**The New Baʿth Archives and the End of Histories**

**Revisiting State-Mosque Relations in Baʿth Ideology as a Test Case**

**Amatzia Baram**

[T]he basic assumptions of Baʿthist intellectual history – mainly that one can read public statements and surmise from them an ideology [is mistaken].”[[1]](#footnote-1)

“[T]he Iraqi archival records reveal that Saddam’s increasing instrumentalization of Islam [in the “Faith Campaign”] should not be attributed to an ideological shift.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

“In the 1990s the regime publicly launched a faith campaign but, simultaneously, behind the scenes, continued to be anti-religious and to repress any sign of real religiosity.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

“The BRCC records show that [in the Faith Campaign] Hussein embraced Islam in order to suffocate it.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Introduction**

Between 1993 and 2003, Saddam Hussein pursued an Islamic “Faith Campaign” in Iraq. Most historians of Iraq see it as an ideological shift from traditional Baʿthist secularism to a Saddam-style Islam, or even Islamism. In 2010, two US-held archives from the Iraqi Baʿthist regime became accessible to researchers: The Baʿth Regional Command Collection (BRCC) at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution and the Saddam Hussein Collection (SHC) at the National Defense University-based Conflict Research Records Center (CRRC). The privileged first few to access these archives produced valuable studies that made a high-quality contribution to our understanding of Baʿthist Iraq. Yet, awed by the dazzling Aladdin’s cave of these archives, three of them pondered whether the regime’s public records still matter. Explicitly or implicitly, Sassoon, Faust, and Helfont have suggested that at least when it comes to state-mosque relations, the newly accessible archives prove that the regime’s public recordsare misleading and dangerous to consider[[5]](#footnote-5) If this is so, the ramifications for the study of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes generally are enormous.

This article examines both the evidence adduced and the analysis produced by these authors in this regard.[[6]](#footnote-6) It argues that, while neither the archival nor the public records furnish the simple and complete truth, they complement each other well as sources. Sometimes, the regime’s open-source communications are more trustworthy, and at other times the archives are. However, taken together, they offer a more complete picture of the regime and its relations with the people it ruled than each one separately. This article looks at this issue through one lens: Saddam’s Islamic “Faith Campaign” (*al-ḥamla al-īmāniyya*)that he conducted mainly between 1993 and 2003. Other lenses like state-tribe relations, Iraqi patriotism (*al-waṭaniya*) as opposed to Arab nationalism (*al-qawmiya*), social policies, party organization and membership, military decisions, education, and culture cannot be examined here for reasons of space.

 Comparing the relevance of the public sources to the previously confidential archival records, this article asks which of the two source types better represents the regime’s ideology. As will be shown below, whenever the three historians discussed here think, explicitly or implicitly, that there is a contradiction between the public and the archival records, they consider the latter as the final arbiters, if not the only standard bearer of truth.[[7]](#footnote-7) Moreover, all three believe that the archives tell them that, unbeknownst to the masses and thepre-archive historian forebears, the regime had a secret ideology. This ideology, they believe, was the realthing, while the publicly expressed ideology was mere smoke and mirrors. Indeed, they believe that they have identified a significant contradiction between these two kinds of sources and that, at least when it comes to state-Islam relations, the public policyof the regime was disingenuous.[[8]](#footnote-8) If we pursue this to its logical end, only secret reports of regime activities may be trusted as conveying its true ideology.

This article argues that there are only rare contradictions between the public and archival sources concerning state-Islam relations. The 1990s metamorphosis from secularism to Islam is manifest in both types of sources. Furthermore, this article will try to show that, even had Saddam had a secret ideology that only the secret archives expose, his open-source media remains by far the most meaningful resource by which to gauge his regime’s ideology. This, because the public was unaware of Saddam’s private ruminations and other regime secrets. All they knew was the regime’s rhetoric and public policy that they experienced daily in the street. So, to the Iraqi people and, therefore, to the historian, the public rhetoric and acts of the regime represent the most crucial part of the information.

