SAKAI Keiko
Iraq and America
The Power Structure of Saddam Hussein’s Regime in Iraq

Keiko Sakai, author of *Iraq and America* and *The Power Structure of Saddam Hussein’s Regime in Iraq* has been conducting research on Iraq for more than 15 years. For many years she has been analyzing the power structure of the country and questioning where the true power lies in Iraq. Sakai published these two books in the eve of the second Gulf war when many people questioned the future of Iraq.

*Iraq and America* gives a chronological account of modern Iraqi history as reflected through the mirror of the United States. In the post-Cold War era, Iraq was seen as a ‘monster’ through this looking glass. In her book, Sakai describes contradictions in the relationship between the U.S. and the Middle East as manifested through how Saddam Hussein, a politician involved in a ‘revolutionary regime’ in the Middle East, viewed the U.S.; how the U.S. viewed him; and how he attempted to exploit the U.S. The book is divided into the following seven chapters:

“Chapter 1: Beginnings - Iraq against imperialism and the U.S.A.” focuses on Iraqi regimes from the monarchy to the Ba’th Party, reflecting the complexity of international politics.

“Chapter 2: Encounters - Oil, revolution and war” discusses American foreign policy toward the Gulf and Saddam Hussein’s position as an ally to the U.S. in the face of threat from the Islamic revolution of Iran. This meeting of interests of the two countries brought
a honeymoon-like period of cooperation between the U.S. and Saddam Hussein through the Iran-Iraq war. This war allowed Iraq to become a regional super-power.

"Chapter 3: The Governance of Saddam Hussein" explains the personality of Saddam Hussein and his system of governance. Sakai argues that through creating an image of himself as leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein transformed himself from a realistic 'populist' redistributing wealth, into a national 'hero.'

"Chapter 4: The Gulf War" discusses processes and problems of the Gulf Crisis of 1990 and the Gulf War of 1991. She raises questions about the American policy short of toppling the regime despite an extremely strong position against Iraq.

"Chapter 5: Life under sanctions" describes economy, life and politics under sanctions including the United Nation's Oil for Food Program and its influences.

"Chapter 6: Opposition and the U.S.A." describes the rise and collapse of the Iraqi opposition to Hussein and its support from the U.S.

"Chapter 7: Diplomacy concerning arms inspections" discusses another disagreement between the U.S. and Iraq over the issue of inspection and disarmament. Sakai mentions that September 11 had provided the momentum to push this dispute into a real war. In the final chapter, she points out the confusion of the Arab people over the double standards of the U.S. Saddam Hussein exploited this kind of confusion for his own survival.

II

The Power Structure of Saddam Hussein's Regime in Iraq, is a collection of essays which Sakai had previously published in various books and journals. This book focuses on Iraqi political systems under the Ba`th Party. Her argument focuses on Iraqi society which created and accepted Saddam Hussein. This book is divided into two parts and six chapters.

Part 1: Political elites - the Ba`th party, the military, bureaucrats and tribes

"Chapter 1: From a single-party autocracy to president worship - cabinet composition until the Gulf War" explains the organization of the Ba`th regime and analyzes patterns in the process of the nomination of cabinet members.

"Chapter 2: The vicissitudes of the president's relatives - members of the National Assembly under the Hussein regime" discusses the rise and fall of Hussein's family members as well as the growing tendency of a tribal character in the cabinet.

"Chapter 3: First steps toward political participation" further analyzes patterns seen in the National Assembly nominations.

Part 2: The Excluded People - social and economic policy under the Ba`th regime
“Chapter 4: Poverty in rural and urban areas - problems faced by farmers in the south,” looks into regional differences in urban and rural societies in light of the distribution of wealth. The author argues that the southern area had been a poor agricultural area but was forced to form ‘the Shi'ite south’ after the Islamic revolution in neighboring Iran.

“Chapter 5: Angry youth - Mobilization of youths by the Ba'th Party and the Islamic movement” discusses Ba'th policy toward youth and new circumstances under war with Iran.

“Chapter 6: Being Iraqi, being Arab - the logic of the Hussein regime in unifying the nation” discusses the identity of the people who live in a historically artificial state and their legitimacy in governing such a nation.

III

It cannot be denied that Keiko Sakai provides a full development of her ideas on the Hussein regime within these two books. The Power Structure of Saddam Hussein's Regime in Iraq consists of a detailed analysis on the cabinet and the National Assembly members as well as demographic change in light of political affiliation, ethnicity, region, tribe and religion. This methodology is a tradition amongst Iraqi researchers and was started by Hanna Batatu. This kind of behavioral scientific method is valid in analyzing a fixed point of observation and patterns of the affiliation. However, it will be difficult to analyze if the unit and grouping under study were changed. In order to deepen understanding of the unit itself a different framework of analysis is indispensable. In this sense, the book Iraq and America is significant in showing the overall background of the author’s insight and supplements her preceding research.

Iraq and America looks at symbolism and image propaganda utilized by Saddam Hussein. Hussein succeeded in convincing the U.S. that his country was invaluable against Iran and subsequently created the image that Iraq was a friend of the United States. Domestically, by claiming ancient Mesopotamia as a historically national entity, Iraq was publicized as a historical nation-state. As Saddam Hussein claimed descendancy both from the Prophet Mohammed and Salah a-Din Ayyoubi, the patriotic hero of Kurdistan, he emphasized his God-given leadership and the legitimacy of his reign. Thus, Saddam Hussein forged the impression that his existence as leader and autocrat were a necessary and preordained step in the history of Iraq. Sakai also points out that U.S. policy contributed to the creation of this “monster” in the Gulf.

It can be said that the autocracy of Saddam Hussein and the construction of his image as a national leader might actually contribute to stabilize the agitation in the state
today. After Saddam Hussein had gone, Iraqi society has experienced turmoil and difficulty. In part, this may be due to the breakdown of the systems carefully developed by their previous leader. If so, understanding this system shall contribute to a smooth transition of authority and stabilize the country. Careful examination of how this system had worked in the past is of utmost significance. Keiko Sakai's two books examine the Iraqi system under the now dissolved Hussein regime, but such studies are still valid in answering current questions. Her contribution may urge us to reconsider how to best tackle the current dilemmas faced by both the U.S. and Iraq.

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