

Assessing the background of saddam hussein politics essay



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The history of Saddam Hussein and his leadership capabilities started up in a small village on the outskirts of the city of Tikrit (G. Butt [7]) where he was born in 1937 and grew up facing the atmosphere of anti-British attitude represented by people at that time. He had a very hard childhood, however he managed to get his basic education at school. When he was 20 years old, a young king Faisal II was killed by general Kasim and a group of army officers who overthrew a weak monarchy that had been introduced by the British three decades earlier. Saddam Hussein was introduced to politics by his uncle Chajrullach and became an active member of Bath party. After an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate general Kasim, he had to escape from the country. In 1963, general Kassim was overthrown by Bath party which enabled Saddam to return from emigration and take over the duties of a person responsible for Bath party internal security. After 8 months of general instability and political murders, the government of Bath party fell down which forced Saddam Hussein to get into underground. Five years later, Bath party returned. This time, it was much better prepared for taking over the power. The new president Al Bakr wanted to introduce a democratic system in Iraq and appointed Saddam to become the head of secret police as nobody else wanted to take over this particular position considered to be a dirty job (S. K. Aburish, [5]) . Saddam Hussein worked hard on reinforcing the security forces which eliminated political elites of all political options using the most cruel methods such as tortures and murders. A year later, in 1969, he was appointed the country's vice-president. He was still responsible for security and special forces in which he used to employ people from Al Bu Nasir tribe, i. e the tribe to which he belonged. By providing the poor and uneducated men with the well paid job of security agents he was able to

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establish a group of fully trusted supporters who helped him to “clean up” the environment from opponents and enemies (Gazeta PL [9]). After ten years, this, in fact, enabled Saddam Hussein to take over the total power and govern Iraq. In 1979, he arrested Hasan al Bakr and became the president of Iraq. Under the pretext of fighting with traitors who wanted to give up Iraq to Syria, he arrested, tortured and killed hundreds of Revolutionary Council and Bath party members. The climate of political crime and murders did not disturb him in the development of his international career (T. Kjeilen [8]). Even though Iraq was in alliance with Soviet Union, Saddam Hussein still maintained the relations with the Western countries. Owing to rapidly growing income from oil sale in 1970's (Britannica Online Encyclopedia [15]), Iraq under the leadership of Bath party controlled by Saddam Hussein introduced an ambitious plan of developing a modern industry and agriculture to reduce the volume of imported products, and improving the infrastructure (transportation, water and electric energy supply, health services). Iraq started to be regarded as a growing economy and one of the economic powers in the region. All these caused that Saddam Hussein, instead of using the revolutionary ideology to get support for his actions, could use the arguments of economic development. He started to consider himself as a leader of all the Arab countries (Wikipedia [10]).

However, even though many modern industrial facilities were established, e. g. modern cement plants were built up, production efficiency could only be achieved with the assistance of international experts since the local labour was highly inefficient (author's own observations). This led to situation that Iraqi products could hardly compete on foreign markets. Also due to the fact that there were huge needs for infrastructure, the government could hardly

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reach the planned goals even though the funds were available. Saddam Hussein needed something else to reinforce his position. The Islamic revolution in Iran caused that Saddam Hussein was provided with the international support, especially the USA, who wanted to stop the development of Islamic fanaticism. This led to the outbreak of the Iraqi-Iranian war during which Saddam Hussein built up the arsenal of all the different weapons that made Iraq become the Middle East military power. This was followed by invasion on Kuwait in 1990 which ended up with the Gulf War. It was noticed by J. Hickman [11] that regimes could rarely survive losing one war, and in case of Saddam's government there were two wars one after another, therefore he posed a question of what were the leadership secrets of Saddam Hussein that allowed him to stay in power. In the following chapter I will try to answer this question by analysing the leadership features of the Iraqi dictator.

