

## The Process of collective obedience in Iraq: Analysing Saddam Hussein's rhetoric of cohesion and the nation-building in Iraq through Milgram Stanley's Paradigm of Agentic State

**Elaaf Hadi**

**Ph.D in Political Theory ,University of  
Luiss Guido Carli of Rome.**

**Khairuldeen Makhzoomi**

**Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign  
,Service**

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This paper aims to explore and understand the political and overall social and psychological impact of Saddam Hussein's nation-building policy in Iraq. The Contemporary Iraqi political sphere had been under the profound consequential legacy of Saddam's rhetoric of imposing an authoritarian rule in every ambit of the Iraqi political and social milieu. The paper aims to understand the atmosphere in which the Iraqi individuals lived during the Saddam Hussein regime. Some of the questions the paper seeks to answer are (1) What are the psychological and social consequences of Saddam's legacy in Iraq? and (2) How far has this legacy affected the political process and national building post-Saddam era? The paper adopts the Milgram Stanley paradigm of Agentic State in explaining and answering the questions. It seeks to use the method to explain the authoritarian policies and measures the regime utilized in ruling its people. Furthermore, this helps identify both the cultural and psychological room of Voluntary Obedience within the Iraqi character. Notwithstanding the objectives, Milgram's mechanism is a significant tool for analysing the power structure and the institutional context that the regime established to strengthen its rule over the people. Additionally, Milgram's theory studies the individual as the agent of this institutional context, which helps to examine the psychological and societal consequences of Saddam's legacy in the post-2003 years.

**Key Words: Political Psychology, dictatorship, political behaviour, the Agentic state, obedience, voluntary obedience, and the question of legitimacy during the Saddam Hussein regime.**

## 1. Introduction

Stanley Milgram's experiment suggests a high compliance rate to authority whereby there was demonstrable proof of torture of innocent victims.<sup>1</sup> Nearly everyone exercises obedience or resistance to pressures from an authority, which depends on the situational variables introduced in studies that covered this concept.<sup>2</sup> The study by Zimbardo demonstrates psychological behavior. The corresponding findings will form the basis for understanding the relationship between the authority and the individual in Iraq during 24 years of Saddam's reign. To examine the possibility of obedience in Iraqi society, there is a need to understand the essential sociological studies on the Iraqi individual's psychological character. Ali Al-Wardi is one of the sociologists in the modern history of Iraq who studied the psychological character of the Iraqi individual.

Most importantly, the paper aims to understand how the individual transfers from coherent obedience to a voluntary one. Thus, this study will analyze different factors of obedience in Iraqi society.. It will also address how far sectarianism and ethnicity replaced political power into obedience.

### 1.1. The Agentic State (Plato, Tyranny)

Milgram tried to understand how far the subject would psychologically obey orders without ethical barriers under the claim of avoiding harm or survival. He called the society of this experiment an 'agentic state.' Herein, the experimenter's relationship as who attends to the instructions pervades the subject's entire set of activities. Consequently, it enhances the likelihood of obedience of the agent. As Milgram describes, the agentic state is the tyrannical state in which one person is the ultimate ruler instead of the general good. Plato and Sigmond Freud perceived tyranny as internally imposed and sometimes willingly accepted by a population that is ignorant of its pressing and real needs.<sup>3</sup> The

ignorance comes due to the absence of internal control and unawareness of their private interests. As such, they justified their actions as similar to the ones that relevant authorities ordered. In similar ways, tyrannies oppress individuals in any century, especially using force through execution or by imposing certain general principles.<sup>4</sup>

Roger Boesche, a distinguished scholar and professor of History of Ideas at Occidental College in the United States, quoted Aristotle's definition of Tyranny. He termed Tyranny as "that arbitrary power of an individual who is responsible to no one, and governs with a view to his advantage, not to that of its subjects" ruling over unwilling subjects. Hanna Arendt (1906-1975), a prominent German-American philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, defined Tyranny as a form of government that least meets human needs and uses fear and violence to sustain their role.<sup>5</sup>

According to Milgram and Plato, the characteristics of Tyranny are:

- Rule by dictatorship (totalitarian).
- Rule over an unwilling population.
- Arbitrary rule unrestrained by constitutional bodies or an independent judicial body.
- The rule is in the interest of the tyrant and not for the general good.
- Milgram's theory attempts to understand an individual's behavior (the subject) within the agentic state (tyranny), and under what conditions can he abandon his free will to achieve the authority's goals by engaging in bad actions that lacked moral control contrary to his ethics.<sup>6</sup> To understand this, Milgram explores the following set of questions:
  - What conditions govern the transition of a person from an autonomous to a tyrannical state? (Antecedent).

- What behavioral and psychological properties of the person change once the person transits to the tyrannical state? (Consequences).
- What keeps a person in a tyrannical state? (Binding factors).

In the case of the first condition, parental regulations are the source of moral imperatives. Since the authority aims to create a specific ethical content for subjects to follow, in a way that the recipients are children who have to obey instructions<sup>7</sup>The authority drew an institutional setting whereby the subjects learn how to function within this framework.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the authority rewards compliance while punishing resistance to ensure the continuance of the hierarchy. The net result is an internalization of the axioms of the social order, chief of them being “do what the man in charge says.”<sup>9</sup> It is from this perspective that the authority needs to identify itself. Police and military uniforms are the most conspicuous signs of authority. The individual identifies authority by noting the absence of competing authorities and thinks that the experimenter is the right man to follow.

