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Politico-Military Memorandum

**THE IRAQI BA'ATH PARTY -  
ITS HISTORY, IDEOLOGY AND ROLE IN  
REGIME SECURITY**

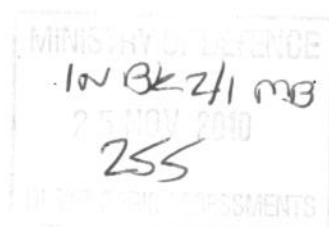
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**THE IRAQI BA'ATH PARTY ITS HISTORY, IDEOLOGY AND ROLE IN  
REGIME SECURITY**

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*Saddam Hussein (ringed) with fellow Ba'athists. In exile in Cairo, 1960.*

The Iraqi Branch of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party has ruled Iraq since 1968. Re-shaped by Saddam Hussein, the Party continues to have a vital functional role in the stability (and possibly reproduction) of the Iraqi Regime. This memorandum seeks to analyse the historical and ideological foundations of the Iraqi Ba'ath and its contemporary functions focussing on security. It also examines the likely role of the Party in a post-Saddam succession scenario.

Comments are welcome and should be addressed to:

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- Officially founded in Syria in 1947 the Ba'ath Party had considerable support in both Damascus and Baghdad by the mid-1950s. Central tenets of Ba'ath ideology were Pan-Arabism, anti-colonialism and socialism. Many early Ba'ath adherents were secular in outlook. Others, like key ideologue Michel Aflaq, were non-Muslims. Ba'ath ideology allowed the Ba'ath to overcome the traditional confessional and social divides of Syria and Iraq.
- Ba'ath Pan-Arabism was reflected in the Party organisation. The Syrian and Iraqi Branches were co-ordinated jointly. But by the mid 1960s relations soured and to all practical purposes the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'ath became separate entities.
- 1963 saw the Iraqi Ba'ath thrust into power through revolution, only to be outmanoeuvred by a rival military led group. They were not to make the same mistake in 1968 and ruthlessly repressed their erstwhile military allies in the 1968 coup. Party

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relations with the Iraqi Regular Army have been characterised by mistrust ever since.

- Saddam transformed the Party, subverting its ideology to his own ends and ignoring those aspects of it that contradicted or undermined his personal rule. He also sponsored state-based security and decision-making institutions and tribal links at the expense of the Party. Yet he has never abandoned the Party and periodically re-energises it. Recent elections to the Ba'ath Party leadership (The Ba'ath Regional Command) reflect this. Senior Ba'ath membership remains a key indicator of an individual's status and influence in the Iraqi state. The 'election' of Saddam's second son, Qusai Saddam Hussein to a senior Party position is therefore an important indicator of his increasing political profile.
- The Ba'ath Party is all-pervasive in Iraqi society. It has representation in most Iraqi social, governmental and military organisations. It performs a number of low level regime security tasks and is perhaps instrumental in creating the sense of omnipotence and omnipresence of Iraqi state security that many ordinary Iraqis attest to.
- The Ba'ath Party Militia has waned in importance under Saddam, who has elevated State security bodies above those of the Party. However, the Party retains an important security role in Southern Iraq, where its members are heavily engaged against the Shia insurgency. Many Party members from the South have risen to positions of prominence within the Party several are themselves Shia.
- Party oversight of the Military continues the chief organ for this is the Party Military Bureau. The Bureau has political oversight of military appointments and deployments and ensures political loyalty in the Iraqi military (including Regular Army, Republican Guard and Police). There is a party presence at all levels of the Iraqi military. Patronage also mediates relations between the Party and senior Iraqi military officers.
- With 700,000 members the Ba'ath represents a significant portion of the Iraqi population with an interest in the continued stability of the Iraqi regime. They are aware that, were there to be a fundamental political change in Iraq, they would lose status, influence, position and access to patronage networks. They would also be targets for retribution by regime oppositionists (and perhaps the 'ordinary populace'). In any succession to Saddam they would support the strongest 'regime insider' who was capable of ensuring a continuation of the present system. While having some basis in the Ba'ath Party a successor to Saddam would be unlikely to be a Party figure per se they would more likely come from one of the key state security institutions. As the only national organisation capable of fulfilling a wide variety of administrative and security roles any regime successor to Saddam would doubtless retain the Ba'ath Party in its current role.

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## THE IRAQI BA'ATH PARTY

### I - 'THE LONG DAYS': A HISTORY OF THE IRAQI BA'ATH PARTY

#### Beginnings

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It was in the Al-Maydan district of Damascus, famed for its militant anti-colonialism and political radicalism, that the founders of the Ba'ath, Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar originated and received their earliest political influences. Aflaq, a Christian (from an Orthodox Greek background) and al-Bitar, a Sunni from a family noted for its religiosity, moved in educated Arab political circles infused with a volatile mixture of radical socialism, Marxist doctrine, anti-colonialism, fascism and pan-Arabist thought. Added to this was a communist influenced style of politics characterised by organisation, militancy and conspiratorial activity.<sup>1</sup>

### A New Movement

Formally founded in April 1947 the Ba'ath party had, by 1949 established a foothold in Damascus (chiefly among the lower intelligentsia) and an embryonic presence in Baghdad<sup>2</sup>. Its success in transforming a somewhat vague yet complex political program (see box) into a mass party in both Syria and Iraq owed not a little to its ability to transcend the traditional confessional, tribal and class divisions of Arab politics. By appealing to a pan-Arabism with which most (though certainly not all) inhabitants of Syria and Iraq could identify and combining this with a palpable demonstration of it in the make up of its own leadership (consisting of Sunni, Shia, Christian and Alawi figures) the Ba'ath were able to achieve a diverse following that, previously, only the Communist Party had attracted. In short, the Ba'ath represented a dynamic mixture of a 'modern' political movement (in which ideological commitment ranked above confessional or tribal background) with a rather traditional 'sectarianism in practice' (in that a specifically Arab history and identity were re-affirmed, even re-discovered).



