

How tepid response to US Census 2020 hurts Arab Americans

Mon, 2020-08-03 22:39

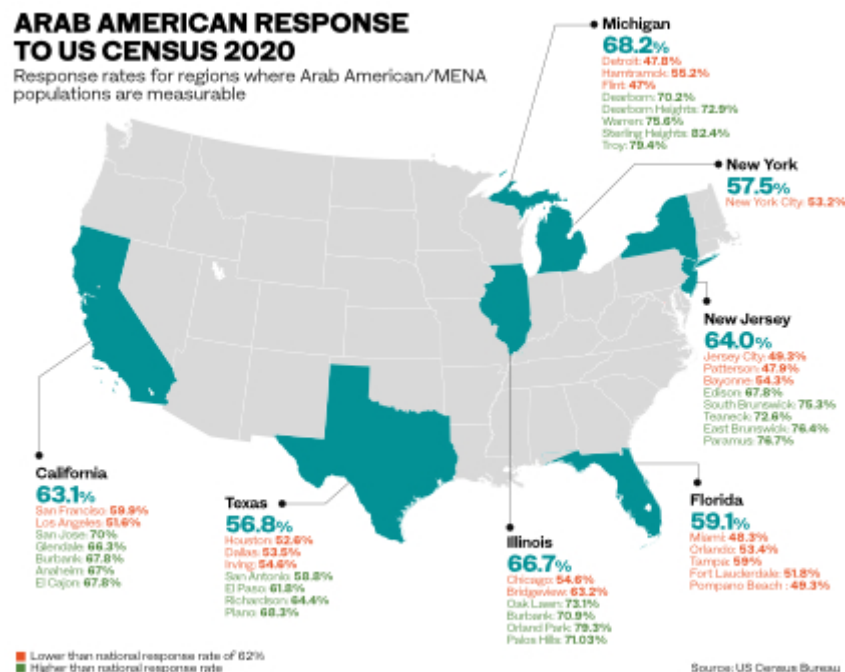
CHICAGO: Nearly half of Arab communities in the US are lagging in responding to the 2020 Census, a trend that could jeopardize their share of a \$675 billion annual funding resource, according to US Census Bureau officials.

Michael Cook, the chief public spokesman for US Census 2020, said he is optimistic that the situation will change. Efforts are being made to connect with members of all communities –including, and especially, Arab Americans and others whose origins can be traced to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – and encourage them to complete the questionnaires.

Attempts in the past four decades by Arab Americans to have “Arab” or “MENA” included as an option for race on census forms, to encourage greater participation, have failed. As a result, Arabs continue to fall under the “white” category. Cook said the consequences of failure to fill out the form include a potential loss of funding and lack of recognition.

The overall response rate so far across the US is 62 percent, meaning that 38 percent of the population has yet to complete the census. The rate among Arab Americans in many regions is good, but it has been poor in others.

“If you look at all of the areas of the country in which people of the MENA community are prevalent, that response rate is actually north of the national response rate, in the 70th percentile,” said Cook.



“We are excited about that response but we know that, as good stewards of taxpayer dollars, we want to give everybody the word and encouragement to continue to respond.”

Places where the census response rate among Arab American and MENA populations are below the national average include major cities such as New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

