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Interview Session Number: 8  
Interview Conducted by: SSA George L. Piro

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Arabic/English Translation: [REDACTED]

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~~(S)~~ Saddam Hussein (High Value Detainee #1) was interviewed on February 20, 2004 at a military detention facility at Baghdad International Airport (BIAP), Baghdad, Iraq. Hussein provided the following information:

~~(S)~~ Prior to the start of interview, Hussein was informed this session would be a continuation of the three previous discussions, focusing on Hussein's ascendancy to the Presidency.

~~(S)~~ Beginning in 1973, Iraqi President Bakr began having health problems including issues with his heart. Despite these problems, Bakr performed his duties as best as he could. Periodically, Bakr told Hussein that he should retire and that he could no longer fulfill his duties as President. Hussein is unaware whether Bakr made such comments to others within the Ba'ath Party (Party) leadership. Hussein stated Bakr felt "close to Hussein."

~~(S)~~ Around this time, Hussein seriously considered leaving the government but remaining in the Party. His main reason for wanting to leave government was linked to the overthrow of the Ba'ath government in 1963. Hussein believed this overthrow occurred because the Party leadership concentrated on the government and forgot about the Party. Hussein did not like the "power" and his position in the government. When he joined the revolution of 1968, his intention was not to stay in government. Hussein had planned to stay involved only within the cells of the Party at the lower levels. At that time, he believed it would be a "shame" to serve in the government. Until this day, Hussein still does not like government. He likes the people and the Party, but believes it is difficult for the government to judge fairly. Hussein observed individuals he

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described as "kind and gentle" before serving in the government who subsequently became the opposite after their appointments to government positions.

~~(S)~~ After the 1968 revolution, a governing Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) was formed. However, the announcement of the RCC was not made until one year later in 1969. The members of the RCC, with the exception of the military members, were not and "did not want to be known." For this reason, the announcement of the RCC was delayed. Hussein was "forced" to take a leadership position in the RCC. Party members asked Hussein whether he wanted the revolution to fail, implying it would without his participation, and that it was his responsibility to be a Party leader.

~~(S)~~ Hussein wanted Bakr to remain as President for as long as possible, describing him as a "nice person." In 1979, however, Bakr contacted Hussein and asked him to meet in Bakr's office in the Presidential Palace. At this meeting, Bakr told Hussein he no longer wanted nor felt able to serve as President. Bakr implored Hussein to assume his duties, telling Hussein if he did not accept the "normal method" of appointment as President, he would use the radio to make an announcement that Hussein was now President. Hussein told Bakr that this means of announcing a successor would not be good for the country, the people, or the Party. Outsiders, or foreigners, especially would have thought something was wrong within Iraq. Thereafter, Tariq Aziz was asked to prepare an announcement regarding the change of leadership. A meeting of the RCC was convened in July, 1979. Hussein is unsure whether he or Bakr called the meeting.

~~(S)~~ At the meeting, Bakr explained to the RCC members that he had wanted to step down since 1973. He further explained to the members that Hussein was ready to assume the Presidency. Hussein described the meeting as being "like a family gathering." There were many emotions present including sadness. The transfer of the Presidency to Hussein was conducted according to the Constitution. Hussein stated a vote was taken, but he does not remember whether it was by secret ballot or by raising hands. He was designated Secretary General of the Party and President of Iraq.

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~~(S)~~ When asked whether Hussein observed any changes in himself upon assuming the Presidency, he responded, "No." He stated he became "stronger and closer to the people."

~~(S)~~ When asked what Hussein believed would have happened to himself if he had been allowed to leave government, Hussein replied that he would have been a regular person, possibly a farmer. He would, however, have continued as a Party member and continued attending meetings of the Party.

~~(S)~~ The interviewer noted his own personal opinion that it would be difficult to imagine Hussein as a farmer. Hussein stated he was afraid to become a public figure. He stated that his situation changed as did his obligations, becoming almost personal. Hussein observed that while he served as President, thousands of people viewed themselves as being close to him. Until 1995, people did not elect him, rather Hussein stated, "The revolution brought me." After 1995 and 2002, the people did, in fact, vote for and elect Hussein. After the elections, his relationship with the people became stronger, and Hussein now felt an obligation to those who had voted for him. Hussein was not only obligated to the people by law, but also to the people "in front of God."

~~(S)~~ Hussein was questioned whether, at the meeting where Bakr announced his resignation, the entire RCC supported his becoming President. Hussein responded there was nothing or no one against him to become the leader. Morally and out of respect for Bakr, some members asked Bakr to stay. Bakr, however, did not allow their wishes to influence his final decision. Hussein viewed Bakr's decision as final because he, himself, could not convince Bakr to remain as President.

