

Dossier on Iraq

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April 13, 2020

Like Iran, the modern nation of Iraq was an unfortunate creation of the British who drew the borders of the country after World War I without listening to their Arab expert, Lawrence of Arabia, who was the European with the greatest insight into the Arab mind of his time. Similar mistakes were made in the African nations of Uganda and Rwanda, whose borders were drawn to include several tribes who were hereditary enemies of each other, and who then engaged in vicious wars for supremacy and the control of the government and the capital city. Iraq contains three distinct ethnic regions: the Kurds in the north, the Sunni Muslims in the middle, and the Shiite Muslims in the south, all of whom are at odds with each other. Like Iran, the country has had a long and proud history as the cradle of civilization going all the back to Nimrod and the Babylonian Empire, but in modern times had become a pawn of other nations.

After World War I the country was ruled by a succession of minor dictators until Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein brought the Ba'ath Socialist Party to power in 1968 by overthrowing the existing government. Saddam eventually sidelined Al-Bakr and became the dictator of the country after Bakr's death; it was said that Saddam poisoned him. Saddam immediately began to consolidate his power through harsh and ruthless repression of opponents as well as socializing the economy to exert governmental control over all of its disparate parts.

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979 which brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power in that country, tensions between Iraq and Iran escalated dramatically. Saddam and Khomeini hated each other, and Saddam, ever the belligerent opportunist, and thinking that Iran would be weak and disorganized, launched a series of attacks to take over the Iranian oil fields near the border. Iran retaliated, and the result was an eight-year war of total stupidity with huge losses for both sides. Almost two million soldiers died in the conflict which ended in a stalemate. The economies of both countries were devastated, and Iraq was saddled with \$75 billion in foreign debt.

Saddam then compounded his errors by attempting to recoup his fortunes with the invasion of Kuwait in 1991 to seize their financial and petroleum assets. He had always viewed Kuwait as an illegitimate state, created for the convenience of the British. But Kuwait and the non-Arab world did not see it that way. This led to the Gulf War of 1991 in which Iraqi forces were quickly routed by the Desert Storm coalition which defeated Saddam but did not remove him from power.

The Kurds and Shiites, seeing their chance, revolted against the Sunni Ba'athists, but they were crushed by Saddam's forces, who among other atrocities, used biological weapons against them.

The coalition responded by imposing a no-fly zone over northern and southern Iraq, as well as economic sanctions against the sale of Iraqi oil, due to Saddam's continued purchase of weapon systems. But the sanctions also resulted in widespread Iraqi hardship. Hyperinflation set in which reduced the value of the Iraqi dinar almost to the level of toilet paper. Therefore, the oil-for-food program was launched by the UN in an attempt to ameliorate the suffering. This program became a source of billions in corruption until the Iraq war of 2003 destroyed the Ba'ath party and toppled Saddam's government.