Researcher and political scientist Stephen R. Grummon conjectures that Saddam and his regime had most likely thought their invasion would have been shocking enough to catch Khomeini off-guard; however, it was clear by November of 1980 that Iran would not crumble under the impact of the Iraqi army.⁹²

The second phase of the war started in the spring of 1982 when a strong Iranian counteroffensive forced Saddam to withdraw his army from Iranian territory. At this point, Saddam became increasingly worried about the future of the war and discussed committing gross human rights violations via chemical weapons with his cabinet.⁹³ Saddam's army faced a series of embarrassing defeats as the war moved further into Iraqi territory, as his defensive strategy, which manifested in a defensive line along the Iraqi border, proved unsuccessful.⁹⁴

The fall of 1983 marked the third phase, during which Iraq defended against repeated Iranian land offensives.⁹⁵ Until the spring of 1988, this phase saw a major stalemate between the

⁹⁰ David D. Palkki et al. *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978 2001* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 126.

⁹¹ Stephen R. Grummon, *The Washington Papers/92: The Iran-Iraq War: Islam Embattled* (Praeger, 1982), 17.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹³ David D. Palkki et al. *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978 2001* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 126.

⁹⁴ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq At War* (I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1988), 58.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

two rivals.⁹⁶ Saddam, desperate to end the war, allegedly used chemical weapons against Iranian forces in 1984, 1985, and 1986.⁹⁷ In this same act of desperation, Saddam ordered the bombardment of civilian targets in Iran; a strong Iranian response to such tactics left Saddam scrambling after severe setbacks in both Baghdad and Basra, which was later captured.⁹⁸ By 1987, it was estimated that over 1.3 million men were serving in both the regular and auxiliary armed forces; out of this number, 80,000 were estimated dead, 170,000 were wounded and 170,000 were captured.⁹⁹

The last phase of the war extends from the spring of 1988 until the U.N. ceasefire in July of that same year. Within this period, Saddam was able to recapture Basra, but not without facing significant costs.¹⁰⁰ By the end of the eight-year long war, Ba'ath documents approximated the death of roughly 250,000 Iraqis, although the Correlates of War Project estimates closer to 500,000. Because Iraqi Shi'as made up close to 80% of the infantry, this specific demographic of Iraq was impacted significantly.¹⁰¹

Aside from boots on the ground, both Iran and Iraq utilized its air and naval power during the war. Although Iraq's air force proved particularly strong, Iran's navy dominated the sea, and much of the time forced Iraqi air forces to retreat to safe havens in other Arab countries before they could execute their missions.¹⁰² However, during the middle phases of the war, Iraqi air

⁹⁶ David D. Palkki et al. *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978 2001* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 126.

⁹⁷ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq At War* (I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1988), 59.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ David D. Palkki et al. *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978 2001* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 126.

¹⁰¹ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Prince University Press, 2018), 94.

¹⁰² Stephen R. Grummon, *The Washington Papers/92: The Iran-Iraq War: Islam Embattled* (Praeger, 1982), 18.

forces proved capable of inflicting considerable damage on Iranian ground forces, economic infrastructure and oil exports.¹⁰³ Iran responded with both power at sea and through long-range artillery, and brought destruction onto Baghdad and Basra in particular. In addition to these traditional military elements, Saddam also became obsessed with obtaining high-tech weaponry. For an example, he used the Exocet missile starting in 1984 to attempt to weaken Iran's strength at sea.¹⁰⁴ Throughout the entire conflict, major foreign powers such as the United States and Soviet Union transferred arms to both Iran and Iraq, and therefore indirectly contributed to the escalation of casualties during the war.¹⁰⁵

Saddam's propaganda and his bold shifts in rhetoric throughout the war period reflect the way the conflict progressed. The Iran-Iraq War can be characterized by shock, tragedy, and desperation, all of which influenced the all-encompassing quality of both the content of and mechanisms of disseminating Ba'ath propaganda. Thus, a timeline of the war should be kept in mind when considering Saddam and his regime's choices as it related to rhetoric that functioned to generate nationalism.

III. Origins of War-Time Propaganda: Territorial Tension

Once the war began, the theme of geography appeared in a variety of forms within Saddam's propaganda. Although disputes over borders and Shi'i shrine cities were all used as symbolic elements to isolate particularly vulnerable Shi'as from Iran and consolidate greater patriotism, they were not imagined out of thin air. These rhetorical elements have origins in real,

¹⁰³ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq At War* (I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1988), 65.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Robert S. Litwak, "The Soviet Union and the Iran-Iraq War" in Efraim Karsh's *The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications* (The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1989), 208.

long-standing rivalries between Iran and Iraq that have spanned for decades. Outlining the detailed histories of these disputes allows us to understand why and how Saddam manipulated and exploited these particular instances when attempting to construct a stronger national identity in the face of the Iranian adversary.

i. The Shatt al-Arab Dispute

A major subject of Saddam's propaganda to be highlighted is Iraq's shared border with Iran and the disputes that have transpired across it. One of the most historically controversial border disputes between Iran and Iraq is that over the Shatt al-Arab, a river that converges the Tigris and Euphrates, empties into the Persian Gulf, and acts as one of Iran and Iraq's borders.¹⁰⁶ The Shatt al-Arab was particularly strategic to both countries in terms of economic and military benefits as it provided access to navigation routes, water sources, oil exportation, crucial military positioning, and communication and trade with the global market.¹⁰⁷ The first attempt at formally outlining legal rights over this waterway took place in 1847 with the Treaty of Erzurum, which was drafted by the Russians, who had influence in Persia, and the British, who essentially controlled the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁸ Legal authority over the waterway was fiercely contested for decades as a result of shifts in the region's power dynamics that were occurring around both modern-day Iran and Iraq. Following World War I, for example, the Ottoman Empire was abolished and Iraq emerged as its own country in 1932 while a coup d'état in Iran led to the rise

¹⁰⁶ Charles A. Fisher in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 216.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Schofield in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 41.

¹⁰⁸ Shaul Bakash in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 13.

of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi several years later. Both new leadership and increased interests in oil triggered old-standing border grievances between Iran and Iraq. In its new stage of independence, the Iraqi government refused to negotiate with Iran over updating the Shatt al-Arab demarcations, which led to greater politicization of the conflict. Iraq stated that it deserved Iran's Khuzestan port and demanded complete control over the Shatt al-Arab. Continual dissatisfaction from both powers remained unchanged for decades, producing a smattering of short-lived drafts of various versions of the river's delineations. Iran and Iraq eventually signed the Algiers Accord and bilateral agreements of 1975, which defined the river as Iraqi but shared it along the mid-channel, a supposed achievement for both sides.¹⁰⁹ However, leading up to the Iran-Iraq War, President Saddam Hussein stated that "...the signing of the 1975 accord is the only step I have ever regretted...this accord was forced upon me...but at the very moment I was signing it, I was thinking of a day when I could tear it to pieces and retrieve Arab rights from the marauding Iranians."¹¹⁰ On September 17, 1980, Saddam Hussein unilaterally nullified this agreement on the basis that Iranian noncompliance forced Iraq to renounce the deal.¹¹¹ This in turn implied the end of any type of cooperation between Iran and Iraq, and foreshadowed Saddam's eventual declaration of war only a few days later.

The tension between Iran and Iraq for power over the Shatt al-Arab endured throughout centuries not only because of the functional benefits it could provide to either nation; it evolved into something more symbolic that emulated Iran and Iraq's competitive relationship. The

¹⁰⁹ Richard Schofield in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 54.

¹¹⁰ Thom W. Workman, *The Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 89.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

history behind the Shatt al-Arab dispute transformed it from a traditional conflict into a symbol of national pride.¹¹² This conceptualization materialized in Iraq after the Ba'ath party's procurement of power, when the regime denounced the 1937 treaty and claimed the Shatt al-Arab a national, Iraqi river.¹¹³ With this came the allegorical importance of nomenclatures; Iraq's control over the river compelled foreigners to refer to the body of water as the "Arabian Gulf," but Iranian customs refused to accept shipments with this term written on the labels.¹¹⁴ The development of the Shatt al-Arab into a national symbol on top of its strategic functionalities led, as we shall see, to its inclusion in Saddam's rhetorical campaign aimed at both isolating Iran and portraying it as imperialistic.

ii. Shi'i Shrine Cities

Much like gaining authority over waterways, stabilizing power over important shrine cities in Iraq acted as both pragmatic in that it ideally normalized relations between Shi'as and the Ba'ath regime, but also symbolic in that it extended Saddam's religious propaganda. With this being said, rhetorical campaigns regarding and throughout Shi'i shrine cities served to cultivate the support of Iraqi Shi'as during the war.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Najaf and Karbala attracted Shi'i pilgrims as they are considered two of the holiest cities for Shi'as; Najaf holds the shrine of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the first Shi'i imam, the cousin of Muhammad and the fourth caliph, while Karbala contains the shrine of Hussein, son of Ali and the third imam, as well as Abbas, Hussein's half-brother.¹¹⁵ In

¹¹² Richard Schofield in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 51.

¹¹³ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 51.

¹¹⁵ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 21.

addition, Arab tribes migrating from the Arabian peninsula settled in southern market cities such as Najaf and Karbala and converted to Shi'i Islam.¹¹⁶ For years, these cities acted semi-autonomously, given their religious and political influence that spread far beyond the borders of Iraq.¹¹⁷ With this being said, the development of both cities bred religious Shi'i communities whose clerics, or *mujtahids*, organized their own schools, universities, mosques, and unions.¹¹⁸ The flow of Shi'i funds as well as the movement of Shi'i students and pilgrims into these cities challenged the surrounding Sunni dominance. In addition, during the late nineteenth century there was a large movement that worked to convert Iraqi tribes to Shi'ism, which only added to the expansion of Shi'i communities in the south.¹¹⁹ Moreover, numbers of Shi'as increased with the arrival of Shi'as from Iran who enjoyed special citizenship in Iraq.

With the emergence and growth of centralized Shi'i leadership came the greater politicization of the influence of *mujtahids*. No party was more concerned with this challenge to power than that of the Ba'ath, whose secular ideology oftentimes fueled opposition within Shi'i communities. As a result, during the 1960s the Ba'ath regime initiated a security campaign that sent spies to the popular religious universities in Karbala and Najaf to report on the lectures of professors and the content of the textbooks.¹²⁰ In addition, the regime commenced a project of oversight which regulated the incoming funds intended for the holy shrines of Karbala and

¹¹⁶ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 14.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹¹⁸ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 91.

¹¹⁹ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'as of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 48.

¹²⁰ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 91.

Najaf.¹²¹ This led to severe clashes between the Ba'ath regime and influential *mujtahids*, who argued that their right to rule over their holy cities was being intentionally curtailed.

The shrine cities, specifically Najaf, also sparked the first direct animosity between Saddam and Khomeini. In 1964, the shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, exiled Khomeini from Iran because of his lectures that rejected the monarchy and demanded an Islamic government.¹²² As a result, Khomeini sought refuge in the holy city of Najaf to continue his work as an influential Shi'i cleric. However, at the behest of the shah, Saddam expelled Khomeini from Najaf in 1978 after his thirteen years of living there.¹²³ This particular instance can explain why Khomeini called so explicitly for the banishment of Saddam from power once his revolution gained momentum in 1979. Moreover, gaining authority over these shrine cities became an added investment for both Khomeini and Saddam throughout the war.

The shrine cities in Iraq, most notably those of Najaf and Karbala, posed a challenge for the Ba'ath regime and Saddam. Not only did these cities have religious significance, particularly among Shi'as, that created a link between Iraqi Shi'as and Khomeini's revolution; they also inevitably cultivated powerful religious leaders who often clashed with secular Ba'ath ideology and competed for influence in areas which the Ba'ath regime was unpopular and therefore could not effectively influence. This tension between shrine cities and the Ba'ath regime did not singularly drive Iraq to war. However, their significance both as oppositional threats and prestigious sites made them controversial leading up to the fall of 1980. With this being said,

¹²¹ Ibid., 91.

¹²² Will D. Swearingen, "Geopolitical Origins of the Iran-Iraq War" (*Geographical Review*, Vol. 78, 1988), 411.

¹²³ Ibid., 411.

Saddam and the Ba'ath regime paid particular attention to these cities when it came to disseminating propaganda, since the communities of Najaf and Karbala were the primary targets of rhetoric that urged Iraqis to prioritize nationalism over religious identity.

The theme of geography became a staple of the Ba'ath regime's propaganda campaign during the war period, particularly because it helped the regime portray Iran as an innately imperialistic entity. Incorporating specific examples from Iranian-Iraqi disputes such as disagreements over the Shatt al-Arab and Shi'i shrine cities allowed Saddam to paint this picture more believably. Ideally, justifying Iraq's claim to various significant geographic sites would justify the Ba'ath regime's own aggression as well as foster an environment that would create a stronger national identity in the defense against Iran.

IV. Origins of War-Time Propaganda: Religious & Ethnic Disparities

In addition to capitalizing on and exaggerating the issues of physical and concrete components such as borders and shrine cities, Saddam also manipulated existing religious and ethnic disparities between the two countries. The Ba'ath regime saw this as strategic because Iran and Iraq did, in fact, have differences between one another; of course, variance in religion and ethnicity did not mean Iranians and Iraqis inevitably clashed. In reality, most of the discrepancies outlined in this section were barely discernible, did not impact the average Iranian or Iraqi, and certainly were not the root causes of conflict. However, when politicized they served to create exaggerated tension. Saddam and his regime, then, recognized that in isolating Iran from Iraq, hyperbolizing clear differences that already existed would be relatively easy. Saddam particularly depended on the variations between Sunnis and Shi'as and Arabs and Persians as a way to portray Iraq as superior and depict Iran as innately hostile towards Iraq.

i. Sunni vs. Shi'a

One disparity typically invoked in Saddam's rhetoric was the difference in sect of Islam, or Shi'ism vs. Sunnism. Although Shi'a and Sunni sects of Islam encompass many similarities, they differ on how they regard Prophet Muhammad and his appropriate successor. Both sects are in agreement that Allah is the one and only true God and that Prophet Muhammad was his messenger, but "...Sunni Muslims endorsed the historical caliphate, whereas Shi'i Muslims lent their support to Ali, cousin of the Prophet and the fourth caliph."¹²⁴ However, it was not the theological schism that aggravated relations between Iran and Iraq, but the long history of persistent shifts in domination and submission between various ruling empires of modern day Iran and Iraq. Early Arab history saw brutal fighting between Sunni Ottomans and Shi'i Safavids, with the Safavids briefly conquering modern-day Iraq until the Ottomans re-gained the territory in the mid-1600s.¹²⁵ Amidst this period of instability, both the Safavids and Ottomans used their respective sects of Islam to mobilize support; thus, both Shi'as and Sunnis within this territory shared a history of discrimination and persecution. Throughout the unstable rule of the Ottomans and Safavids, religious divisions as well as tensions between tribes created a social hierarchy in which differing groups rarely intermingled, and Shi'as were intentionally excluded from the political sphere, especially in the Ottoman provinces.¹²⁶ Foreign powers purposefully reproduced and manipulated these hierarchies in order to maintain their control and strategic interests. Ultimately, the Shi'i Safavids captured modern-day Iran, but they were surrounded by

¹²⁴ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 91.

