



**Saddam
Hussein**

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Saddam Hussein, the son of a landless peasant, was born in Tikrit in 1937. His father died before his birth and the family lived in extreme poverty until his mother, Sabha, took a third husband, Hassan Ibrahim. His step-father was extremely stick and he was regularly beaten with an asphalt-covered stick. In turn, Saddam also became very cruel. At first to animals but in his teens he murdered a shepherd from a nearby tribe.

Tikrit was an area controlled by Sunni Muslims. Orthodox Sunni Arabs are only about 15% of Itaq's population and are completely outnumbered by the Shias in the south (approximately 60%) and the Kurds in the north. However, the Sunnis dominated Iraq's political life. The Sunnis also provided a disproportionate number of the country's military officers.

In 1955, Saddam went to live with his uncle in Baghdad and was educated at Karkh High School. In 1957 joined the Ba'ath Party, a radical, pan-Arab nationalist doctrine. During this period he became a street-gang leader that was opposed the British-created Hashemite monarchy.

In July 1958, King Faisal II and his entire household were assassinated during a military coup. Nuri es-Said attempted to escape from Baghdad disguised as a woman but he was captured and executed on 14th July, 1958.

As a result of the Iraqi Revolution, the Arab nationalist, Abdul Karim Kassem, became the country's new leader and in 1959 Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact. Later that year Saddam Hussein was forced to flee to Egypt after being implicated in the attempted assassination of Kassem.

Kassem's moderate policies lost him the support of the Ba'ath Party and he was executed after a military coup in February 1963. Colonel Abd al-Salam Aref became the new president and Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr served as prime minister. As well as nationalizing the oil industry the new government developed close links with Gamal Abdel Nasser and his government in Egypt. Ahmad Hasan al Bakr left the government later that year when right-wing military leaders ousted the Ba'ath Party from power. Saddam Hussein, who was by this time the leader of Jihaz al-Hunein, was imprisoned and was not released until 1966.

When Abd al-Salam Aref was killed in an air crash on 13th April 1966 he was replaced by his brother General Abdul Rahman. Another military coup on 17th July 1968 brought to power Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr. He quickly nationalized the Iraq Petroleum Company and introduced wide-ranging social and economic reforms.

Over the next ten years Saddam Hussein held several important political posts in the government. This included Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council (1968-1979). The Ba'ath Party government ruthlessly suppressed opposition but it did agree to enter negotiations with the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). In March 1970 the government promised to grant the Kurds a degree of autonomy.

On 6th October 1973, Egyptian and Syrian forces launched a surprise attack on Israel. Two days later the Egyptian Army crossed the Suez Canal while Syrian troops entered the Golan Heights. Iraq joined in the Arab-Israeli War but was defeated when Israeli troops counter-attacked on 8th October. Iraq was able to hurt the Western economy when it participated in the oil boycott against Israel's supporters.

It now became clear to the Kurdish Democratic Party that Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr was not going to keep his promises about Kurdish autonomy. In the spring 1974 fighting broke out between the Kurds and the government's armed forces. In March 1975 Iran closed its border with Iraq which led to the collapse of the Kurdish military force. Kurdish villages were destroyed and their inhabitants resettled in specially constructed villages surrounded by barbed wire and fortified posts.

Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr also suppressed non-Kurds in Iraq. In July 1978 a decree was passed which made all non-Ba'thist political activity illegal and membership of any other political party punishable by death for all those who were members or former members of the armed forces.

Saddam Hussein gradually increased his power in the Ba'ath Party and when Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr retired in July 1979, he became the new

president. In the next few months Saddam Hussein swiftly executed his political rivals. Increasing oil revenues allowed him to increase spending on the building of schools, hospitals and clinics. He also established a literacy project that won him a Unesco award.

Another important reform was a massive programme to bring electricity to Iraq. This was followed by a huge nationwide distribution of free fridges and television sets. He also improved the status of women and by the late 1970s they were a major part of the workforce.

A student of dictators such as Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein arranged for portraits and statues to be placed all over the country. He also created the Republican Guard, an elite presidential security force.

In 1980 Saddam Hussein launched a war against Iran in an attempt to gain control of the Shatt al Arab Waterway, that runs along the border of both countries. During the war Iraq received support from the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and France.

In an effort to gain their independence from Iraq, the Kurds supported Iran during the war. Saddam Hussein retaliated and in the spring of 1988 the Iraq air force responded with poison gas, causing 5,000 deaths. As a result of these raids thousands fled to Turkey.

Iran gradually gained the upper-hand and recovered all its conquered territory and moved into Iraq and attempted to turn it into the world's second "Islamic Republic". Fearing that Iran would now dominate the region, the United States provided Saddam Hussein with conventional weapons, and the means to manufacture nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

Iraq agreed to a cease-fire in July 1988. It is estimated that the Iraq-Iran War caused the deaths of 400,000 deaths and around 750,000 seriously injured. Of these casualties, three-quarters were Iranian.

Disillusioned by his rule, a group of soldiers in the Iraq Army attempted to overthrow Saddam Hussein in December 1989. The military coup failed and Saddam Hussein ordered the execution of 19 senior army officers.

It is estimated that Saddam Hussein spent around \$5 billion a year on military rearmament. This created serious economic problems and began to consider the possibility of capturing the Rumaila oilfield in northern Kuwait. On 2nd August 1990 he ordered an invasion of Kuwait.

The United Nations immediately impose economic sanctions on Iraq and demanded an immediate withdrawal from Kuwait. In January 1991 a United States led coalition of 32 countries launch an attack on Iraq. Operation Desert Storm is a great success and after Iraq left Kuwait President George H. W. Bush was able to declare a cease-fire on 28th February.

In April 1991 Saddam Hussein agreed to accept the UN resolution calling on

him to destroy weapons of mass destruction. He was also forced to allow UN inspectors into his country to monitor the disarmament. A no-fly zone was established in Northern Iraq to protect the Kurds from Saddam Hussein. The following year a no-fly zone was also created to protect the Shiite population living near Kuwait and Iran.

In April 1995, the UN Security Council passed an "oil-for-food" resolution. This allowed Iraq to export oil in exchange for humanitarian aid. However, this resolution was not accepted by Saddam Hussein until 1996.

The UN disarmament commission reported in October 1996 that Iraq continued to conceal information on biological and chemical weapons and missiles. Two months later Iraq suspended all cooperation with the UN inspectors.

In December 1998 the United States and Britain launched Operation Desert Fox, a four day intensive air strike that attempted to destroy Iraq command centres, missile factories and airfields. The following month U.S. and British bombers begin regular bombing attacks on Iraq. Over a 100 air strikes took place in 1999 and continued regularly over the next few years.

President George W. Bush described Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the "axis of evil" and made it clear that he intended to remove the governments of these three countries. In March 2003, Bush, with the support of Tony Blair, ordered the invasion of Iraq.

In December, 2003, following a tip-off from an intelligence source, US forces found Saddam Hussein hiding in an underground refuge on a farm near Tikrit. It was decided that Saddam should be charged with the massacre in the small town of Dujail in 1982. The trial began in October, 2005, but the proceedings were immediately adjourned.

A second trial on war crimes relating to the 1988 Anfal campaign opened in August, 2006. On 5th November, he was found guilty and the court sentenced him to death by hanging. The sentence was confirmed by Iraq's highest court and he was executed on 30th December, 2006.

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