The second condition Milgram highlights explains how the system influences the subject as a major part of it. Milgram argues that the free will of individuals to enter the space of authority has psychological consequences. It may create a sense of commitment (voluntary) and obligation, which will play a part in binding the subject to the position of his role. Thus, the authority tries to contain the society by a moral index to justify the sense of voluntary commitment. Sometimes, the authority creates external enemies to attract people and rally around this common enemy. The second condition reflects to a great extent the strategy of Saddam Hussein’s regime. PBS published six series called “The Dictator's Playbook” This series answers how dictators seized and wielded power in six immersive hours, each a revealing portrait of brutality. The 2nd series covered Saddam Hussien; Saddam’s regime had four

characteristics to justify Saddam's rule and prolong his authority: to create an enemy, to fight an enemy, to generate propaganda and to increase military spending, thus resulting in expanding the army. Saddam's Ba'ath Party flourished because it was able to harness its security apparatus. Even though its security organization was established in 1968, Saddam Hussein perfected its operations and employed it in a manner that had not been witnessed before. During Saddam's time, the security agencies had an overlapping design, such that every agency could spy on each other. In this way, no one particular agency could grow strong enough to be a threat to the regime.<sup>10</sup> The security organization was made up of different agencies. At first, **the Special Security Organization (SSO)** reported directly to Saddam, but later, Qusay, Saddam's son, became its director, which strengthened the organization's direct access to the president.<sup>11</sup> It was the most powerful security agency when Saddam was the president before the U.S invasion in 2003.

At the same time, the authority needs to use violent "coercive measures" to enforce the subject who acts as a subordinate under coherence claim (when all parts of the system are functioning in harmony without opposition). In this case, obedience stops when the threat of the gun disappears. This contradicts the case of voluntary obedience that depends on the individual sense of commitment. An authoritarian regime needs to ground its morals within the social order because when subjects believe that tyranny is a just order then the society will sacrifice for it. When a child grows believing that one man can rule forever because he is the only saver of the general good, the whole population must follow him.<sup>12</sup> In this context, Plato claimed that the tyrant and his city suffer from disharmony in both the soul and the classes of the city.<sup>13</sup> No difference exists between the tyrant and the subject. The overarching ideology is "the perception of a legitimate source of social control, and tyranny is more than a frightening abuse of power but most lean upon a

political culture that teaches us how to behave, to think and feel.”<sup>14</sup> The ideological justification is vital in obtaining obedience. For that purpose, Saddam Hussein tried to create an ideological content dependent upon the patriotic duty to fight his opponents. Hussien launched his religious campaign after the second Gulf war and claimed he was a descendant of the prophet Mohammed to give himself religious justification and legitimacy.

Furthermore, results occur from a loss of responsibility. As such, Milgram believes that a man feels responsible to the authority but feels no responsibility for the content of the actions that the authority prescribes. William F. Schultz, a Unitarian Universalist minister, explained “the subordinate person feels a sense of pride or shame depending on how adequately he has performed the actions called for by the authority under perceptions such as loyalty, duty, discipline.”<sup>15</sup> For a man to feel responsible for his actions, he must sense it as a duty. Therefore, the subject’s conscience does not limit the actions of the subjects when they accept to act regardless of whether they acted voluntarily or under fear. This process will create a culture within the society. A culture that fails in inculcating internal controls on actions that have their origin in authority. For instance, a pilot who dropped the chemical bombs on Halabja in Kurdistan of Iraq obeyed the authority order by using chemical weapons in attacking civilians with whom he shared citizenship. He did not evaluate the goodness of this action.

On the contrary, he perceived a sense of obligation to do his duty and considered the victims of his actions as betrayers of authority. It is so difficult to determine why the pilot obeyed such a heinous order but one can argue that it was the anxiety of not obeying the authority. Disobedience would not only cost him his social position but also cause harm to his family. This type of behavior relates to the self-image within society and within the subject himself. The subject tries to get closer to his internal beliefs that also regulate

success or loss of soul. A person's ego-ideal can be an important source of internal inhibitory regulation to assess the consequences of one's actions. However, once a person shifts into the agentic state this evaluation mechanism is wholly absent.<sup>16</sup> The shift causes harm to the mental health of the subject damaging his self-control process. The third condition is about the binding factors that keep the subject within a hierarchical structure. Once people come into a social hierarchy, there must be some semantic mechanism to endow the system with minimal stability. One of the main factors affecting a subject in such a situation is the sequential nature of the action whereby the subject tries to internally justify his actions. Consequently, the subject goes to the end because he has no other window. Furthermore, the subject cannot break off alone as Erving Goffman (1959), one of the most prominent American psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, wrote about this state. He pointed out "every social situation is built upon a working consensus among the participants, and once a definition of the situation has been agreed there shall be no challenge to it; disruption of the accepted definition by one participant has the character of moral transgression."<sup>17</sup> Since the subject refuses to obey the authority, it leads to severe social impropriety in the form of punishment. In a hierarchy, any attempt to alter the defined structure comes out as a moral transgression that evokes anxiety. This situation will cause harm and societal embarrassment that many people are unable to face up. Thus, most of them find obedience a less painful alternative. Alfred Irving Hallowell (1892-1974), an American entrepreneur, archaeologist, and anthropologist, believes that anxiety fears experienced by the subject are anticipatory. Anxiety in social life comes from the forbidden actions and it thereby creates an emotional barrier.<sup>18</sup> In this perspective, Milgram noticed that most of the Individuals in his experiment avoided the possibility of the

electric shock. By obeying orders, subjects avoided the punishment that could cause them physical and social damage.