3. Key leadership capabilities of the Iraqi leader

In order to define the key leadership capabilities, it would be necessary to find an answer to the question: what features were represented by Saddam Hussein that made him an effective leader in the Middle East and Iraq during the 3 decades of 1970's, 1980's and 1990's? According to Stoner and Wankel [1], the effective leaders possess certain features or properties such as charisma, the ability to anticipate the events and the ability to convince people in order to get their support. A. Sharplin [2] discusses the trait approach to leadership based on a believe that the leaders who are effective possess some particular features that other people do not have such as physical strength, stamina, size, intelligence, integrity, wisdom, etc. Kouzes

and Posner [12] analyse how the leaders mobilize other people to do extraordinary things, what practices they use to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards. All of the above mentioned features base on the behaviour of the leaders. J. B. Avolio at al [4] made an attempt to group all the different leadership features in order to define 3 groups of leadership styles including transformational leadership, transactional leadership and corrective avoidant leadership.

Following Freud's theory of personality types, M. Maccoby [16] focused on description of narcissistic leaders, features of which can also be attributed to the former Iraqi leader.

Therefore, what features or leadership styles can we allocate to Saddam Hussein. In the following subsections I will try to analyse Saddam's leadership strengths and weaknesses:

3. 1. Leadership strengths of Saddam Hussein

Saddam Hussein definitely represented an autocratic leadership style which, in fact, was the only possible way to govern the country consisting of Kurds and Arabs who additionally subscribed to two opposing branches of Islamic religion, i. e. Sunni and Shia Muslims (G. Butt, [7]). This is particularly visible nowadays taking into consideration the difficulties faced by the USA and other Western countries who try to implement the democratic rules into this very conservative and politically shattered country.

Said K. Aburish [6] identified a number of strong leadership features represented by Saddam Hussein including:

extraordinary ability to see the overall picture of future achievements that allowed him to get to the desired vision,

good organizer's skills which was something special in the Arab mentality functioning in the environment of the Middle East – this caused that he had a broad potential and was much better visible when compared to other Arab leaders,

ability to get the control over planned activities by surrounding himself with relatives and basing on family and tribal connections as those that could be trusted,

ability to work long hours,

enormous popularity – even though he was a dictator he was able to provide the Iraqis, especially in 1970's and mid 1980's, with what they expected and needed, i. e. wealth, infrastructure and prospects.

good learner's skills as he read a lot and listened to a variety of people.

J. Hickman [11] identified some other features of Saddam Hussein's leadership strength such as:

understanding of the value of state terror,

development of a cult around his person,

appreciation of the political value of relatives and close friends, ability to get the people's acceptance for extremely risky decisions such as declaring war against the neighbouring countries or fighting the minorities, ability to exploit the international public opinion by getting support of the Muslims from all over the world and attracting the attention of others to unfair punishment of the Iraqi nation by the economic sanctions.

It seems that narcissism was the leadership strength of Saddam Hussein. According to M. Maccoby [16] the narcissistic leaders become great charismatic leaders due to the fact that they have fascinating visions which get them supporters. Maccoby classifies narcissistic leaders among the people who have widespread imagination and try to create the future instead of trying to understand the future. However, he noticed that having the vision is not enough as the psychiatric patients also have visions. In case of Saddam Hussein the ability of using rhetoric and ability to arouse enthusiasm among the followers seems to be this additional feature.

3. 2. Leadership weaknesses of Saddam Hussein

There have been several important leadership weaknesses that brought Saddam Hussein and Iraq to the disaster. One of the most evident weak points has been the susceptibility to intimidate the people when governing the country. On one side, he had a strong security apparatus which was indicated as strength but on the other hand, by using terror he did not get the acceptance of, at least, a part of the Iraqi society.

Ability to take risky decisions could have been classified as one of the strengths but, if related to the ability to make mistakes, both constitute the leadership weakness. This was the case with the involvement into the Iran/Iraq war which produced a debt of 65-100 billion USD (S. K. Aburish [6]). Even though Saddam declared the victory, he was unable to provide the Iraqi people with the fruits of this victory which led him to another mistake of invading Kuwait. Therefore, one of the serious weaknesses was Saddam's ability of leading people in the wrong direction.

Narcissism was mentioned in the previous subsection to constitute one of Saddam's leadership strengths. However, it can also be one of the weaknesses which was the case of the former Iraqi leader. According to Maccoby [16], narcissistic leaders only accept the desired information. They love giving the speeches and are dominant during the meetings with subordinates. They are very sensitive to any criticism and react violently. In case of Saddam Hussein, any criticism was punished with the death sentence which led to situation of being completely isolated from reality. This also caused that the number of people he could trust was getting smaller and smaller (S. K. Aburish [6]).

3. 3. Analysis of Saddam's leadership capabilities and styles

Looking at different leadership features of Saddam Hussein, following Bass and Steidlmeier [14], it can be stated that the Iraqi leader represented a mixture of transformational and transactional leadership style as most of the leaders do. Such features as charisma and vision could place the former Iraqi leader among those who represent the transformational leadership style as

he tried and managed to get his supporters involved and committed to his visions. On the other hand, if we were to attribute the leadership style to Saddam Hussein, transactional style seems to be more appropriate as he used to motivate his followers by reward (offering well paid jobs and other benefits to his supporters) and punishment (putting people to prison, torturing and murdering). This style of leadership requires from the people that are managed or ruled to do exactly what the leader wants them to do. The Iraqi leader established clear structures that gave him full authority and power over the Iraqi subordinates whose performance was monitored. According to Bass et alia [17], the leader representing the transactional style outlines the compliance norms as well as evaluates the performance that does not meet the standards and can punish all those who do not keep the set up standards.

According to D. Goleman [18] particular capabilities such as intellectual properties, cognitive abilities and possession of long term vision that contribute to certain leadership styles are extremely important but he discovered that emotional intelligence is much more important for effective leadership of large organizations. He also discovered that the larger the organization was, the more important was emotional intelligence. Let's try to analyse Saddam Hussein regarding the elements of emotional intelligence including self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy and social awareness.

The self awareness is the ability to realistically evaluate own personality D. Goleman [18]. It seems that Saddam Hussein was unaware of his shortcomings and was totally unable to listen to the constructive criticism. <https://assignbuster.com/assessing-the-background-of-saddam-hussein-politics-essay/>

According to Goleman, people having low level of self-awareness are threatened by any suggestion of introducing improvements. This was definitely featured by the former Iraqi leader who used to punish anyone who criticized his activities. The self-control seemed to be another weak point of the Iraqi leader as he was unable to create the atmosphere of trust and very often used to lose his temper when talking to subordinates. It seems that motivation was the only element out of five emotional intelligence factors that Saddam Hussein possessed. He had a very strong desire to achieve success. Empathy and social awareness, both associated with social relations were also weak points of Saddam Hussein as, being a dictator, he did not try to understand the feelings of his subordinates. He used to govern his subordinates by fear.

4. Conclusions

There is a long list of particular leadership features that could be attributed to Saddam Hussein showing his skills and capabilities that differentiated him from other people. However, even though there is no question about specific leadership capabilities of the former Iraqi leader, we must not forget that they were supported with very brutal and criminal activities such as tortures and murders. A. Safty [3] raised the issue of the moral dimension of leadership related to the political context. He is of the opinion that dictators often characterized as people who had visions, were able to mobilize the supporters, were self-confident and had the ability to persuade the audience should not be called effective or great leaders. Instead, he proposed to use the term of a ruler in regard to the brutal dictators such as Saddam Hussein as this word is more in line with leading by tyranny, force, fear and

intimidation. The issue of ethics and morality has also been discussed by Bass and Steidlmeier [14] who noticed that somebody who represents the transformational style of leadership could be manipulative in relation to the followers, and as they stated such a person might “ have the public image of a saint but privately be a deceptive devil” This statement ideally suits Saddam Hussein who represented certain features of transformational leadership which were not authentic but pseudo-transformational as named by Burns [13]. Due to these reasons, even though Saddam Hussein’s leadership reflected both transformational and transactional features which is normally treated as the best combination of styles, it is so difficult to talk about leadership capabilities as the ethics and morality have been disregarded. In this particular case we should, in fact, talk about the dictatorship capabilities instead of leadership capabilities even if some leadership features discussed above in this paper can be attributed to this Middle East dictator. The analysis of the emotional intelligence of Saddam Hussein has shown that he was missing the most important features such as self-awareness, self-control, empathy and social awareness which are a crucial thing for effective leadership.