¹²⁵ Stephen R. Grummon, *The Washington Papers/92: Iran-Iraq War, Islam Embattled* (Praeger Publishers, 1982), 3.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

external opposition and forced to continually fight to preserve their rule. The Sunni Ottomans acquired the provinces that comprise modern-day Iraq, but with that they inherited entrenched Sunni hostility toward Shi'as as well as the illogical hierarchies strengthened by foreign powers that left the Sunni minority elites dominating the Shi'i majority.¹²⁷ Therefore, it was not differences in religious interpretations that generated tension, but a history of oscillating discrimination. Thus, later in the 1980s, it was not these two sects of Islam but the clashing ideologies of the Ba'ath regime's secularism and Khomeini's religious movement that drove conflict and competition between Iraq and Iran. Saddam capitalized on these differences in order to prove his own devotion to religion and portray Khomeini as preaching a fraudulent version of Islam.

ii. Arab vs. Persian

In addition to exaggerating and manipulating theological differences, Saddam's rhetoric included distorted distinctions between Persian and Arab identities. Persians purposefully preserved their own culture, most notably their unique language, despite the popular movement to Arabize Muslim states.¹²⁸ With this being said, the concepts and ideologies associated with the pan-Arab movement did not take hold in Iran as much as in Iraq. Although this contrast was present during the rule of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, it was arguably most prominent during the 20th century with the rise of Khomeini's revolution in Iran and the growth of the secular Ba'ath party in Iraq. The former espoused rhetoric that focused on bringing Islam to the forefront of nation-building, while the latter advocated for a pan-Arab platform as well as the separation of

¹²⁷ Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Westview Press, 2012), 8.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

religion and government. Saddam exaggerated these baseless claims of clashing religions and ethnicities to reinforce Iraq and the Ba'ath regime while delegitimizing Iran. W. Thom Workman argues that the combination of ideological differences and territorial disagreements brought "the outbreak of war...between two societies destined to collide," but this blanket statement is riddled with misinformation and unfounded assertions.¹²⁹ It was more accurately the combination of border disputes, ethnic disparities and competition over shrine cities within Saddam's propaganda that aided his ambition, culminating in military aggression.

In an attempt to isolate particularly Iraqi Shi'as, who were perceived to have ties to Khomeini's revolution, from Iran, Saddam integrated what he saw as major differences between Iran and Iraq into his propaganda. His reliance on competition over territory as well as religious and ethnic discrepancies stand out clearly in his rhetoric, especially when attempting to prove Iran's imperialistic and hostile nature as well as Iraq's superiority as Arab. As mentioned earlier, this chapter does not mean to imply that territorial rifts or cultural differences drove Iran and Iraq to war; instead, these were the primary elements with historical footing that Saddam used to justify the conflict and attempt to consolidate a national identity.

V. Conclusion

In order to analyze both the themes of Ba'ath propaganda as well as the mechanisms that disseminated that propaganda, a discussion on historical elements present before the war must be discussed. First, a general overview of the rise of the Ba'ath party outlines some of the party's major principles, such as pan-Arabism and secularism, both of which play important roles in

¹²⁹ Thom W. Workman, *The Social Origins of the Iran-Iraq War* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 23.

Saddam's propaganda during the war. Engaging with the history of Saddam's predecessors also helps to qualify Saddam's attempt at strengthening an Iraqi identity; almost every president under the Ba'ath party faced extreme difficulty in undertaking this task. The early examples of Saddam's ambition and compulsion with control provided in this chapter can be linked to the eventual extensive nature of his regime's content of and mechanisms of disseminating his regime's propaganda. In conjunction with later chapters, understanding Saddam's original principles of leadership paints the "before" picture, and allows the reader to understand the radical shift in his rhetoric and ideology during the war period. Second, understanding the legacy of imbalanced power dynamics throughout Iraq's history that left Shi'as discriminated against helps to make sense of the difficulty in fostering Iraqi nationalism. In addition, this analysis considers why the Ba'ath regime saw the Iraqi Shi'as as specifically vulnerable to Khomeini's revolutionary rhetoric, and thus why the regime perceived them as having the potential to endanger the construction of an Iraqi identity. Saddam's rise to power and increasingly ambitious, controlling character coupled with the international context influencing Iraq during the 1970s and 1980s set the stage for not only the actual invasion of Iraq, but also for an expansive rhetorical campaign throughout the conflict with Iran. Although Khomeini's revolution made Saddam's regime particularly vulnerable, especially as it related to targeting Shi'as, the instability that developed as a result also provided Saddam with the opportunity to launch an offensive attack. By outlining Saddam's decision-making process as it related to invading, the reader will better grasp Saddam's need to have full authority as well as his preoccupation with the disgruntled Shi'i population. Lastly, understanding the historical basis of two major elements found within his propaganda, that of geography and that of religion and

ethnicity, provides us with two conclusions. First, Saddam decided to exaggerate very obvious and therefore relatively easy differences between Iraq and Iran as a way to isolate Iraqis, primarily Shi'as, from Iran. Second, as we will see later, depending on these two aspects was not enough to fully justify Iraqi aggression or portray Iran as innately hostile; because of the fact that neither geographic rifts nor indiscernible cultural differences were in reality important to the average Iraqi, the Ba'ath regime needed to both exaggerate their realities as well as incorporate other themes into its propaganda.

Altogether this chapter acts not only to provide a historical overview of Iraq and Saddam to better interpret how the country behaved during the war with Iran; it also acts to illustrate how radical Saddam's rhetorical shifts were during the war period. As mentioned previously, Iraq had been governed by principles steeped in secularism and pan-Arab for as long as the Ba'ath party had been in power. However, Saddam found the war and the need to consolidate a national identity, both of which in his view required a transformation in ideology, larger priorities in comparison to maintaining the Ba'ath doctrines that he and other members of his regime had ascribed to for years.

Chapter 2. Themes & Goals of Propaganda: Redefining Iraqi Identity

Many historians have researched the varying types of propaganda employed by Saddam's regime during the Iran-Iraq War. Because of the sheer volume of this material, there has yet to be one overarching synthesis of Saddam's propaganda during the 1980s, nor an accompanying attempt to make sense of why the regime espoused disparate and at times opposing rhetoric simultaneously. Although the primary categories of the Ba'ath regime's propaganda peaked during two separate phases of the war, overlap still existed and proved confusing. For instance, there could be a case in which a newspaper illustrated Iraqi soldiers riding into a Mesopotamian battle scene while at the same time Saddam was being televised at a Shi'i shrine likening himself to an Islamic legacy. In the same way, Saddam could espouse propaganda steeped in Iraqi uniqueness and hegemony while members of his regime engaged in a rhetorical campaign that proved the importance of pan-Arabism in defense against the Iranian enemy. In fact, the only element that tied together the varying aspects of Saddam's propaganda was their collective universality. An Iraqi could be an atheist or devoutly religious, an artist or an academic, rich or poor – it did not matter as long as they were Iraqi. Saddam's propaganda attempted to *reach* as well as *appeal to* all Iraqis, even if the only thing two of them had in common was that they happened to walk down the same street. In this way, Saddam's propaganda greatly diverged from that of his Ba'ath predecessors.

War was of course a motivation for this seemingly frenzied type of propaganda; although past Iraqi leaders had faced the challenge of creating a unified national identity, few were forced to deal with this issue amidst conflict and increasing casualties, especially against a historical rival like Iran. Therefore, Saddam confronted the difficulty of not only producing and bolstering Iraqi nationalism, but simultaneously de-legitimizing Iran. Thus nationalism no longer served a

political advantage but a political necessity in which its effectiveness would dictate whether or not Saddam and his regime would remain in power. Also, we must acknowledge Saddam's obsession with authority and control noticeable at the onset of his time in politics. With this in mind, it makes sense that during a time in which his regime was vulnerable to external threats, that he would do everything to mitigate any internal ones. Therefore, although Saddam's web of propaganda intersected and dissected in confusing, oftentimes paradoxical and even seemingly self-destructive ways, an analytical synthesis of his rhetoric proves it was purposefully all-encompassing. The Ba'ath regime attempted to touch the psyche of every type of Iraqi Shi'a, and therefore spread propaganda by stressing pan-Arabism, reviving mythic antiquities, redefining patriotism and bolstering Saddam's cult of personality.

I. Pushing Iranian Inferiority: the Pan-Arabism Tactic

One of the primary principles of the Ba'ath party was its emphasis on pan-Arabism, given that the party extended across different states throughout the Middle East. From its early beginnings in the 1950s, the party highlighted a collective Arab history and the goal of the ultimate unification of all Arabs within a single nation-state. In the face of a powerful and neighboring enemy, utilizing pan-Arabism as a rhetorical tactic essentially functioned to "other," or separate, Iran from Iraq. In this way, the Ba'ath regime attempted to appeal to Iraqis, specifically vulnerable Shi'as, and unify them together under a national identity rooted in being Arab, which ideally would supersede domestic religious tensions. Because Khomeini's revolutionary rhetoric mainly targeted the religious heterogeneity in Iraq, utilizing pan-Arabism strategically bypassed this reality of religious divisions and emphasized secular commonalities. However, as will be discussed in this section, religion and pan-Arabism, although in tension with one another, intermingled quite purposefully within Ba'ath propaganda. Therefore, Saddam and

his regime embarked on a campaign that aimed to convince Iraqis, particularly Shi'as, that Iran was innately imperialistic and eager to attack Iraq, and that only Arabs could practice true Islam. Doing so aimed to discredit Iran and ideally thwart Khomeini's influence from penetrating vulnerable Iraqi Shi'i communities.

i. The Topic of Iranian Aggression

The rhetorical technique of "othering" is not unique, but it is powerful. One of the most obvious strategies of "othering" used by the Ba'ath regime during the war was the division between Arab and non-Arab, or more specifically Arab and Persian. Using this minor difference as a rhetorical tree trunk, the Ba'ath regime created branches of propaganda that suggested Iranians were instinctively hateful of Arabs and inherently imperialistic. In doing this, Saddam and his regime hoped that Iraqi Shi'as would see how different they were from Iranians, and merge with their fellow Iraqis under their collective Arab ethnicity. This specific approach worked to satisfy secular members of the Ba'ath party while also appealing to Iraqi Shi'as who were less religious.

Ba'ath rhetoric couched in proving Iranian aggression sought to convince Iraqi Shi'as of Iranian perpetual and innate hatred of Arabs in order to demonize Iran and isolate it from Iraqi Shi'i communities. If successful, the Ba'ath regime believed Iraqi Shi'as would unite under collective pan-Arab sentiments. Since the war started with Iraq's invasion of Iran, this propaganda also worked to justify and distract from Iraq's own aggression. Interestingly, not only was it Iraq that initially invaded Iran, but Saddam and his regime also chose to occupy Khuzestan, a part of Iran with a significant Arab population. Therefore, this rhetoric aimed to validate Iraq's offensive and frame it not as expansionist but in defense of the greater Arab

population. In order to sell this point, the Ba'ath regime and state-sponsored media alike employed phrases to characterize the Iranian-Iraqi relationship as “the strategic hatred,” “the black hatred,” or “the hatred stretching over generations.”¹³⁰ Moreover, Iraqi newspapers attempted to make the conflict between Iran and Iraq more personal and less political by describing Iran as having stuck a knife “into the back of the Arabs whenever their guard was down.”¹³¹ The Ba'ath regime also attempted to create an image of Iran that portrayed the country's historical interactions with the Arab world as always attempting to steal something from it. More specifically, one newspaper article claimed Iran had always embodied aggressive ambition and sought to steal “from the Arabs whenever there was an opportunity.”¹³² To extend this narrative that posed Iraq as a victim of Iranian aggression and hatred, the major newspaper *Al-Thawra* wrote that “the Persians...do not fight except to occupy Arab soil, to injure Arab honor and diminish Arab pride.”¹³³ By conjuring up this imagery in which Iranians innately and historically have hated Arabs, Saddam hoped to isolate primarily Iraqi Shi'as from Iran while also relating to the greater Iraqi population as well. By implying that Iraq was the natural leader of all Arabs, using pan-Arab propaganda actually aided in uniting all Iraqis behind a more specific and cohesive national identity.

The Ba'ath regime also incorporated various references to times in history in which Arabs succeeded over Persians as a way to form a national identity in defense against Iran. For example, Saddam and his regime incorporated the color “yellow” in association with the conflict

¹³⁰ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 141.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 141.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 144.

as a way to subtly conflate Iranian aggression with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258. Within poetry and newspaper articles, the color yellow was frequently used to describe Mongols and their conquest of Baghdad that resulted in the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate and the annihilation of thirteenth-century Iraq.¹³⁴ In addition to the actual conquest of Baghdad, the Mongols historically bore an extremely violent and barbaric reputation. By conflating the Mongols with modern-day Iran, Saddam aimed to exaggerate Iran's aggressive and violent nature, especially that against Arabs. To capitalize on the historical linkage between the Mongols and Iran, Saddam claimed that "the Iraqi people" needed to "stand up to this yellow wind, just as our forefathers had stood up to the incursions of Persians."¹³⁵ Soon after Saddam's speech, newspaper articles and poems began referencing the "yellow wind" and the "yellow pest" when writing about the war.¹³⁶ By constructing an Iranian image couched in historical destruction and violence, Saddam hoped to consolidate Iraqis behind a common defense against the fearsome Iran.

ii. Islam for Arabs

In combination with pan-Arab rhetoric, the Ba'ath regime used religious rhetoric in an effort to undermine Khomeini's influence as well as to preach the superiority of Arabs and their necessity to unite together against their common enemies. Manipulating Islam for rhetorical purposes marked a considerable shift in trends in Ba'ath propaganda, given that the party was in part founded on secularism. The Ba'ath regime creatively bridged together this Islamic

¹³⁴ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 142.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 143.

component that served to appeal to more conservative and religious Iraqis, specifically Shi'as, with pan-Arabism, which functioned to connect with more secular Iraqis, as a way to bring all Iraqis under one national identity. In order to do this, the Ba'ath regime argued that only Arabs had the ability to genuinely understand the Qur'an or to preach or live under its principles.¹³⁷ In following this logic, Khomeini's version of Islam had to be fraudulent, since not only was he not Arab, but he was an enemy of an Arab state. Therefore, he could not possibly lead a truly Islamic revolution. More specifically, Saddam argued on several occasions that "a Muslim who hates the Arabs cannot be a Muslim, because the Arabs are the leading force of Islam as they are of all heavenly religions."¹³⁸ Saddam's regime and state-sponsored media also claimed that the Qur'an had come to them in Arabic, and argued that Khomeini was not fluent in the language (even though he was), and therefore not a "real" Muslim.¹³⁹ In saying this, Saddam hoped to undermine Khomeini's influence over Islam (Shi'ism in particular) in an attempt to unite all Iraqis behind their common Arab ethnicity.