## 2. The character of Iraqi Individual:

Ali Al-Wardi spent decades analyzing the psychology of the Iraqi subject as well as how this subject treats authority and society. Interestingly, the theory of Al-Wardi could comply with Milgram's mechanism in explaining the psychology of obedience within the character of the Iraqi subject, particularly how far an Iraqi subject voluntarily submitted to Saddam Hussein's authority.

Al-Wardi argued that one of the most important characters of the Iraqi subject is 'duplication,' 'dual personality,' which allows the subject to adopt the dominant rules and principles in a society. To be clear, not all Iraqis have the same degree of this duplication. In the Iraqi case, most of these principles emanate from two themes: Tribe and Religion, where they both have a contradictory set of principles. On the one hand, the individual has to be a good Muslim while, on the other hand, has to be a perfect man of his tribe. Al-Wardi gives an account to the subject to justify any bad actions he committed against his co-citizenship favoring authority and his self-interest.<sup>19</sup>

From a psychological point of view, Al-Wardi asserts that the consciousness of subjects were not able to express real desires. This is because society enforced upon these subjects to deny these desires. Through the socialization process, people are taught to be trained members of society. This, in turn, reflects in allowing subjects to ignore this ideal character and will seek other ways to comply with societal conditions..<sup>20</sup>

For this reason, Al-Wardi believes that the Iraqi subject has two types of social behavior: the winner (the fighter) and the defeated (the farmer). The paper refers to a high propensity towards obedience when the Iraqi individual faces a greater threat to his life or interest in a way that allows him to accept the obedience. While

doing this to survive and avoid danger, the subject may seize any potential opportunity to resist and disobey orders of authority. The Iraqi society is a Muslim conservative society in which the religious clerics play a great role in preserving the traditions. Notably, religious leaders encouraged the subject in obeying the authority. One of the chapters of the Holy Qur'an states 'obey God, the Prophet and those in charge.'<sup>21</sup> Some of the religious leaders interpret this text depending upon their interests, which mostly favor the political elite during Saddam's era. The text does not suggest that Muslims have to obey leaders and follow them without any control or check the goodness of their actions. The authority deployed such quotations to justify power and coherence to control the populace by creating a moral periphery that stands in tune with actions. Such a justificatory process aims to increase the space of voluntary actions.

In the absence of moral supervision, one can expect that an individual will tend to his desires, no matter how far they comply with moralities. Sometimes, when subjects are out of control of religious and political authority, they tend to resist these values.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.1. **Saddam Hussein Regime (Psychology of Obedience):**

According to Ali al-Wardi, the Iraqi subject has shown a great tendency to obey Saddam's authority for many reasons that comply with Milgram's mechanism:

First, the Iraqi subject was totally under fear and anxiety because of the authority's coercive measures towards its people. The measures included killing, torturing and exiling people without trial.<sup>23</sup> Iraqis did not enjoy free speech or could not criticize the Ba'ath Party due to the presence of such threats. The subjects merely had to obey orders without thinking about the result of their actions.<sup>24</sup> Kanan Makiya (1949), an Iraqi-American academic and a professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies who advocated for the overthrowing of Saddam while in exile, wrote in his book *Republic*

of Fear (1989) “The Baath have saddled Iraq with two kinds of tyranny, the despot and his means of violence on the one hand, and his bureaucracy on the other.” As to the first of these, Saddam rules over his closest aides with the same brand of terror that he applies to Iraq’s populace. However, he reserved Iraq’s guns for use on the citizens. “Saddam Hussein exists in every corner, every place, every eyebrow and every heart in Iraq.”<sup>25</sup>

The major theme and the cross-cutting theme was *fear* under Saddam’s regime. Rumors always circulated that anyone who dared to contradict the dictator would face execution. For instance, one brigadier in the military spent more than one year in prison because he suggested that the U.S tanks were more powerful than those of the Iraqi army. One senior minister noted, “Directly disagreeing with Saddam Hussein’s ideas was unforgivable. It would be suicide.” Nor was Saddam alone in his distaste for the bad news. According to Major General Hamid Ismail Dawish al-Rubai, the director-general of the Republican Guard’s general staff, “Any commander who spoke the truth to [Saddam’s son] Qusay would lose his head.”<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, this fear seems to have engulfed even his son Qusay, the head of the security organizations. Indeed, the history of politics, as well as the security apparatus in the Arab republics has been associated with fear, betrayal, violence, and human viciousness. ‘The leaders of the Arab republics were determined to coup-proof their regimes and relied on members of their families or clans to ensure the loyalty of the inner circle.’<sup>27</sup>

