

Observation no: 157 (Yom Kippur War)

Country-year: Iraq - 1972

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

Yes.

On July 17, 1968, a right-wing Ba'athist army faction, brought the Ba'ath party to power and Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr was named President of Iraq.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.²

In 1972, the country had experienced six military coups. Following the July 15, 1958 successful military coup that abolished the Hashemite monarchy and established the Republic of Iraq, a power struggle between the leaders of the Free Officers, the military coalition that had conducted the coup, marked the next decade.

General Abd el-Karim Qassim, an Iraqi nationalist, first ruled as prime minister, until his autocratic regime was overthrown on February 8, 1963 (after a first attempt on March 1959) by a military coup led by Ba'athists and other Pan-Arabists. The Ba'athist General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr ruled the country as prime minister in the first Ba'athist regime in Iraq until being brought down on November 18, 1963 by a Nasserist counter-coup led by the president, Abdul Salam Arif, himself another member of the Free Officers. His brother, Abdul Rahman Arif, like him a Pan-Arabist and Nasserist, succeeded him at the presidency after his death. On September 17, 1965 and June 30, 1966, two abortive military coups failed to replace the Arif brothers' rule. Finally, on July 17, 1968, a right-wing Ba'athist army faction, brought back to power the Ba'ath and Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr was named President of Iraq.³

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr ruled as the country's top leader from the coup of July 17, 1968 to 1979. Although al-Bakr was president of Iraq, secretary of the Iraqi Regional Command of the Ba'ath (the ruling party), and chairman of the highest

¹ Ismael, Tareq Y., Ismael, Jacqueline S., Abu Jaber, Kamal. *Politics and government in the Middle East and North Africa*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1991, pp. 157-167.

² Verified in Luttwak, Edward. *Coup d'État. A practical Handbook*. Table II Basic List of Coups and Attempted Coups, 1945-78. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 205

³ Ismael, Tareq Y., Ismael, Jacqueline S., Abu Jaber, Kamal, pp. 157-167.

decision-making institution, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), he gradually lost power to the country's number two man, Saddam Hussein. Hussein, a civilian Ba'athist, held the positions of vice-president, deputy secretary of the party, deputy chairman of the RCC, and chief of internal security.⁴

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

Yes.

The start of the army "Ba'athification" at the end of the 1960's coincided with the grouping of military factions, at every level of the army, along tribal lines. The recruitment of men from tribes close to Saddam Hussein's tribe from Tikrit and from other Sunni Arabs clans was part of the new government's plan to reinforce regime security and state control.⁵

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

It is really after the Eighth Ba'ath Party Congress of 1974 that the party decided to fully control the army by "indoctrinating" it and purging it from all political opponents.⁶

However, it can be assumed that by 1972, and from the Ba'ath takeover of 1968, the "Ba'athification" process of the army had begun. For instance, special intense trainings for party activists were introduced and the graduates of these courses would then quickly be promoted at senior positions in spite of their military inexperience.⁷

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

See answer to question 5.

⁴ Baram, Amatzia. *Saddam Husayn, the Ba'ath Regime and the Iraqi Officer Corps*. In Rubin, Barry & Keaney, Thomas A. *Armed Forces in the Middle East: Politics and Strategy*. BESA Studies in International Security. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002, pp. 208 - 209.

⁵ Jabar, Faleh A. The Iraqi Army and Anti-Army: Some Reflections on the Role of the Military. In Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change. *The Adelphi Papers*, Vol. 43, Issue 354, pp. 116-117.

⁶ Jabar, Faleh A., p. 116.

⁷ Baram, Amatzia, p. 211.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

See answer to question 5. The military bureau of the Ba'ath Party was specifically in charge of the selection of the cadets.⁸

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

From 1962 to 1970, the Iraqi government was in conflict with separatists Kurds until Baghdad's government announced a plan to grant autonomy to the Kurds. Conflicts between Kurds and the Iraqi forces resumed in January 1972 when the Iraqi government threatened to expulse Kurds with alleged ties to Iran and at least 86 people perished after protesting against the expulsions. Iraqi forces were also deployed and fighting Iranian forces along the common border over Iranian support to the Kurdish separatists.⁹

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

Yes.

The country was ruled militarily from the Free Officers' coup of 1958 to the Ba'athist military coup of 1968. However, under the presidency of General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, Saddam Hussein gradually rose to power as a civilian Ba'athist. The first ten years of the post-monarchic period were marked by the succession of military regimes and greatly influenced Hussein's distrust for army officers and their subsequent loss of influence in politics after 1968.¹⁰

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

The Republic Guard was created to mainly enforce regime security and became almost disconnected from the regular army.¹¹ The presidential guard units were

⁸ Jabar, Faleh A., p. 117.

⁹ Jessup, John E. *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Conflict and Conflict Resolution, 1945-1996*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998, pp. 328-329.

¹⁰ Baram, Amatzia, pp. 207-210.

¹¹ Jabar, Faleh A., p. 117.

also known for being from Hussein and President al-Bakr's tribe from the Tikrit area (the two men being themselves relatives).¹²

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

Yes.

The General Intelligence called al-Mukhabarat al-'Amma.

Moreover, Saddam Hussein controlled the officer corps by establishing a tight internal security system. A political officer who had the power to oppose all orders and instructions permanently accompanied every officer with a position of command.¹³

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

Yes.

After the July 1968 Ba'athist coup, Saddam Hussein, a civilian Ba'athist, was appointed vice president and arrested and banished two senior officers that had participated in the coup but were not Ba'ath members. Additionally, between two and three thousand army officers were dismissed for being supporters of the Egyptian leader Gamal Abd al-Nasser, at odds with the Iraqi Ba'ath at the time. In 1970, Hussein ousted two generals from the RCC in his attempt to contain military influence in politics.¹⁴

On February 1973, a failed coup to depose the Ba'athist government resulted in 17 officers to be executed for their participation in the coup. And again, on July 1, 1973, a coup led by Colonel Nazzem Kazzar attempted to assassinate President al-Bakr and was crushed by Saddam Hussein.¹⁵

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes.

The party-run RCC, established after the 1968 Ba'athist coup, constituted the country's highest decision-making institution with both executive and legislative authority. Although the RCC was originally composed of five army generals, Saddam

¹² Baram, Amatzia, p. 210.

¹³ Baram, Amatzia, pp. 210-211.

¹⁴ Baram, Amatzia, p. 208.

¹⁵ Jessup, John E., p. 329.

Hussein expanded it on November 1969 to 15 members, all of them being civilian Ba'athists.¹⁶

¹⁶ Baram, Amatzia, pp. 208-210.