In a further effort to prove the infidelity of the Islam preached by Khomeini and practiced by Iranians, Saddam ordered the production of the film *Al-Qadisiyya* based on the battle of *Al-Qadisiyya* fought between Arab-Muslim forces and the Persian-Zoroastrian army. The battle took place in Najaf roughly in the year 637 and spanned three days, ultimately resulting in an Arab-Muslim victory over the Persian-Zoroastrians. Many Muslims recognize this battle as a symbolic Islamic victory over infidels, and in Saddam's eyes, an Arab victory over Persia.¹⁴⁰ The

¹³⁷ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 144.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

regime's purpose in creating this movie and bringing back this battle was to suggest that the Arab-Persian and Muslim-Zoroastrian rivalry still existed and would play out the same way it did in 637. Additionally, the movie implied that Arabs still acted as the defenders of Islam against the radical teachings of Zoroastrianism, which lingered within Iranian Shi'ism during the 1980s, and therefore all Arabs needed to unite together again, as they did at *Al-Qadisiyya*.¹⁴¹ Aside from ensuring that the movie played in every Iraqi theater, the regime's propaganda machine worked tirelessly to make *Al-Qadisiyya* a common reference in Iraqi society by commissioning artwork and statues that incorporated motifs from the battle. Additionally, shortly after the Iraqi invasion of Iran, Ba'ath-sponsored media outlets began to brand the war as "The Second *Qadisiyya*" or "Saddam's *Qadisiyya*."¹⁴² The strategic comparison between 637 and 1981 worked to convince Iraqi Shi'as that just as Arab-Muslims defeated the Persian-Zoroastrians in the name of true Islam, so would Saddam and his army. Furthermore, it blended the achievements of *Al-Qadisiyya* with the leadership of Saddam, implying that Saddam embodied the modern reincarnation of this historic legacy.¹⁴³ This technique combined Saddam's typical pan-Arab postures with greater Islamic consciousness as a way to conflate true Islam with being Arab. In portraying Iraq as the leader of Arab Muslims, Saddam and his regime attempted to link Iraqi Shi'as to their Iraqi national identity by emphasizing elements of Islam as well as Arab and Iraqi superiority.

II. Revivals of the Past to Influence the Present

Alluding to the past within propaganda has traversed history as a popular tactic, especially among authoritarian regimes and leaderships with cults of personalities. One of the

¹⁴¹ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 173.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁴³ Said K. Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: Politics of Revenge* (Bloomsbury Books, 2000), 202.

major reasons this strategy appears so frequently throughout history is because emphasizing the glory of the past offers leaders the ability to supersede and overlook, but also manipulate the realities of issues occurring in the present. Saddam, who faced the war with Iran and mounting sectarianism, searched for ways to distract his Iraqi subjects from the realities of the war and the tensions within society, and simultaneously foster an environment ripe with patriotism. To do this, Saddam invoked imagery that referenced both ancient Islamic and Mesopotamian legacies. Although these two topics of propaganda do not necessarily share similarities, together they worked to prove Iraqi Arab superiority as well as better include Iraqi Shi'as within state-sponsored rhetoric.

i. Ancient Islamic References

Saddam, himself not very religious, found the principles of the Ba'ath party originally strategic in unifying an ethnically and religiously diverse Iraq. Ideally, rhetoric couched in Ba'ath principles would help create an overarching identity that erased connections to ethnic or religious divisions. However, during the first two phases of the war in particular, Saddam's fear of Khomeini's growing influence over Iraqi Shi'as triggered a dramatic shift in the content of government propaganda. In an effort to thwart Khomeini's reach, Saddam tasked the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs paired with the Ministry of Information, the propaganda machines of the regime, with creating rhetoric steeped in Islamic references. The strategy behind this rhetoric was two-fold. First, if the Ba'ath regime could prove to Iraqi Shi'as that it was devoted to Islam just as they were, perhaps they would not defer to the judgment or rhetoric stemming from Khomeini's revolution. Second, the Ba'ath party needed to prove that its devotion to Islam was not only in relation to Iraq's evil enemy, Khomeini; if the only time it

mentioned religious propaganda was in association with Khomeini, it could come off as a sloppy political stunt. Despite the traditional secular nature of the Ba'ath party, Saddam and his regime integrated more Islamic allusions and terminology in relation to Iraq rather than directly citing the conflict with Iran in an attempt to better include Shi'as within an Iraqi national identity.

Referencing ancient Islamic terms and legends as a way to incorporate Iraqi Shi'as into a collective national identity proved rather difficult and precarious, at least in comparison to making rhetorical connections to more secular instances in history. The reason for this was first and foremost because the Ba'ath party was secular in its foundations, and such a stark switch in its principles not only risked alienating some of the party's most loyal members, but also risked confusing Iraqis in general about the basis of the government. This significant liability, though, proved the commitment on behalf of the Ba'ath regime to attempt to better consolidate support among Iraqi Shi'as as a way to strengthen Iraqi nationalism. Using this tactic in particular, the Ba'ath regime aimed to reach out to religious Iraqi Shi'as who did not necessarily wish to participate in discussions on the competition between Saddam and Khomeini specifically.

One of the ways in which the Ba'ath regime attempted to appeal to Iraqi Shi'as who perhaps were more religious but not interested in the political power struggle between Saddam and Khomeini was by integrating new Islamic terminology into their speeches and official statements. For example, in contrast to other conflicts in the past, the Ba'ath regime started characterizing the general war against Iran as a *jihad* or a holy war, which is a word with connotations of loyalty and devotion dating back to the days of the Prophet Mohammed.¹⁴⁴ More

¹⁴⁴ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 186.

specifically, this term alludes to warfare on behalf of Allah against infidels or those who fight in defense of Islam. Therefore, employing this term during a war not only functioned to appeal to more religious Iraqis, including Shi'as, in the face of Khomeini, but also to overall justify the conflict. Evidence of the regime first utilizing this strategy can be traced back to when Saddam addressed soldiers towards the beginning of the war and told them that “this is the day of your *jihad*.”¹⁴⁵ Additionally, one of the major newspapers in Iraq, *Al-Jumhuriyya*, included the term as well, explaining that the war corresponded with the Arab-Muslim concept of liberation from infidelity.¹⁴⁶ The major benefit about this strategy was that it made the war more abstract but also more meaningful; rather than looking at the war as an accessory to a competitive rivalry between Iran and Iraq, assigning the conflict with the word *jihad* transformed it into a spiritually imperative crusade. In this way, the Ba'ath regime attempted to legitimize its fighting to Iraqi Shi'as in order to better unify the country.

In an extension of the term *jihad*, the Ba'ath regime also used the term *mujtahid* or “someone engaged in jihad” into official language when speaking about the war effort. This again marks a major shift from the traditional Ba'ath party, since the party's principles were originally secular. In reference to the conflict, this term first appeared when a pro-Ba'ath Shi'i cleric ceremoniously bestowed the title of *mujtahid* onto Saddam.¹⁴⁷ After this took place, Saddam began assigning the title to men who worked in essential Iraqi military industries. Saddam would reference individuals he saw as *mujtahid* by telling them that “our Arab nation is

¹⁴⁵ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 186.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

a religious nation and is obliged to carry [the call of] its religious mission to the peoples of the earth.”¹⁴⁸ This worked in conjunction with the term *jihad*, but also was more powerful in that Saddam had the ability to call out a specific group or individual by bequeathing on them the term *mujtahid*. In doing this, Saddam demanded that Iraqis live up to their religious duties.

Another method the Ba’ath regime used to incorporate more religious rhetoric into its propaganda campaign was the conflation of Saddam with ancient religious legends. By reviving Islamic legacies and likening them to Saddam directly, Saddam could prove his own link to Islam and therefore ideally convince Iraqi Shi’as to perceive him as their religious leader rather than Khomeini, or any other popular Shi’i cleric. In theory, Shi’as would then better integrate themselves into their Iraqi identity as a result of Saddam’s cult of personality steeped in Islamic greatness. One of the ancient Islamic leaders to which the Ba’ath regime attempted to liken Saddam was Ali bin Abi Talib, the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in-law, fourth caliph, and most importantly the first Shi’i imam whom Shi’as regard as infallible. Not only is Ali a largely significant symbol in Shi’i Islam, but he was also buried in Iraq, and therefore relevant to Iraqi Shi’as both ideologically *and* geographically. To truly accentuate this connection, Saddam published an “official” genealogy tree that “proved” his descent from Ali, and members of the Ba’ath regime argued that Saddam had not mentioned this fact in previous years because “he did not wish to dwell on his own historical and religious roots in front of those who had none.”¹⁴⁹

Both Arab Sunnis and Shi’as, but Shi’as in particular, place large importance on ancestry to

¹⁴⁸ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam’s Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 182.

¹⁴⁹ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba’thist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 80.

significant Muslim figures. Thus, it's arguable that this strategy functioned to appeal to all Iraqi Muslims, but Shi'as in particular.

In addition to Ali, Saddam claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein al-Mansur. al-Mansur greatly expanded the Abbasid territory and allegedly built the city of Baghdad, so by connecting himself with al-Mansur, Saddam attempted to equate their military prowess and religious significance. To bring this linkage to life, a member of Saddam's regime wrote in reference to the war that "Saddam Hussein al-Mansur will continue to be [our] moon and Iraq will be the flag of victory."¹⁵⁰ At the peak of the war around 1985, Ba'ath-sponsored newspapers began calling Saddam "*Baghdad al-Mansurayn*," explaining that the name incorporated al-Mansur's historical contributions while simultaneously integrating Saddam's improvements upon them.¹⁵¹ The word "*mansur*" also means victorious, so the use of this term aimed to extend Saddam's confidence as it related to the war.

By incorporating greater Islamic terminology into speeches as well as likening Saddam to historical religious legacies, the Ba'ath regime attempted to appeal to Iraqi Shi'as who they viewed as potentially vulnerable to Khomeini's rhetoric. This major transformation from stubborn secularism to bold references to Islam within Ba'ath propaganda proves the significance the regime placed on proving its connection to Islam in order to relate to more religious Iraqi Shi'as. The regime clearly postured that although this shift in principles would

¹⁵⁰ Kamyar Abdi, "From Pan-Arabism to Saddam Hussein's Cult of Personality: Ancient Mesopotamia and Iraqi National Ideology" (*Journal of Social Archaeology*, Sage Publications, 2008), 31.

¹⁵¹ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 81.

upset a handful of internal Ba'ath members, such backfire was worthwhile if it meant consolidating more Shi'i support.

ii. The Mesopotamian Myth

In an effort to supersede sectarian divides and specifically appeal to and include Iraqi Shi'as into an overarching national identity, the Ba'ath regime bridged its propaganda with Mesopotamian history. This acted as a tool to bring the contemporary Iraqi back to a time in which there were seemingly no sectarian divides nor religious tensions. Rooting a modern national identity in collective historical excellence worked particularly well for the Ba'ath regime for two major reasons. First, it appealed to the regime's target group, the Shi'as, but was still accepted by Sunnis and non-religious Iraqis. Second, manipulating Mesopotamian antiquities was strategic given the fact that no Iraqi could accurately picture Mesopotamian civilization because he did not live through it. This left the Ba'ath regime with the ability to run its imagination as it was advantageous, and as a result push the Iraqi to daydream about his connection to Mesopotamian legends through the imagery provided to him by the government.

Much of the Ba'ath regime's propaganda specifically manipulated the ancient city of Babylon in an effort to conflate ancient historical greatness with that of the contemporary Iraqi. The Ba'ath regime relied on this specific antiquity for several reasons. First, Babylonian civilization and its stories of excellence and conquest are some of the most well-known in comparison to other Mesopotamian histories. Coupled with this of course was the fact that Babylon existed (roughly) within present day Iraqi Shi'i communities. Therefore, choosing Babylon as a symbol for national unity and greatness aimed to better include the Iraqi Shi'as living where Babylon used to reign. Lastly, Babylon was well recognized as a society that prided itself on military success, and this helped to provide the Ba'ath regime historical legitimacy to be

engaging in a war. In recognition of these strategic benefits, the Ba'ath regime attempted to bring Babylonian excellence into modern-day Iraq, primarily through the reconstruction of the ruins of Babylon. The regime recreated the city in its alleged historical home, which happened to be in a heavily Shi'a-populated community.¹⁵² By the fall of 1987, a replica of the Ishtar Gate, a famous entrance symbolizing popular elements from Babylonian life, was constructed alongside massive yellow brick walls and two supplementary gates. Saddam also ordered the building of the Ishtar Agade, a palace, and a Greek amphitheater, and held Ba'ath celebrations at these sites as a way to associate Babylon's legacy with that of the regime.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the regime organized Babylonian festivals at these sites throughout the war. Such festivals would be comprised of prominent Ba'ath members marching through the streets followed by other participants clad in typical Babylonian military garb.¹⁵⁴ Participants stood on floats holding banners that read "referring to the glory of Babylon of the past, and the present of the new Iraq."¹⁵⁵ Various state-sponsored Iraqi journals were pushed to analyze the Babylonian festivals in Iraq, and some went so far as to publish translations of Gilgamesh Epos as well as the Hymn of Ishtar.¹⁵⁶ Saddam himself said that the importance of bringing ancient Babylon to present-day Iraqis was so it could be "an inspiration to his people [as it] engaged in the terrible...conflict with Iran."¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the regime viewed these Babylonian festivals as ways to relate ancient Babylon with present-day Iraq and therefore embolden contemporary Iraqis in their collective fight against Iran.

¹⁵² Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 47.

¹⁵³ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 63.

¹⁵⁴ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 50.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

Saddam also brought the conceptualization of Babylon out of ceremonial spaces and into the everyday lives of Iraqis through the renaming of Iraqi provinces and government administrative units as well as in his speeches. Saddam's regime engaged in a renaming campaign in order to make Mesopotamian terms more relevant in the daily routines of Iraqis. Saddam renamed provinces to traditional Mesopotamian symbols such as Nineveh, Akkad, and Nimrud, and most clearly changed the name of the province of al-Hilla to "Babylon."¹⁵⁸ By incorporating these terms regularly into the lives of Iraqis, Saddam could mention and manipulate them more effectively in his speeches. For example, Saddam said in a speech, "Sons of...Babylon...you are the sons of the Tigris and Euphrates...sons of the civilizations of the Mesopotamian valley which cast upon humanity when humanity was in darkness...behold, their swords are with you...will the grandfathers abandon their grandsons when their grandsons are fighting for justice?"¹⁵⁹ Similarly, in introducing the new Iraqi national anthem finalized in 1981 to the public, Saddam asserted the rhetorical connection between Babylon and modern-day Iraq: "Splendor and resolve, majesty and grandeur...Babylon inside us...and with us history is filled with glow...O the flying columns of the Ba'ath..."¹⁶⁰ As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, making such historical references more visible to the average Iraqi almost subconsciously developed a sort of internal nationalism.

Recreations of Mesopotamian art in particular worked as a strategic tool for the Ba'ath regime to equate the greatness of modern Iraq with that of its mythic past because truly no one had a perfectly accurate understanding of what Babylon looked like. Therefore, the Ba'ath

¹⁵⁸ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 62.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁶⁰ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'ath Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 60.

regime was able to manipulate the little most people did know about Babylon in order to illustrate it in a way that fostered the narrative of Iraqi greatness. In accordance with this strategy, one of the first government-commissioned works of Mesopotamian art during the war was a relief by Mukhlid al-Mukhtar that depicted Babylonian sites and emblems, which hung at the international airport in Baghdad.¹⁶¹ In addition to artwork, one of the largest sculptures commissioned by the Ba’th regime was one that portrayed the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, which stood in al-Zawra park in central Baghdad.¹⁶² In an effort to continue amassing propaganda that linked contemporary Iraq to Babylon as well as elevate Saddam’s cult of personality, the Ba’ath regime directed an Iraqi artist to create a painting that illustrated Saddam receiving the Mesopotamian bequest from a Babylonian figure, with modern-day Baghdad in the background.¹⁶³ Although a slightly unconventional form of art, the illustrations on the new 25-dinar bill circulated during the 1980s were on one side Saddam in his military uniform in what appeared to be a medieval battle site, and on the other side the Gate of Ishtar in Chaldean Babylon.¹⁶⁴ Lastly, similar references to Babylon appeared in poetry commissioned by the Ba’ath regime as well. One poet in particular, Dr. Muhammad al-Hallab, wrote an article published by the Defense Ministry that drew connections between ancient Babylon and the war, notably after Iraq’s loss of al-Faw: “O the redeemed homeland...we lived / on the remnants of the glory... / O Babylon...”¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, poet Shafiq al-Kamali was tasked with writing a poem focused on pushing the Iraqi people to believe in their collective historical excellence: “...and the

¹⁶¹ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba’thist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 71.