Aaron Faust, *The Beatification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Totalitarianism* conclusion chapter highlights Saddam Hussein’s mastermind in targeting Iraqis at all levels of their individual and communal existence yet also showed that Saddam and Ba’ath failed in controlling every detail of each Iraqis’ life. However, Faust

provided an interesting point that put Lisa Wadeen's argument into question. “

“Regardless of whether or not Iraqis truly believed or agreed to with Hussein Ba’athist values, the Ba’ath system of control forces Iraqis to act according to the regime’s wishes because of the Ba’ath injected political meaning into each action and thought in every sphere of life: public, civil, and private. A citizen’s record of allegiance determined whether or not he and his family prospered, survived, or perished.....as a result, to succeed within the system a person had to constantly prove his allegiance by continuously proclaiming his loyalty and actively demonstrating the truth behind his words” <sup>28</sup>Lisa Wedeen, “*Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*” points out that it is hard to distinguish whether a bond between people and leaders is based more on fear than on emotional commitment.<sup>29</sup> Saddam managed to venerate and manipulate Iraqi “traditional” tribal and religious values and practices. Another critical note to mention is the true statement made by a Baathist doctor stating that “All Iraqis have two or more characters, it was the only way to survive under pressure for such a long time” were “all” meant to those who lived under the regime, not as a generalization of populations. Ali al-Wardi, *Understanding Iraq: Society, Culture, and Personality* he explained that the focus is on how attitudes and practices, functional in one society, may carry over into another were maybe” dysfunctional” or at least “incongruent” leading to what al Wardi describes as a “dual personality” while this feature is not unique in Iraq Al-wardi further describe that is has been particularly sharp in Iraq.

Lawrence Kaplan, a writer and professor of Rabbinics and Jewish Philosophy at McGill University, and William Kristol, an American neoconservative political analyst, quoted in *The Human Rights Watch Report* in 1998 that Iraq had more unresolved

“disappearances” than any other United Nations member state. The U.N. official reports placed the disappearances at over 16,000. In recent years, several reports of mass executions of adult males surfaced. On the contrary, Baghdad charged that the Kurds, like the Shiites, helped the Iranian war effort. For this sin, the Kurds became the first ethnic group since the Holocaust that the government gassed.

The second reason is the symbolic domination, which aimed to glorify the commander and his personality. As such, most poets, drama, cinema and literary productions concentrated on Saddam's wisdom and courage.<sup>30</sup> During Saddam's regime:

- Articles extolling Saddam and promoting the need for a true qaïd (leader) were published as early as 1975;
- Mythical image “was created in poetry, prose, and the arts, all of which were made subservient to this aim.”; Religion was also used to consolidate the personality cult. As Overy states, “Cults are conventionally religious rather than political phenomena,”
- Naming towns, mosques, streets, theaters, bridges, and rivers after Saddam Hussein was another time-honored form of expanding the cult.
- The country had no private televisions with the only two TV channels broadcasting Saddam's words and meetings.

In his book, *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab World*, Joseph Sasson unpacked many elements of the cult of personality of the Arab World leaders: Relying on family and clan in advancing leader's image; mythical images of the cult were accomplished by poetry, art, symbols, and spectacles were widespread; publication of biographies was an integral part of creating the cult; creating a myth around their personality cult, e.g, creating the myth of winning against the Iran-Iraq war ( The war waged in 1980, between Iraq and Iran lasted eight years and ended in stalemate and left a million

people dead); and lastly, manipulating the inner circle to the extent that they all accepted that Saddam was their ultimate leader.<sup>31</sup>

Michael Nehme, a business analyst, asserts that individuals construct their values by interpreting their leaders' social and political comments and speeches; such experiences then form an individual's knowledge. From this knowledge, the individual determines what behaviors are valuable to his specific group.<sup>32</sup> The core of this process in Iraq during the Baath regime era was Saddam. 'Saddam was Iraq when he spoke, Iraq was spoken' and Hussien's ran the state according to his desires.<sup>33</sup> The essential consequence of this culture was the maximization of the voluntary behavior atmosphere both in the subject's consciousness and society. The subject could only go beyond the authority by risking being its target. This voluntary spirit lets the subject define himself as part of the authority structure, and his destiny relates to its existence. Saddam Hussien's regime was successful in this aim. The experiences of the Iraqi society post-2003 during the downfall of the regime provide credibility to this claim. Many subjects still believe in Saddam as a leader and a figure to idolize a decade after his death. Many citizens aimed to be in his position and dreamt of becoming him.

Herein, Nehme quotes Freud's awareness of the contrast between the social and narcissistic levels of the individual's state of being. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud explained that:

"In the individual's mental life, someone else was invariably involved, as a model, object, or opponent. Individuals merge in the group to lose their sense of limits; this takes place within what is psychologically known as the principle of direct induction of emotion. The individual loses his control of criticism, a feeling intensified by mutual interaction. Freud adds to these

characteristics the pattern of lacking in self-consciousness, devoid of self-respect and a sense of responsibility.”<sup>34</sup>

The third reason is how the authority distinguishes itself towards the subject. Simply put, Saddam was the only authority. According to Sassoon, the party and governance structure had two ‘interlocking pyramids: the state and the party, ruled with substantial overlap between the two, allowing the state to control and monitor the party’<sup>35</sup>

The political leadership and an extensive security apparatus working in the totalitarian ideology pervaded and politicized all aspects of social life. Therefore, the subject had no choice or alternatives in competing with the authority and had no tools to resist it. Economically, the authority controlled everything within the Iraqi state and sometimes transgressed to other countries. The individual had two choices: cooperating with it to get good positions within the social structure or suffer punishment.<sup>36</sup> Amazia Baram, a professor at the University of Haifa, Israel, found out that Saddam sought to secure his hand over the army for two reasons. First, for the power show off, and second, to prevent any chance of resistance.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Saddam Hussien frequently wore publicly the military uniform with the honor medals on his chest. Such propaganda served to create a strong image of Saddam in the public mind despite people knowing that he had no real experience as a military man.

