

Introduction

The following remarks are based upon an article written at the time of the first Gulf War. A question then, as subsequently, was the likelihood of revolution to topple Saddam Hussein. An attempt is made to consider whether historical evidence might be systematised to illuminate important issues such as this and, of course, to highlight the problems and the pitfalls of such a systematic approach. The discussion is, however, in no way a critique of government action, however tempting that might be. It is concerned with method only.

IRAQ and Axiomatic Historical Systems

Preamble:

- a. This presentation is not an attempt to become involved in any of the political issues surrounding the recent invasion of Iraq
 - b. Nonetheless, if an axiomatic system might give some reliable clues to the issues which should be addressed in considering such action, it would be worth developing it.
 - c. What is sought to be considered, therefore, is whether it is feasible to develop information systems which would give useful clues to such matters.
1. In trying to forecast the unfolding of complex political events, it is asserted that a formalised axiomatic approach may be of assistance.
 2. The purpose of this presentation is to explore this contention against the background of the Gulf conflict. Immediately, we must dismiss any facile assertion that Saddam Hussein was mad. Such an assertion would deny the possibility of analysis by any rational means. We are saved by Dr Jerrold Post, a psychiatrist and US government adviser in 1991 who commented "Saddam is not crazy." To assume otherwise is to demonstrate that the observer does not understand the behaviour of the individual concerned.
 3. While we assume rationality, what we must not assume is that the opponent is playing the same ball game as we are. The example of German and French strategy in the opening rounds of World War11 demonstrates the hyper-game theory enunciated by Bennet and Dando (1977). They played by different rules and the German rules were much less restrictive than the French. Similarly, Saddam played by different rules to the coalition in the first Gulf war (by seeking to draw Israel into the war with missile attacks). It may be that he learned his lesson that this strategy would be ineffective by the time of the second Gulf campaign. Perhaps it was then his expectation of being overrun and developing guerrilla type attrition warfare to wear down American resolve as in Vietnam.
 4. Quite apart from this, Saddam clearly had a whole range of alternative strategies to achieve what appears to have been his personal goal of being recognised as a latter-day Nebuchadnezzar (Faoud Matar 1990)
 5. Against this background, it is clear that the Middle East situation is too complex in its totality to be able in a short compass to demonstrate the axiomatic approach. So the discussion is narrowed to the specific issue of whether Saddam could have been ousted by revolution at any time whether before or during the military action..
 6. An axiomatic system for the interpretation of history sets up definitions which are both nominal (e.g., "government") and adjectival (e.g., "autocratic"). Other words such as "control" are used in a normally acceptable manner. The term "revolution" however, has no universally accepted definition. Leiden and Schmitt adopt Calvert's (1967) definition:

“forcible intervention either to replace governments, or to change the processes of governments.”

On examination, this is not good enough. Some revolutions, for example, are the result of a bloodless coup. And can an unsuccessful intervention be considered to be a revolution? So the following appears to be a more useful definition:

“Revolution is an action which replaces a government otherwise than in accordance with the law and in respect of which the actors are prepared to use force.”

7. When (and if) the definitions have been sufficiently settled, the causes of revolution may be hypothesised that:

“A government based upon elite support may fall because the elite may lose its self-confidence or become disaffected.” The Politics of Violence. Revolution in the Modern World (1965), Leiden and Schmitt,

8. The difficulty is that in drafting such an hypothesis, if we are to pretend to a scientific (hence predictive) approach it must pass the falsifiability test. The above statement does not. So we try again:

“A government based upon elite support will fall if the elite loses its self-confidence or become disaffected.”

This may not be perfect, but it is an improvement and it will do for the time being.