*Michel Aflaq, ideologue of the Iraqi Ba'ath.*

### Ba'ath Thought

#### ***Self-Awareness and Liberty (Hurriya)***

Ba'ath (Renaissance or rebirth) thinking has many features common to anti-colonialist critiques. Lack of self-consciousness was the first of these. Aflaq and other Ba'ath ideologues maintained that, through colonialism, lack of education and the inculcation of Western values, the Arabs had lost all sense of their self-identity. Hence, Ba'ath represented as much of a personal as a political or collective enlightenment. It called for the Arabs to become self-conscious of their

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own identity, history and culture. While Aflaq's conception of identity was primarily linguistic and cultural it also had political ramifications. Re-discovery of that 'identity' could only come about within (and consequent upon) a struggle against western imperialism and its influences.

### ***Arab Unity (al Wahda al-'arabiya)***

That conception of the Arab people (or nation) was the central political tenet of the Ba'ath and one of the few things on which Ba'ath ideologues could agree. There were, inevitably, rifts within the movement over the content of that Arab collective (the extent or otherwise of its socialist character, of its democratic make up and its civilian or military leadership). But that there was a collective Arab identity that should have a political manifestation there was no doubt. These later rifts were exacerbated by the fact that Aflaq, in particular, was rather vague as to how that Arab nation would manifest itself. Rifts between rival factions of the Iraqi Ba'ath were particularly bitter and violent. Arab unity as an ideal was not in fact a Ba'ath innovation it had, for instance, been a central goal of the Iraqi Monarchy. But it was inherently problematic. On the one hand it was an ideology capable of uniting the chief schism in Iraqi society (between Sunni and Shia) - indeed the early Iraqi Ba'ath was dominated by secular Shia (who, previously, had only the Communist Party as a political outlet). However, many Shia feared Sunni domination in any Pan-Arab state. It was also hugely problematic in dealing with Iraq's non-Arab minorities, in particular the Kurds and could at times clash with Iraqi nationalism. Indeed, Saddam has at various times, alternated between stressing this pan-Arabist doctrine and a, potentially alternate, Iraqi identity (he has in particular highlighted the latter in his negotiations with the Kurds and Iraqi identity was particularly stressed to the Iraqi Shia during the Iran-Iraq war).

### ***Separation of religion from politics***

The Ba'ath's specifically Arab, rather than Muslim, conception of identity is also important. The relationship between Arab identity and Islam was always problematic and indeed many early Ba'athists were not Muslims (Aflaq being the chief example) and large numbers were confirmed secularists. Many within the party ascribed to a modernist critique of Islam and saw it (at least in its 'traditional' form) as an impediment to 'progress'. However the modernist faction within the Party never gained the upper hand and, unlike the Communists, the Ba'ath did not dismiss Islam entirely. Indeed, Aflaq frequently eulogised Islam and emphasised the importance of Islam in influencing Arabism itself ("Islam is the tremor that stirs the latent forces of the Arab Nation"). Instead they espoused a discrete separation of the religious from the political spheres and frowned upon an explicit iteration of the relationship between the two. Once again this pragmatic decision goes some way to explain the Ba'ath suitability to Iraq it opened the Party to both Shia and Sunni (and indeed Christian Arabs, of whom Tareq Aziz is a notable example). However this inherent tension between Ba'athism and Islam continues to this day, and is most apparent in the fact that neither Syria nor Iraq describe themselves as Islamic states but rather as Arab Republics. Saddam has at times increased the

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Islamic content of Iraqi political and public life, but there seems little doubt that he and leading Ba'ath figures remain inherently wary of orthodox Islam (and its political pretensions) for the same practical and ideological reasons as the early Ba'ath.

### ***Socialism (ishtirakiyya)***

Socialist thought (ranging from mild Fabianism to militant radicalism) was also a feature of Ba'ath ideology and expressed itself in ideas of the re-distribution of wealth and nationalisation of industry. Adoption of a quasi-Marxist terminology was another feature, vestiges of which still appear in Iraqi Ba'athist speech (and sometimes Saddam's rhetoric). In particular that socialism found its expression in the rejection of various social classes associated with the old (pre-Revolution) feudal/capitalist order and their 'complicity' in Western exploitation.

### ***Vagaries/Mysticism***

Aflaq's vision of the Ba'ath in power has much in common with Marx's vision of Communist society: vague, quasi-mystical and open to endless interpretation (or exploitation). This malleability makes Ba'ath ideology a robust political tool in that it can be used to justify almost anything (and is therefore, like Marxism, particularly suited to legitimising dictatorship). But it also partially accounts for the bitter infighting between Ba'ath factions and the long political estrangement between Syria and Iraq (with parallels to that between the communist regimes in Peking and Moscow). Combined with Aflaq's personal philosophy that, at times, bordered on the mystical ("love before anything else" was a typical mantra) the result is a political ideology that, in its Iraqi form, is infinitely contestable and at times indefinable.

### **Early Syrian/Iraqi Divergences...**

By the 1950s (and the emergence of the Ba'ath as a serious political force in Syrian politics) <sup>3</sup> the first signs of divergence between the Baghdad and Damascus branches were beginning to emerge. Partly this was due to the increasing domination of the Syrian Ba'ath by the military officer class, while the Iraqi Ba'ath retained (and still retains) a strong civilian element (of whom Saddam Hussein, with no military background, is the most notable example). The Damascus Party was further characterised by the confessional nature of the Syrian officer class Alawite. By the 1960s the Alawite sect had come to dominate the Syrian Ba'ath Party.

### **.... but Pan-Arabist Organisation**

Despite this, Party organisation was co-ordinated jointly through the Ba'ath Party National (Pan-Arab) Command (a body elected by Ba'ath regional congresses) and only then through the various Ba'ath Party Regional Commands (of which there was one each for Syria and Iraq). But the 1960s saw relations between factions of the Ba'ath reaching a nadir and by 1966 the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'ath parties had ceased to function as a single organisation. Partly this was due to personal and doctrinal conflicts among the leadership (particularly between Michel Aflaq and the Syrian Ba'ath) but also due to differing political circumstances that now emerged in Syria and Iraq and that saw the Ba'ath come to power in both countries.