### 3. The New Era of Terror and Violence under Saddam:

After the resignation of Iraqi President Ahmad Hassan Al-Bakr in 1979, Saddam Hussien seized all the authorities and replaced Al Bakr as the new president of Iraq.<sup>38</sup> Hussien announced his intention to celebrate the occasion of his appointment and invited about 1,000 cadres of the Ba'ath Party to attend his celebration.<sup>39</sup> Saddam read out the names of conspirators and other enemies of the state in what he termed the “list of the damned.” It comprised the leading

members of the party and members of the government and five members of the Revolutionary Command Council. Saddam settled for the death penalty of 22 of the accused. The Ba'ath Party members executed the orders. Saddam also ordered some of the party's leading members and the government to implement the death penalty against their colleagues.<sup>40</sup> Makiya in his book, *Republic of Fear*, as a comparison of Saddam to Hitler, asserts, "Such an idea, in its various details, did not find a place within Hitler's mind." Saddam imposed his actions on the party members and made them part of his evil actions. Makiya, in his book, tried to understand the space for individual rights during Saddam's regime, especially by the institutions of violence, as he called them. He further explored how this feeling of fear and anxiety would sharply diminish the subject's dignity and force him to obey the authority to avoid embarrassment and save his family honor.<sup>41</sup>

Jerrold M. Post (1934), a professor of international affairs, psychiatry, and political psychology at George Washington University, tries to analyze Saddam's personality when he gives an example of the political atmosphere that reigned during Saddam's era. Post assures that Saddam drew circles of oppression. The first circle surrounded the elites of Saddam; ministers and leaders of the security apparatus. In this circle, some rules controlled the relationship between its members with the master (Saddam).

Thabit Abdullah (1973), a Saudi Arabian journalist, novelist, and poet assert that Saddam's aggressive policies, whether on domestic or foreign politics, made whole generations reach adulthood without knowing the meaning of peace.<sup>42</sup> Such had a massive psychological impact on the population. Entire generations grew disturbingly accustomed to dealing with death, suffering, and the breakdown of ethical values.<sup>43</sup>

On the foreign policy level, Baram stated "Saddam Hussein developed a new, Iraqi-centered and imperial brand of Pan-

Arabism.”<sup>44</sup> Pan Arabism is a message by which Saddam sought to legitimize political maneuvers on foreign policy to distract the attention of the international community from his brutal practices that violated human rights in Iraq. The eight-year war with Iran was a part of this message, which collaborated with secularism. However, Saddam shifted his rhetoric from secularism to Islamism. Baram finds out that Saddam presented himself as the modern-day champion of Islam (mujaddid al-din).<sup>45</sup> The induction of tribal values made Saddam’s rhetoric more complicated than the international community expected. The common aspect between Islamization and tribalism is sectarianism.<sup>46</sup> Hence, Saddam introduced some of the young men of his tribe into key positions in the security institutions. Tribal loyalty, combined with meaningful social and economic benefits, creates a strong bond.

On the contrary, Thabit Abdullah (2006) identified that the majority of Ba'ath party comrades and even of general security services were Shiite.<sup>47</sup> The recruitment policy of the urban population intensified the aura of fear and terror. Thus, two policies would counter this threat. They were deploying coercive measures and extending the scope of voluntary obedience. At the beginning of the Baathist era, they enforced either anti-tribalism or anti-sectarianism (al-taqiyya) policies. In general, semi-covert support for both tribal shaykhs and tribal identity appeared explicitly for the first time in the Ba'ath media in the last stages of the Iran-Iraq War and the interwar period (1988-90). The reason for this ideological volte-face was twofold.<sup>48</sup> First, the Arab tribal identity of the Iraqis could serve as another buffer between the Iraqi and the Iranian Shia. Second, the regime needed support from the tribal countryside.<sup>49</sup>

Along with this tribal policy, Abbas Kadhim, the Director of the Iraq Initiative at the Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. sees that Saddam also emphasized sectarian discrimination. He asserted “Saddam used all the aggressive tools against the members of Al-

hawza in Al-Najaf, the sacred province in Iraq, by killing, chasing, exiling against leaders especially Al-imam Al-khoyee and Mohamed Baqir Alsader, the most important modern philosopher in Iraq.”<sup>50</sup> Kadhim noted that the “Ba'athists had succeeded in the past in extracting collaboration from prominent figures in the Mujtahid establishment and recruited some agents within the lower levels of the clergy, through the use of coercive and non-coercive means.” This ensured control and justification from within the religious discourse. To this end Saddam launched his religious campaign on three pillars. First, Saddam began all his speeches with "Bismillah {in the name of God}" and ended with the phrase "Allah o Akbar {God is the greatest}'. Second, he claimed that he was a descendent of Imam Ali, Cousin of the Prophet Mohammed and his son-in-law. Third, most of his people knew him by many names such as Glorious Leader.