¹⁶² Ofra Bengio, *Saddam’s Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 72.

¹⁶³ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba’thist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 91.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

pride implanted within us by these lowlands [in the south] / Babylon inside us...”¹⁶⁶ By directly referencing Babylon, the Ba’ath regime had one specific place, time and history to which the Iraqi Shi’a could imagine and ideally relate.

In accordance with the government’s reliance on Babylon throughout their Mesopotamian rhetorical campaign, the Ba’ath regime also highlighted Nebuchadnezzar an exorbitant amount during the war period. The regime perceived this as strategic due to his legacy as a fierce fighter and fearless leader during the 500s B.C., but also because there were few traces of confirmed information on him. Therefore, he could be easily manipulated to fit the narrative of the Ba’ath regime. Additionally, Saddam himself was particularly fascinated with Nebuchadnezzar, and so naturally was frequently likened to him as a way to create a national identity not only steeped in Iraqi excellence but one couched in the excellence of Saddam, who superseded religious and ethnic divides. An example of the conflation of the two leaders is arguably most prominent at a Babylonian festival in which a bust of both Saddam and Nebuchadnezzar was constructed and unveiled during a commemorative ceremony.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, the regime spread images of Saddam with missiles and machine guns posing on a chariot charging toward the enemy, closely mimicking paintings of Nebuchadnezzar riding into battle.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, in September of 1981, which marked the one year anniversary of Iraq’s war with Iran, the Ba’ath regime organized a three-day celebration in al-Hilla under the slogan “*Nabuchadnasr al-ams Saddam Hussein al-yawm*,” which translates literally to “yesterday

¹⁶⁶ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba’thist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 96.

¹⁶⁷ Kamyar Abdi, “From Pan-Arabism to Saddam Hussein’s Cult of Personality: Ancient Mesopotamia and Iraqi National Ideology” (*Journal of Social Archaeology*, Sage Publications, 2008), 30.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

Nebuchadnezzar, today Saddam Hussein.”¹⁶⁹ Despite the fact that the two leaders have seemingly nothing in common, these references became common mottos in Iraq. In speeches, members of the Ba’ath regime would refer to this phrase. One individual in particular linked Saddam to Nebuchadnezzar when saying “Yesterday Nebuchadnezzar, today Saddam Hussein [who] establishes the link between the historical contributions of this country...the flags of victory...under the leadership of the fearless and inspired leader Saddam Hussein.”¹⁷⁰ Another festival, the Babylon International Music Festival which took place in September of 1981, also incorporated imagery likening Saddam to Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, the emblem of the festival illustrated profiles of Nebuchadnezzar and Saddam Hussein, both under the same slogan of “Nebuchadnezzar yesterday, Saddam Hussein today.”¹⁷¹ A year later, the same festival slightly modified its motto to “From Nebuchadnezzar to Saddam Hussein, Babylon arises anew!”¹⁷² As this comparison became increasingly popular throughout the war, other mediums such as newspapers began portraying Saddam with or as if he were Nebuchadnezzar. The newspaper *Al-Thawra* produced a cartoon illustration of Saddam standing above Nebuchadnezzar with a caption that read that Babylon was rising again.¹⁷³

Pushing this narrative that Iraq mimicked the greatness of Babylon or that Saddam mirrored that of Nebuchadnezzar would ideally appeal to Iraqi Shi’as who did not necessarily understand or care about the regime’s Islamic rhetoric or propaganda that directly targeted Iran. In addition, consulting Iraq’s mythic past provided the Ba’ath regime with the commonality it needed to supersede division and tension, and simultaneously promote Iraqi nationalism.

¹⁶⁹ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba’thist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 48.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 90.

Although the core of the Ba'ath regime's entire propaganda campaign was to win over the hearts and minds of Iraqi Shi'as in particular, this specific type of rhetoric had an added strategic component in that it satisfied Iraqi Sunnis most loyal to the Ba'ath regime who did not relate as closely with Islamic references.

III. Redefining Iraqi Patriotism & Saddam's Cult of Personality

In an effort to redefine Iraqi national identity, a shift in language that appealed to Iraqi greatness and hegemony in comparison to traditional pan-Arab sentiments associated with Ba'ath ideology emerged during the mid-1980s. The impetus behind this change in discourse came after Saddam and his regime introduced increased symbols of Iraqi historical and mythic greatness, citing both Mesopotamian and Islamic references. From this, Saddam argued that Iraqis were the natural leaders of the rest of the Arab world and therefore should unite under their uniqueness as a country and Saddam's exceptionalism as a leader. At this point, Saddam and his regime began redefining what Iraqi patriotism really meant as a way to better solidify the conceptualization of an Iraqi identity. To do this, the Ba'ath regime started introducing new terms that reflected the hyperbolic nature of this new Iraqi nationalism. In attempting to shift its rhetorical emphasis towards an Iraqi identity steeped in national excellence, the Ba'ath regime sought to better define its interpretation of patriotism or "*wataniyya*." In a party congress political report from the 1980s, congress said that the word meant "the practice preponderance, in times of crisis, should it conflict, in given circumstances, with the loyalty...to religion, to a religious school..."¹⁷⁴ In outlining this definition as such, Saddam attempted to build a collective nationalism in which Iraqi patriotism outweighed any other potential component of an Iraqi's identity. The report continued to define patriotism as no longer a superficial sentiment, but

¹⁷⁴ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 91.

instead as a “deep, strong and solid emotion of love of the fatherland, loyalty to it, and action for its sake.”¹⁷⁵ This redefinition of the expectations of Iraqi loyalty began to penetrate government-sponsored newspapers, one of which published the slogan that read “a man who does not shoulder his responsibility of defending *watan* is not entitled to live.”¹⁷⁶ Saddam and his regime altered this definition of patriotism in an attempt to shift the primary allegiances of every Iraqi, especially Shi’as, to the state, rather than to their religion.

Building off of the concept of “*wataniyya*,” in an effort to glorify the Iraqi identity as well as justify the war, the Ba’ath regime manipulated the motif of “*sharaf*” or “honor.” Saddam and his regime recognized that by manipulating sentiments surrounding honor, they could camouflage mistakes and aggression in the context of the war while simultaneously sparking patriotic emotions. To bring this motif to life, Saddam proclaimed to soldiers that “your honor is your rifle -- keep it and use it to give back to [*sharaf*] honor meaning for the sake for which your fathers fought.”¹⁷⁷ By utilizing the concept of honor, Saddam and his regime could transform the conflict into a war not only for “its geography” but also one that promoted the sovereignty and “*sharaf*” of Iraq.¹⁷⁸ Incorporating this term in various speeches and statements, the Ba’ath regime hoped to strengthen the Iraqi understanding of patriotism beyond superficial constructions.

To further give Iraqi patriotism a deeper meaning and shift Shi’i loyalties towards their state, the Ba’ath regime integrated the concept of “*istishhad*,” or self-sacrifice out of loyalty to country, into its rhetorical campaign. Especially as the number of battlefield casualties in the major predominantly-Shi’a southern provinces increased to over 13,000 by 1984, this idea of sacrifice for the love of one’s homeland helped continue to justify the conflict while also solidify

¹⁷⁵ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam’s Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 91.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

a strong national identity.¹⁷⁹ Saddam began referencing Iraqi soldiers as “*mashru li-l-istishhad*,” which means “a project for the *istishhad*,” and as the war progressed, he promoted the idea that *istishhad* should be the “dream” of every fighter who possessed honor.¹⁸⁰ The regime went so far as to order the newspaper *al-Jumhuriyya* to produce a segment for children about the war that advocated for “...the language of heroism and *istishhad*.”¹⁸¹ Introducing this terminology served to unite all Iraqis, but particularly Iraqi Shi’i fighters, under their loyalty to their country. Although the use of this term and its goal were a bit idealistic, in theory it built off of the regime’s redefinition of patriotism and would push Iraqis to enhance their nationalist sense of duty.

Saddam and his regime also sought to encourage sentiments surrounding Iraqi uniqueness by including terms that subtly differentiated Iraq from other Arab countries. In accordance with this strategy, during the late 1980s Ba’ath propaganda incorporated the word “*qutr*,” which literally translates to “region” or “area.” The use of this word marks a shift from pre-war discourse, since traditionally the term was associated with the antithesis of pan-Arabism and implied isolationism and the promotion of a specific state’s interest.¹⁸² In fact, before the war Saddam argued that pan-Arabism rose “above all narrow *qutri* interests;” however, this usage changed as the conflict with Iran progressed.¹⁸³ During the war period, Saddam announced that “when we speak for the Iraqi people...and when we mention the [greater] Arab homeland, we must not cease to educate the Iraqi to take pride in his plot of soil, in *al-qutr al-Iraqi*.”¹⁸⁴ This small tweak in the connotation of this word mirrors a shift in the rhetoric being prioritized by the

¹⁷⁹ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 95.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹⁸² Ofra Bengio, *Saddam’s Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 95.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

Ba'ath regime; Iraqis originally were supposed to avoid any “*qutri*” interests, but now they were being urged to celebrate them.

Building off of this distinction between Iraq and the rest of the Arab world, the Ba'ath regime also manipulated the term “*a'rab*” during the war period. The connotations of the word “*a'rab*” implied ignorance, disloyalty, and blasphemy, and during the 1960s and 1970s it applied to Arab states that in some way opposed Iraq. Saddam and his regime characterized those considered “*a'rab*” as “non-Arab Arabs,” and in order to differentiate Iraq from such, he began to assign Iraqis the label “*ya'arib*.”¹⁸⁵ In doing this, Saddam was implying that Iraqis were a different, more superior breed of Arabs that always defended Arab honor, soil, and security unlike some of their counterparts. The term “*ya'arib*” allegedly derived from Ya'rib bin Qahtan, the supposed first man to have ever spoken Arabic.¹⁸⁶ The Ba'ath regime began incorporating this particular word into their official statements and propaganda, and most notably recreated the Iraqi national anthem which sung “...and the glory and the character of *ya'ribiyya*.”¹⁸⁷ By using two separate terms when referring to Iraqi Arabs and all other Arabs, Saddam's regime aimed to push a patriotic narrative that Iraqis were the superior leaders of the Arab world in an effort to construct a persuasive collective national identity.

Another way in which the Ba'ath regime shifted its propaganda and definition of Iraqi nationalism inwards toward Iraq rather than outwards toward pan-Arabism was through the expansion of Saddam's cult of personality. The key features of a cult of personality, including that of Saddam, are typically the elevation and glorification of an individual, the use of symbolism and ritual, the management of the image of the given person, and the manipulation

¹⁸⁵ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 96.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

of mass media.¹⁸⁸ Cults of personality to a certain degree have the ability to prompt stability given its reliance on traditions that work to conceal the disorder occurring in a society and the non-symbiotic relationship between the leader and the collective. Therefore, considering the context of Iraq in regards to both the war and lack of a solidified national identity coupled with Saddam's ambition, it's not a surprise that a strong and seemingly inescapable cult of personality flourished. In addition, given the Ba'ath regime's shift in characterizing its national identity within Iraqi greatness rather than through boundary-cutting ideologies, it's understandable that a glorified exaggeration of Saddam's leadership would accompany this change. Since Saddam as the leader of all Iraqis was an obvious commonality, the concept of Saddam embodying what it meant to be Iraqi was the Ba'ath regime's last attempt to consolidate Iraqis and better include Shi'as under one singular collective identity.

In attempting to push this idea that Saddam was more than a regular human being but instead the representation of Iraqi nationalism, phrases such as "*Abu-l-Iraq al-jadid*" (the father of new Iraq) and "*Baba Saddam*" (Father Saddam) became common references to Saddam.¹⁸⁹ Even Iraqis themselves began to be described in association with Saddam. For example, any Iraqi born after 1979 was known as a member of "*jil Saddam*" (Saddam's generation) while a youth organization created to provide military and ideological training to young teens was named "*ashbal Saddam*" (Saddam's cubs).¹⁹⁰ One of the clearest examples of the regime's depiction of Saddam as the embodiment of Iraq was the incorporation of the motto "Iraq is Saddam and Saddam is Iraq," which was written on banners and repeated in speeches.¹⁹¹ As an extension of

¹⁸⁸ Anita Pisch, "The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters: 1929-1953: Archetypes, Inventions, and Fabrications" (The Australian National University Press, 2016), 53.

¹⁸⁹ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 157.

¹⁹⁰ Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 181.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

this, poets wrote that “Saddam in this country is the country” while a children’s poem read “we are Iraq and its name is Saddam...we are a people and its name is Saddam.”¹⁹² These phrases and mottos that suggested Saddam was the embodiment of Iraq attempted to supersede any religious, ethnic, or class tensions by bonding all Iraqis together under their one inevitable similarity: Saddam as their fearless leader.

Furthermore, to construct the conceptualization that Saddam was superior to an average human, poets and authors described him in relation to objects suggesting heroism or forces of nature. More specifically, towards the end of the war Saddam was frequently characterized as “*sayf al-Islam al-battar*” (Islam’s sharp sword), “*faris al-arab*” (knight of Arabs) or “*faris al-ulama al-arabiyya*” (knight of the Arab nation).¹⁹³ These phrases suggested that Saddam was not simply a man but instead was heroic to the point of being godlike. A variety of state-sponsored poetry as well as speeches from government members also associated Saddam with symbols of the sun, moon, river, rain, and trees of paradise.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, court poets often likened him to eagles or lions. In doing this, Saddam and his regime initiated a campaign that transformed basic environmental components into historical and political agents. Because nature will always have a type of sacred, mythic quality that demands dedication greater than what could ever be demanded by humans, equating Saddam with rhetorical elements of such power pushed Iraqi citizens to dedicate themselves even further to the cause of Saddam and more generally to the cause of Iraq.

¹⁹² Ofra Bengio, *Saddam’s Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 79.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

IV. Conclusion

Although working in the background, the war with Iran influenced the Ba'ath regime's propaganda in several ways. First, Saddam faced the challenge of not only producing and strengthening Iraqi nationalism, but at the same time discrediting Iran in order to thwart its influence on potentially vulnerable Shi'i communities. Second, not only were Saddam's hands full in regards to constructing a two-pronged rhetorical approach; he also was forced to manage this operation while responding to increasing casualties and military setbacks. Therefore, the war with Iran sparked Saddam's construction of an Iraqi identity and informed the ways in which Saddam molded and shifted his conceptualizations of Iraqi identity and patriotism. With this in mind as well as a general understanding of Iraqi history outlined in chapter one, we can make some kind of sense of the confusing and oftentimes conflicting themes of propaganda coming from the Ba'ath regime. To use simple terms, Saddam "pulled out all the stops" as it related to his propaganda machine. Saddam attempted to appeal to every Iraqi, especially Iraqi Shi'as, despite their devotion to religion or interests in politics or even more basically their jobs, families, or levels of education. By doing this, there were instances in which the definition of Iraqi identities flip-flopped quite dramatically. However, his ultimate goal was not necessarily to create an Iraqi identity informed by a singular ideology. Instead, he aimed to convince all Iraqis to put their "Iraqiness" before any other allegiance. Interestingly, although such a multi-dimensional campaign at times proved confusing and on paper may appear as comprised of conflicting components, many of the elements that seemed in tension with one another actually helped elevate Iraqi nationalism as a whole. Instances of this strange phenomenon existed in arguments that Arabs were the only true Muslims and that superior Iraqis were the natural leaders and defenders of the Arab world. By recognizing the overlap and intermingling between

seemingly disparate characteristics that oftentimes enhanced the regime's overall rhetorical messages, we can realize the shortcomings of narrowly viewing Iraq exclusively through the Orientalist monocle that assumes sectarian cleavages imminently precipitate destruction within a Middle Eastern country.