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*Members of the Ba'ath Regional (Iraq) Command, 1963.*

### **Power, 1963**

Iraq's political development had, since 1945, been determined by a series of coups and counter-coups orchestrated by the Sunni dominated officer classes. A revolution in 1963, in which the Iraqi Ba'ath were key participants, briefly brought the party to power. The ability of the Party to mobilise armed support was critical. The party had had some paramilitary units since the 1950s but they came to the fore in 1963, participating in fierce street fighting in Baghdad. 'Special Investigative' units of the party were also employed in the aftermath of the fighting and were particularly ruthless in the repression of the Iraqi Communist Party. Indeed, it was partly the emergence and excesses of this alternative paramilitary powerbase that contributed to tensions between the Party and the various army factions with whom they had come to power in 1963. By the end of the year the Ba'ath party had been manoeuvred out by an army faction led by Abd Al-Salam 'Aref and in the wake of its fall from power was plunged into a period of internal squabbling. This was resolved in 1964 by the elevation of Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr to leadership of the Iraqi Regional Command.



*Abd-Al-Salam 'Aref, President of the Iraqi Republic, 1963-6.*

### **The July Revolution, 1968**

The Revolution of 17 July 1968 was again orchestrated by the Ba'ath and an army faction opposed to the Aref Regime<sup>4</sup>. In an echo of 1963 the army faction hoped to use the Ba'ath to secure power for themselves and then outmanoeuvre them in the aftermath. But the Ba'ath were not prepared to lose power a second time and ousted their erstwhile military allies in a bloodless coup at the end of July 1968.

### **Party Control of the Army**

The circumstances through which the Party came to power in Iraq have been instrumental in shaping Party attitudes toward the Iraqi military (and indeed Saddam's attitude towards any alternative power bases). Any civilian government in Iraq would be rightly wary of

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military overthrow in a country that saw thirteen military coup attempts between 1936 and 1968 but the specifics of the Ba'ath accession to power set the precedent for the tension between the Party and the military that continues to this day.

Hence the new regime immediately ensured Army allegiance through an extensive purge of senior ranks and the imposition of Ba'ath members and Party organisations within the Armed Forces. Popular military figures within the Armed forces were gradually removed in a series of purges throughout the 1970s. In addition parallel command structures were established by a system of Ba'ath Party Officials within military units (in effect a 'Commissar' system) controlled through the Ba'ath Party Military Bureau (see below). As Matkia notes:

*"..the Officer Elite was atomised by this parallel authority, and its ability to maintain a group identity not subordinated to Party policy disintegrated".*

This political control was supplemented by an ideological re-shaping (or suppression) of the Iraqi Army's perception of itself as a guarantor of 'national values',

*"Comprehensive party organisation robbed officers of the opportunity to see themselves as surrogates and guardians of a national identity otherwise in jeopardy...the degree of Ba'athist social organisation profoundly undermined the historic rationale that had led officers into Iraqi political life time and again since independence."*

#### **Saddam's Transformation of the Party.....**

Saddam's assumption of power in 1979 from the ailing Bakr heralded a transformation in the Ba'ath Party. Saddam's role in the party had always been that of a *gada'* ('tough' or enforcer) rather than an ideologue. Both Aflaq and Bakr had relied on him in this regard. Post-1968 Saddam had ensured his control of key party security organs and following his assumption of power he used these to ruthlessly crush opposition within the Party. There seems little doubt that Saddam viewed the party's ideological and organisational strengths as both opportunity and threat. The purge of the Ba'ath upon which Saddam immediately embarked in 1979 was designed to produce an organisation in which all vestiges of ideological independence were suppressed and the tradition of loyalty to the Party rather than its leader, reversed.



*Saddam Hussein with Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr, his predecessor as President.*

Saddam's transformation of the Ba'ath has three strands. First is the domination of key Iraqi institutions (including the Ba'ath Party) by individuals linked to Saddam by familial and tribal ties. The key node within this is the 'Tikritis', that grouping of interlinked Sunni families and

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tribal groups hailing from Saddam's home. That exclusive, traditional conception of the conduct of politics and the exercise of power sits oddly with the progressive and modernising aspects of early Ba'ath ideology. It is however a style of politics that suits Saddam's key goal the retention of power. But it is perhaps worth noting that the so-called 'Tikritisation' of the Party (and State) was in many ways a continuation of a trend rather than a novel policy. Al-Bakr himself was from Tikrit (and from Saddam's tribal confederation, the Al Bu Nasir) as were many of the key officers in the 1968 coup. Indeed six of the sixteen RCC members between 1968 and 1977 (i.e. before Saddam's presidency) were Tikritis. That 'Tikritisation' had confessional implications as well 1968 marked the transition in the leadership of the Iraqi Ba'ath from Shia to Sunni.

The second element of Saddam's transformation is elevation of the State above the Party. The key security institutions of the regime (the Special Security Organisation, SSO and Special Republican Guard, SRG), while retaining elements of Party control and having party organisations within them, are State and not Party institutions. The legitimacy of those organisations and the direction of their activities rely on their relationship with Saddam Hussein in his capacity as Head of State. Likewise their ultimate function is not the defence of Party rule, but Saddam's rule specifically. This is most clearly demonstrated in Saddam's use of state security organisations to monitor the loyalty of individuals within the Party and conduct periodic purges of Party members. Through such activities Saddam has suppressed those elements of Party ideology (and party ideologues) that might suggest alternative forms of governance to his personal rule. Similarly, Saddam has been less enthusiastic in his support for party security organisations like the Ba'ath Party Militia, which has waned in importance relative to the State Security organs.

The personality cult created around Saddam is the third element mediating Saddam's relations with the Party. There were always elements within Ba'athist thought extolling the virtues of leadership and party discipline and thereby providing a philosophical underpinning (or at least a tendency) for the party to develop a 'cult of the leader'. Nevertheless, the total domination of the Ba'ath by Saddam is at odds with those other aspects of party philosophy (and organisation) that stress collective leadership and republicanism.

#### **....but Party resurgence?**

This transformation has not gone unnoticed by Party cadres. In mid-2000 there was criticism of the regime from within the Party. Much of this stemmed from Saddam's neglect of the Ba'ath in favour of his family and tribal connections and organisations like the SSO. However, Saddam is careful not to alienate Party members and periodically re-energises the party through a judicious mixture of praise, purge, re-organisation and patronage.