The regime's deep legitimacy crisis was intense as to what Isam al-Khafaji, a reputable Iraqi intellectual, historian, and political economist, describes as the lack of majority rule.<sup>51</sup> Given the majority of Iraqi people are the Shiites that never had the chance to express their free political will during Saddam's regime. Saddam's atrocities against the Iraqi people worsened the situation.<sup>52</sup> Al-Khafaji quoted some statistics about Saddam's victims as follows: “between 1987 and 1988, a ten-part genocide operation, ul Anfal, cost the lives of 120,000-180,000 Kurds.” He further states “between March and April 1991, an estimated 40,000-60,000 Iraqis were killed during the suppression of the anti-regime intifada. The number of Iraqis living in exile is about 3 million”.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. The 1991 Uprising '*Intifadhah*':

Concerning the *Intifadhah*, an uprising or resistant movement, the *Human Watch Report* states:

"When the March 1991 uprising confronted Saddam's regime with the most serious internal challenge it had ever

faced, the government forces responded with atrocities on a predictably massive scale. Thousands of civilians lost their lives; the regime used helicopters to attack unarmed civilians as they fled the cities. The fate of thousands of Kurds and Shiites who were seized during the suppression of the uprising remained unknown... Over 100,000 Kurds and Shiites who fled the conflict zones remain displaced inside Iraq, and another 70,000 civilians were in refugee camps in Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran. They have yet to return home since they are afraid or because their homes have been destroyed. ... Religious life was sharply restricted. In the remote marshes along the southern border with Iran, thousands of Shiites who fled during the uprising lack adequate food, hygiene and medical care and were at risk of Iraqi military operations in the area. The suppression of the uprising resulted in the exodus of over ten percent of the country's population. Iran received 1.4 million Iraqis, Turkey 450,000, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait received together with some 35,000, while smaller numbers escaped to Syria and Jordan."<sup>54</sup>

The report (1992) highlights some points regarding the humanitarian situation of the displaced people who came through after the uprising took place in one hand as well as the brutal measures Saddam's regime conducted to put down the uprising. Some specialists try to explain the reasons that motivated Saddam's followers to obey his cruelty in oppressing the Intifada. In this regard, Wendell Steavenson, an American writer and journalist, in conversations with the former regime's members addressed the question: "Why? Why did you go along with the cruelty?" The answers were "What could I do?" "It was like this!" "This was usual then!"<sup>55</sup>

Zimbardo explains that social order has a deep-rooted psychological effect on the individual's behavior. Zimbardo's mechanism explains why Saddam comrades went along with cruelty:

"Any environmental, social conditions that contribute to making some members of society feel that they are anonymous, that no one recognizes their individuality and thus their humanity, make them potential assassins and vandals, a danger to their personal property".<sup>56</sup>

How can subjects survive if violence and threat of execution and persecution is a daily life probability? The participation in the reign of terror compounds thus. The officers were deliberating about whether to resist or collaborate with the regime. People had to think about themselves and their families before making any decision.

It explains why citizens and soldiers were killing their own kin and citizens. However, were they acting voluntarily while doing so? The uprising happened after 23 years of the Ba'ath party and 12 years of Saddam's Reign. Therefore, the regime's ideas saturated the minds of the soldiers. It is crucial to understand the ethnic diversity of the Iraqi society because the Ba'ath regime used this diversity for its purpose. For instance, Saddam claimed that this uprising was receiving support from the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the process, he turned rebels into collaborators of the enemy. Thus, he evoked the nation's threat, which found good ground to be accepted with the soldiers defending the regime. Furthermore, Saddam's handpicked commanders made Iraqi soldiers obey their command without giving them due time or the freedom to understand the consequences of their actions. The anxiety made the soldiers blind to the truth with the options of obeying commands or facing fatal punishment.

One more motive to obey; the subject (soldier) believed that the opponent could not reach him while in areas of authority. On the contrary, it was effortless for the authority to punish him without

hesitation. Political scientist James Q. Wilson and criminologist George Kelling outlined their novel theory about the twin causes of crime in a popular Atlantic Monthly article (March 1982). They stated "Crime is a product of individual criminals and situational conditions of public disorder. When people see abandoned cars in the streets, graffiti everywhere and broken windows not covered, it is a sign that no one cares about that neighborhood. That perception of public disorder or disarray then lowers inhibitions against further destructive or criminal actions of those who are not ordinarily criminal."<sup>57</sup> Editor Jeremy Rozansky and American economist Josh Lerner believe that Wilson's argument was that "criminals generally choose to commit or not to commit a crime based on an evaluation (though not necessarily a conscious deliberation) of potential risk and reward."<sup>58</sup> To emphasize Wilson's analysis, many Iraqi soldiers believed that their actions had no legal or moral consequences because the authority itself authorizes Iraqi soldiers to kill under its name. As long the regime will last, subjects place no legal or moral responsibilities on themselves.

## 5. The Conclusion

This paper first examined how Saddam successfully enlarged the space of voluntary action within the subject's self-esteem (Iraqi Individual) and second, how far sub-identity replaced political power into the coercion process of obedience in post-Saddam Hussein.