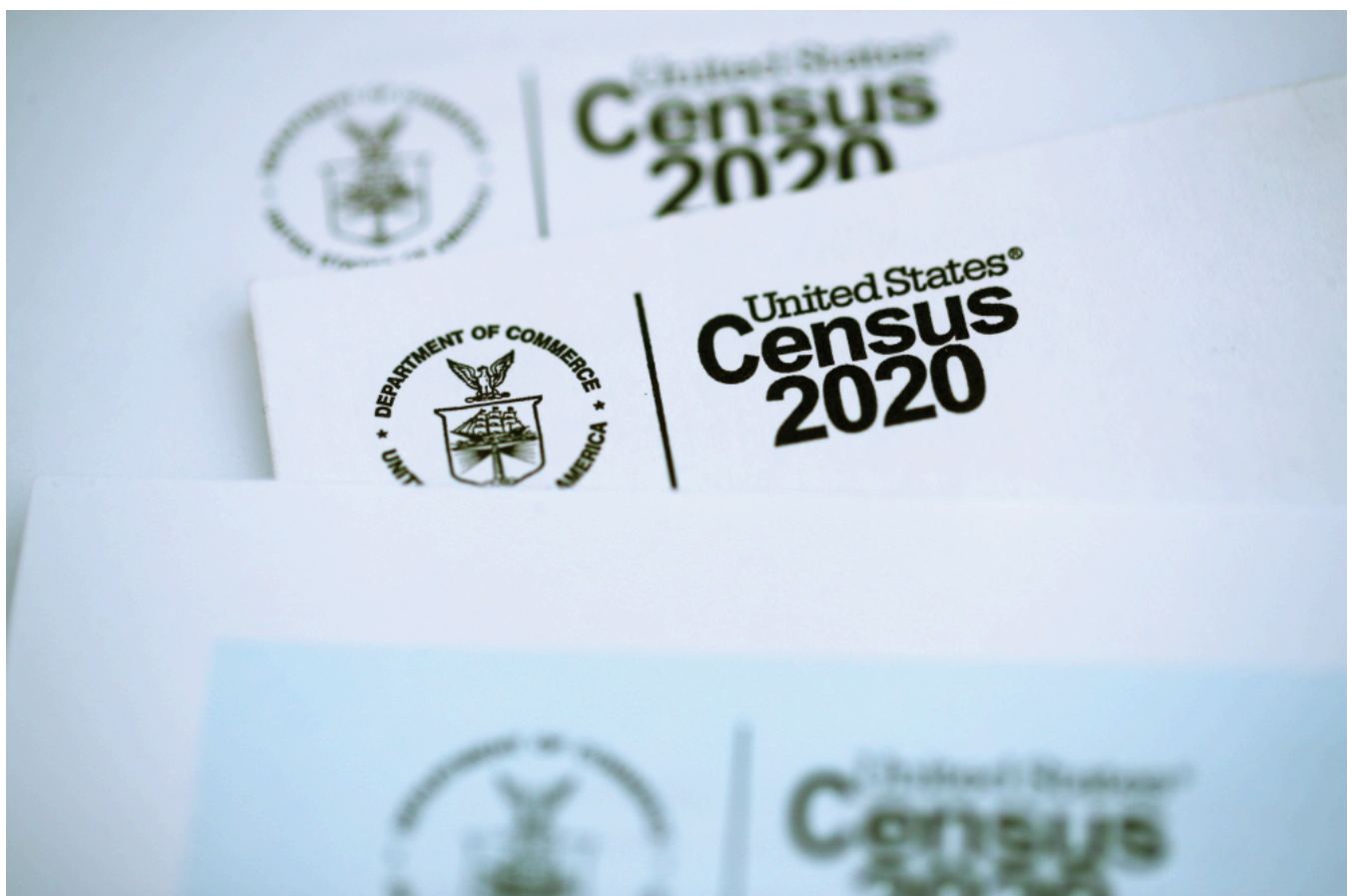
A push is also needed in locations such as Hamtramck and Flint in Michigan; Jersey City, Patterson and Bayonne in New Jersey; Houston, Dallas and Irving in Texas; and almost every major city in Florida, including Orlando, Miami, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale and Pompano Beach.

However, the response in others places, such as Chicago, has been more encouraging.

"When you look at the MENA community, we know which suburbs of major markets have tended to house (Arab/MENA) communities in the past," Cook said. "This impacts political representation. It impacts the federal funding – \$675 billion every year – going down to the local level for much-needed social services."

He added that the Census Bureau is continuing its outreach efforts in Arab American and MENA communities. It is hiring people from those communities to conduct follow-up activities to encourage people to complete the forms. It is also partnering with key Arab American organizations to ensure the message reaches as many people as possible.

Imad Hamad, director of the American Human Rights Council in Dearborn, Michigan, is one of those "official partners" working closely with the 2020 Census campaign. He said Arab Americans have a history of concerns about being excluded from census designations.



