**Saddam Hussein**

Saddam Hussein Abd al-Majid al-Tikriti (/hʊˈseɪn/;[5] Arabic: صدام حسين عبد المجيد التكريتي Ṣaddām Ḥusayn ʿAbd al-Maǧīd al-Tikrītī;[a] 28 April 1937[b] – 30 December 2006) was President of Iraq from 16 July 1979 until 9 April 2003.[10] A leading member of the revolutionary Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, and later, the Baghdad-based Ba'ath Party and its regional organization the Iraqi Ba'ath Party—which espoused Ba'athism, a mix of Arab nationalism and socialism—Saddam played a key role in the 1968 coup (later referred to as the 17 July Revolution) that brought the party to power in Iraq.

As vice president under the ailing General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, and at a time when many groups were considered capable of overthrowing the government, Saddam created security forces through which he tightly controlled conflicts between the government and the armed forces. In the early 1970s, Saddam nationalized oil and foreign banks leaving the system eventually insolvent mostly due to the Iran–Iraq War, the Gulf War, and UN sanctions.[11] Through the 1970s, Saddam cemented his authority over the apparatus of government as oil money helped Iraq's economy to grow at a rapid pace. Positions of power in the country were mostly filled with Sunni Arabs, a minority that made up only a fifth of the population.[citation needed

Saddam formally rose to power in 1979, although he had already been the de facto head of Iraq for several years. He suppressed several movements, particularly Shi'a and Kurdish movements, which sought to overthrow the government or gain independence,[12] and maintained power during the Iran–Iraq War and the Gulf War. Whereas some in the Arab world lauded Saddam for opposing the United States and attacking Israel[13][14]—he was widely condemned for the brutality of his dictatorship. The total number of Iraqis killed by the security services of Saddam's government in various purges and genocides is conservatively estimated to be 250,000.[15] Saddam's invasions of Iran and Kuwait also resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths. He acquired the title "Butcher of Baghdad".

In 2003, a coalition led by the U.S. invaded Iraq to depose Saddam, in which U.S. President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair falsely accused him of possessing weapons of mass destruction and having ties to al-Qaeda. Saddam's Ba'ath party was disbanded and elections were held. Following his capture on 13 December 2003, the trial of Saddam took place under the Iraqi Interim Government. On 5 November 2006, Saddam was convicted by an Iraqi court of crimes against humanity related to the 1982 killing of 148 Iraqi Shi'a, and sentenced to death by hanging. His execution was carried out on 30 December 2006.

**Early life**

Saddam Hussein Abd al-Majid al-Tikriti was born in the town of Al-Awja, 13 km (8 mi) from the Iraqi town of Tikrit, to a family of shepherds from the al-Begat clan group, a sub-group of the Al-Bu Nasir (البو ناصر) tribe. His mother, Subha Tulfah al-Mussallat, named her newborn son Saddam, which in Arabic means "One who confronts". He is always referred to[clarification needed] by this personal name, which may be followed by the patronymic and other elements. He never knew his father, Hussein 'Abd al-Majid, who disappeared six months before Saddam was born. Shortly afterward, Saddam's 13-year-old brother died of cancer. The infant Saddam was sent to the family of his maternal uncle Khairallah Talfah until he was three.

His mother remarried, and Saddam gained three half-brothers through this marriage. His stepfather, Ibrahim al-Hassan, treated Saddam harshly after his return. At about age 10, Saddam fled the family and returned to live in Baghdad with his uncle Kharaillah Talfah. Talfah, the father of Saddam's future wife, was a devout Sunni Muslim and a veteran of the 1941 Anglo-Iraqi War between Iraqi nationalists and the United Kingdom, which remained a major colonial power in the region.[21]

Later in his life relatives from his native Tikrit became some of his closest advisors and supporters. Under the guidance of his uncle he attended a nationalistic high school in Baghdad. After secondary school Saddam studied at an Iraqi law school for three years, dropping out in 1957 at the age of 20 to join the revolutionary pan-Arab Ba'ath Party, of which his uncle was a supporter. During this time, Saddam apparently supported himself as a secondary school teacher.

**Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party student cell, Cairo, in the period 1959–1963**

Revolutionary sentiment was characteristic of the era in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. In Iraq progressives and socialists assailed traditional political elites (colonial era bureaucrats and landowners, wealthy merchants and tribal chiefs, and monarchists).[23] Moreover, the pan-Arab nationalism of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt profoundly influenced young Ba'athists like Saddam. The rise of Nasser foreshadowed a wave of revolutions throughout the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s, with the collapse of the monarchies of Iraq, Egypt, and Libya. Nasser inspired nationalists throughout the Middle East by fighting the British and the French during the Suez Crisis of 1956, modernizing Egypt, and uniting the Arab world politically.[24]

In 1958, a year after Saddam had joined the Ba'ath party, army officers led by General Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew Faisal II of Iraq in the 14 July Revolution.

**Rise to power**

Of the 16 members of Qasim's cabinet, 12 were Ba'ath Party members; however, the party turned against Qasim due to his refusal to join Gamal Abdel Nasser's United Arab Republic.[25] To strengthen his own position within the government, Qasim created an alliance with the Iraqi Communist Party, which was opposed to any notion of pan-Arabism.[26] Later that year, the Ba'ath Party leadership was planning to assassinate Qasim. Saddam was a leading member of the operation. At the time, the Ba'ath Party was more of an ideological experiment than a strong anti-government fighting machine. The majority of its members were either educated professionals or students, and Saddam fit the bill.[27] The choice of Saddam was, according to historian Con Coughlin, "hardly surprising". The idea of assassinating Qasim may have been Nasser's, and there is speculation that some of those who participated in the operation received training in Damascus, which was then part of the UAR. However, "no evidence has ever been produced to implicate Nasser directly in the plot."

The assassins planned to ambush Qasim at Al-Rashid Street on 7 October 1959: one man was to kill those sitting at the back of the car, the rest killing those in front. During the ambush it is claimed that Saddam began shooting prematurely, which disorganised the whole operation. Qasim's chauffeur was killed, and Qasim was hit in the arm and shoulder. The assassins believed they had killed him and quickly retreated to their headquarters, but Qasim survived. At the time of the attack the Ba'ath Party had fewer than 1,000 members. Saddam's role in the failed assassination became a crucial part of his public image for decades. Kanan Makiya recounts: