

Saddam Hussein, the Fighter, the Thinker and the Man

Part II

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Saddam Hussein AND THE COMPREHENSIVE NATURE OF THE DEMOCRATIC QUESTION

Chapter 9

Democracy: A Comprehensive View of Life

We have now reached a point where we must pause for a while to ask a group of pressing questions which, in one way or another, may arouse sensitivity. Irrespective however, these questions will, on the contrary, clarify certain aspects of the picture hidden to those whose view is obscured by fanaticism, ignorance, hatred, or prejudice. These are the very people at whom this book is aimed.

Is Saddam Hussein an absolute ruler, a lone dictator who tyrannizes and represses? Is he a representative of "bourgeois" interests in his society, trampling underfoot the interests of the poor and hardworking social classes and sectors of society? What is his position towards the national minorities, in particular the Kurds? How does he stand on the issue of other parties, including the Iraqi Communist Party, practicing their political activities within Iraq? In his opinion, was the Progressive Pan - Arab National Front merely a temporary tactical position, or was it an intrinsic part of the revolution strategy, voluntarily established by the revolution, or did the revolution want it to shatter? Or more accurately, is the authority in Iraq, headed by Saddam Hussein, hostile to communism like the other Arab regimes, without exception, including those which have decorative" communist parties which conspire to order from the leader in power, rush to sign his communiqués, and totally absorb themselves in serving his aims and responding to his demands? Or does the authority in Iraq differ from communism in its philosophical principles and in its practical methods of dealing politically with various issues such as Arab nationalism, Arab unity, the Palestinian cause, and the nature, extent and philosophy of relations with the Soviet Union, as practiced by certain Arab communist parties? Were it not merely a philosophical question about the creation of the world, the genesis of man and the development of society, but instead a question of struggle in a given time and place to effect a radical change for the better in all political, economic, social and cultural relations, which is what the authority in Iraq strives to do, then why has everything happened as it has, and why was the firm grip destroyed?

Who bears the historical responsibility for all this? And who is the ultimate loser? Were not the question, as some understand it, an expression of a pragmatic tendency they shy away from, but essentially instead an expression of striving for the "experiment" which for years shined in darkness, could its rays have reached all the "Roman wrestling" -rings in our Arab nation?

Endeavoring to find a reply to these questions requires the following:

- a) a brief glance at the political picture in Iraq before the Revolution of July 17th, 1968; and
- b) another look at the theory and practice of Saddam Hussein's ideology on the issues of democracy, the Kurdish minority and the Progressive Patriotic National Front.

1 - An Alternative to Internecine Fighting between Patriotic Forces.

The struggle of all patriotic and progressive national forces in any society always aims to bring political, economic and social changes to society in response to the hopes

pinned on them by the masses and social classes and sectors which regard them as their leadership and avant-garde. Naturally, each of these forces has strategies and aims, which may or may not coincide with those of the other surrounding forces, and there may be agreement or disagreement over detail.

In third world societies in general, and in Arab societies in particular, and as a natural result of many years of colonization, patriotic and national progressive forces faced, and in some Arab countries still face, one basic problem, which, apart from their ideological premises and strategic aims, is the minimum they can expect. This is to achieve political independence, break the chains of economic dependence, bring about real growth, and embody a form of democracy in line with the objective circumstances of each country.

It is normal that these forces may agree on these objectives at the start of any revolution, but later differ according to their respective interests for society. However, it is illogical for the bourgeois forces in any society to plant roots for building socialism in the country which itself will be their first "victim". On the contrary, these bourgeoisies very often relinquish the original objectives declared at the beginning of liberationist revolutions, and re-establish ties, if they had ever actually been cut, with the forces of imperialism, surrendering themselves, according to Stalin's famous phrase, to the science of patriotism. It is equally illogical for popular revolutionary forces in any society to introduce agricultural reforms and industrial projects, to apply democracy in one form or another, and to think only of achieving the aims of a democratic patriotic revolution. Instead, they should quickly make the radical changes, which will open the doors wide for entering the socialist stage. This, of course, is if we consider the two stages to be completely separate and unrelated, which is the case in many third world countries, including certain Arab ones, following the new changes made internationally.

If we take the general situation in Iraq on the eve of the 18th-30th July Revolution in political, economic and social terms, and judge by previous general standards, we find that there would have been no lasting or influential progress as regards the stage of democratic patriotic revolution.

It is true that the previous stage overthrew the monarchy, established a republic, annulled the Baghdad Pact, had a form of political autonomy, and passed Law 80 on the national use of oil. It also introduced agricultural reforms and nationalized a few small industrial projects.

However, in a country, which has oil wealth as the backbone of its one-sided economy, oil, as before the revolution, was still a spoil for the foreign monopolies. These exploited it at will, thus threatening a people's livelihood. Successive governments and even national projects in this area remained weak, incapable, paralyzed and besieged from without by the interests of the large monopolies, and from within by their clients, stooges and men who carried out their policies in another fashion.

So what is the meaning of economic independence itself, the essence of political independence, if the country's wealth remains in the hands of its enemies?

Semi-feudal conditions still prevailed in the countryside, keeping tight rein over the traditions, morals and customs of the peasants, who represented reactionary pockets opposed to any attempt at progress and development. In trade and industry, even the city capitalists continued to persecute the workers under socialist banners whilst relations between them and the world imperialist structure were again being strengthened and activated in ways, which, although new, still had the same roles and aims.

If this was the general economic position, then what could the political picture possibly be, especially as regards the democratic question?

With respect to the relationship between the two "brother" nationalities in Iraq, namely the Arabs and the Kurds, the armed conflict between the central power and Barazani's tribal power would hardly have stopped to catch its breath under false declarations of peace than it would flare up again, even more fiercely, with increased chauvinistic, reactionary and narrow-minded tendencies. The more the bloodshed lasted, the more the bitterness and resentment increased, putting further impediments in the way of any solutions for injecting new blood, replacing the huge sums of money spent daily, and restoring true peace to the whole nation.

The rights of other small national minorities were also lost and threatened. Naturally, it was pointless for the Turcomans, for example, to demand any social or cultural rights, which would restore features of their national identity, which had been crushed and lost.

With regard to the political freedoms of all citizens, repression and tyranny were the outstanding traits of that time. After the coup by Abdul Salam Arif in October 1963, the country's patriotic parties were replaced by his formal and artificial organization known as the Arab Socialist Union, which followed the same lines as its Egyptian counterpart of the same name. Violent terrorist campaigns, intellectual and material, then began against all national, Pan-Arab and progressive voices raised against it. The prison doors opened to receive those from different political parties, and torture chambers, with their savage methods, were prepared for the prime fighters.

One of the ironies is that the Iraqi Communist Party issued a resolution after the full assembly of the Central Committee in August, 1964, declaring that: "the positive stand taken by our party towards the Arab Socialist Union essentially derives from the progressive ideals embraced or advocated by the progressive elements in this organization, as well as from the possible changes in its leadership and subsequent programme. Our party will not take an isolated stand against it. On the contrary, we will adopt a positive stand, and made the necessary arrangements for cooperation with the aim of consolidating the progressive aspect of its policy and developing its ideology (1)".

Only a few months later, in January 1965, the Iraqi Communist Party issued a communiqué in which it said:

"With regard to prison, banishment and the introduction of the death sentence by Arif's top officials, in one year they executed more communists and ordinary citizens than the monarchy had done in twenty-five years (2)."

In the light of a deeper understanding of the nature of the contradictions of this stage, were the patriotic forces and their political parties growing closer and opening up to each other? Had the time come to stop the bloodshed between them, halt the ignoble conflicts, and cease the accusations and bickering, which had long prevented any form of meeting between them?

In a passage from his book, "The Revolution of The New Way", Tariq 'Aziz says: "A new trend had begun finding its way into people's minds, and from there, although relatively slowly, into their souls. This new direction resulted from long experience in the past, and was still being formed, but the June, 1968 setback was a turning point, and gave it sharp incentive to burst out into the open (3)."

What is the nature of this new trend, and what is its intellectual core? The passage goes on to say that: "The different patriotic groups, despite their varying intellectual premises and methods of work and analysis, began realizing with considerable clarity that they had been following a completely wrong path. So instead of working on the

basis that the major contradiction was between all progressive patriotic forces and reactionary colonialism and Zionism, and that the contradictions between themselves were only secondary and could not possibly escalate to a state of severe tension and violent conflict, these groups began regarding these secondary contradictions as major, and battle flared between them.

The general picture over the past ten years had been that the conflict between the national forces in Iraq and the Arab world was quantitatively and qualitatively sharper and wider than the conflict between all these forces and colonialism, Zionism, and reaction. The June disaster gave inestimable evidence of this erroneous course. That this has been acknowledged, and work done to overcome it, is the minimum requirement for maintaining the Arab nation, and consequently its freedom and ability to progress (4)."

Nevertheless, even though the political climate was ready to meet these forces, even though the right intellectual and ideological conditions, although somewhat late, had been created, and even though the general Arab position after the 1967 catastrophe exacted a hasty union, these progressive patriotic forces failed to unite. The Progressive Patriotic Front seemed far from being achieved, and remained "forbidden ground " which separated the progressive Pan-Arab and national parties.

This certainly had its psychological, intellectual and organizational causes, but it also had its perils. The Arif regime did not realize the tight spot it was in, and so the possibility of it adopting a policy of violent and bloody terrorism was the only potential danger, but perhaps not the greatest. Instead, the possibility of an inside military coup, aiming merely to produce formal changes in the leadership, was the danger within the framework of the circumstances at that time. It is not difficult to imagine what another tyrannical military dictatorship would do, not only with the progressive patriotic and national political forces, but also with the Iraqi masses themselves, who had paid blood for their salvation, which, as yet, had not been achieved. The wait meant only one thing, namely preparing the way before them and gladly giving them more than one opportunity to succeed.

The Arab Baath Socialist Party was then able to strike a blow, thus ending the Arif family's dictatorial and reactionary rule, blocking any further attempts at a military coup, and achieving its revolution on July 17th, 1968. July 30th was the revolutionary culmination to the long hard struggle, whereby the revolution, as we saw in the first part of this book, eliminated the last pockets of infiltrators amongst its ranks. From the positions of power, where there were usually strong leanings towards autocracy, particularly if they had the aptitude to justify it and a history of struggle to hide behind, the Arab Baath Socialist Party called upon the patriotic and progressive parties and forces in Iraq to cooperate, and rally together to form a progressive national and patriotic front. With this, they could put an end to the tragedy of conflict and division, help to build the country's future, work side by side to solve their problems, effect progress, and with their weight, lay the foundations of socialism, and not only achieve the tasks of a democratic patriotic revolution.

We must mention here that this is the first time, at least in the third world, that a political party alone has reached power, and then of its own accord, decided to share its power with others.

In case we have forgotten, Gamal Abdul-Nasser, leader of the July Revolution in Egypt, did no less than stipulate the dissolution of all political parties in Syria as a condition of union, even though he later cooperated with some of their leaders and members. The dissolution of all political parties in Egypt, irrespective of our attitude towards them then or now, and the establishment, at the beginning, of the so-called

Liberation Organization, then the Nationalist Union, and lastly the Socialist Union, all forms of the one organization which permitted membership of individuals, but not of groups, parties or organizations, were distinctive features of his method and logic of rule from 1952 to 1970.

Not to forget either, the prisons and detention camps in Egypt were never empty of its political pioneers, members of the dissolved parties and secret communist organizations, throughout Nasser's entire rule, apart from a few months. Regardless of what was then right or wrong, the release, in 1964, of Egyptian communists who had been incarcerated for more than five consecutive years, during which, for the first time in Egyptian history, they had seen their colleagues killed before them, before firing squads, or in the torture chambers, ended with a decision to dissolve the Egyptian Communist Party and incorporate it into the Arab Socialist Union. Only some of its members, and only in their capacity as individuals, were permitted to join the Union, which was nothing more than a huge shelter for the bureaucrats and those in authority.

These painful memories, because of their consequences to the internal situation in Egypt and the entire Arab world, have a useful significance for those who wish to know the bare facts. This is that they will realize the great import of the Arab Socialist Baath Party's invitation to the other political parties, including the Iraqi Communist Party, to form a progressive patriotic and national front in Iraq.

Furthermore, these historical and objective facts will perhaps help to form a resistance to the artificial confusion created by some, and remind them of what they always forget, namely that "The Arab Socialist Baath Party is not anticommunist. Only reactionary parties are hostile to communism, and the Arab Baath Socialist Party is not one of these (5) " So said its founder, Michel ' Aflaq, in 1966.

2 - Advocating a United Struggle.

When the Arab Baath Socialist Party assumed power in Iraq, it did not only face a mountain of accumulated economic, political and social problems, but also many of the psychological gulfs separating the national and progressive forces within Iraq. It therefore had to cross those gulfs and remove the mountain from its path.

It must be said here that, despite all the political parties which emerged and became active within Iraq, in the words of the political report from the Eighth National Congress of the Baath Party, it "was the Arab country most lacking in democratic traditions and practices, irrespective of their social content. Iraq had had one despotic regime after the other ever since the Ottomans until the July 17th, 1968 Revolution, and its people had only ever known short periods of relative freedom as regards thought, the press, parties, trade unions and parliaments (6)

In such conditions, it was not easy to disregard the wide gulfs, or to cross the mountain in one leap. It had to tread shaky ground both slowly and cautiously, although nevertheless firmly and with an "unshakeable" will. It first of all directed its attention to popular organizations, and devoted its efforts to building workers' unions, peasant cooperatives, and organizations for students, women and professionals. Many of these organizations had coalition leaderships, or had the participation of representatives from the Baath Party or other progressive political forces.

It then turned its attention to the media in order to ensure that all political forces could compete democratically and freely express themselves. As to the official press, the central party newspaper being ath- Thawra (The Revolution), it permitted the Democratic Party of Kurdistan to publish a daily political newspaper entitled at-Taakhi (Fraternity) (now called al-Iraq). It also gave the Communist Party license to publish a monthly political and cultural magazine called ath- Thaqafa al-Jadida (The

New Culture), a weekly newspaper entitled al-Fikr al-Jadid (New Thought), and a daily political newspaper known as Tariq ash-Sha'ab (The People's Way). It also granted license for a cultural and political magazine to a number of the democratic leftists of Marxist ideology called al-Thaqafa (Culture). Until now, no other Arab country has allowed the communists to have so many media and cultural platforms, or to compete freely in this wide field and express themselves openly and officially through newspapers distributed daily and headed by Lisan Hal al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i al-Iraqi (The Organ of the Iraq Communist Party). This was no ruse on the part of the Baath, or a desire to limit and confine these trends, and in any case, would not be the best and quickest way to do so. Instead, it was a purely democratic expression, and a sincere wish to build a particular democratic experiment in Iraq which could serve as a model to be imitated by other countries, or at least as an example to inspire them. When we speak here of the true democratic direction taken by the Baath Party, we are inevitably talking about the directions followed by Saddam Hussein, and vice versa. This is because he is a party loyalist, and represents the finest intellectual development and highest experience of struggle and organization within the party. His role in guiding the historic events before and after July 17th-30th, 1968, led him to the top position of responsibility as President of Iraq. More than once he told his colleagues of his sincere desire to relinquish his executive powers, because he was always, and still is, proud of the title he declared openly the day the head of the military tribunal asked him what his job was, and he replied "a struggler in the Arab Baath Socialist Party". However, his pride of and endeavors for this title are not justified by ancient history, but by the realities of a historical course followed and constantly rejuvenated in the arena of struggle.

However, perhaps he would prefer us to hear what he said to the North Yemen Prime Minister and his delegate when he met them on June 4th, 1979:

"The Revolution Command Council is a non-advisory council, and like President al-Bakr, we all participate in the decision-making. The system here is different. Ours is a system of leading the Muslims, who were calling Muhammad by name until the revelation. We are like Omar Ibn al-Khattab when he addressed his people saying: "If you think I'm crossing you what will you do?" They said they would resist with the sword, and he replied, "Praise God who gave you the ability to do this. " This is our position. We maintain constant respect for those who struggle against us (7)."

In Saddam Hussein 's view, therefore, democracy is a "comprehensive view of life". The political report from the Eighth National Congress thus referred to Iraq as the Arab country most wanting in democratic traditions.

He himself says:

"In order for them to reach maturity, we must accept some loss with certain of the new practices we are undertaking, particularly those like democracy. We must not conceal such losses, because when we study the overall gains, we find we are certainly required to move in the direction of democracy, of achieving socialism, and of striving for Arab unity)."

Iraq, perhaps more than any other Arab country, has known severe hardship, whether in the internal relationships between the different political groups, or whether in the struggles affected by these national forces within society as a whole. Colonialism, imperialism and reaction are the conventional hooks on which the failures experienced by these forces in their struggle are pinned.

Saddam Hussein breaks through this conventional barrier and points to other factors:

"The secret of this is in subjective factors, maturity, benefiting from experience, correct analysis, adopting the right attitudes, curbing willful sentiments, and

restraining the selfish view arising from mistaken calculations made mostly at the cost of the long-term strategic aim (9) " He then adds more precisely: "Reaction, imperialism, the right and all their bastions, and the right-wing mentality and interests exist in society. They are not a product of today, nor of that abortive stage we have been through, but have been in existence for years (10)." Saddam Hussein's objective in saying this is to create of all the facts: " A way of looking at oneself, at others, and at the progress being made, and envisaging the future and its requirements...(11)" How has Saddam Hussein been able to achieve this view in practical terms? How has he overcome the negative aspects of the past in building democracy? We shall now go on to contemplate this latter process.

Notes

- 1) Resolution of The full assembly of The Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party, August 1974, pp. 32-33.
- 2) From a communiqué issued by The Iraqi Communist Party at the end of January 1965.
- 3) Tariq, Aziz, op. cit., p. 99.
- 4) Ibid.
- 5) Mukhtarat min Aqwal Mu'assis al-Baath (Selections from Sayings by The Founder of The Baath), Beirut, al-Mu'assassa al-Arabiyya Lil –Dirasat wan-Nashr, p. 151.
- 6) Arab Baath Socialist Party, The political resolution issued by The Regional Congress, Baghdad 1974, p. 95.
- 7) From the meeting between Saddam Hussein and The North Yemeni President in Baghdad, January 1979.
- 8) Saddam Hussein, al-Dimuqratiyya Nadhra Shumuliyya lil-Hayat (Democracy: A Comprehensive View of Life), Baghdad, Dar al-Huriyya, 1977, p. 10.
- 9) Saddam Hussein, Ahadith fil-Qadaya ar-Rahina, p. 119.
- 10) Ibid. p. 118.
- 11) Ibid. pp. 119-120.