The US Census logo appears on census materials received in the mail with an invitation to fill out census information online (Getty Images)

While many ethnic and national groups are identified in the 2020 Census, encouraging their participation, efforts to have “Arab” or “MENA” include as official categories have been persistently rebuffed. There are other concerns, too, as a consequence of which, Hamad said, the Census Bureau has connected with some Arab groups but not the wider community.

“The census has not been comprehensive and fully inclusive regarding the allocation of funds and resources,” he said. “Most funds were provided to a select few, neglecting the grass-root organizations that matter and which have the influence to compel people to participate. It smacked of a selective approach determined by political connections and power.”

Even within the Arab American community there is some disagreement about whether “Arab” should be included as an option on the census.

“Some Arab Americans resist the designation ‘Arab’ as a separate category from ‘white’ on the US census form because they don’t consider themselves a minority,” said Hamad.

“However, Arab Americans are de jure, but not de facto, members of the white majority. They are in limbo – legally considered a part of the white majority, but de facto seen as being in the category ‘other.’”

He also pointed out that Arab Americans can select the “other” category on the census form and write in “Arab” to describe themselves if they want.

“Arab Americans are not perceived by the broad American society as white,” Hamad said. “But since they are legally white, Arab Americans don’t benefit from the classification of minority status, with all the legal and political ramifications that classification entails.”

Despite these ongoing concerns he said that on the whole, Arab Americans have responded well to the census to ensure they are seen, funded and empowered.

“What really matters to the vast majority of Arab Americans is to be counted,” Hamad added.

Hassan Nijem, president of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce in Chicago, works closely with the Census Bureau and the Arab Americans it hires to engage with Arab and Muslim Americans.



Workers of the organization Make the Road New York attend a Census training meeting in Queens on March 13, 2020 in New York City. (Photo by Kena Betancur / AFP)

“There have been some issues,” he said. “Funds have been given mainly to non-Arab organizations and then sub-contracted to only a few Arab American organizations.

“But we have to be active, involved and loud to make sure the Census Bureau hears our voices. The money that can go to the Arab American community is significant, and the political empowerment is critical to ensuring that we have a voice in this country.”

When Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker provided \$20 million to promote the census, little of the money reached Arab American organizations, said Nijem. African American and Hispanic groups were the main beneficiaries of the funds, from which a few thousand dollars were allocated to census-awareness campaigns in the Arab and MENA community, he added.

"We can't wait for the government to see us," said Nijem. "We have to be loud and make them see us and include us. More money needs to be spent on the census in the Arab and MENA community. It's not just good for us, it is good for America."

The encouraging response to the census by Arab Americans in Chicago might be attributable to a long history of efforts to promote inclusion in a particularly diverse city.

As far back as the 1980s, Anna Mustapha, the only Arab American to have served as a member of the Chicago Board of Education, was recruited by the Census Bureau to promote participation by the Arab and MENA communities.

Ellisa Johnson, the deputy regional director of the Chicago Regional Census Bureau, said the 2020 Census recognizes that Chicagoland has a diverse population that speaks about 124 languages. The bureau has hired census workers who speak 24 of them, including Arabic.

"We have one of the most diverse cities in the country and it is important that Arab Americans are included in everything we do," she added.

"We want everyone to feel included in the 2020 Census. It is vitally important for the MENA community to make sure everyone is counted, to ensure we have fair congressional representation."

Census 2020 spokesman Cook said much is at risk in communities that do not complete the census form. Census authorities will attempt to fill any gaps created by lack of responses, but their efforts might yield data that is much less accurate than information provided by those who live in the communities.

"If you don't do it yourself ... there are processes and procedures in place where we use proxies to get additional information, look at administrative records and try to fill in those gaps," Cook said.

However, every person completing their own form, he added, "is the best response and the most accurate information, which can be reflected in political representation as well as federal funding."

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Campaigners call for US census to recognize Arab identity
At 90, Alaska Native woman is 1st counted in US Census

[Two dead, hundreds affected by chicken contamination in Jordan](#)

Tue, 2020-08-04 00:25

AMMAN: When Abeer Saeed, 40 years old, and her family wanted a shawarma sandwich, they did not expect to end up in the local hospital. Saeed and her husband, two daughters and a niece live in Baqaa camp, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan.