~~(S)~~ The interviewer noted reports which stated there was at least one outspoken person at the meeting who questioned Bakr's retirement and stated that Hussein's selection should be unanimous, Muhie Abd Al-Hussein Mashhadi. Hussein stated this information is not correct. There was discussion about Bakr's resignation but no talk about the process for selecting Hussein. Others offered to assume some of Bakr's duties so that he might be able to remain as President. He did not accept these offers, however. At that time, Hussein was Deputy Secretary General of the Party and Vice President of Iraq. As such, he was next in line to become President, a fact which could not have been

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questioned. Additionally, the Constitution specifically stated any selection of the President had to be made by a majority, not unanimous, vote. Some members talked about the possibility of postponing Bakr's resignation. Hussein stated there are former RCC members still alive who can be questioned regarding this matter. The interviewer stated several former RCC members generally agree on the details provided by Hussein about this event. However, some former RCC members also provided information indicating Mashhadi voiced his opposition to Bakr's resignation and Hussein's selection as President at the referenced RCC meeting. Hussein replied that he had told the interviewer all the details known to him.

~~(S)~~ The interviewer stated a plot against Hussein was discovered shortly after Hussein assumed the Presidency. An infamous meeting took place on July 22, 1979 whereupon the details of the plot were revealed to senior members of the Party. The interviewer added that the meeting was recorded on videotape, viewed by the interviewer. Hussein stated this matter was not a secret and the video was given to all Party members. Hussein does not remember whether the meeting was opened with comments by Taha Yasin Ramadan. He acknowledged that Mashhadi was brought before the assembly, admitted his participation in a plot against Hussein involving the Syrian government, and named some of the others who participated in the plot. Hussein's reaction and feelings were the same as anyone who had been betrayed by friends in the Party and the government, sadness and a feeling of being "back-stabbed." This was especially true because the plot involved Arabs outside the government and country. Hussein described these actions as treason and the participants as traitors.

~~(S)~~ Regarding when Hussein became aware of the plot, he responded, "At that time." The interviewer pointed out that Mashhadi was arrested a few days before the meeting, approximately July 15, after Hussein became President. Hussein stated he became President July 17. The interviewer responded that July 17 was the official date, although Hussein had actually assumed the Presidency almost one week prior.

~~(S)~~ The interviewer questioned Hussein as to how the plot was discovered. Hussein asked, "Did you hear the video?" He added that the information on the video should be enough. The interviewer noted the video did not provide details about how the

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plot was discovered. Hussein responded, "These are secrets of the country." He emphasized that he still considered these details secret despite the fact that the event occurred almost 25 years ago.

~~(S)~~ The interviewer then steered the discussion to the video which was not a state secret. The interviewer noted the video depicted several present and future members of the senior leadership. Among those shown were Tariq Aziz and Ali Hasan Al-Majid, who was seen standing and shouting. The video names approximately sixty-six individuals as participants in the plot, including Adnan Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister, and Ghanim Abd Al-Jalil, Director of the Office of the President. Hussein stated Adnan was the Minister of Planning and Secretary of the Committee for Oil and Agreements. Hussein acknowledged that Adnan may have already been appointed as Deputy Prime Minister after Hussein assumed the Presidency and before this meeting. Hussein acknowledged that a total of five RCC members, and none of the original seventy revolutionaries, were implicated in the plot. Hussein denied that any of the conspirators, including Adnan and Ghanim, were his friends. People who worked in the government were not his friends. Hussein stated Adnan and Ghanim were "not close to me." Like others, they were appointed to government positions. Some "made it" while some did not. When pointed out to Hussein that the interviewer saw Hussein crying in the video when Ghanim's name was announced, Hussein responded that, as a human being, he still had feelings. As the head of his office, Hussein saw Ghanim every day delivering various papers. All of the members of the plot were in the leadership. Hussein remarked that treason makes you feel "sorrowful." When noted by the interviewer that one might say Hussein had been betrayed by his closest colleagues, Hussein responded the most important thing is that they were in the government and were with Hussein in the Party.

~~(S)~~ Hussein acknowledged that over sixty people were implicated, although not all were convicted. Hussein further acknowledged that the names of the "conspirators" were announced by Mashhadi or read by Hussein from a list at the meeting. As the names were announced, the person named was asked to stand up, and, one by one, was escorted from the hall by the Himaya.

~~(S)~~ Thereafter, a tribunal was held to adjudicate the matter and to decide punishment. Hussein stated he does not

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remember the exact number or identities of persons who were found guilty and were executed or imprisoned, or who escaped, or who were found innocent and were released. He acknowledged that the entire matter, including executions, was concluded within approximately sixteen days, or by August 8, 1979. Hussein believes the amount of time used during the process was "more than enough" for an unbiased and impartial trial. Although he believes this was enough time to be fair, Hussein acknowledged there might not have been adequate time to "go deep into things." When asked to clarify this statement, Hussein responded there may have been other conspirators who were not identified. Hussein does not know whether there were other participants, but he reiterated that the information available and the time utilized for the investigation were enough to convict those who were identified. He commented that the law says it is better for one guilty person to go free than for many innocent people to go to jail without being guilty.