Recent elections (May 2001) to the Ba'ath Party Regional Command are part of this trend. Seven new members of the Regional Command were elected. These tended to be younger and more representative of the Iraqi population including several Shia and the first female Command member, Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash. This had been accompanied by a drive to increase membership of the Party among the youth and women (demographically the most significant groups in Iraq) and the activities of Party Bureaux responsible for these areas (see below). This has resulted in a rejuvenated and far more effective Party structure. Indeed Saddam has shown particular interest in the recruitment of younger members to the Ba'ath for both practical (42% of the Iraqi population are under 15) and ideological reasons. Idolisation of 'youth' was always a key feature of Ba'ath thought (and traditionally the Ba'ath was a young party). Aflaq believed that Arab youth were the true representatives of the revolutionary Arab spirit (*inqilab*).

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Overall whilst ideologically the importance of the party has waned it continues to perform vital functions within Iraq and remains a key component of regime security, political and social advancement, popular mobilisation and bureaucratic interaction with the Iraqi people. Those key functions are examined in Section II.

## II - REPUBLIC OF FEAR: FUNCTIONS OF THE BA'ATH PARTY

### Organisation of the Party

The Ba'ath Party Regional (or Iraq) Command is the highest decision making body of the party. Typically, Command members have either regional Party responsibilities (as Party leaders in the Iraqi Governorates and major cities) or functional responsibilities (in charge of party activities in a particular social sphere or organisation). Command members rarely have official government portfolios.

Below the regional command are a series of Party Bureaux responsible for oversight of particular social classes or organisations. Of these the Ba'ath Party Military Bureau, with its key role of Party oversight of the Regular Army and Republican Guard, is the most prominent. Below the Bureaux and responsible to them are a series of party branches (*fara'*), divisions (*firqa*) and sections (*shu'ba*) at each level of the respective organisation. Hence, every government ministry (as well as state labour organisations, youth and student organisations and media organisations) has within it, at each level, a parallel Ba'ath Party structure.

The Party's regional structure complements its functional cells. There are Party organisations in each Iraqi Province and major population centre. These are hierarchically organised along similar lines to the Bureaux.

The importance of the Regional Command and the Party in the Iraqi decision making process is difficult to ascertain. The Regional Command has an important function as a conduit for information from the various branches and Bureaux that permeate Iraqi life. On certain issues Saddam seems to take notice of Party views, particularly on the security situation in the South (see below). But there are a number of other competing formal and informal decision making bodies, including the government ministries themselves and the Iraqi Cabinet, the security organs and the powerful Presidential Office (with the Diwan and Secretariat overseeing many of the same areas as the Ba'ath Party Bureaux). For example, Ba'ath Party views on foreign policy are largely ignored - Ba'ath ideology informs the pan-Arab rhetoric but not the reality of Saddam's foreign policy. However, it is worth remembering that many members of those alternate decision making bodies are themselves Ba'ath Party members. Along with the Security/Intelligence organs and the Republican Guard, a Party position is one of the central guarantees (and vehicles for) advancement in Iraqi society. The most senior figures in the regime (for example Qusai Saddam Hussein or Ali Hasan Al Majid) straddle all three areas.

Hence as a vehicle for prestige and as a symbol of political power, membership of the Regional Command of the Party seems second only to Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) membership (Iraq's ruling forum) - indeed many of the members are one and the same. Regional Command members are the 'inner circle' of the regime traditionally irreproachably loyal veterans of the Ba'ath Party (often having joined the Party in the 1950s), typically ex-ministers of State, who can be reiled upon to perform ad hoc or high profile tasks on Saddam's behalf. In that respect the elevation of Saddam's son, Qusai Saddam Hussein, to membership of the Regional Command is significant, not for the (relatively little) formal political power it confers but the political message it sends to others.

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Saddam's most senior 'inner circle' is composed of four men (Izzat Ibrahim Al Duri, Tariq Aziz, Ali Hasan Al Majid and Taha Yassin Ramadhan Al-Jazrawi) who are veteran Ba'ath activists (and members of the both the Regional Command and the Revolutionary Command Council). All are pre-1963 members of the Party and therefore have a shared experience of underground activity with Saddam. Saddam's personal decision making process and information channels remain opaque. But it seems reasonable to assume that these four men, who are present at all senior meetings of the regime, may be able to convey information to Saddam without undue fear. Indeed these veteran party activists may be the only men in Iraq who feel confident in telling Saddam the truth.

### **Ba'ath Party Regional (Iraq) Command**

#### **SADDAM HUSSEIN:**

*Secretary General Ba'ath Party; Secretary, Iraq Command; Head Military Bureau; Head Foreign Relations Bureau; Chairman, RCC.*

#### **IZZAT IBRAHIM AL-DURI:**

*Deputy Secretary General Ba'ath Party; Deputy Secretary Iraq Command; Vice-Chairman RCC.*

#### **TAHA YASIN RAMADAN:**

*Member, RCC.*

#### **TARIQ AZIZ:**

*Deputy Secretary, Culture & Pan Arab Media Bureau; Member, RCC. Chairman, Arab Liberation Movements Bureau.*

#### **ALI HASAN AL-MAJID:**

*Secretary, Central Workers Bureau; Party Head Salah Al-Din Governorate; Member, RCC.*

#### **MIZBAN KHUDR HADI\*:**

*Party Head, Diyala Governorate; Member, RCC. Head, Central Farmers Bureau*

#### **LATIF NUSAYYIF JASIM\*:**

*Deputy Head, Military Bureau*

#### **MUHAMMAD ZIMAM ABD AL-RAZZAQ AL SADUN:**

*Party Head, Kirkuk (Ta'amim) & Nineveh Governorates.*

#### **ABD AL-BAQI ABD AL-KARIM ABDULLAH AI- SADUN:**

*Party Head, Basra & Dhi Qar or Party Head Baghdad/Al-Karkh.*

#### **SAMIR ABD AL-AZIZ NAJM:**

*Party Head, Diyala*

#### **ADIL ABDALLAH MAHDI AL-DURI AL TIKRITI:**

*Party Head, Dhi-Qar and Al-Muthanna Province(?)*

#### **AZIZ SALIH HASAN NUMAN EL-HAFAJI\*:**

*Party Head, Misan & Wasit Governorates or Party Head Baghdad/Al-Rasafa*

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**QUSAI SADDAM HUSSEIN:**  
*Deputy Head, Military Bureau.*