Chapter 3. Faces & Spaces of Dissemination

While the themes of the Ba'ath regime's propaganda outlined symbolic and ideological ways in which the government attempted to dominate the hearts and minds of Iraqi Shi'as, its methods of dissemination open up a discussion of how the regime entered Shi'i communities spatially and geographically. The methods of dissemination used by the Ba'ath regime during the war period were not new or unique to the party, Saddam, Iraq or the 1980s. Instead, Saddam metaphorically shopped around history, picking out propagation techniques and implementing those he believed could behave in Iraqi society amidst the backdrop of the war.

Despite this unoriginality, what is interesting about the Ba'ath regime's dissemination tactics was that they were enforced all together and within a very short period of time, almost in a way that appears conflicting especially when considering the content of the propaganda. To clarify, a drawing of Saddam as a born-again Nebuchadnezzar could appear in the newspaper while posters were hung promoting the production of an Islamic film steeped in propaganda attempting to prove the Ba'ath regime's religiosity. Although an abundance of historians and researchers have evaluated the various themes of propaganda and ways the government circulated it, few have attempted to postulate or analyze how and why it all intersected in such a confusing nature. Through the synthesis of research, it's arguable that Saddam's choices of rhetorical dissemination matched his choices of the subject of the rhetoric itself; both seemed scattered, confusing and often times conflicting, but simultaneously they were all-encompassing and expansive. Saddam's unrelenting ambition and compulsion of control meant that he would unmistakably attempt to appeal to every type of Iraqi Shi'a, regardless of an individual's class, community, family, level of education, industry of work, hobbies, or even the street they lived on or the way in which they walked to work. His methods of disseminating propaganda were

expansive in order to push his rhetoric into every space of Iraqi society; he infiltrated schools, produced festivals, exploited the publication of journals, reconstructed archaeological sites, embraced renaming campaigns, manipulated the media, and utilized official government speeches to ensure that each crevice of Iraqi society was reached.

I. Indoctrination Within Schools

Nationalist indoctrination within the classroom has been a strategic tool used by regimes, such as those of Mussolini and Stalin, for centuries in an effort to produce new generations who romantically adhere to a sense of patriotism. In an ideal scenario, this method seeks to target individuals within a society whose ages suggest that their personal judgments have not fully developed and therefore are susceptible to non-rational persuasion.¹⁹⁵ With access to the classroom, governments have overwhelmed vulnerable youth with propaganda in an effort to produce a future population whose primary allegiance is to their country. This approach has been used throughout history as a tool within countless societies, spanning from East to West. What is interesting in particular about indoctrination in schools under Saddam during the Iran-Iraq War is his clear attempt to penetrate as many spheres of instruction as possible, ranging from secular middle schools to Shi'i religious schools to reputable universities. Therefore, in recognizing that Iraqi youth had the potential to help or hinder efforts to isolate Iran from Iraqis and boost support for Saddam during the war, the Ba'ath regime tightly regulated almost all forms of education while contemporaneously flooding them with anti-Iranian propaganda. In fact, a party report from the late 1980s stated that "the leadership of the party takes a great interest in the youth...because it considers them the tools capable of achieving the party's future aspirations

¹⁹⁵ William Hare "Ideological Indoctrination and Teacher Education," *Journal of Educational Controversy*: Vol. 2, No. 2, Article 5, (2007), 1.

and carrying out the party's central goals."¹⁹⁶ In other words, by targeting Iraqi youth, specifically young Iraqi Shi'as, Saddam and his regime attempted to tap the Shi'i youth demographic, which was not typically influenced by the Ba'ath party. Ideally, Saddam foresaw a future generation that his regime could rely on to defend and spread messages of loyalty to the government.

One of the ways in which the Ba'ath regime wedged its propaganda into academia was through the regulation of courses and textbooks. The regime formed a committee consisting of members of the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs whose main task was to neutralize Iranian influences in the classroom. The committee in particular oversaw the phrasing of lessons in books and approved teachers' curricula in both religious and secular schools.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, the committee could and did confiscate and destroy books published by Persians that it deemed contradicting Islamic law and religion.¹⁹⁸ The regime also urged teachers and textbook publishers to exaggerate accounts of Persian aggression to prove the impious and imperialistic nature of the ethnicity, while simultaneously characterizing Arabs as devout and defensive of the Arab world. As an extension of this, the regime pressured teachers to exclude historical instances of Iranian-Iraqi crossover altogether, and instead base studies of this content on Iranian-Iraqi confrontations.¹⁹⁹ As a result, courses emphasized events in history such as the Sassanid occupation of Iraq, the anti-Arab Persian

¹⁹⁶ Aaron M. Faust, "The Ba'thification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein and the Ba'th Party's System of Control" (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 2012), 132.

¹⁹⁷ Samuel Helfont. *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the Roots of Insurgencies in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 66.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁹⁹ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'thist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 110.

movements under the Umayyads and the Abbasids, and the wars between Persians and Ottomans as a way to frame Persians as antagonists and Arab Iraqis as victims. Let it be realized that the idea that Iraq existed over 2500 years ago during the Sassanid Empire, Umayyad or Abbasid Caliphates works as propaganda in and through itself.

In addition to regulating textbooks, the committee pressured university teachers to glorify Saddam's regime in lieu of providing a true analysis of Iraqi history. To avoid potential repercussions, professors centered their courses around Saddam's ideologies and greatest achievements rather than fostering a raw or accurate discussion of contemporary Iraq. Furthermore, the regime cut off or warned professors against using certain resources or publications for their research, and had to rely solely on Ba'ath documents and speeches.²⁰⁰ As research became couched in government materials, the regime took away the ability for academics to critique each other's work, as doing so would risk being perceived as criticizing the regime. With this in mind, the Ba'ath regime did not simply flood university classrooms with exaggerated versions of Saddam-led Iraqi greatness; it also drowned the existence or possibility of dissent among influential members and future leaders of Iraqi society.

Suspicion of Shi'i religious seminaries in particular grew substantially among members of the Ba'ath party during the mid-1980s. Because these Shi'i seminaries arguably acted as the center of Shi'i Islam jurisprudence and instruction, Saddam did not shut down the schools and face the backlash; instead, he kept them open in order to co-opt them. This juxtaposed the Ba'ath party's secular foundations, but the resentment towards the Ba'ath regime's support of these

²⁰⁰ Eric Davis. *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (University of California Press, 2004), 222.

schools only ruffled the feathers of internal regime members. This discontent proved more manageable than that which would play out both domestically and internationally if Saddam had closed some of the Shi'i community's most reputable institutions. Therefore, the regime found it strategic to "strengthen the role of the *hawza* [religious schools] in order to serve the march [of the Ba'ath] and the revolution."²⁰¹ In doing this, Saddam superficially portrayed himself as a supporter of traditional Shi'i institutions while behind closed doors used them for the purpose of preserving his regime. To prove he would do more than just voice his support, Saddam ordered his regime to start funding Shi'i schools as well. Although this may seem counterproductive and potentially self-destructive, the regime believed that by filling any financial void the religious schools may have faced, the schools would be less likely to depend on foreign money, which the regime assumed was coming from Iran.²⁰² Saddam also argued that providing Shi'i students, especially those from lower income families, with financial support could "influence [the students] and...supply them with ideas on the Islamic religion and its luminous essence."²⁰³ Additionally, by involving itself financially, the Ba'ath regime had the ability to incorporate new programs into Shi'i curricula originally isolated from government propaganda. More specifically, the Ba'ath regime initiated a "Party Education" course in which Iraqi Shi'as learned about the principles of the Ba'ath party and its devotion to Islam.²⁰⁴ By doing this, Saddam and his regime aimed to indoctrinate the next generation of influential Iraqi Shi'as within institutions that many Ba'ath members distrusted the most.

²⁰¹ Samuel Helfont. *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the Roots of Insurgencies in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 63.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

To take things even further than publicly endorsing and financing Shi'i religious schools, the Ba'ath regime established its own Islamic college during the late 1980s. In a correspondence between the Director of the Party Secretariat and the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, the Director explained that the creation of an Islamic college funded and controlled by the Ba'ath party would prove strategic for the survival of the regime amidst the war.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, the Director argued that an Islamic college had the potential to "stand in the face of the popular [Islamic] tide that threatens the existence of the Arab nation...thwart the hostile Khomeinist call and plans towards the Arab nation...and create conviction among students that religious instructions deriving from Iran are nonreligious [and] hostile to Arabs..."²⁰⁶ Therefore, the Ba'ath regime saw establishing a college as a way to push its new position on religion into academic environments. Moreover, the Director also seized the opportunity to choose particularly talented students, subject them to more training, and eventually appoint them to significant religious positions throughout the country.²⁰⁷ Therefore, indoctrinated individuals would serve in highly-respected religious positions and ideally spread a message of Ba'ath-loyalty to their subjects.

In doing this, Saddam and his regime introduced Ba'ath propaganda into a space where it had been originally curbed. The infiltration of rhetoric into this previously unreachable realm proved the effort the government put into prioritizing schools. Saddam recognized the crucial nature of not only influencing future generations, but also the necessity to mute any criticism

²⁰⁵ Aaron M. Faust, "The Ba'athification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party's System of Control" (PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 2012), 132.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

coming from lectures at prestigious universities or *khutbahs* at popular religious schools.²⁰⁸

Adding nationalist indoctrination within a variety of schools to his rhetorical toolbox supported Saddam's attempt to hammer his propaganda into every wall of Iraqi society.

II. Productions, Constructions & Reconstructions

The impetus behind using constructions, reconstructions and productions to disseminate Ba'ath propaganda stemmed from the ability for materials under all three categories to subtly spread a message or invoke a feeling. Whether monuments, archaeological reconstructions, festivals, or journal publications, these methods of espousing Saddam's rhetoric allowed the regime to appeal to Iraqi Shi'as without doing so forcefully and without isolating other ethnicities or religions. Additionally, they allowed the regime to creatively enter both physical and metaphorical spaces within Shi'i communities. By doing this, Saddam only widened the net he cast, hoping to catch more loyalties of Shi'as as the war persisted.

Author and historian Harcourt Fuller argues that a monument is "the permanent structure, building, erections...made at the place to mark the memory of a historical event, action place or person."²⁰⁹ He goes on to say that they are the "...embodiment of foundational myths, memories, and philosophies, and served as official sites for the commemoration of war victories and the martyrs who died for the state, among other functions."²¹⁰ In accordance with Fuller's characterization of the motivations behind monuments, the Ba'ath regime embarked on a campaign of constructing large-scale monuments as a way to disseminate its propaganda. One of

²⁰⁸ A Muslim sermon that is delivered on Fridays at a mosque.

²⁰⁹ Harcourt Fuller, *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State: Kwame Nkrumah's Symbolic Nationalism*, Chapter 6 (Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 119.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

the most extravagant of these monuments was entitled the Unknown Soldier Monument, finalized in 1982.²¹¹ Dedicated to fallen Iraqi soldiers, the Ba'ath regime hoped that such a grandiose gesture of gratitude would encourage the continued support of the war by soldiers and families alike. Following its construction was the establishment of the Monument of the Martyrs of Saddam finished in 1983. This structure was created by “slicing vertically through an onion-profile dome” and surrounding it with a three-dimensional Iraqi flag capable of being seen for several miles.²¹² Not only did such a massive sculpture catch the eye of anyone walking near it; it also acted as a reminder of an Iraqi citizen's patriotic duty. Later in 1989, the Ba'ath regime commissioned the production of the Victory Arch.²¹³ At the base of the structure laid Iranian helmets, some pierced by bullets and shrapnel.²¹⁴ Either Saddam's regime was overly confident or intended to portray confidence in regards to the war, since the monument dedicated to Iraq's victory was unveiled before the end of the conflict. Overall, these constructions acted as a more subtle vessel for Ba'ath propaganda. Although the only words associated with these monuments were their names, such extravagant constructions turned heads from those walking by or those seeing pictures in newspapers or on televisions. Furthermore, the monuments had the potential to speak to a large audience as they had no ethnic or religious markers; rather they incorporated simple, overarching Iraqi memorabilia. Therefore, Saddam's regime could attempt to invoke

²¹¹ Eric Davis. *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (University of California Press, 2004), 194.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 194.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 196.

²¹⁴ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 81.

feelings of patriotism among its target group of Iraqi Shi'as while not upsetting or neglecting Sunnis or more secular Ba'ath members.

Another method used by the Ba'ath regime to disseminate its propaganda was the reconstruction of legendary ancient Mesopotamian cities and the use of their ruins. The advantage behind this method of propagation was that such sites were already emotionally and symbolically charged, and this fact supplemented Ba'ath discourse aimed at arousing feelings of nationalistic excellence. By invoking Iraq's mythic past through archaeology, the Ba'ath regime superseded sectarian ethnic and religious divisions that challenged the concept of one unified Iraqi national identity. As author Simon Schama puts it, "landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock."²¹⁵ By the time Saddam became president in 1979, reports showed a significant increase in government spending on archaeological digs and reconstructions. This extended into a new law drafted that same year which expanded the State Organization for Antiquities and Heritage.²¹⁶ Following this, the Ba'ath regime ordered the restoration of the ruins of Babylon. In recreating Babylon in al-Hilla, a heavily Shi'a-populated area, the Ba'ath regime aimed to infiltrate the community with its propaganda couched in ancient Iraqi excellence. By the fall of 1987, symbolic walls, gates, entrances, palaces, and theaters were built to mimic those of Babylon.²¹⁷ In addition, to attract as many Shi'as as possible, the regime financed a modern highway so that they could arrive at the site within a reasonable amount of time.²¹⁸ The reconstruction of ancient historical sites not only

²¹⁵ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (Random House Inc., 1996), 7.

²¹⁶ Amatzia Baram *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 42.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

served to spread Ba'ath propaganda through its ability to conjure up collective memories of Mesopotamian greatness; it also specifically reached Iraqi Shi'as because of the sites' proximity to their communities. This method of dissemination, then, functioned to more concretely relate Iraqi contemporary life to that of its ancient past, while also aiming to explicitly integrate Shi'as into that conceptualization.

To supplement the reconstructions of Mesopotamian civilizations, Saddam and his regime established productions in the form of festivals in order to disseminate their propaganda. Although the use of festivals and performances is not unique to Saddam's campaign, it's notable that these festivals did not serve to glorify modern-day Iraq, but instead Iraqi folkloric history. During Saddam's presidency, and most notably during the Iran-Iraq War, the General Directorate for Cinema and Theatre had been tasked with expanding cultural festivals in an effort to supersede sectarian divisions and foster the creation of an all-encompassing Iraqi identity that better included Iraqi Shi'as. As a way to execute this, the Ba'ath regime established folkloric and fashion festivals in which individuals could perform dances and songs from their respective communities.²¹⁹ In conclusion, these festivals typically unified the various cultural celebrations under the umbrella of Iraqi identity by singing or marching to patriotic songs. Aside from the actual folkloric content of these festivals that equated modern-day Iraqi achievements with the greatness of ancient Mesopotamia, using festivals and performances as a method of disseminating propaganda served to transform those participating into the actual embodiment of the regime's rhetoric. Remarkably, this approach made individual Iraqis the platform for Ba'ath

²¹⁹ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 36.

propaganda, whether they knew it or not. In this way, the government was more subtly spreading its message, and therefore could reach Iraqis who distrusted or typically ignored more direct efforts of Ba'ath inculcation.