Talking to Arab News from a hospital bed, she said that soon after eating the chicken shawarma, she felt feverish, with sharp pain and diarrhea. The same symptoms were experienced by all other family members as they headed to the

local hospital only to find tens of others suffering from what was believed to be food poisoning.

Mohammad Abed, director of the local Prince Hussein hospital in Ain Al-Basha, told reporters that a 5-year-old child arrived at the hospital with major organ failure. A married man who was unable to find available hospital beds was sent home, but his condition deteriorated, and he passed away.

Prime Minister Omar Razzaz appointed a high-level investigative committee headed by several ministers, including Minister of Research and Higher Education Muhyieddeen Touq, president of the Jordan University of Science and Technology and deputy head of the Royal Scientific Society. The committee was given wide powers to investigate the cause of the problem and to recommend solutions.

Health Minister Saad Jaber said that the child, along with 700 others, had been affected by food poisoning after consuming contaminated chickens. The As-Salt attorney general's office said that the owner of the warehouse that distributed the chickens has been remanded to the As-Salt prison for a week. Nizar Mhaidat, head of Jordan's Food and Drug Administration, said that lab tests showed that the uncooked chicken used for the shawarma sandwich was affected by *Enterococcus faecalis* and *Campylobacter/bacillus cereus* bacteria. Mhaidat said that food inspectors made 500 field visits in which 316 warnings were issued and 74 food enterprises were stopped. In addition, 23 locations were permanently closed with red wax as a result of serious food violations.

FASTFACT

Food inspectors made 500 field visits in which 316 warnings were issued and 74 food enterprises were stopped.

He added that 8,500 kg of unusable food have been destroyed and that 59 laboratory specimens were checked in locations throughout Jordan, concluding that the center involved in exporting meat and chicken was the main cause of the food poisoning in Baqaa. Jordan Food and Drug Administration officials confirm that they have no offices in the Baqaa area where the incidents occurred despite the fact that over 100,000 people live in a very cramped facility.

Senior health experts, however, have told Arab News that what happened was not food poisoning but rather contamination.

"What we have here is a clear case of food contamination, possibly as a result of a lack of supervision of the food chain," a senior health source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Arab News.

The source said that Jordan's food safety standards are compatible with international and, specifically, European standards. The problem appears to be with the partial relaxation of the supervision of the food chain, most likely because health inspectors are overburdened in managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Medical experts in Jordan are confident that the current crisis will pass and that stricter supervision mechanisms will be installed to ensure that the public is protected.



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Jordan calls on Israel to respect Al-Aqsa mosque sanctity
Jordan rejects Israel's settlement decision

[For Iraqi mothers-to-be, hospitals are pandemic no-go zones](#)

Mon, 2020-08-03 01:05

KUT, IRAQ: Iraqi midwife Umm Mariam used to help bring three babies into the world per day. But with mothers-to-be avoiding pandemic-hit hospitals, she now delivers twice that number in her makeshift home clinic.

Across the country recovering from decades of war, health centers face shortages of oxygen supplies and protective equipment even as coronavirus cases soar to almost 130,000, with nearly 5,000 deaths.

Among those infected in the economically battered country, according to official figures, are 3,000 medical staff.

"That's why many women now prefer to deliver their children at my place," says Umm Mariam, speaking from the clinic she has set up at her home in Kut, southeast of Baghdad.

The dire situation is a far cry from the Iraq of the 1970s, which prided itself on one of the best health care systems in the Middle East, by offering free state-of-the-art care to its citizens.

But back-to-back conflicts – from the war with Iran that started in 1980 to the US-led military campaigns and the battle against the Daesh group – have sapped funds used to maintain the system.

For years international sanctions made it impossible to get new medical equipment or even spare parts into the country.

The government still allocates barely 2 percent of its annual budget, which is funded almost entirely by oil sales, to the Health Ministry.