**YAHYA ABDALLAH AL-UBAIDI\*:**  
*Party Head, Basra*

**SAQR ALKABISI A'BD AQALA\*:**  
*Party Head, Al-Muthanna(?)*

**RASHID TAAN KAZIM\*:**  
*Party Head, Al Anbar*

**FADIL MAHMUD GHARIB/GHARIB MUHAMAD FAZEL  
ALMASHAIKHI\*:**  
*Head, Labour Bureau; Party Head Babel/ Karbala*

**MUHSIN KHUDR AL-KHAFFAJI\*:**  
*Party Head, An Najaf/Al-Qadisiyah*

**HUDA SALIH MAHDI AMMASH (F):**  
*Head, Student & Youth Bureau. Trade Unions Bureau. Father was Interior Minister under Bakr.*

**GHAZI HAMUD ALABIDI\*:**  
*Party Head, Wasit*

\*: Denotes Shia. All others Sunni save Tariq Aziz (Chaldean Christian).

## Membership

Party membership is estimated at 6-700,000 (around 4% of the population). Membership is obligatory for advancement into senior governmental, professional and military positions. Republican Guard Officers and SSO Officers are always Party members. The Party is organised along hierarchical lines and closely resembles a military organisation, with official ranks, awards and uniforms<sup>5</sup>. Advancement within the Party is officially by election (though in practice is directed by the higher echelons of the Party) and with advances in rank come extra privileges. Ba'ath Party members, especially senior members, are one of the chief beneficiaries of regime patronage. In addition to party salaries patronage comes in the form of cash bonuses, portions of land for senior (*Udw Firqa*) ranks and luxury items (for example Mercedes cars) for the most senior leadership (*Udw Far*).

In addition to the official benefits that accrue to members there seems little doubt that party officials abuse their position and accept bribery in the 'wasta' tradition that conglomeration of personal networking, favours and gifts that traditionally mediated relations between the Iraqi people and the bureaucracy.

## Party Ranks

**Sadiq** (Friend)

**Rafiq** (Comrade)

**Mu'ayyid** (Supporter)

**Udw Firqa** (Division Leader)

**Nasir** (Partisan)

**Udw Shu'ba** (Section Leader)

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Udw Fara' (Branch Leader)

**Nasir Mutaqaddam** (Senior Partisan)

### **The Ba'ath in Daily Life -**

As a result of this system the Ba'ath Party is all-pervasive in Iraqi society and government. Interaction with a Ba'ath official is possibly the commonest contact that Iraqis have with the Regime. Ba'ath officials act as low-level information gatherers on anti-regime activity, subversion and crime and sometimes act as auxiliary police. In that sense they act as an outer ring of the regime beyond the state security institutions. The party maintains its own security organisation which liaises closely with, and is tasked by, the Directorate of General Intelligence (DGI), SSO and the Directorate of General Security (DGS). The Party Security Organisation has a diverse range of tasks including:

- Tracking down military deserters within Iraq;
- Vetting officials due to travel outside of Iraq;
- Investigating government officials due for promotion;
- Ensuring that officials travelling abroad returned to Iraq (typically by taking a member of the official's family hostage);
- Monitoring (on behalf of the DGI) movements of foreign diplomats and static surveillance on Embassies;
- General information gathering on conditions and attitudes within their designated neighbourhoods.

The Ba'ath Party also has a considerable role in the distribution of food within Iraq. This has become increasingly important under international sanctions. Indeed the degree of bureaucratic record keeping and the need for registration of the populace in order to receive food may have increased the Ba'ath Party's influence among the local populace. Ironically, the sanctions regime may have strengthened the Party's control. (S

These low-level Party activities are crucial in permeating state surveillance and control through all aspects of Iraqi life. Indeed such activities may make a large contribution to the impression of omnipresence and omnipotence of the formal State Security structures (SSO, DGS, DGI) that ordinary Iraqis frequently attest to.

### **Ba'ath Party Militia - History**

The Ba'ath Party Militia has its origins in the Jihaz Hanein (an internal Party security organisation) and those irregular Ba'athist units that fought in the 1963 Revolution. The status of the Ba'ath militia has waxed and waned over the years. At one stage in the 1970s and early 1980s it appeared that the 'Popular Army' (an ideologised, Party dominated force) was emerging as a radically politicised alternative to the (still suspect) Regular Army. However, in keeping with Saddam's distrust of potential alternative power bases the 'Popular Army' has been fully disbanded. Other security forces (in particular the Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard) have taken on the role of guardians of the regime.

### **Militia Current Functions**

Despite the elevation of alternative bodies above them Ba'ath Party Militia units continue to

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have a role in regime security not least due to their numbers. Party members are automatically enrolled in the Militia with units organised along parallel lines to the local party structure. Indeed it is likely that militia units are, typically, little more than groups of armed local Party officials performing security functions and are not regular formed units. Levels of training and professionalism are questionable. Typical militia activities include support to Regular army forces in counter smuggling operations and pursuit of infiltrators. Ba'ath militia are often used as an emergency force or as an alternative to the deployment of regular units in the suppression of localised civil unrest. For example, Presumably their local knowledge increases their efficacy in suppressing disorder.

During national emergencies the Ba'ath Party role is considerable.

The party was also prominent at the national level. Saddam's choice of 'regional commanders' (capable of taking decisions autonomously were Baghdad to be cut off) was telling all four were seasoned Ba'ath Party veterans rather than military or security officials.

### **'Most Loyal and Most Courageous' - The Ba'ath Party in the South**

The Ba'ath Party's security role is most prominent in Southern Iraq, where Party Militia units are heavily involved in counter-insurgency operations against the various Shia resistance movements.

