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WATBAN IBRAHIM AL HASAN

TF 1.4a High Value Detainee, Half-Brother to Saddam Hussein, former Interior Minister
23 May 2008
Iraqi High Tribunal, International Zone, Baghdad

by (b)(3), (b)(6)
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This interview resulted from Maj Gen Stone's April 2008 initiative to have historians interview high value detainees before they were returned to Iraqi custody. TF 1.4a informed the detainees of the opportunity for an interview and passed out release statements for them to sign if they were willing to be interviewed. Of 73 detainees, I believe only 14 have agreed to interviews. As of 23 May, some 17 of the detainees had been transferred from Camp Cropper to the IHT, where some are being tried on various crimes. I do not know what charges Watban is facing right now. The goal right now is to transfer the first few to Iraqi custody by 1 June.

Watban was about 5'10" with a very dark complexion and quite hairy, unshaven, but no a beard or mustache. He was wearing a kind of white, v-neck t-shirt and dark blue sweat pants. He had a silver necklace with a half-circle broken pendant with an Islamic haditha, I believe it was "There is no God but God." I assumed his wife had the other half. He told me that it was not his wife, but his daughter who had the other half, and they would put them together again someday when they could be together again.

The interview went well. He was quite responsive. We started a little after 1300. Around 1350, he indicated time was pressing because he wanted his break, the social hour outside to visit, smoke, have tea, etc. I asked a couple of more questions and he became increasingly animated, louder, and talked faster, with huge gestures to me. He was quite worked up by the end.

Abstract

The Ba'ath Party took over in 1968 to stop the parties that were ruining Iraq. Conspiracies against Saddam forced him to crush resistance. He invaded Kuwait because the Iran-Iraq war, in which Iran was defending all the Arabs against Iran, ruined the Iraqi economy. The king of Kuwait did not insult Iraq, but the atmosphere was insulting. Saddam fell because the sanctions eroded the military and the economy. Recent operation in Basra and Sadr City have hurt the coalition's image and weakened Maliki, who looks like a tyrant. The coalition must feed the poor, establish security, and provide food and all basic services. Democracy is pointless unless you first have safety and security. People loved Saddam because he was generous in handing out money. If the coalition leaves, half of all Iraqis will die in a civil war.

Interview

Watban was born in Tikrit in 1952. He went to law school in Baghdad but never practiced law, which required more training than he did.

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What jobs did you hold?

I held many different jobs and did a variety of things.

I asked this question two or three times in different ways and never got a straight forward answer. I understood for two years he seemed to be out of favor, away from Saddam, but then he just did what he was directed to do in many different circumstances.

How and why did the Ba'ath Party take over in 1968?

There were too many conflicts between parties, between the communists and the nationalists. Before 1968, the communists were gradually taking over. The Prime Minister was a communist and communists were purging others out of government. Before 1968, there was the 1963 revolution, before that the 1959 attempted assassination.

In 1970, Iran started interfering in Iraq by supporting a revolt against the Ba'ath Party by a General Abdul Ghany AL RAWY [Double check name and spelling]. In 1973, the government nationalized the oil fields. Before that, the Kurds were causing problems in the north in 1971. Saddam went up and negotiated a deal with Mustafa al Barzani. They resolved a ceasefire and Kurdish autonomy.

in 1979, Saddam consolidated control in the Ba'ath Party. Ba'athi leaders took over the most powerful positions in the government. Saddam had been Bakr's deputy. Saddam recommended Bakr retire because he was an old man. Bakr did retire, and he received all the rights of an ex-president. He was revered and treated very well, with great deference.

Saddam discovered a conspiracy by Syrian Ba'athists. The Syrian Ba'ath had split from the mother party. In 1978, the two parties were talking about uniting, but the Syrian leader, Assad was trying to get Iraqi Ba'athists to topple Saddam so that Assad could be the overall ruler.

How did Saddam hold power for so long?

When he took power, he purged the party of all the bad people, the bad apples. He kept the rest who supported him, and the party ran the country. The Ba'ath Party was the power of the country. Saddam was smart in how he ran things politically, economically, and militarily, and he got good results and kept good relations with Arab leaders. His only Arab enemy was Assad. He also got good support from the U.S. and from Europe in the 1980s, and had good relations with Africa and South America.

Why did Saddam attack Kuwait in 1990?

When Iraq fought Iran from 1980 to 1988, and that war defended the entire Arab world and the US and the west from Iran . . . it stopped the sectarian invasion . . . and all the Arab nations and the US supported Iraq against Iran . . . Iraq stopped Iran on the road to Palestine . . . the war drained the Iraqi economy for eight years. It was clear that we needed better access to the gulf and the Iraqi economy was zero.

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After the Iranian war, the Arabs cut Iraq off from support. Saddam sent a representative to Kuwait to request support and Kuwait refused. Historically, Kuwait belongs to the Basra governorate. In the 1950s, King Faizal asked for it back. In the 1960s, the government again asked for it back. Kuwait just made excuses.