Even before COVID-19 hit this year, Iraq's hospitals were run down, with outdated or broken equipment and staff often poorly trained and overworked.

Mais, 29, is expecting to give birth to her first child in a few weeks. Last year, she could have gone to a public hospital and paid a small, symbolic fee for the delivery.

"But I was afraid of COVID-19, so my gynecologist advised me to go to a private clinic," she said.

HIGHLIGHT

Across the country recovering from decades of war, health centers face shortages of oxygen supplies and protective equipment even as coronavirus cases soar to almost 130,000, with nearly 5,000 deaths.

Private clinics are flourishing, but few can afford them – particularly as Iraq's poverty rate is set to double to 40 percent this year, according to a World Bank prediction.

Mais will have to shell out nearly \$1,500, but she feels she has no choice.

"All my friends did the same thing because the obstetric services have been exposed to patients infected with COVID-19," she said.

One of the nine public hospitals in Wasit province, where Kut is located, has been transformed into a coronavirus treatment ward.

The other eight are trying to operate as usual, referring all COVID-19 cases to the specialized facility.

Still, residents are so afraid they will be exposed to the virus that they have largely stopped going to medical facilities altogether.

Mehdi Al-Shuwayli, who heads the local branch of Iraq's medical syndicate, said patient intake has been slashed in half.

"In the first three months of 2020, we carried out 400 surgeries. The next three months, it was just 187," added Qader Fadhel, a surgeon at the public Al-Karama Hospital.

Instead of heading to hospitals, Iraqis suffering from illness and injuries are flocking somewhere else: pharmacies.

"Around 90 percent of my customers describe their symptoms to me so I can prescribe the medication myself, and they can skip going to a hospital altogether," one pharmacist, who preferred to speak anonymously, said.

They then treat themselves at home, skeptical they could even get an appointment in a country with just 14 hospital beds for every 10,000 people, according to World Health Organization data.

France, by comparison, has 60 beds for every 10,000 people. Hospitals are also facing a shortage of oxygen tanks for those severely affected by COVID-19's attack on the lungs. A state-sponsored factory in Taji, north of Baghdad, is struggling to fill the gap. "Every day, we produce 1,000 to 1,500 oxygen tanks for hospitals but we also prepare around 100 for those bedridden at home," says Ahmed Abdelmutlaq, the factory's deputy director. Even for those treating themselves at home, costs can add up. Oxygen tanks, Vitamin C or zinc tablets meant to boost immunity and even some face masks have tripled or quadrupled in price, Iraqis trying out domestic remedies said. Still, they insist, going it alone is a better choice than catching COVID-19 in a dilapidated public hospital.



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Iran reaps the rewards of Saddam's 1990 Kuwait invasion
Flights between Turkey, Iraq suspended over coronavirus

[**President of Algeria secures fugitive**](#)

army officer with Erdogan call

Mon, 2020-08-03 01:13

ALGIERS: Algeria's president phoned his Turkish counterpart last month to secure the return of a fugitive military official who fled Algeria days after its powerful army chief died in December, a top Algerian security source said.

Guermit Bounouira was handed over to Algerian security officials in Turkey on Thursday, accused of leaking military secrets, and will face a military judge on Monday in Blida prison southwest of Algiers, the source said.

Turkey's surrender of Bounouira to Algerian authorities underscores the importance Ankara attaches to its relationship with Algeria, a powerful neighbor of Libya where Turkish forces have intervened in the civil war.

Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune phoned Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan about a week before Eid Al-Adha holiday, which began on Friday, to request he hand Bounouira over, the source said.

Bounouira, a top aide to the late army chief Ahmed Gaed Salah, is accused of leaking a chart showing movements of army officers including their names and codes. The chart has circulated on social media, embarrassing the army, although it was unclear who posted it.

BACKGROUND

Bounouira fled to Turkey in the week after Gaed Salah died and the Algerian security source said he had subsequently leaked military secrets to activists based abroad.

Gaed Salah emerged last year as Algeria's most powerful man when weekly mass protests succeeded in unseating the veteran president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and a host of other officials.