For the former, Post describes Saddam's political behavior, as "irrational but was dangerous to the extreme."<sup>59</sup> American political theorist, Roger Boesche, quotes Plato by attributing that the problem of the tyrant belongs to their personalities who are unbalanced and suffers from conflicting desires. Saddam can only get satisfaction upon meeting his desires. To the tyrant, his desires represent the general good. In the case of Saddam, he had a difficult childhood as he grew in a village with low literacy levels. He lacked parental

control, which allowed the streets to shape his character and it endorsed the mantra "who is more powerful who impose his desires on his friends." Post and Baram assure that childhood is crucial to the development of healthy self-esteem. Concerning Saddam, they identified that he suffered "the wounded self."<sup>60</sup>

Saddam's unhealthy mentality was one of the reasons for distortions of the values within the society, which adversely affected the moral content of the subject. Michael Nehme asserts that:

"Irrational aggression by individuals or groups against an alleged opponent could be explained by fear. In addition to biological and love needs, people have a symbolic appetite for ideas and suitable actions and reactions to reconcile their fears. Rational and irrational fears are like an obsession or a paranoid system; they are translated into methods whereby normal feelings of sympathy are denatured, numbed, or killed so that people can act with cruelty toward others. However, concepts like mania, paranoia, omnipotence, neurosis, and psychosis should be applied with caution to political fears of groups and societies."<sup>61</sup>

Nehme added that structural interaction has an impact on the minds of individuals from a psychological perspective, and that occurs in all societies, even the most primitive ones. To this extent, Milgram's findings that 26 out of 40 participants complied with directives to continue administering some similarity to the Iraqi officers' plight. However, the officers contended that refusal to execute innocent civilians could result in their deaths or harm to their families. Russell Searight, a professor of psychology, finds out a similarity in the cases of Milgram's participants to the former Baathists whom Steavenson interviewed who emphasized that they had no choice other than to execute orders no matter how painful to others it was.<sup>62</sup> It seems that those officers had an idea of the cruelty of their actions,

but they did not reconsider. As Al-Wardi explains, most of the individuals suffer from duplication where they have the motive to ignore any moral or normative standards ahead of the impending punishment. Their recognition of cruelty does not stop them from practicing it. One would argue that explains the voluntary commitment by claiming that coercive measures or violence do not motivate a voluntary role.

The lesson from Milgram's experiment is that the individual's voluntary commitment towards authority may not appear in the early stages of the relationship. This process of transformation may require time to implement specific conditions that help the tyrant to establish his reign. These requirements could be summarized, among others, as (deploying a mastermind game by using the power of image through creating symbols and social brands, strengthening a belief that every individual is part of a divine mission, the tyrant fashion himself as one of the people and they both represent one collective entity, creating enemy images to unite the society under his rule, and establishing dominance through fear and reward). This process would take time for the individual to be part of the hierarchical system. Voluntary obedience can start within the ethical content of the individual through the symbolic domination of the authority over the populace. The process of creating institutional structure over time grounds the justification of authority. From this perspective, it is difficult for the individual to refuse or challenge such principles. Simultaneously, most people abandon their egos in favor of authority. However, one would argue why some people stood up against Saddam's regime in 1991.

According to the theories of both Milgram and Ali Al-Wardi, there is room to disobey authority. Milgram explains that the individual may disobey in the case of coercion obedience. Once the institutional structure drops down, the individual will challenge the authority. As for voluntary obedience, the individual will continue

obeying the authority because he believes that it is the right choice for the general good. Al-Wardi explains disobedience through psychological words. Al-Wardi emphasizes that no matter how strong the authority is there is always room for disobedience within the character of the Iraqi individual. According to al-Wardi, the circumstances align with the modeling of individual behavior.

Finally, Milgram's mechanism could explain how the Iraqi subject came to obey the authority under anxiety or voluntarily, which explains the symbolic domination of society. It is for this reason, Saddam adopted attractive rhetoric for both the audiences domestically or abroad. For the domestic arena (he was the leader, the father, the strongest, the believer), while abroad (he was the believer, the commander of necessity, the principle man). To offer a better explanation, Zimbardo created a model that combines Plato and Milgram's mechanisms to explain the mutual effect between the subject and the society in the process of obedience. In this process, authority plays a crucial role in strengthening the collective spirit of obedience.

Kaplan and Kristol believe that Saddam was the core of a totalitarian regime in Iraq that generated sheer-malice towards the west.<sup>63</sup> Post labeled Saddam as a "madman of the Middle East" and a "megalomaniac" but Post Found out that he acted only after judicious consideration (Statement before the House Armed Services Committee 1990). Post conceptualized Saddam's paranoia as malignant narcissism, which means "the personality configuration of the destructive charismatic, who unifies and rallies his downtrodden supporters by blaming outside enemies."<sup>64</sup> Margaret Hermann asserts that Saddam was likely to internalize threats to the state as threats to his power and prestige and since he obtained a certain charismatic charm by which he attracted the individual to join his club of voluntary support.<sup>65</sup> The members of this club enjoyed Saddam's awarding system. At the same time, the

regime tried to attract those (individuals or tribes) who were remaining on the side-line by the deployment of Arabism warning of the Iranian threat. To this extent, Baram may suggest why some tribes did not join the Intifada.<sup>66</sup> According to the theories of both Milgram and al-Wardi, Iraqi people had shown a strong tendency to obey Saddam's regulations, under certain conditions of fear, anxiety, and necessity.