Another form of production used by the Ba'ath party to disseminate its propaganda was the manipulation of journals and the publication of articles. The Ministry of Culture and Information under the Ba'ath regime published articles through the *Iraqi Fashion House* in order to draw attention to Iraq's historical connection to Mesopotamia. The regime also worked through the academic journal entitled *Al-Turath al-Shabi* in order to push the association between present folklore and ancient Mesopotamia.²²⁰ One of the principal contributors to the journal explained that “we collect [our] heritage because it...contains psychological indicators of the collective [character] of the Iraqi individual throughout the centuries, apparently reaching back to the Sumerian or Babylonian period.”²²¹ This construction of an Iraqi identity immersed in its relation to its Mesopotamian past had not been invoked by other leaders before, marking a shift not only in typical Ba'ath propaganda but also that of the Iraqi leaders that preceded Saddam. By using both cultural and academic journals as an instrument for espousing government propaganda, the Ba'ath regime sought to reach scholarly Iraqi Shi'as in a way that would not upset Sunni or secular Iraqis who subscribed to the same journals. Furthermore, since publications function to spread knowledge, the Ba'ath regime used its manipulation of journals to reproduce and therefore emphasize its carefully crafted propaganda.

²²⁰ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 39.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

III. The Name Game

In navigating a maze of propaganda methodology, it may seem on the surface that rhetorical changes in the names of provinces, towns, administrative units, military operations and divisions during the war period in Iraq were inconsequential. However, this tactic of renaming such visible and relevant components of society is yet another powerful mechanism from the imagined grab-bag of propaganda techniques. Like the other methods of dissemination mentioned in this chapter, renaming campaigns have overwhelmed civilizations from East to West, especially during times of conflict or periods in which patriotism was tested. In facing both of these challenges, it seemed natural that Saddam and his regime would incorporate this technique into their rhetorical strategy. In general, this tactic works both symbolically and spatially. The renaming of every day aspects of life meant that the chosen words would be seen, heard and internalized constantly, albeit casually. It also meant that anyone who chose to live in a given area, walk down a given street, or work at a given post would find those names relevant. In addition, the inclusion of specific names in daily Iraqi life supplemented the cultural production of a shared mythic past, and with that a national identity.

After a series of defeats against Iran in the early 1980s, the Ba'ath regime embraced the approach of manipulating nomenclatures through renaming provinces, towns, and administrative units. Commemorative names, in this case names deriving from popular figures and events in Mesopotamian history, not only map the geography of a society, but act to map history as well. They merge history and geography, merging them together as a way to bring the past into ordinary environments. In this way, these specific names and terms become active, or at the very least appropriate to reference in everyday life. In recognition of this, Saddam changed the names

of multiple provinces to those of ancient Babylonian and Assyrian cities, as mentioned in greater detail in Chapter 2. In extension of this, although traditionally administrative units had names that referred to their provinces or towns, this trend shifted noticeably during the early 1980s, especially in Shi'a-majority communities. During this time, Saddam ordered the renaming of these units so that they instead bore Mesopotamian appellations. This tactic would, admittedly to varying degrees, impact every Iraqi who encountered or even talked about these various provinces or units. As a result, this method of dissemination infiltrated every corner of Iraqi society, and functioned to bring contemporary relevance to ancient Mesopotamian history.

In addition to assigning provinces and unit names from Mesopotamian history, the Ba'ath regime also labeled towns, street names and government divisions after Saddam.²²² By doing this, the regime aimed to institutionalize Saddam's cult of personality into every aspect of Iraqi daily life. The regime took advantage of transforming space; Saddam City and al-Hussein Bridge became common points of reference for Iraqis, and were one of many names that marked Saddam's radical shift from simple leader to embodiment of Iraq. As a result, the regime not only attempted to make such a fanatical cult of personality seem ordinary; it also pushed Saddam's cult of personality into Shi'a-majority spaces and communities that it otherwise would not be able to penetrate.

Saddam's regime applied this strategy of strategic renaming to military divisions as a way to ensure that propaganda reached the Iraqi Shi'as serving on the battlefield. Saddam changed the name of several military divisions, units, and brigades during the mid-1980s in order

²²² Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 182.

to push the narrative that his regime was devoted to religion.²²³ Furthermore, starting in January of 1981, Saddam began assigning military operations religious code names, specifically names that commemorated significant figures present in Shi'i Islam.²²⁴ Saddam and his regime did this as a way to more indirectly bring their rhetoric to Iraqi Shi'i soldiers, who were arguably one of the most prioritized demographic in regards to loyalty considering they served on the frontlines.

In addition to renaming domestic components of society, Saddam also employed the use of strategic nomenclatures by stubbornly calling Iran "*ajam*," a racial pejorative that derogatorily refers to someone who is not a native Arabic speaker.²²⁵ In doing this, Saddam and his regime intended to disregard Iran's true existence, emphasize the country's ethnic distinction, and overall isolate it from Iraqi Shi'as by erasing any positive contemporary or historical relationship. An instance of this subtle yet powerful rhetorical technique can be noted in an Iraqi newspaper sponsored by the Ba'ath regime that wrote "what is called the contemporary state of Iran is an artificial state established by force, oppression, and national bondage."²²⁶ Therefore, in naming itself Iran, the Ba'ath regime argued that "Persian *ajam*" were attempting to conceal their legacy of violent imperialism against Arabs. Saddam also refused to use the phrase "Persian Gulf," as it suggested that the major waterway was under the authority of Iran instead of Iraq. Instead, he demanded his regime members to more accurately refer to the body of water as "*Khalij Basra*" (the Gulf of Basra) or "*al-Khaliq al-Arabi*" (the Arab Gulf) as a way to imply

²²³ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 184.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

²²⁵ James Bill, "Resurgent Islam in the Persian Gulf" (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019), 117.

²²⁶ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 140.

Arab superiority.²²⁷ To further accentuate the Ba'ath regime's rejection of the name "Persian Gulf," the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council opened the Arab Gulf Office. Saddam's regime saw this tactic as a way to accentuate Iran's history of hegemonic ambitions, and believed that referring to the waterway as the "Persian Gulf" would only work to glorify Iran's legacy of empire and expansionism.

The renaming campaign conducted by the Ba'ath regime allowed its propaganda to reach into the daily lives of Iraqis, particularly Shi'as, in ways they may not have consciously noticed. Moreover, by bringing propaganda into the names of streets, provinces, military operations, administrative units, and within political statements, Saddam's regime made its rhetorical terminology more relevant, and therefore more effective when it referenced such terms directly.

IV. An Eye for the Arts

Throughout history, leaders have manipulated art to influence the beliefs and behaviors of others. Art has been and continues to be used to educate, persuade, and shape individuals and the choices they make regarding things as simple as what they will eat to the understanding of their very existence. In terms of serving a political agenda, art has provided a platform for the dissemination of government propaganda that often times outsmarts any well-drafted speech or carefully revised piece of legislation. Art can breathe propaganda into the viewer or reader through an emotive link, whether it manifests in political cartoons, portraits, or poetry. This "a picture is worth a thousand words" argument does not stand alone as the rationale behind why countless leaders in history manipulate it for political benefit. Another principal, and rather

²²⁷ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 140.

obvious, consideration of espousing propaganda through art is that it has the ability to reach an added demographic in a given society. For the citizen who ignored the television or stopped reading the newspaper or no longer attended government-sponsored events, a form of art may be the only way in which the regime could reach him. Therefore, by manipulating art such as large-scale murals and reliefs in public spaces, Saddam and his regime not only aimed to create images and words that invoked associations and sentiments that had the potential to relate to all Iraqis, regardless of ethnicity or religion. He also intended to infiltrate a new section of the Iraqi Shi'i community to ensure that his propaganda did not miss a single individual. It also must be mentioned here that the relationship between artists and the regime was not symbiotic; artists who wished to continue pursuing their craft in Iraq during the 1980s could not stray from the official message of the Ba'ath regime.²²⁸ Therefore, the Ba'ath regime often co-opted such artists into designing its propaganda.

Saddam tasked his regime with manipulating various mediums of art as a way to spread and relate its message to as many Iraqi Shi'as as possible. In accordance with this, members of the Ba'ath regime created increased opportunities to involve artists in highly lucrative jobs working for the Ministry of Culture.²²⁹ The Ministry of Culture typically commissioned a given artist to produce large-scale works in an effort to foster "the deep continuity between artistic creation of pre-historic eras, the Islamic era, and our modern sculptors."²³⁰ Saddam's regime often requested the recreation of ancient paintings, engravings and reliefs in public areas.²³¹ By

²²⁸ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 81.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

doing this, Saddam and his regime could help the modern Iraqi imagine and ideally relate to the greatness of the ancient Mesopotamian people. Coupled with this was the constant demand of portraits of Saddam himself, which appeared in newspapers and government buildings. Eventually, these were also expected to be hung in private homes.²³² By pairing the mass production of portraits of Saddam with the simultaneous emergence of ancient Mesopotamian art, the Ba'ath regime rewrote a visual history to fit the government's narrative of contemporary politics. In other words, by creating ancient Mesopotamian-inspired artwork alongside works based on Saddam, the Ba'ath regime attempted to conflate the circumstances of Iraq's mythic past with that of the modern times.

Poets, like painters and illustrators in Iraq during the 1980s, were not free agents; they were political tools used to extend propaganda into the artistic realm. The Ba'ath regime commissioned the work of Iraqi poets to push the relation between modern-day Iraq and Mesopotamia as well as to elevate Saddam to the status of superhuman by likening him to supernatural entities in order to expand his cult of personality.²³³ Poetry in particular worked to push this narrative even during times of loss and struggle during the conflict with Iran; more specifically, the Ba'ath regime used the lofty phrasing of poetry to justify its mistakes and camouflage its ambition. Overall, poetry manipulated during this time sought to rewrite a collective Iraqi history in a way that unified Iraqis based on their shared mythic past as well as the glorification of Saddam.

²³² Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 183.

²³³ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 79.

Another form of art manipulated by the Ba'ath regime was the illustrations that appeared on coins, bills and government documents. During the mid-1980s, these three components underwent a shift in design that capitalized on spreading depictions of ancient Mesopotamia and Saddam himself.²³⁴ Eventually, Iraqi coins, bills and documents from various government conferences had the ability to introduce imagery of ancient Mesopotamia and Saddam's excellence into the lives of Iraqis more casually and more frequently. By doing this, Saddam's propaganda reached every Iraqi, particularly Iraqi Shi'as, and infiltrated everyday spaces of life, making his propaganda more relevant.

V. Manipulating the Media

As both private and public access to newspapers, cinema, and television expanded throughout Iraq during the 1980s, the Ba'ath regime employed predictable tactics to use these mediums of communication as vessels for its propaganda. Benedict Anderson has stressed the power and importance of the role of communicative space when it comes to the development of a national identity.²³⁵ Hobsbawm supplements this theory by arguing that communicative space not only creates the concept of a nation, but also maintains it.²³⁶ Cinema, television, and newspapers primarily comprise this space, at least in regards to Iraq during the 1980s. The ability to communicate and also to access information has typically been a threat to powerful dictatorships founded on corruption, violence, or any other sort of malfeasance. Therefore, in

²³⁴ Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History & Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89* (St. Martin's Press, 1991), 64.

²³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983), 42.

²³⁶ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

many historical cases, regimes have extended their reach into the control rooms and editing offices of organizations involved in media as a way to have a more direct impact on forming the shared identity that media can so strongly shape. Thus, any freedoms to originality or honesty are choked by the hands of dictatorship and molded into reproductions of government propaganda. It's true that government manipulation of the media can be quite apparent to citizens living in authoritarian societies; constantly hearing stories that prop up a government message with little to no criticism becomes obvious, especially when the government diverges considerably away from the truth. This is even more clear during times of tension and conflict in which the government seemingly, or superficially, neglects the casualties and economic hardship impacting communities. Despite this reality, manipulating the media as a mechanism for disseminating propaganda still proves beneficial. This tactic is relatively easy in that a given regime must simply hold consequences over the heads of those they co-opt, and perhaps make an example out of one or two. This form of circulating rhetoric was particularly powerful in that televisions, newspapers and movies comprised the free time of the average citizen. Also, televisions, newspapers and movies were everywhere in Iraq during the 1980s; in homes, cafes, shops, markets, and businesses. Manipulating the media in Iraq, then, goes beyond targeting one singular or specific industry or demographic; control over television, newspapers, and movies meant dominating an outlet that reached every Iraqi from every corner of the country.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Saddam's regime spent manpower and funds on infiltrating the cinema, particularly with the production of the movie *Al-Qadisiyya*, which was used to prop up Saddam's anti-Iranian propaganda. Cinema is particularly good at fostering state-sponsored propaganda because at its core, it lives in a space of myths in which everything is practiced,

edited, and staged. In recognizing this, Saddam's regime saw the production of *Al-Qadisiyya* as a way to disseminate particularly exaggerated propaganda in a form as casual as a movie, where neither him nor his regime were directly characterizing the battle as such. The Ba'ath regime ordered the film to be played in every movie theater, and the buzz it received from other state-sponsored media sources made the term "*Al-Qadisiyya*" a more common reference within Iraqi society.²³⁷ By integrating its rhetoric into cinema, the Ba'ath regime attempted to infiltrate a more informal site: the free time of the typical Iraqi.

Even more accessible than cinema was television, and naturally the Ba'ath regime took particular advantage of the introduction of televisions into homes and cafes in Iraqi society during the mid-1980s. Saddam and his regime saw this trend as a way to make Ba'ath propaganda more visible, almost to the point where it was seemingly inescapable. For example, the Ba'ath regime publicly funded the renovations of significant shrines in the Shi'a-majority cities of Najaf and Karbala and ordered that the progress of their reconstructions be televised.²³⁸ After their completion, Saddam increased his visits to both sites and ensured that those visits be televised as well.²³⁹ In addition, regime-sponsored media networks interviewed Shi'i clerics who expressed their thanks to the president for his generosity towards Najaf and Karbala.²⁴⁰ Therefore, updates on the progress of the war that originally flooded television networks instead

²³⁷ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 173.

²³⁸ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 189.

²³⁹ National War College, "Saddam Hussein and the Iran-Iraq War" (National Defense University, 2001), 9.

²⁴⁰ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba'thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 189.

took a seat in the background, while Saddam waved and showed off his contributions to the shrines.

The Ba'ath regime also utilized the television to show interviews with Iraqis on the battlefield in order to portray the war in a way that shed positive light on the Ba'ath regime and the accomplishments of the soldiers. More specifically, the military chaplains, or religious scholars who administered guidance and praise to soldiers fighting, were featured by television networks that created segments on their role during the war.²⁴¹ By doing this, the Ba'ath regime conjured up the exact representation of the war it wanted its people to see, and supplemented it with its own prepared propaganda.

Mixing both cinema and television, Saddam ordered television networks to broadcast movies and series that promoted his regime's pro-Iraqi and anti-Iran narrative. Because of the Ba'ath regime's sudden shift from supporting secularism to promoting its religiosity, Saddam was desperate to prove his new devotion to Islam. One way he did this was by using television and its nearly immeasurable access to Iraqis to show government-created movies that explained the Ba'ath party's stance on religion and its work in strengthening Iraq.²⁴² By manipulating television networks, Saddam could inject his propaganda in a fast-paced nature and to far-reaching places.