(S) Hussein stated he does not know the specific results of the investigation. This matter was decided by a court and the sentences were carried out thereafter. When questioned about Abd Al-Khaliq Al-Samarra'i's involvement and how it was possible for someone already in prison to be a part of such a plot, Hussein responded, "Ask those who did the investigation." When asked to provide the names of the investigators, Hussein stated he does not remember. The interviewer noted that Barzan Al-Tikriti, having just been named Director of the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS), headed the investigation. Hussein replied that there must have been a committee, but he denied knowledge of the composition of any such committee. He further denied knowing anyone who might know the composition of this committee.

(S) Regarding the involvement of the RCC in this investigation, Hussein first denied knowledge of any details. He observed that if the matter was decided by tribunal, there must have been an official committee. The interviewer reminded Hussein of a speech he gave on August 8, 1979, wherein he stated that the RCC, formerly numbering twenty-one, now included sixteen members due to the implication of five RCC members in the plot. Hussein continued in the speech saying, of the sixteen RCC members, three conducted the investigation and seven formed the tribunal which heard the facts and decided the punishment. In the speech, Hussein added that this was the first time in the

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history of revolutionary movements and human struggle that over half of the supreme leadership of a nation took part in such a matter. Hussein responded to the interviewer, "Good, very good." According to the Constitution, members of the RCC must be tried by other RCC members, not by a tribunal outside of the RCC. When questioned regarding the fairness or neutrality of the RCC conducting a trial of its own members, Hussein replied that fairness existed within the individuals of the RCC. The plot was not against them, it was against Hussein. Additionally, the Constitution, which dictated procedure, existed well before the plot.

~~(S)~~ When questioned regarding previous statements he made saying the plot was against the Party, Hussein replied, "I did not say that. I said it was against Saddam." The conspirators plotted with another country (Syria) to prevent Hussein from coming to power. While it is true Hussein was head of the Party, the plot was against him individually. Hussein believes there were individuals who did not want him in power because he would not be "easy to control." With another person as President, who had conspired with the five members of the RCC and the other country, others would have been able to control Iraq. Hussein acknowledged that a tentative agreement regarding unification of Syria and Iraq was being worked on at the time, specifically through Tariq Aziz. However, the plot ended that discussion/agreement as "anything based on plotting has no value." When questioned what the other country hoped to gain, Hussein responded, "Ask them. We did not ask them."

~~(S)~~ Hussein denied knowledge of any reward being paid to the individual(s) who discovered the plot. When questioned as to the reason for videotaping the meeting on July 22, Hussein stated the video was made in order to inform the Party of what had occurred. He confirmed that, as seen in the video, there were many emotions present, including sadness. The interviewer pointed out that fear appeared to be the most noticeable emotion, first from audience members, and then from those who were named and shouted their innocence upon being ordered to stand. Hussein acknowledged that he, himself, ordered at least one of the named individuals to leave the hall.

~~(S)~~ The interviewer noted three things in the video which seemed to stand out, including Hussein smoking a cigar, the expression on Tariq Aziz' face, and Ali Hasan Al-Majid shouting

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about Al-Samarra'i and his belief that conspiracies would continue as long as Al-Samarra'i was alive. Hussein responded that he knows the meaning behind each example provided by the interviewer. He stated that he rarely smokes unless the "times are difficult." Hussein questioned the expression of Aziz, whether it was a happy or sad one. The interviewer responded that Aziz appeared scared. Hussein stated this "reading" by the interviewer was not correct, "we were all scared." Regarding Ali Hasan, Hussein asked the interviewer whether he was implying Al-Samarra'i was executed simply because of the words of Ali Hasan.

~~(S)~~ Hussein stated copies of the video of the July 22, 1979 meeting were sent to Iraqi ambassadors in other countries. The videos were to be used by embassy officials to present information to Iraqis living outside of the country concerning events occurring within Iraq. Hussein denied knowledge of whether the video was shown to leaders of other countries. Hussein remarked, if it was shown to such persons, that would have been "a good thing, not a bad thing." Perhaps the video would have been shown to other leaders because another Arab country was involved in the plot. Regarding whether the video was made and distributed to demonstrate that Hussein was in charge of Iraq, Hussein responded that the interviewer had seen the video and "this is your opinion, you have the right."

~~(S)~~ The interviewer provided comments reportedly made by Hussein around the time of the plot wherein he said, "With our Party methods, there is no chance for any one who disagrees with us to jump on a couple of tanks and overthrow us." Hussein stated he does not remember making such a comment, but believed he could explain as these words were a part of his thinking. This message was directed at not only the other country with whom the conspirators were plotting but also to all Party members.

~~(S)~~ Hussein was questioned about the sincerity of his reported previous statements to Bakr in the 1960s and 1970s wherein he expressed a desire to leave the government. Hussein responded by saying that after 1974, he believed he had a moral obligation to the Iraqi people. After many discussions with President Bakr, Hussein acknowledged it was "his fate." From this time forward, he decided he would accept such an appointment and planned for the Presidency.

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