As well as performing standard security functions in the southern cities Ba'ath militia, in concert with Regular Army formations, conduct sweep operations in the countryside. Casualties among Ba'ath militia units have at times been high

Ba'ath officials are the chief targets of the insurgents and bear the brunt of ambushes and assassinations in the South. Saddam seems particularly appreciative of the sacrifices made by the Party on the South. In addition to singling them out for praise he has given substantial financial rewards for officials from *Udw Firqa* to *Udw Far'* rank and there are increasing numbers of Southern Party officials in the top echelons of the Party. Recent electees to the Regional Command of the Party include Abd Al-Baqi Abd Al-Karim Sa'dun (Party Head, Basra & Dhi Qar) and Muhsin Khudr Al-Khaffaji (Party Head, An Najaf).

### **Shia and the Ba'ath**

One interesting aspect of this is the role of Shia members of the Ba'ath Party. Traditionally the Shia were heavily represented in the Iraqi Ba'ath, indeed from 1952-63 the Shia

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dominated the Iraqi Ba'ath leadership. Vestiges of that remain both ideologically and actually (prominent veteran Shia Ba'athists include Speaker of the Iraqi National Assembly Sa'adun Hammadi, who Saddam's son Udai has attempted, unsuccessfully, to replace). Nine of the twenty Regional Command members are Shia, including four of the seven recent appointees<sup>6</sup>. Whether Shia membership of the Party is more widespread at the lower echelons is unknown but the Ba'ath appears to be the only regime structure in which the Shia have significant representation. This Shia element doubtless gives the Party a better information gathering network in Southern Iraq and perhaps some informal levers of influence over the Southern tribes other than patronage and repression. It may also account for the virulence with which insurgent groups target Party members. Nevertheless, Shia representation in the Ba'ath should not be over-emphasised. Even at the highpoint of Shia membership (the 1950s/60s), the Iraqi Ba'ath could never compete with the Communists for Shia support. There were a multitude of reasons for that, but prominent amongst them was the fact that the Shia populace identified the Pan-Arabist aspects of Ba'ath thought with Sunni domination. And, after the repression of the Iraqi Communist Party by the Ba'ath, it is telling that a great many Shia turned to politicised Islam as the 'radical alternative'. The Shia slums of Baghdad (now renamed the *Madinat Saddam*) once a hotbed of communist activism had become, by the 1970s, the breeding ground of Islamic militancy. One doubts that a Ba'ath official would pass through such an area without considerable fear (and an armed guard). And indeed it would true to say that for a great many Shia, the Ba'ath Party's primary role is repression rather than representation.

### Ba'ath Party and the Military

Ba'ath Party oversight of the Iraqi Regular Forces, Republican Guard (RGFC) and Police is maintained through the Ba'ath Party Military Bureau. Chaired by Saddam,

Below Saddam and responsible for most day to day activities of the Bureau are two deputy chairmen - Latif Nusayyif Jasim (Party leader in the Al-Rasafa area of Baghdad) and Saddam's son, Qusai Saddam Hussein.

The Military Bureau's existence reflects the historic Party mistrust of the Iraqi armed forces its primary role is to ensure military loyalty to the regime.

In parallel with other Bureaux the Military Bureau controls a series of branches, divisions and sections within military units. As a result there is party representation at almost every level in most units of the Armed Forces.

Ba'ath representatives are also responsible for co-ordinating political activity within military units. This normally takes the form of lectures on Ba'ath ideology, Iraqi history and current affairs typically illustrated with reference to Saddam's speeches and writings. The issue of written materials (in particular *Al-Qadisiyya*, the daily newspaper of the armed forces), supplements political programmes.

Party membership confers considerable benefits. Military officers with senior Party ranks

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(Udw Shuba and above) receive party stipends in addition to their military salaries. The most senior party members in the military have access to discounted luxury goods and consumer items.

### Party - Military Relations

There are indications that Party oversight of the military is a source of some resentment. Senior Regular Army officers are among the most resentful of party interference. It is difficult to assess whether this resentment is purely on professional grounds or whether it has any political content (thereby indicating that Iraqi Armed Forces officer class still retains some sense of itself as a political force and guardian of 'national values'). Émigré reporting suggests that senior Ba'ath Party rank in the armed forces garnered little respect career soldiers viewed them as ruthless apparatchiks with limited military skills.

However, it is important to remember that, in many respects, the Ba'ath under Saddam (and indeed under Bakr) represent a very traditional form of Iraqi state-military relations. While one aspect of Iraqi military ideology has been brutally repressed (the Army as a repository of national values) and consequently one aspect of traditional military practice curtailed (the coup d'etat) others have been maintained. Most importantly the Iraqi officer class, and the Iraqi military (by which we mean the Regular Forces and RGFC) still hold an important place in Iraqi society and politics. The regime recognises and rewards military efficiency and professionalism. Inevitably the right tribal affiliations and Ba'athist background are the key to rising to the very top of the Iraqi military structure. But it is difficult to find a period in Iraqi history when tribal and political connections did not play a role in military advancement. And it is important to remember that some aspects of the traditional character of the Iraqi officer class, most importantly its predominantly Sunni nature, have also been maintained. It would be interesting to investigate whether many of the same Sunni families dominate the military both pre and post the Ba'ath rise to power, but this lies outside the scope of this memorandum.

### III BA'ATH PARTY AND REGIME CHANGE

The Ba'ath Party is one of the key institutions supporting the regime of Saddam Hussein. Stripped of most of its ideology it remains functionally important but politically weak its authority flows solely from Saddam. In any succession crisis the Party would doubtless support the strongest *regime* figure that emerged. That support would be important to any successor but not critical. It is highly unlikely that any succession 'candidate' would emerge from within the Ba'ath Party itself - senior Party figures, such as Taha Yasin Ramadan and Tariq Aziz, are unlikely to be serious contenders for power post-Saddam. They lack powerbases in key security organisations and come from confessional or tribal backgrounds that would command limited support (Aziz as a Chaldean Christian, Ramadhan as a Jazrawi, a minor tribe from the Mosul hinterland<sup>7</sup>).