However, Gaed Salah died suddenly of a heart attack on Dec. 23, weeks after a presidential election that he had pushed for, but which the street protest movement opposed as illegitimate.

Bounouira fled to Turkey in the week after Gaed Salah died and the Algerian security source said he had subsequently leaked military secrets to activists based abroad.

"Guermit was Gaed Salah's closest man. As such he was aware of military secrets," the source said.

Tebboune is trying to stamp his own mark on Algeria's government after Bouteflika's two decades in office and appointed a new army chief in January.



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Algeria president orders probe into forest firesHaftar warns Erdogan: Stay out of Libya or you face our bullets

[Iran reaps the rewards of Saddam's 1990 Kuwait invasion](#)

Sun, 2020-08-02 23:23

LONDON: Thirty years on, we continue to endure the catastrophic reverberations of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This act set in motion events that would unleash a three-headed hydra of sectarianism, terrorism and Iranian militancy.

The August 2 invasion constituted an immense psychological shock. We woke to images of utter horror and chaos: Arab soldiers assaulting and looting another Arab nation. Ordinary Kuwaiti families upended from lives of luxury –

fleeing as terrified refugees into Saudi Arabia. The invasion was particularly disconcerting, given that Kuwait had been a principal ally and backer for Baghdad during the previous decade's war with Iran.

Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon famously marked his point of no return, committing his armies to a devastating and history-changing Roman civil war. The Kuwait invasion represented Saddam Hussein's own personal Rubicon crossing.

In 1990, Saddam was just another dictator who would have scarcely deserved a mention in the history books if he had been displaced in yet another Baathist, communist or Islamist coup a couple of years later. The Kuwait invasion saw him justifiably demonized in the global media as a savage, dictatorial monster who would have to be slain.

Within a year, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis would be dead – murdered by their own regime after the brutal suppression of uprisings which followed the Kuwait conflict. The Iraqi army was humiliated and destroyed, with tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers dead, and many others fleeing home to join ill-fated uprisings leaving the skeletons of thousands of abandoned tanks scattered across the desert.

1990 Kuwait invasion recap

- On July 18 Iraq accuses Kuwait of stealing oil and encroaching on territory.
- Iraq's President Saddam Hussein demands \$2.4 billion from Kuwait.
- Kuwait accuses Iraq of trying to drill oil wells on its territory.
- Iraq accuses Kuwait of flooding oil market and driving down prices.
- On August 1 Arab League and Saudi Arabia suspend mediation attempts.
- On August 2 Radio Kuwait accuses Iraqi troops of occupying its territory.
- Faced with 100,000 Iraqi troops and 300 tanks, Kuwaiti army is overwhelmed.
- Kuwait City falls and Kuwait's ruler Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah flees to Saudi Arabia.
- UN Security Council demands immediate pullout of Iraqi forces from Kuwait.
- On August 6, Security Council slaps trade and military embargo on Iraq.
- President George H.W. Bush announces dispatch of troops to Saudi Arabia.
- On August 8, Iraq announces Kuwait's "total and irreversible" incorporation.
- Later in the month, Iraq annexes Kuwait as its 19th province.

President George H.W. Bush made the equally fateful decision not to pursue Saddam's army to Baghdad. The rights and wrongs of Bush's decision continue to be argued over, but this left Saddam in power – wounded and vengeful. Unquestionably in 1990, Saddam had to be forced out of Kuwait, particularly

as there were fears that he might send his forces deeper into the Gulf region. Yet cutting Saddam down to size led to a fundamental destabilization of the regional balance of power.

Throughout the 1980s, the ayatollahs' regime in Tehran had been kept at bay by means of the vicious confrontation with Iraq, costing around a million lives. When Saddam's regime fell like a dead branch in 2003, the Islamic Republic remained as a dominant regional force, free to spread its tentacles into Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Bahrain and beyond.

Already during the 1980s and 1990s, Tehran had been responsible for terrorist attacks, militant insurgencies and attempted coups, such as the 1996 Alkhobar bombings, which killed 19 US service personnel.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

A number of Iraqi regime figures gained prominence during or after the 1990 Kuwait invasion

Saddam Hussein
President, prime minister and Revolutionary Command Council chairman



Captured by coalition forces in December 2003. Executed in Baghdad in 2006 after being tried and sentenced by Iraqi court.