Regarding the latter point, if the country did not implement the pluralist society with some degree of success from 2003 onward, the country would not undergo continued violence and terrorism. Eventually, ISIS would have not gained ground in such a significant and brutal manner that occurred in 2014. To answer the question of sectarianism as the fuel of obedient in post-2003 Iraq, one needs to explore these variables:

1. The growing threat of terrorism.
2. The growing role of Militias / Non-State Actors (Society Militarizing).
3. The results of general elections (the prospect of secularism in political life).
4. The room for pluralism in Iraq.

The Constitution preserves basic rights and respects diversity, but the mainstream culture has not internalized these principles yet. In addition to the absence of a reasonable political culture, and an actual rule of law and democratic order, the lack of justice in the distribution of economic advantages has widened disparities among various groups. This further disrupts domestic stability and societal harmony. Elaaf Hadi describes Sectarianism as the hallmark of today's Iraqi identity and mindset. Hadi listed these reasons as:<sup>67</sup>

- 1- A political, religious or social framework prisons the individual autonomy.
- 2- The distribution of official positions occurs on the basis of the ethno-sectarian quotas (*muhasasa*).

3- The growing role of militias, even though it has been a necessity to cover the institutional deficit.<sup>68</sup>

These reasons above contributed to two realizations, the first, is widening the gap of trust between various segments of Iraqi society. Second, it deprived individuals of the notion of building trust between individuals (subjects) and the state apparatus. The evidence is the results of general elections that show an extreme tendency towards sectarian affiliation. Yet, the reality is that popular sectarianism is a fundamental consequence of political sectarianism, which the political elite deployed since the establishment of the Interim Governing Council (IGC).<sup>69</sup> Consequently, sectarianism controls both state institutions and societal establishments.<sup>70</sup> In this context, the growing role of sectarian militancy in Iraq is due to the failure of the political process and a 'state failure.'<sup>71</sup>

Charles Tripp summarizes the political turmoil in Iraq to the nature of the 'dual state.'<sup>72</sup> A Dual state stems from the existence of shadow organizations. The term refers to the fact that in Iraq an important distinction needs to be made between the formal, public apparatus of the state and the less visible 'shadow state' organized along rather different lines and subject to different dynamics. The process caused the decline of national sentiment in Iraq since people lost confidence in the State's apparatus, especially when these apparatuses appeared as tools to deliver goods for specific social groups. Thereby, grievances of the state's national groupings intensify and people start questioning the legitimacy of institutions. This occurs especially when militant groups representing exclusive nationalism in the name of the nation's self-defense. To summarize the above, one can refer to Pollard et al.<sup>73</sup> and Hagan et al. as analyzed what happened in Iraq post-2003 as follows:

“The state lost sovereignty on part of its territory; the government lost either the identity as the sole legitimate executor of people's needs and its power as sole

legitimate use of force. Now, anyone can notice the ability of non-state actors – such as the militias – to impose political choices on the government. As a result, the obedience process has shifted its compass from political authority towards non-state powers.”

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- <sup>3</sup> Boesche, Roger. 1996. *Theories of tyranny: from Plato to Arendt*. Pennsylvania: Penn State press., p. 445
- <sup>4</sup> Nardin, Terry. 2013. "From Right to Intervene to Duty to Protect: Michael Walzer on Humanitarian Intervention." *The European Journal of International Law* Vol. 24 (1): 67-82. Accessed on July 19, 2018. <http://www.ejil.org/pdfs/24/1/2371.pdf>, p. 73
- <sup>5</sup> See also: Court, Antony. "Hannah Arendt's Theory of Totalitarianism – Part Two." *Rozenberg Quarterly*. <http://rozenbergquarterly.com/hannah-arendts-theory-of-totalitarianism-part-two/>
- <sup>6</sup> Milgram, Stanley. 1974. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental view*. New York: Harber & Row Publications., p. 123
- <sup>7</sup> Zimbardo adds that "Dispositional analyses of anti-social, or non-normative, behaviors always include strategies for behavior modification to make the deviant individuals fit better by education or therapy, or to exclude them from society by imprisonment, exile or execution" (Zimbardo in Miller 2004, 22).
- <sup>8</sup> Subject cannot choose a role, and he has to practice continuously from youth onwards, what the authorities dictate to him. This behavior over time becomes a habit and a part of one's nature unconsciously, and the subject does not show himself as he really is (Boesche, 1996, 45).
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- <sup>34</sup> Nehme, Michel. 2003. *Fear and Anxiety in the Arab World*. Florida: University Press of Florida., p. 99
- <sup>35</sup> Sassoon Joseph, *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab Republics*, Chapter 2 pp 38-41
- <sup>36</sup> See also: Farouk – Sluglett, Marion / Sluglett, Peter, 1990, 1991: Iraq since 1958, from revolution to dictatorship. London. p227.
- <sup>37</sup> Baram, Amazia. 1989. "The Ruling Political Elite in Bathi Iraq, 1968- 1986, the Changing Features of a Collective Profile." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 21 (4): 447-493., p. 471
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- <sup>39</sup> Saddam Hussein, Salat Al-khold: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1-f-A3Pgcs>. [Accessed on 17 June, 2014].
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