The Party's role is however important in determining what sort of successor regime would emerge. Like many of the other key regime institutions (e.g. the SSO, SRG and 'Tikriti Clan') the Party's survival (and indeed the personal survival of its members) will be dependent upon a 'regime insider' succeeding Saddam. This is the only way to ensure the continuation of the patronage systems, status and influence that benefit Party members. More fundamentally, Party members are aware of their personal identification with the regime and the vulnerable position that places them in were real political change to occur. As the Shia uprising in 1991 demonstrated, Ba'ath officials, easily identified and despised by many, would be among the first victims of any organised opposition or anti-regime pogrom (especially in the South). Hence, the Ba'ath Party represents a significant element within the Iraqi population (approx. 700,000) with a vital interest in ensuring a smooth

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transition from Saddam to another regime insider capable of defending their interests. It also represents a, potentially, more diverse base of support for the regime than other institutions. Its potential ability to represent Shia, the Iraqi youth and women in ways that other institutions do not might make the Party a more important asset for a successor to Saddam than has sometimes been thought.

However, its *actual* ability to represent such groups (particularly the Shia) has been limited. Hence the Ba'ath's ideological appeal is less significant than its functional role. Indeed one could argue that its continuing importance in Iraqi society will be because of its role in the suppression of groups like the Shia, not its representation of them.

Hence, it seems apparent that any 'regime insider' succeeding Saddam would find the functional roles of the Party indispensable in administering the state and controlling the populace. One can therefore assume that, unless a fundamental political change accompanies the succession to Saddam, the Ba'ath Party will continue in its present role. Were a figure outside of the inner circle of the regime to take power (such as a senior military officer), the future of the Party would be open to question.

## **ANNEX A to THE IRAQI BA'ATH PARTY**

### **Prominent Personalities in the Iraqi Ba'ath**

Most senior governmental, military or security figures will be Ba'ath Party members. However, for many of them the party itself will not be the key to their prominence in the regime. Many Iraqi government figures, such as Oil Minister Rashid or Military Industries Minister Mulla Huwaish, hold party rank but are in essence technocrats.

Ba'ath uniform resembles that of the Iraqi military's barrack dress, though tends to be darker green in colour. Rank is indicated by insignia on the shoulder boards and seniority by the addition of 'fern branches' and the Iraqi Eagle and Flag insignia (see examples below).



The most senior members (see Tareq Aziz or Taha Yasin Ramadan) have all these features on their shoulder boards. Generally, the inclusion of the Iraqi Eagle and flag is reserved for those senior members who participated in the 1968 Revolution. Interestingly Saddam is rarely, if at all, seen wearing Party uniform. Indeed, there would seem to be a widespread hierarchy of uniform wearing - senior Iraqis who hold military rank will tend to wear military rather than Party uniform (Ali Hasan Al Majid, who is a full General, is a good example).

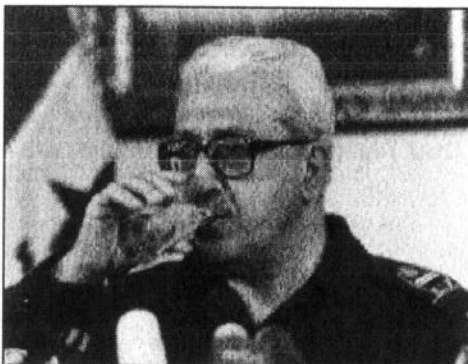
### **Taha Yasin Ramadhan Al-Jazrawi**

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The son of a gardener and sometime bank clerk, Ramadhan was a committed Ba'athist in the early 1960s. With historically important roles in the Party's military section (he was awarded nominal, if lowly, military rank in 1963 and again in 1968) Ramadhan is perhaps the prime exemplar of Party control of the Iraqi military. A member of the RCC from November 1969 he was President of a special court set up to try those involved in the unsuccessful coup of 21 Jan 1970. Elected to Party Regional Command, 1977 and holder of several ministerial posts (including the industry and public works portfolios). Deputy Prime Minister in July 1979, CinC of the Popular Army and Vice President of Iraq from March 1991, Ramadhan is among the most senior Ba'athists. He is a key interlocutor for Saddam and is frequently present at the most intimate regime discussions. Though sometimes seen as a possible Party successor to Saddam, this is unlikely. His age (born 1939), tribal background (the minor Jazrawi tribe) and reported unpopularity with the military stand against him. Aply described as "an Ottoman Grand Vizier".

### **Tareq Aziz**



Born Tell Kaif, near Mosul in 1936, Aziz joined the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party in the early 1950's. A graduate of the English Department of Baghdad University (1958), Aziz has spent much of his career in the official or the Ba'ath Party press, either at home or in exile in Syria. His first prominent Ba'ath Party appointment was infamously short-lived<sup>8</sup> he was 'elected' to the Ba'ath Regional Command in the chaotic circumstances of November 1963. Indeed Aziz held his position for only three days (11-14 November) Aref's seizure of power, which drove the Ba'ath underground curtailed his appointment. Aziz's first ministerial appointment in 1974 was as Minister of Information. He also became a reserve member of the Regional Command. He was elected as a full member of the National and Regional Commands and as a member of the RCC three years later. In July 1979 he became Deputy Prime Minister, narrowly escaped assassination (by the Shia Dawa) in 1980 and was Foreign Minister from January 1983 to 1991. Aziz held the foreign portfolio again for several months in 2001 (in the interregnum between Al-Sahhaf and the current Foreign Minister, Al-Hadithi). Aziz's current status within the regime is difficult to gauge and his influence at the foreign ministry may have declined. Nevertheless he remains, like Ramadhan, a key interlocutor for Saddam (though increasingly he acts more as a messenger than an

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advisor). The recent imprisonment of his son (on corruption charges) may have added to disenchantment with the regime, though this is unconfirmed. That Aziz would ever break with Saddam is highly unlikely his entire life has been committed to the Iraqi Ba'ath. An able apologist for the Iraqi regime abroad (and fluent in English) Aziz is probably one of the more sophisticated and 'internationalist' of the senior regime figures. As a Chaldean Christian (a tiny minority in Iraq) he is very unlikely to command any personal following as a successor to Saddam.