Izzat Ibrahim Al-Douri
Vice president and Regional Command No. 2



Never captured or killed after the fall of Saddam's regime. Remains at large.

Taha Yasin Ramadan
Head of Popular Army militias, later vice president



Captured in Mosul in 2003 and handed over to US forces. Tried, sentenced and executed in Baghdad in 2007

Taha Muhyi Al-Din Maruf
Vice president

Taken into custody in 2003 after the fall of Baghdad. Died of cancer in Jordan in 2007

Sa'dun Hammadi
Regional Command member and later prime minister

Imprisoned after the fall of Baghdad

in 2003 but later released. Died of leukemia in Germany in 2007

Tareq Aziz
Deputy prime minister and senior Ba'ath party official



Surrendered to US forces in 2003. Died after suffering a heart attack in Iraqi prison hospital in 2015.

Sabawi Ibrahim Al-Tikriti
Head of Mukhabarat (Iraqi Secret Service)

Handed over to US forces. Sentenced to death in 2009, but died of cancer in prison in 2013.

Uday Hussein
First son of Saddam Hussein and Iraq Olympic Committee boss



Died in firefight with a US task force in Mosul in 2003 after the invasion.

Qusay Hussein
Second son of Saddam Hussein and member of Regional Command



Died in the same firefight as his brother Uday after the 2003 invasion.