9. Historical phenomena such as revolutions are, however, viewed by historians as the result of a broad concatenation of events – complexity is not resolved by a single relatively simple hypothesis. For every complex problem there is a simple answer which is probably wrong. On the other hand, a successful analysis must seek to eliminate the irrelevant. When I was Planning Director of a multi-national, in probing plans for this very complex set of businesses world-wide, our goal was to produce an integrated financial model of the corporation based upon models of our business environment, including crucially market models of products as diverse as advertising in and circulation of national daily newspapers and consumer magazines, sales of decorative paints and wallcoverings, papermaking and packaging, plastic pipes and ceramic sanitaryware, etc. This was a formidable task, but we were able to produce useful predictive tools by eliminating many of the factors which experience and prejudice had (erroneously) taught us were relevant.

10. The axiomatic system under discussion must, therefore, be able to specify what are the necessary and sufficient causes of revolution. We want to examine whether such causes exist. As an example, we again have to focus down and consider specific features – in this case, leadership.

- The effect the leader has on his organisation is critical.
- What sort of leader must he be (to avoid being overthrown)?

11. Consider Hitler According to Allan Bullock (*Hitler, A Study of Tyranny* (1962)) he demonstrated the following characteristics which appear prima facie to have secured his position against revolt:

- Belief in a great destiny for his nation, coupled with a mystical view of its past. the German Siegfried - which was shared by the majority. It would have been difficult for any German, certainly up to the onset of World War II, to have disassociated himself from such belief without appearing disloyal to the nation. Party policy was (deliberately) vague, little that could act as a focus for

intelligent opposition. So long as Hitler was perceived as successful, disapproval of method was not enough to create real opposition to his vision.

- An unshakeable conviction that he was the chosen leader.

"It is by the grace of Providence that I have been chosen to lead my people in such a war",

he wrote to Mussolini in 1943. This was also the theme of one of his most famous pronouncements (Munich 1936):

"I go the way that Providence dictates with the assurance of a sleepwalker."

- Single-mindedness in pursuing this goal with neither scruples nor inhibitions

"Hitler had one supreme, and fortunately rare, advantage," writes Bullock, "he had neither scruples nor inhibitions."

In fact, the author points out how, in seeking to maintain his goals, he was even prepared to destroy Germany. Something of a paradox!

- Lack of trust of anyone, even his closest colleagues

"I am lied to on all sides, I can rely on no one, they all betray me,"

he said angrily towards the end, but he had always remained aloof. "He never committed himself to anyone, never admitted any loyalty," comments Bullock. This undoubtedly made him more impregnable. Always on the watch for disloyalty, he was ever the leader out on his own and not attached to any particular faction within the Party against which opposition might more easily focus.

- Refusal to share power with anyone (a symptom in part of the mistrust) was evident throughout his career, from his earliest moves to make the Party into a mass following for himself in 1921 to his assumption of the German presidency (as well as remaining Chancellor) in 1933. This additionally meant a freedom to act without the constraints imposed by any individual or party coalition.
- Charisma and oratorical ability (including his understanding of the masses and of propaganda)

"To be a leader means to be able to move masses."

- Political acumen and intuition. Fingerspitzengefühl (finger-tip feeling) - were, of course, critical in being ahead of the opposition at the critical time. In fact, one of his considerable abilities was the use of surprise, as many of his erstwhile colleagues such as Röhm, the leader of the SA, found out to their cost.
- His support for the army which was a particular feature of his political acumen; he recognised the need to control the elements of power and certainly throughout his climb to power he took care to avoid alienating the army. At the same time, he needed his own force and as a result created first the brown-shirt Storm troopers and then subsequently, his own personal elite the black-shirt SS.

- Above all, his preparedness to use terror and to be seen to be using terror. From the early days he talked and practised the language of thuggery against his opponents. Not only was he to say

"If you will not be German, I will bash your skull in"

(and by German he meant Nazi), but his literal implementation of such a policy is well documented.

- The conjunction of terror with all (or perhaps most of) the foregoing characteristics made Hitler, in the event, an unbeatable force from within. It was only when he lost control of the situation through military defeat that he was ultimately forced to commit suicide. But he never faced any serious threat of revolution.

12. Does Saddam fit this pattern?

- He believed in the destiny of Iraq: The glory of the Arabs stems from the glory of Iraq.

