

Observation no: 174

Country-year: Iraq 1979

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

Yes

The Ba'th came to power in Iraq through a 1968 coup that overthrew President Abdul Rahman Arif.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

See answer to question 1. Iraq also experienced multiple coups prior to 1968.

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

No

Saddam had no military background or standing, having failed the entrance exam to the Baghdad Military Academy. He was a military officer in name only, with no training or experience.²

4. Is the military officer corps largely closed to those who do not share the leader's ethnic or sectarian background?

Yes

Iraq's senior officer corps consisted largely of Sunnis who shared the background of Saddam and his predecessor General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr.

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

Yes

Senior officers were expected to demonstrate complete personal allegiance to Saddam.³

¹ Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: a Political Biography* (New York: the Free Press, 1991), chapter 2.

² Karsh and Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein*, pp. 15, 35.

³ Caitlin Talmadge, *Authoritarian Armies on the Battlefield: Explaining Fighting Power in Non-Democratic Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015, forthcoming), chapter 4.

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

Yes

Senior officers were Ba'th party members.

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

No

Although personal allegiance to Saddam and acceptance of the tenets of Ba'thism were required, military training in general was lax and perfunctory.⁴

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

Yes

The military had been heavily involved in a campaign to repress the Kurds in the mid-1970s.⁵

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

No

Iraq was a firmly civilian-led regime, with a great emphasis under both Bakr and Saddam on preventing military governance and ensuring political control of the army.⁶

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

Yes

In 1970 Saddam oversaw the formation of the Popular Army. The nucleus of this paramilitary force had already played key roles in the 1963 coup and in the initial consolidation of Ba'th power in 1968. The Popular Army then became a full-fledged

⁴ Talmadge 2015, chapter 4.

⁵ "The Implications of the Iran-Iraq Agreement," paper produced by the Central Intelligence Agency, State Department, and Defense Intelligence Agency, May 1, 1975, available at www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB167/01.pdf; and Anthony Cordesman and Abraham Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War, Vol. II: the Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 28, 60.

⁶ Talmadge 2015, chapter 4.

counterweight to the regular military, growing to a strength of 100,000 men by 1979.⁷ The Popular Army came in addition to the Republican Guard inherited from Arif. This force would grow from two brigades during the early years of the war to more than two dozen by the end of the conflict.⁸

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

Yes

Iraqi intelligence was generally more concerned with tracking political developments inside Iraq and monitoring the loyalty of the armed forces than with gathering information on the Iranians.⁹

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

Yes

Saddam engaged in extensive purges upon his rise to power in 1979.¹⁰

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

No

Authoritative histories provide little evidence of well institutionalized civil-military communication. Rather, decision-making power was heavily concentrated in the hands of Saddam and members of his inner circle.

⁷ Chubin and Tripp, *Iran and Iraq*, p. 294.N

⁸ Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), pp. 218-219; and Ibrahim Al-Marashi and Sammy Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces: An Analytical History* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 168.

⁹ Al-Marashi and Salama, *Iraq's Armed Forces*, p. 147.

¹⁰ Said K. Aburish, "How Saddam Hussein Came to Power," in *The Saddam Hussein Reader*, ed. Turi Munthe (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002), pp. 51-4.