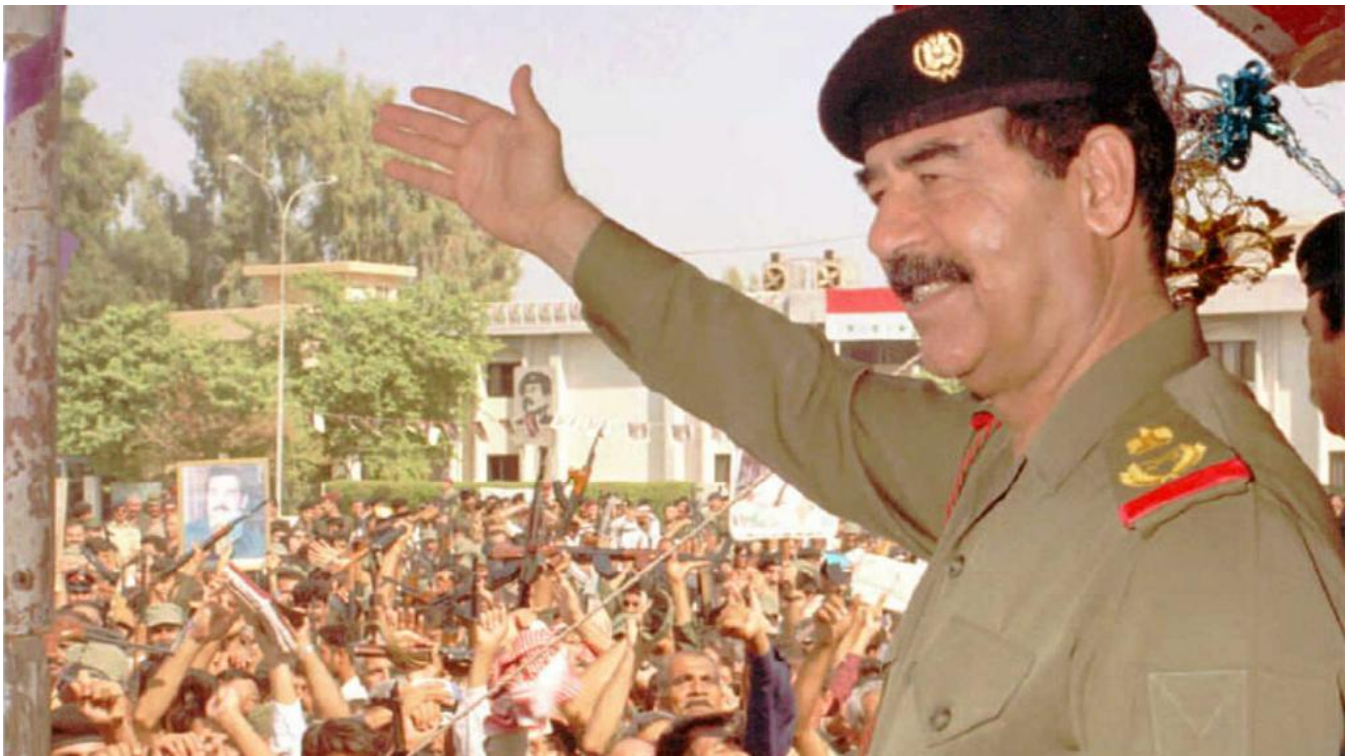
By Christopher Hamill-Stewart

With Saddam gone, the ayatollahs desired not only to ensure that Iraq could never again exist as a threat, but to export their revolution throughout the Middle East, following the blueprint of Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Consequently, a sizable chunk of the region has been severed from the Arab sphere of influence, with Tehran today trying to knit these disparate nations together as a miserable and marginalized bloc of “resistance” states.

Yes, Saddam was a monster – a murderous threat to his own people and his neighbors. But in the years since 1990 we have discovered that there are worse things than his kind of monster.

When the hateful regimes of Saddam, Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi, Syria’s Bashar Assad and Yemen’s Ali Abdullah Saleh were challenged and upended, the result was mass civil chaos which has cost upwards of a million lives, displacing countless millions. It may be more than a generation before these nations enjoy the most elementary levels of stability, if ever.



Former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein rallying his troops. (AFP photo)

I was an in-house analyst for CNN during the 2003 conflict. Anyone familiar with Iraq knew that regime change would be infinitely more challenging than President George W. Bush’s administration claimed. We shared Iraqis’ jubilation at the prospect of being rid of Saddam. Yet in our worst nightmares, few could have guessed how devastatingly far-reaching the ramifications of the invasion would be today, leaving Iraq and other nations as crippled, satellite dependencies of Tehran.

The events of 1990 and 2003 ignited the catastrophic Shia-Sunni divide, which in Iraq alone saw tens of thousands massacred in sectarian warfare as Iranian-sponsored militants bloodily erased Sunni and Christian populations from entire districts of Baghdad.

Saddam's war helped radicalize figures like Osama bin Laden against the US, leading to Al-Qaeda and 9/11, which in turn set in motion the 2003 invasion, precipitating an explosive expansion of jihadist terrorism: Violence giving birth to violence on an ever-expanding scale.

Yes, Saddam was a monster, but in the years since 1990 we have discovered that there are infinitely worse things than monsters.

Baria Alamuddin

The White House in 2003 had neither the vision nor the desire to establish a stable, sovereign and well-governed Iraqi state. Through incompetence and malice, the US-led coalition succeeded in triggering a bloodbath, unifying Iraqis against them and handing over the keys of governance to Tehran. It all could have been so different.

During the 1980s, Saddam had been an ally of America and the West. These states conveniently turned a blind eye to his homicidal regime's horrific crimes. Saddam's invasion of Kuwait would change all that, while transforming himself from a necessary bulwark against Tehran to an international pariah. Overnight, he unified the entire world against him.

Today in 2020, there is plentiful evidence that Iran itself may be bringing the world to a tipping point where its terrorism, militancy and criminality become too horrific to ignore, with its suppression of the democratic aspirations of citizens throughout its "resistance bloc," use of proxies to attack peace-loving nations, and efforts to acquire nuclear weapons to menace the world.

Just like Saddam, sabre-rattling ayatollahs risk their own Rubicon moment by taking their aggressive expansionism a step too far. And just like Saddam, the Iranian ayatollahs will eventually unite the world against them, bringing an unlamented end to their Satanic Republic.

• *Baria Alamuddin is an award-winning journalist and broadcaster in the Middle East and the UK. She is editor of the Media Services Syndicate and has interviewed numerous heads of state.*









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Thirty years ago, Iraq invaded KuwaitUK envoy to Iraq threatened by pro-Iran militias