"Throughout history, whenever Iraq became mighty and flourished, so did the Arab nation. This is why we are striving to make Iraq mighty, formidable, able and developed." (Faoud Matar, 1990)

Generally speaking, the Baath philosophy of uniting all Arab peoples has a powerful popular appeal against which few Arabs can contend except to defend particular vested interests as members of a ruling elite in any particular region.

- Belief in his unique capacities to lead the nation

"It is certain that matters would have been accomplished faster had I become President of the Republic five years earlier." (Faoud Matar, 1990)

- Single-minded in that he has no scruples or inhibitions. It is also apparent that Saddam is like Hitler in the ways in which he seeks to achieve his goals. He is prepared to indulge in assassination while simultaneously negotiating. See for example, his attempt to kill both the son of the leader of the Kurds and later the leader, Barzani, himself despite a fifteen point accord established for discussions on autonomy in 1970 (Faoud Matar, 1990).

- Lack of trust of those round him is less clear-cut (but many potential rivals died suddenly). He has certainly involved his family, uncles, half-brothers, cousins, to a great extent in government and the security forces, though this did not prevent the death in a helicopter crash of his cousin and brother-in-law, Defence Minister Adnan Khayrallah, shortly after he had voiced concerns about his personal safety. Outside his family, however, the frequent executions of or accidents to formerly close colleagues, of army chiefs and the like indicate little confidence in them - certainly once they achieve any position of potential power. Thus Adnan Tulfar, the most successful and popular general in the Iran-Iraq war also died in a helicopter crash after the end of the conflict. But this is not just a matter of political expediency. It is likely he believes he has been betrayed and this attitude pervades everything:

"He is afraid of society. The state does not trust its neighbours, the party does not trust its members and the government does not trust its ministers."

commented Sami Rahman, a cabinet minister from 1970-1974

- Power sharing: the position here is also less clear. Certainly, as soon as the Baath came back to power in 1968 it very quickly disposed of its allies, Nazif and Daud, who had secured Republican Guard support for the coup. But Bakr, a military man, became and remained President with Saddam as Vice President.

"It has never happened before, either in ancient history ... or in modern times, that two leaders have been in power for eleven years within one command, without this resulting in a dangerous moral or practical imbalance in leadership and without their relationship ending in one of them driving the other out."
(Faoud Matar, 1990)

But Saddam did not think of himself as subordinate. There are a number of possible explanations on the success of this cooperation, e.g.:

- that Saddam was in any event the only leader, "the strong man of Iraq since 1968" - probably not initially true;
- that Saddam was not entirely acceptable to all factions at the outset and lacked standing both within and outside Iraq;
- that because of Bakr's army connections, it was essential to keep him in position to control military opposition until Saddam himself had secured control of the army;
- that at least initially, Saddam preferred anonymity until the new Baath regime was firmly established;
- that Saddam was concerned to strengthen his position in the Party by concentrating on the organs of power before he sought to take over full control (Faoud Matar, 1990).

At all events, Saddam clearly became the dominant partner in the co-regnum and was content for some time with this position.

- Charisma and the ability to influence people was apparent from early in his career. Ahmed Saleh commenting on an encounter in Egypt some years before (Panorama (1991)) said that Saddam had "the cool quality of a born leader, a natural air of authority." His use of propaganda, particularly through television, was effective. His appeal was to the Arab masses and frequently he appeared as a man of the people dressed in peasant clothes and mingling with them. Yet he was also promoted as the noble warrior, the new Nebuchadnezzar.
- Political acumen and intuition preserved him. He certainly pretended to a highly developed "sixth sense" (Faoud Matar, Panorama, 1

"I can judge a conspirator against me from his looks. A look is enough for me to know he is a conspirator." (Sami Rahnian, Panorama, 1991).