### **Latif Nusayyif Jassim**



A veteran Ba'athist, Jassim was the hard-line Minister for Information during the Gulf War and was reputed to be the architect of Iraq's propaganda machine. Served as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs following the Gulf War until 1993. Elected to the Regional Command in 1996, Jassim was reportedly head of the Archive Department of the Presidential Diwan in 1999 and Ba'ath Party leader in the Al-Rasafa area of Baghdad. His appointment in May 01 as one of the two Deputy Chairmen of the Ba'ath Party Military Bureau (the other being Qusai Saddam Hussein) may signify a return to prominence. However, he has always been personally close to Saddam (his duties in the Diwan Archives Department included editing and advising on Saddam's speeches). Once described as "inaccessible, uninformative and a Party hawk" Jassim is one of the most senior Shia Ba'athists. Some press reports have indicated that his son may have been arrested for corruption in mid 2001.

### **Muhammad Ziman Abd Al-Razzaq Al Sa'dun**



Born 1942 in Suq at-Shuyukh deep in the Shia south. A member of the Ba'ath during the abortive coup of 1963, he was dismissed from military college as part of the repression of the Ba'ath under the Aref Regime. A graduate in Law from the University of Baghdad, Al Sadun went on to a number of Party positions, typically overseeing Party Governorate organisations. Director General of the Party Secretariat in 1988 he was elected to the Regional Command in 1991. He played a crucial role in the repression of the uprising against Saddam in the aftermath of the Gulf War (when he was based in Salah Al-Din

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Governorate). He replaced Saddam's half-brother Watban as Interior minister in 1995, in a move that might have been designed to placate Party members (who saw Watban's appointment as evidence of nepotism). He vacated this slot in May 2001 and is currently Ba'ath Party Head in Ta'mim and Ninawa Governorates (opposite the Kurdish Autonomous Zone). Al-Sa'dun comes from an important Tribal family of Sheikhs the Sa'dun of the Muntafiq. The Sa'dun have been important power-brokers throughout modern Iraqi history, providing one Prime Minister and several other important politicians. They remain one of the largest land-owning families in Southern Iraq, though, unlike the majority of the Southern populace, the Sa'duns are Sunni.

### **Ali Hasan Al-Majid**



Saddam's cousin, presidential advisor, RCC and Ba'ath Regional Command member. Born in Tikrit in 1941 and married to former President Bakr's daughter, Ali Hasan's 'regime credentials' are impeccable. He assisted Barzan al-Tikriti (Saddam's half-brother) in the DGI in 1983 and temporarily took over from him at the end of that year. He became Director of General Security in June 1989. After the invasion of Kuwait he acted as Iraqi Governor of occupied Kuwait from September to December. In early 1991 he was appointed Minister of the Interior with responsibility for Northern Iraq and was Minister of Defence from 1991 to 1995. Ali Hasan has a reputation as a brutal enforcer of Saddam's will, a reputation aided by his notorious role in the gassing of Kurdish civilians in Halabja in 1998. Along with Ramadhan and Qusai, Ali Hasan is present at the most senior discussions with Saddam. He has the tribal links, military and security background and party experience that guarantee his position as one of the most senior regime figures and he will play a vital role in any succession to Saddam. Often seen as personally tied to Saddam, he is in fact Ba'ath 'old guard', having joined the Party in 1960. He holds the military rank of General (see picture), though he has no formal military training.

### **Izzat Ibrahim Al Duri**



Regional (Iraq) Command member since 1968. Appointed to the RCC in 1969, RCC Vice Chairman from 1979 and deputy general Commander of the Armed Forces (though he is a

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civilian Ba'athist with no military experience). He has also held several ministerial posts (including long tenure as Interior Minister) Born in Samarra in 1932 or (according to his official biography) 1942, the son of an ice vendor. He is Saddam's faithful servant, and has ties to Saddam dating to the early days of Iraq's Ba'ath Party activism in the 1950's. He has limited influence and power, nevertheless there are considerable number of his relatives in senior positions and the Harb tribe from the area of Dur and non-tribal Duris have been consistently linked to Saddam's regime. He is earnest and pleasant, but suffers from poor health, including severe back trouble and possibly skin cancer. Travelled to Vienna in 1999 for medical treatment. Sunni.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tertiary education at the Sorbonne, Paris was also a shared experience of early Ba'ath ideologues. Aflaq, Al-Bitar and Zaki Al Arsuzi (an Alawite from Alexandretta and an important figure in Syrian Ba'ath thought) were graduates. [ [Back](#) ]

<sup>2</sup> In fact the Iraqi Ba'ath was not formally established until 1952 (interestingly after the Jordanian (1947) and Lebanese (1949) Branches). [ [Back](#) ]

<sup>3</sup> Merger with Ahrām Al-Hurani's group was a vital part of the Ba'ath's sudden growth. Hurani's supporters were mainly among the Syrian peasantry in the Hama region, drawn to his radical and often violent campaign against the Syrian land-owning class. The 'failure' of the Arabs during the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict also radicalised many. Indeed Hurani's own irregular forces saw action in 1948 against Zionist settlers. (U) [ [Back](#) ]

<sup>4</sup> Now led by the elder Aref brother, Maj Gen 'Abd-Al-Rahman 'Aref. [ [Back](#) ]

<sup>5</sup> See *Annex A Prominent Personalities in the Iraqi Ba'ath* for a note on Ba'ath uniforms and ranks. [ [Back](#) ]

<sup>6</sup> Indeed with Tareq Aziz as a Christian, Sunni representation in the Ba'ath leadership is only 50%. However, key security portfolios are rarely in Shia hands. [ [Back](#) ]

<sup>7</sup> Though Ramadan himself was born in Cizre, Turkey. Batatu suggests he is from Arabised Kurdish stock. [ [Back](#) ]

<sup>8</sup> Infamous as the election was conducted at gunpoint the meeting being interrupted by armed members of a Ba'ath faction. Indeed the Iraqi Ba'ath turned on itself viciously in the days before Aref's 'putsch'. [ [Back](#) ]

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