Kuwait's economy should have supported Iraq. Iraq lost manpower in the war with Iran, and it was protecting Kuwait. During the war, Iraq asked Kuwait for access to Bubayan Island to use it as a staging point for operations against Iran. Kuwait refused.

The US Ambassador met with Saddam, April Glaspy, and she said the U.S. regarded the Iraq-Kuwait dispute as an Arab problem. Arafat and King Hussein in Jordan both supported Iraq.

Did Kuwait insult Iraq?¹

The king did not insult Iraq, but there was an insulting atmosphere due to the tough economic times. There was a joke going around to the effect that an Iraqi woman, using a term of respect for women beginning with an M (you'll have to find an interpreter and/or listen closely to the recording) was worth no more than a Kuwaiti dinar. It was braggadocio about the strength of the Kuwaiti currency, not directly and exactly an insult to Iraqi women.

Why did Saddam fall so quickly?

Iraqi deteriorated through the twelve years of sanctions. We had felt the western green light to oppose the Iranian threat, but had no more strength to move forward. The military deteriorated and the economy went downhill. I did not believe . . . (?)

What is your impression of the recent operations in Basra and Sadr City?

The coalition's image has been hurt. What has been happening today is worse than in 1991.² Maliki is losing power now because of these events, because of how he has been crushing Basra and Sadr City. This is excessive force. The uneducated and poor people are losing respect for this brutal tyranny. The majority of the population feels bad for the people, the very poor are suffering.³

What you need to do is feed the poor. When you feed the Iraqi poor, they will support the government. A full belly is the key to everything, that and basic services, water, electricity, power, and fuel. Make prices affordable. Establish security and ensure there is no crime in the streets. People have been hungry for security since their childhoods,

¹ I have seen an account, according to which, Saddam in detention claimed that the King of Kuwait told Saddam's envoy that Kuwait would not stop squeezing Iraq economically "until every Iraqi woman was a two-bit whore." I don't mean that as a quote but a paraphrase of the insult I recall.

² I screwed up here. I should have immediately asked him "what happened in 1991?"

³ The discussion picked up pace quickly. Watban spoke loud and fast in Arabic and the interpreter translated ideas as quickly as he could. It was too fast and inexact for me to write exactly what the interpreter said. All notes from this point on reflect what I thought the interpreter meant Watban said. Rather than listening to the interpreter's English and transcribing it, it would be better to have a translator listen and summarize Watban's words and thoughts, which seemed to me very repetitive, at least as given by the interpreter.

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and women want security. 80% of Iraqi people have never been [outside?] to Iraq's borders. Now there are power limits and orphans on the street. The government is not providing social services and taking care of the people. Unemployment is high and people are begging. You need to feed the people, and feed them from Iraqi monies. Iraq is rich. Iraq does not need foreign money, it just needs its own money spent on its own people.

There are three things that you must do. I tell you this, and you must do this. You must make sure the United States does this for Iraq. First, provide security; second provide food; third, provide social interaction, commercial buying and selling, trade, education, culture. People need to see better; they need any improvement. Just provide safety and security and food. What is democracy? Democracy comes after everything else. Democracy doesn't matter if you don't have these other things.

The mosque sheiks are bad. They promote sectarian parties who are against Iraq and Iraqis.

I feel sorry for American troops getting involved in all this mess.

The reason people loved Saddam was because he went out and handed money out to the people. It wasn't his money; it was the Iraqis money. He knew that and they knew that. People worshipped Saddam because he gave them their money.

Iraqis don't need democracy; they need all the basics.

Only normal people can and will help you. Saddam got rid of parties because they were partisans tearing the country apart. In the last five years, the parties have stolen everything. All the parties are like dogs fighting over a piece of meat in the street.

He gestured with his hands, head, and mouth to illustrate a steak lying in the street and dogs tearing at it with their teeth and fighting over it.

What would happen if the coalition forces left Iraq?

If the coalition left Iraq, all of the government of Iraq and the parties would leave the next day and there would be a sectarian war. It would be like Lebanon, and half the country would be killed.

Coalition forces need to support Iraqi national feeling. You should take a popular referendum. Take a vote every four years and give a choice: should the coalition forces stay to help or not? If 51% say yes, then stay.

Only Iraqis can solve Iraq, and Iraq is split into two halves.

The nationalists are fighting the coalition; the traitors are working with the coalition.

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At the end of the interview I asked about the silver pendant he wore, which I described at the beginning. I did not realize at the beginning of the interview to whom I was talking. I learned during the interview who he was.

During the mind, it crossed my mind once or twice that . . . wow, this is Saddam's brother. I imagined Saddam's hanging, and I could not help but imagine a noose around Watban's neck and the rope pulling taut above his head.

Approved for Release

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