- Support for the army – He was well aware that loss of army support was the reason for the failure of the first Baathist coup in 1963. but, at the same time he created his own private force: the Mukhabarat.
- His readiness to use terror is well documented, not just at a personal level - he is alleged to have shot prisoners himself - but also at a party level, as in the naming of conspirators at the top level party meeting on 23rd July 1979 shortly after his accession to the Presidency, at the national level with his gassing of the Kurd minority and at the international level with his invasion and pillage of Kuwait.

13. Problems with this approach.

The foregoing points seem to add-up to a similar sort of impregnability to that enjoyed by Hitler. But there are many difficulties

- Very limited evidence is presented and there seems to be a limited number similar cases from which patterns can be discerned. While in the foregoing discussion, the various similarities between Hitler and Saddam have been pointed out, the analysis of the latter is based upon a single case and this is insufficient to support a general law. At best, it can suggest a tentative hypothesis. If Saddam also manages to stave off revolution, his history may then be used, along with that of Hitler and other dictators who survived without revolution, to test and refine such hypothesis. But it would also be necessary to review all those cases of dictators who had been replaced by revolution to see whether such cases could be distinguished from the others. For if any had the characteristics described and yet were ousted by revolution, the theory would fail.
- The distinction between necessary and irrelevant factors. What is not certain in the above discussion is whether the differences, e.g., use of family and readiness by Saddam Hussein compared with Hitler, at least during the Bakr presidency, to let another front the government, represent crucial elements. If successful revolution had been mounted before military defeat, this might indicate a chink in the armour and suggest that these factors were critical. There remains a high degree of uncertainty about the relevance of all the factors enunciated.
- Bias is implicit in all sources The sources used in gathering evidence on Saddam Hussein were, on the one hand, US authors who were antagonistic to his attitudes and policies and on the other, an Arab supporter of the regime. Both discuss the same events, but from very different perspectives. Thus, Faoud Matar comments on the 23rd July meeting of the party at which various traitors were denounced, in the following terms:

“This ... plot was overall a more dangerous one, because the plotters all held high positions. its discovery caused an uneasy atmosphere in Party ranks. To counteract this, President Saddam Hussein met with some of the Party leadership just one week after taking over full authority, and talked to them in a way designed to raise their morale and strengthen their resolution “ (1990).

Miller and Mylroic, however, comment that:

“No episode better reveals the essence of Saddam’s regime than the baptism of blood that accompanied his accession to absolute power in July 1979.” (1990).

Their further description makes it clear that, from their perspective, far from seeking to reassure members, the whole tenor of the meeting was to terrorise any potential opposition. By good fortune, a video is available of the meeting which seems to support the latter interpretation, as individuals are removed one by one from the meeting and the remainder become hysterical in their efforts to avoid condemnation. The point, however, is that in the absence of primary information such as an (undoctored) video, a wide degree of bias is implicit in all accounts and this makes it increasingly difficult to approach that level of non-ambiguity which is necessary for a formalised system.

While many writers deliberately set out to prove a particular case (and there is nothing wrong in supporting any particular hypothesis) it is important to set out all available evidence. The scientific historian must not ignore information which could be interpreted against the hypothesis.

- The system needs more rigorous testing. The historian would have to go through a much more rigorous process of definition and formulating hypotheses and so on before any degree of certainty could be asserted. It is apparent, therefore, that a massive information gathering, sifting and analysis has to be undertaken in a scientific manner to examine even the smallest corner of history. The scale of the endeavour does not invalidate a scientific approach to historical explanation, though it does cast doubts on the present feasibility of formalisation with a view to

building predictive models. What is left is, nonetheless both scientific and useful, namely, the development of more precise and accepted definitions and of tentative hypotheses based on these which can be used for analysis of events. Politicians and businessmen may then use these as the basis for developing their own views about likely future events, applying the flexibility and intuition of the human mind to satisfactorily robust hypotheses about the past.

Admitting all the difficulties, the exercise itself is educational. By participating in an investigation of this nature, better signposts to future action might be available to the individual analyst – and even the strategies behind government action might more readily be laid bare.