Aside from creating visual government propaganda on screens, the Ba'ath regime also controlled the print media in order to reach Iraqis, but primarily Shi'as who may have not had

²⁴¹ Samuel Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the Roots of Insurgencies in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 41.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 67.

regular access to television. Benedict Anderson argues that print-languages lay the basis for national consciousness primarily because they create an environment for exchange and expression among “fellow-readers;” however, in Saddam’s Iraq, print media comprised the foundation of nationalism because the Ba’ath regime manipulated major newspapers to push its ideal Iraqi identity.²⁴³ Newspapers served the Ba’ath regime because they provided it with the capability to both thwart the spread of criticism as well as espouse its own propaganda. To stay in business, major newspapers such as *Al-Jumhuriyya*, *Al-Thawra*, and *Al-Qadisiyya* were forced to agree with this logic. All three papers published articles that helped explain the history of Iraq and Islam as a way to supplement Ba’ath propaganda, and at times printed articles that directly disseminated government rhetoric steeped in emotional anti-Iranian discourse or that which acted to glorify Saddam.²⁴⁴ The Ba’ath regime often ordered the publication and manipulation of certain Qur’anic surahs to boast the regime’s devotion to religion.²⁴⁵ Additionally, throughout the war with Iran, these newspapers were required to dedicated space explaining the war using precise government phrasing.²⁴⁶ In addition to articles, these newspapers also illustrated political cartoons that promoted Ba’ath rhetoric against Iran or expanded upon Saddam’s growing cult of personality. Furthermore, every year on Saddam’s birthday, the newspaper *Al-Thawra* published a drawing of Saddam amidst some sort of Mesopotamian or Islamic backdrop.²⁴⁷ Forcing Ba’ath

²⁴³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983), 42.

²⁴⁴ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam’s Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 144.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁴⁷ Amatzia Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam, 1968-2003: Ba’thi Iraq from Secularism to Faith* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 90.

rhetoric into print not only worked to flood popular newspapers with the regime's propaganda, but also to ensure the absence of dissent.

Together, the cinema, television, and the newspaper worked as components of a greater cultural production working to extend the reach of the Ba'ath regime's propaganda. Despite the fact that many Iraqis viewed certain broadcasting networks and newspapers as nearly fiction because of the Ba'ath regime's obvious handle on them, they still managed to touch an increased number of Iraqi Shi'as and expose them to cleverly crafted government propaganda.

VI. Official Government Speeches and Statements

The art of propaganda lies in the ability for an individual to foster an emotive link between their rhetoric and their audience, essentially finding a way into their hearts and minds. This concept is at the core of why we see propaganda disseminated primarily through speeches throughout history. A face-to-face, powerful address to an audience can oftentimes do more to connect with the psyches of a specific group than what can be done with pen and paper. The foundations of persuasion and manipulation exist within the realm of human connection, which helps explain why speeches, especially when supplemented by other mechanisms, can be so effective in espousing rhetoric with political intentions. Like any government throughout history, the Ba'ath regime utilized orations from top members of its government, namely Saddam himself, as a way to disseminate its propaganda. Although a more direct technique for propagation, the Ba'ath regime relied on this method particularly because Saddam had the talent of commanding the attention of, speaking emotionally to and directly connecting with the Iraqi

masses.²⁴⁸ Moreover, as mentioned above, the regime typically supplemented Saddam's speeches with other techniques already discussed in this chapter, chiefly the manipulation of newspapers and television networks. Overall, Saddam's skill as an orator allowed him to get away with exaggerated rhetoric and manipulated semantics, both of which were typically at the core of his speeches.

VII. Conclusion

The methods of dissemination outlined in this chapter are not new or unique techniques of propagation unseen throughout other points in history. Saddam and his regime essentially recycled popular tactics in an effort to espouse their own message and produce a more inclusive national identity. What *is* notable is both the variety of the mechanisms and the fact that they were all employed in a seemingly jumbled nature during a comparatively short timespan of eight years. In attempting to understand the logic of why Saddam chose to embrace all of these tactics together, especially considering that the content of his propaganda also mirrored this tangled, unconnected yet interconnected web, we must note the context in which Saddam was working. Saddam, like many Ba'ath leaders, faced opposition from primarily Iraqi Shi'as, which weighed on the construction of any unified Iraqi nationalism. At the same time, the war with Iran drove a particular need for that nationalism to exist; how else would Saddam justify his aggressions and sustain morale? The war made the creation of an Iraqi identity not simply a political benefit but a national security priority in regards to the survival of Saddam and his regime. Therefore, in a desperate effort to reach and appeal to Iraqi Shi'as, Saddam and his regime employed a variety

²⁴⁸ Salomon Ruysdael, *Speeches of Deception: Selected Speeches of Saddam Hussein*, (Writers Club Press, 2003), xxi.

of dissemination methods that attempted to infiltrate important societal spaces that had not been entered prior. In acknowledging Saddam's growing obsession with control since his beginnings in politics, it's not surprising that he would order his regime to ensure that every corner of Iraq would have a trace of Ba'ath propaganda. This helps to explain, then, the not only confusing and sometimes paradoxical nature of his propaganda, but also the sheer variety of the faces and spaces of Ba'ath dissemination.

Conclusion. Shi'i Reception & Significance

After discussing both the content and mechanisms of Ba'ath regime propaganda, it's clear that the creation of patriotism through the construction of a national identity is rather complex. Countries in which ethnic, religious, tribal, and historical elements meet each other with both harmony and tension prove that the conception of nationalism is not a simple branding of ideology. Faleh A. Jabar argues that nationalism is a "...cultural space in which history, religion, cultural and socioeconomic aspects play crucial parts."²⁴⁹ Although this analysis makes a valid point, it neglects the role that conflict can play in the development and spread of a national identity. During times of war, nationalism not only serves to foster a space which includes the aspects outlined above; it also acts as a supplement to the military efforts ensuing on the frontlines. This helps to explain the seemingly frantic attempt to espouse rhetoric that could reach and touch every possible Iraqi Shi'a. Moreover, the shift in Iraq's military campaign from offensive to defensive, although not intentional, had a significant influence on Ba'ath propaganda. The setbacks that plagued Iraq during the mid-to late phases of the war enabled a change in rhetoric which consequently led to a change in reception; the Ba'ath recognized this and used it to its advantage.

However, there were costs to the creation of an all-encompassing national identity. Despite the fact that the Ba'ath regime attempted to appeal to every single type of Iraqi, the chaotic amalgamation of overlapping and conflicting varieties of propaganda continued to give rise to ethnic assimilation and cultural domination. Much of this came as a result of the coercive (and seemingly inescapable) tactics employed by the Ba'ath regime and its reliance on very

²⁴⁹ Faleh A. Jabar, "The War Generation in Iraq: A Case of Failed Etatist Nationalism" in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 129.

specific elements. This revealed its attempt to hegemonize every corner of cultural or social autonomy, and therefore triggered trends opposing unification. In addition, Iraqi Shi'as faced the brunt of the war; not only did their long history of economic hardship become exacerbated by the conflict, but young, male Shi'as also comprised the majority of the Iraqi infantry. This, coupled with the Iranian regime's attempt to appeal to Iraqi Shi'as, is another primary reason why this section seeks to focus on Shi'i reactions to Ba'ath propaganda rather than Iraqi reception in general. However, given the lack of an archive that documents every Iraqi Shi'i response to government rhetoric throughout the 1980s, a chapter analyzing and speaking precisely to all Shi'i attitudes towards Ba'ath propaganda is an impossible undertaking. In addition, under the Ba'ath regime, many Iraqi Shi'as feared speaking out publicly, and moreover did not enjoy any representative political organization or newspaper that could have potentially reflected the real views of the average Iraqi Shi'a.²⁵⁰ With that being said, this chapter admittedly and inevitably includes generalizations and overarching analyses of Shi'i reception to Ba'ath rhetorical efforts. What can be confirmed is that the Ba'ath regime spent a significant amount of time and resources collecting information on the effect of the war burden, specifically in regards to Iraqi Shi'as both on the battlefield and existing within regular Iraqi society. Overall, the Iran-Iraq War worked as a test for the case for Iraqi nationalism, which of course had ebbed and flowed over the course of the Ba'ath party's time in power. Two trends appear in discussing the success of Ba'ath propaganda in generating positive responses from Iraqi Shi'as. First, during the early years of the war, Iraqi Shi'as were seemingly unaffected by Ba'ath propaganda and maintained their distrust of the regime. However, as a result of both a change in military and rhetorical tactics employed by the Ba'ath regime, the latter half of the war ultimately showed unmistakable

²⁵⁰ Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 98.

signs of support for Iraq within Iraqi Shi'i circles. Therefore, the nature of the war was a main determinant of Shi'i reception to propaganda and allowed for greater mobilization.

I. Realities of War Debunk Rhetorical Tools

Conventional yet restrictive historical narratives often suggest that war has a positive influence on the development of national identity and the consolidation of a citizenry through a common cause or struggle. However, researcher and political scientist Lisa Blaydes astutely points out that this is only valid when the costs of war are shared across regional and communal groups.²⁵¹ When differential impacts of a conflict among varying groups exist, war can work against efforts to unify under any sort of collective patriotism. This scenario quite accurately describes the early phases of Iraq's war with Iran, in which Iraq embarked on aggressive offensive invasions of Iranian territories that were met with unexpectedly strong counterattacks. With an optimistic perspective, Saddam and his regime believed these setbacks were temporary and that the conflict as a whole would span no more than six weeks, let alone eight years laced with unexpected amounts of casualties.²⁵² Eventually, continued battles within Iranian territory seemingly had no end in sight. Younger Shi'as, both those fighting on the frontlines and those not, lost any enthusiasm they initially had and replaced it with building frustration. Although the Ba'ath regime attempted to pepper them with historical cases of Iraqi greatness or evidence of Arab superiority, its propaganda did not match the realities of their heavy losses. This context informed Iraqi Shi'as and led to an unfavorable response to Ba'ath-sponsored propaganda.

i. Failures Among the Frontlines

Notably, during the beginning years of the war, resentment among Shi'i soldiers intensified for two major reasons: the disproportionate rates of casualties among Shi'as and the

²⁵¹ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 82.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 25.

government's failure to recognize and honor their contributions to the war.²⁵³ Much of this had to do with the fact that in an attempt to distract from the atrocities happening on the battlefield, the Ba'ath regime turned its rhetoric to the glorification of Iraq's ancient Mesopotamian past as well as Saddam Hussein's leadership. In terms of propaganda specific to the army, Saddam and his regime chiefly incorporated the use of more religious terms into military jargon and attempted to convince Shi'as that this war was their *jihad* and fighting it should be considered an honor. Amidst this propaganda, Saddam never embarked on an effort to profusely thank or honor those who were actually sacrificing their lives for the survival of the regime. This coupled with the heightened numbers of casualties and lack of an established plan of action against Iran only fueled resentment and led to the weakened effectiveness of government propaganda.

As a result, the Ba'ath regime first faced higher instances of draft evasion, which put Iraq at a considerable disadvantage given Iran's significantly larger population, especially of able-bodied men.²⁵⁴ Later and more importantly, however, were the increased numbers of voluntary surrenders to the enemy and desertions. Interviews with Iraqi POWs from 1982 collected by Faleh A. Jabar confirmed this trend, and archives from the Ba'ath regime attribute this fact to "the plots of traitors," a term usually referenced when speaking of Iraqi Shi'i soldiers.²⁵⁵ In accordance with the dissatisfaction within the Iraqi infantry, desertions among rank and file members of the Iraqi military increased exponentially until the year 1984, essentially halfway through the war.²⁵⁶ Less than a year later, records show that roughly 30,000 deserters were hiding in the southern marshes of Iran in order to avoid repercussions from their capitulations.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (University of California Press, 2004), 190.

²⁵⁴ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 276.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

This issue also led to the discussion of five different categories of “problem soldiers:” those politically affiliated with the opposition; those who pursued their own agendas; those who were hesitant, confused, or lacking determination; those driven only by survival instincts; and those who prioritized tribal or personal commitments over the strategic interests of Iraq.²⁵⁸ These categories were outlined in upper-level party meetings and stamped as one of Saddam’s primary concerns in regards to maintaining optimism, and therefore suggest the prevalence of disloyalty within the Iraqi military.

Once the Ba’ath regime recognized this problem among the Shi’i infantry and its effect on general morale, the regime made an effort to dedicate a series of monuments to those serving in the war. In addition to praising Shi’i fighters in a rhetorical way, the Ba’ath regime also established a program that provided generous financial compensation in the form of Iraqi dinars, cars, rights to pension, rights to land, and interest-free loans to buy houses, to Iraqi soldiers and their families.²⁵⁹ However, as economic conditions became increasingly burdensome and Saddam was hard-pressed to reduce budget allocations in order to continue financing the war, his regime became less inclined to offer material goods and more reliant on the influence of its propaganda.

ii. Resistance Beyond the Battlefield

The resentment developing on the battlefield was mirrored throughout the rest of society. Ba’ath party membership in 1992 was down forty percent compared to 1990, with the largest declines occurring in Shi’a-majority communities such as Basra, Najaf, al-Hilla and Karbala.²⁶⁰ More generally, ineffective propaganda at the beginning of the war led to a lack of patriotism.

²⁵⁸ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 106.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

This primarily came as a result of Saddam and his regime's decision to manipulate historical events in which Iraq had proven its military prowess or innate superiority over other civilizations in the face of severe losses to Iran. Thus, these state-sponsored historical collectivities were not seen as legitimate or even relatable. How could the Iran-Iraq War be viewed as the renewed Battle of *Qadisiyya* if Iraq proved far from any sort of extraordinary victory? How could Saddam be realistically associated with Nebuchadnezzar if the battles he led his men into were repeatedly lost?

In addition to voluntary capitulations, other forms of resistance to Saddam existed within Iraqi Shi'i communities. The consequences of such forms of resistance typically landed an Iraqi in jail or awaiting death, so naturally the full extent of defiance is unknown. However, researchers have outlined that large numbers of Iraqi Shi'as who willingly fled the country. They would travel to Iran or other countries in which they could convey their discontent for the Ba'ath regime and avoid engaging in a society in which the Ba'ath party dominated.²⁶¹ Two general industries aside from the military that experienced increased levels of Shi'i departure were those of security and the arts; the former because of its demands of violence and brutality, and the latter because of the considerable amount of government monitoring and exploitation.²⁶² Other Shi'as, especially those involved in government-affiliated organizations and saw the risk of leaving as too dangerous or wanted to keep living in Iraq, engaged in passive resistance, a common tool within authoritarian regimes that close off access to more active forms of expression. Under this umbrella, Iraqi Shi'as often boycotted work or blatantly disobeyed party

²⁶¹ Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 225.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 152.

orders to voice their dissatisfaction.²⁶³ In addition, families of loved ones who had been arrested for allegedly speaking out or criticizing Saddam and/or his regime wrote letters to government officials pleading for the release of a given individual while citing the cruelty of the regime.²⁶⁴ Moreover, some who felt particularly outraged and brave took to organizing small-scale protests. Those who were more frightful of the iron grip of the Ba'ath regime found it sufficient to spread rumors or jokes about Saddam and his closest advisors.²⁶⁵ These passive techniques of resistance flourished because the consequences for major acts of defiance were so far-reaching and brutal that their existence was unusual and seemingly impossible. In addition, many Iraqi Shi'i families opted for these more subtle ways of showing disapproval of Saddam and Iraq due to the fact that many of their loved ones were fighting the war. With this in mind, it would be instinctive for such individuals to try and keep themselves as well as the rest of their families safe. In addition, because Saddam's internal security force's crackdown on criticism became increasingly coercive and violent, there was no real environment that could foster the growth, development, or strengthening of legitimate oppositional groups during this period.

Overall, despite the fact that the Ba'ath regime expended considerable political and material capital to respond to its concerns over morale, the differential war costs undermined the regime's attempts to further incorporate Iraqi Shi'as under its all-encompassing national identity. The conflation of symbols, especially those that did not match contemporary Iraqi life given the realities of the war, worked to confuse Iraqis rather than provide them with any meaningful or emotional understanding of their national commonalities.²⁶⁶ Also, coupled with the lack of

²⁶³ Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 225.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁶⁶ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (University of California Press, 2004), 197.

valorization of Shi'i soldiers, civilians began to resent the duration of the war, especially as it failed to bring any sort of revival of economic prosperity.

II. Shifts in the Nature & Rhetoric of the War: A Defensive Campaign Bolsters Propaganda

Iraq's withdrawal of its troops from Iranian territory during the summer of 1982 brought with it a shift in allegiance toward the Ba'ath regime, particularly among Iraqi Shi'as. Scholars such as Adeed Dawisha argue that the regime's rhetorical campaign that aimed to both produce an expansive Iraqi identity and delegitimize Iran actually countered the Ba'ath regime's goal to convince Iraqi Shi'as to give their loyalties to Iraq instead of to their respective religious communities or worse, into the hands of Khomeini.²⁶⁷ However, the switch in both the war and rhetoric throughout the later phases of the conflict led to more positive Iraqi Shi'i reception to Ba'ath regime propaganda, and overall a better consolidation of loyalties under the state. Although a military withdrawal that brought the conflict onto Iraqi soil was not necessarily a premeditated decision, the Ba'ath regime did notice how it related to its rhetoric that imagined Iraq as a victim to Iranian influence, and therefore manipulated it. In particular, Iraqi Shi'as began responding more agreeably towards the Ba'ath regime's pan-Arab and Islamic propaganda during the middle and later years of the war, especially since Iraq's retraction from Iranian territory matched these narratives well. More specifically, espousing anti-Iranian propaganda steeped in Persian imperialism and the country's innate hatred of Arabs built an environment of fear. Coupled with this, exposing Khomeini's revolution as radical and rejecting true Islam led to the consolidation of greater loyalty among Iraqi Shi'as to the Ba'ath regime.

i. Matching the Histories: Increased Military Loyalty

²⁶⁷ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 85.

After withdrawing its troops from Iranian territory, Iraq shifted to a defensive campaign for the majority of the war, specifically spanning from 1982 to the summer of 1988. This change to fighting on Iraqi soil triggered a change in war sentiments; from interviews synthesized by Faleh A. Jabar, young Iraqi Shi'as recognized a greater legitimacy of the war and also believed peace was eventually achievable.²⁶⁸ Coupled with this change in war was the increased spread of Ba'ath propaganda steeped in proving innate Iranian hostility and imperialism towards the Arab world. Pairing both these alterations in the nature of the war and rhetoric, the conflict was gradually perceived as an act of Iranian aggression.²⁶⁹ This judgment is confirmed by Saddam's own realization during the mid-1980s that "the clearer the Iranian intentions become to the Iraqi forces, the more willing they become to offer sacrifices and to perform better."²⁷⁰ As a result, sympathy for Khomeini and his revolutionary propaganda subsided among Shi'i fighters and was replaced by the perception that Khomeini promoted a threatening, radical sect of Shi'i Islam that was acting on behalf of political ambition rather than religious genuineness. Each time Khomeini ordered another military attack in Iraq, the more Iraqi patriotism grew in opposition to Iran, especially among the infantry who had family and friends to protect. Although scholars like Charles Tripp are quick to judge that there was little proof of collective Iraqi Shi'i loyalty to the Ba'ath regime, he fails to explain the statistics that disprove this claim. Figures in Jabar's research show that as the war progressed into the latter half of the 1980s, voluntary capitulations decreased and cracks in opposition to the regime throughout the army began to form.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Faleh A. Jabar, "The War Generation in Iraq: A Case of Failed Etatist Nationalism" in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 127.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁷⁰ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (Westview Press, 1988), 95.

²⁷¹ Faleh A. Jabar, "The War Generation in Iraq: A Case of Failed Etatist Nationalism" in Lawrence G. Potter and Gary G. Sick's *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 127.

Iraq's switch to a defensive military campaign granted Saddam greater concrete material to incorporate into rhetoric that aimed to convince Iraqis to come together in defense against Iran. Therefore, this shift in military realities both laid the foundation that supplemented existing propaganda as well as lit the match that sparked the initiation of other rhetorical campaigns. Now operating on the defensive, Saddam's regime could better argue its narrative of Iraqi collectivity, and as we've seen, it did so in a variety of ways.

ii. **Anxiety Births Allegiance**

This same combined shift in military and rhetorical strategy played out not only on the battlefield but also within society. The war with Iran began to become more ideologically and geographically relevant, since rhetoric that illustrated Iran as an innate threat to Iraq was more believable given that destruction and warfare occurred within sight of the average Iraqi. Therefore, Eric Davis notes the development of suspicion towards Iran among a large portion of the Shi'i population.²⁷² Both secular and religious communities alike acted within this carefully crafted conceptualization that Iran was harboring everlasting feelings of hostility and evil toward Iraq specifically. By accepting this narrative, interviews with Iraqi Shi'as as well as the general population of Iraq suggest they believed their only defense against Iraq facing another instance of imperialistically-driven Iranian destruction was to show loyalty to their country, either by fighting or supporting Iraq in the war against Iran.²⁷³ The fact that Iraqi Shi'as for the most part did this, then, is a clear indicator of their sense of patriotism. Moreover, this environment of panic intentionally created by the Ba'ath regime throughout the war pushed Iraqi Shi'as to fear the victory of Iran and the violent disruption that could arise as a result.²⁷⁴

²⁷² Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (University of California Press, 2004), 188.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁷⁴ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 85.

Even Iraqi Shi'as who did not fall under the spell of Saddam's nationalist propaganda were, to varying degrees, influenced by this concept that Iran intrinsically aspired to destroy Iraq. Joseph Sassoon's research found that the majority of average Iraqi Shi'as wanted to revert back to living their normal lives, and realized out of necessity, the only way this could realistically be achieved was if they adapted to the ideological constructions the Ba'ath regime created.²⁷⁵ In also understanding the limitations of expression and freedom living under an authoritarian regime, the majority of Iraqi Shi'as found that the easiest way to endure the war was to adjust their values to those that the regime was pushing. As a result, this meant obeying Saddam, the individual who allegedly embodied all the qualities that comprised Iraq's national identity, and accepting rather than resisting his regime. This shift in Iraqi Shi'i understanding obliged citizens to not only rally vaguely behind Saddam, but to participate actively in the war effort and tolerate huge losses, in terms of both the economy but more importantly of human lives.

Coupled with the context of fear generated by anti-Iranian propaganda, the Ba'ath regime's use of Islamic rhetoric also pushed Iraqi Shi'as to no longer look to Iran or Khomeini for religious guidance. By espousing propaganda likening Saddam to Islamic legends, revisiting and manipulating instances of Arab-Muslim historical achievements, and arguing that only Arabs should be considered true, pure Muslims, the Ba'ath regime convinced Iraqi Shi'as to renounce the creation of a Khomeini-inspired Shi'i theocracy.²⁷⁶ By engaging in this rhetoric, Saddam's regime survived; Iraqi Shi'as were not only generally unresponsive but disapproving of Khomeini's calls for their community to stage a coup d'état to overthrow Saddam. In addition, interviews edited by Eric Davis found that Ba'ath efforts to undermine Khomeini as a reputable

²⁷⁵ Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 284.

²⁷⁶ Lisa Blaydes, *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton University Press, 2018), 85.

or respectable leader of Islam proved successful in that towards the later years of the war, Iraqi Shi'as no longer found Khomeini's revolution impressive nor did they actively desire a similar revolution to spread into their own communities.²⁷⁷

Although a military withdrawal was not intentional on the part of Iraq, it did better match the environment of fear and the image of an imperialistic Iran conjured up by the government. The fact that destruction and violence was happening within miles of an Iraqi home would perhaps suggest that sentiments towards the war would be more negative; however, with the increased amount of propaganda that took advantage of and manipulated Iraq's defensive campaign, Iraqis began working together to defend Iraq against Iran. Although little concrete evidence on Shi'i attitudes toward specific Ba'ath propaganda exists, the two major components of the latter phases of the war, shifts in military and rhetorical campaigns, suggest that all Iraqis, including Shi'as, bound together out of patriotism.

²⁷⁷ Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (University of California Press, 2004), 192.

III. Conclusion

Originally, this thesis was motivated by the question of whether individuals in heterogeneous states, which are common in the Middle East, value their national identities or those linked to sub or supranatural communities more. Throughout the research process, I began to realize that this question was relatively normative and less relevant than other considerations to be made surrounding identity in such an interesting time and place in the world. It became clear that identities are not necessarily valued more or less, but instead work in tandem, pushing and pulling individuals to make choices alongside other factors in their lives. This thesis, then, has evolved to be primarily interested in the realization of multi-dimensional identities by governments, specifically those leading diverse populations, and how they both fear and exploit them during times of conflict.

War can make relevant political cleavages more pertinent, especially for citizens living under dictatorial conditions. However, the Ba'ath regime took advantage of its context and attempted to unite Iraqis under an all-encompassing yet singular Iraqi identity in the face of the Iranian adversary. Predictions that the war would fragment Iraq along sectarian lines overall failed to materialize. Iraqis of all ethnicities and religions, specifically the Iraqi Shi'as who were most vulnerable to influence from Iran, worked together through extreme hardship and arguably the most severe war that engrossed Iraq during the 20th century. The war did then, elicit a sense of nationalism among all sectors of Iraqi society, Iraqi Shi'as included.

Although this bodes true throughout the conflict, after Iraq was no longer victim to a concrete, non-Arab, radical, and historically imperialistic adversary like Iran, there were few ways of transforming this abstract sense of collective solidarity into a long-term acceptance of Saddam's regime. Despite the fact that the Ba'ath regime took advantage of the temporary

erasure of political attitudes, sectarian divisions, and religious tensions to embark on an extensive rhetorical campaign, after the smoke of the war cleared, Iraqis realized that the propaganda was just that. Without a common enemy and with many still dealing with their losses from the war, Iraqis grew increasingly frustrated with the Ba'ath regime and settled into their old ways of embracing their immediate communities rather than the government. In addition, the fact that the Ba'ath regime uplifted varying aspects of Iraqi society, ranging from Shi'i Islam to pan-Arab identity to historical legends, acted to embolden those divisions once the Iraqi people lacked one singular commonality, such as the Iranian enemy.

Several larger lessons can be learned from the case of the Ba'ath regime's rhetorical attempts to construct greater patriotism during the war with Iran. First, the argument based in Orientalist foundations that Iraq is an artificial nation-state given its arbitrary borders installed by foreign entities as well as its cluttered, heterogeneous citizenry not linked through traditional nationalist tendencies should be discredited. Overall, a nation-state that consists of real, living humans should never be described as "artificial" because nothing about the cultures, families, struggles, and lives of individuals should be considered manufactured or false. However, more relevant to this thesis' research, Iraq in particular should not classify as artificial because its citizenry responded to propaganda steeped in aspects of their collective identity. Scholars argue that Western observers frequently assume Middle Eastern societies suffer a structural deficit in which citizens can only identify with their ethnicity or religion over national identity, and therefore are inherently more vulnerable to political instability driven by sectarianism. This narrow understanding misses that both harmony and commonalities, as seen in Iraq, could and were realized. It must also be understood that although the nationalism exhibited under Saddam's rule did not necessarily match traditional western nationalism, it does not mean it was innately

backwards; instead, it adapted based on the realities of conflict, arbitrary boundaries, and tribal, ethnic and religious diversity.

In extending this point, we can note the power of propaganda as well as nationalism, especially under an authoritarian regime. The concept of national historical excellence, which the Ba'ath regime employed in a variety of ways, has been a persuasive tool used elsewhere in time and place. Nationalism is rooted in the existence of a collective history, and every nation needs, for its reproduction, to be proud of some part of its past, or at least what it perceives is its past. The Ba'ath regime molded Iraqi pride to function as justification of the superiority of Arabs and inspiration that led modern-day Iraqis to link their societies with those of the ancient past. Moreover, as a result of the Ba'ath regime's compulsion with control, Iraqi nationalism also became inextricably linked to the ever omnipresent and omnipotent cult of personality of Saddam.

A national identity takes the shape the cultural gives it, but this concept becomes more complex when the regime in power dictates and manipulates the culture. This can help explain why Saddam and his regime decided to embrace the rhetorical campaign they did, which was one of mechanisms and themes that both interjected and rejected one another. Although many scholars and students of Middle Eastern history find this plan (or lack thereof) to be a political blunder provoked by carelessness and frenzy, in reality Saddam's regime was simply mirroring the culture it was handed. In fact, this strategy was not necessarily new or unique to the Middle East; nationalist programs are likely politically fluctuating and unstable. Although the Ba'ath regime of course exaggerated many aspects of Iraqi culture and included components, such as Saddam's cult of personality, that did not necessarily mimic elements of society or history already there, at the core of both the content and mechanisms of government propaganda was the

diversity of the country. This, then, can clarify the major shift in content over the course of the 1980s and why the Ba'ath regime created a multi-dimensional and nearly inescapable propaganda scheme that sought to *appeal* to and *reach* every Iraqi.

As mentioned in the introduction, this research is dedicated to the understanding of Saddam and Iraq for and as themselves, not as accessories to a conversation on Western imperialism within the Middle East. Although the U.S. invasion of 2003 and its aftermath undoubtedly made an impact on Iraq, I will conclude with contemplating present-day and future Iraq as its own entity, not as one solely influenced by Western policy. The future of Iraq, then, depends on how both citizens and their governments understand their collective, respective identities. The parliamentary elections last May announced that the party of Muqtada al-Sadr, a popular Shi'i cleric, had unexpectedly won the majority of seats. Despite the fact that this win came years after Saddam's rule, the Ba'ath regime was, in large part, responsible for the instigation of southern Shi'i communities after the war that gave rise to strong public personalities like al-Sadr. With powerful Shi'i leaders now penetrating some of Iraq's most influential spaces unlike ever before, I wonder how nationalist trends will evolve and how the concept of national identity will be perceived, particularly by those newly in power. From a historical standpoint, it's clear that a future Iraq does not need to erase sectarian differences in an effort to achieve a more hegemonic population. In fact, Saddam manipulated these differences in order to not only form the basis of his rhetorical campaign, but also to survive. It does, however, require a way for its communities to balance their diversities with not only tolerance but integration. Will frustrations among varying sects that impede the construction of a collective identity be reproduced? Or will greater representation among traditionally excluded groups bring new hope for greater national integration?

Overall, this thesis hopes to have provided a more dynamic understanding of political engagement during this period. Grasping the realities of Middle Eastern societies comprised of complex multi-dimensional identities and governments that actively recognize and exploit them provides a more grounded and in-depth lens for viewing the Middle East. With that being said, this thesis aims to accompany other literature that attempts to dislodge Orientalist tropes that often paint the Middle East as a jumble of inevitable and perpetual instability. By doing this, we can practice the essential act of viewing and discussing people and places within the Middle East as legitimate, rational, and with their own agency.

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