All three historians studied here ponder whether the 1990s Islamic “Faith Campaign” represented ideological continuity with Baʿthism or an about-face. Discussing this issue requires—however briefly—revisiting Baʿthist ideology from the party’s inception in the 1940s and assessing it in relation to the ideology and practice of the regime between 1968 and 2003. As will be shown below, all three historians agree that, albeit with minor fluctuations, there was continuity in Baʿthist ideology from 1968 (in Helfont’s studies even from the 1940s) until its end in Baghdad in 2003. Their views on what this ideology was, however, are sharply opposed. Both Sassoon and Faust believe that it was unrelenting in its secularism and even hostility to Islam. Helfont, however, is utterly convinced that it was the product of nothing short of a “deep love for Islam”[[9]](#footnote-9) and a fervent desire to establish the legitimacy of the Baʿthist regime in Baghdad upon it.

By way of contrast, this article argues that from 1983—and much more adroitly so from 1993—the Baʿthist regime ideologically transformed itself. Saddam dragged the party kicking and screaming from secularism to his version of political Islam or Islamism. As a result, neither Saddam nor his regime were Baʿthist any longer by 2003. The fact that four historians, including the present author, interpret the archival records on this in three very different ways indicates that they are not the key to decoding all enigmas. Rather, they are a labyrinth. This article suggests that Ariadne’s threads are a good acquaintance with Baʿthist history and codes, and that one should apply one’s common sense and discrimination to all the available evidence, whether archives of previously confidential documents or those declarations and on-the-ground policies that were always made public. Trawling government archives can help but is not in itself enough.

**Public Or Archival Record: Which Should the Historian Trust?**

All three historians studied here challenge most pre-archive access historians’ view that Saddam’s public Islamic “Faith Campaign” was an about-face from the party’s traditional secularism. These three feel that access to the archives changed all that,and that their predecessors methodologically blundered in trusting the regime’s open media to gauge its ideology. They acknowledge this was all their predecessors had, but still affirm that simply trusting the open sources for ideology was a mistake. Sassoon Helfont and, in a more nuanced way, Faust see deception in the open sources and the truth in the hitherto secret archives. Despite Saddam’s extensive Islamization campaign over more than a decade, all three are convinced that the archives show it represented no ideological change.

Helfont’s 2015 Princeton University Ph.D. dissertation states that the Iraqi archives “are the only open archives of a modern Arab state. They suggest that relying on [the regime’s] *public policy* and *public statements* – which is the standard method of studying such [authoritarian] states – is inadequate and can even be misleading.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

All the pre-archive historians erred, Helfont believes, because they wrongly made “the basic assumption” that “one can read public statements and surmise from them an ideology.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Helfont further proclaims enthusiastically that “[f]ortunately, with the regime’s internal documents we can differentiate between Saddam’s tactical … views on religion” and his “more foundational stances upon which the regime based its actual policies.” For Helfont, “[p]ublic appearances were misleading”[[12]](#footnote-12) and that, for the “Faith Campaign,” we “no longer need to rely solely on the vague picture provided by the tightly controlled Iraqi press” or “one-off statements by regime officials, and other open-source materials.” At long last, “the archival records provide straightforward informationon this topic.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

This article seeks to show that this view is mistaken, and all conclusions derived from it are invalid. The picture provided by the regime’s open media on the “Faith Campaign” was anything but “vague” and the Baghdad media was not “tightly controlled” like Stalinist Moscow’s. Finally, assuming that Helfont understands that Saddam was not just some “regime official,” I will show that his Islamist speeches and policymaking were not “one-off” events, but numerous and, from June 1990, consistent. Sassoon goes even further than Helfont in arguing that, even when the internal archival sources report on regime public policies and statements, they are not credible[[14]](#footnote-14) and that every publicmanifestation of the regime, even when reported in the archives, should be seen as misleading. Faust lends much more credence to studies based on the regime’s open sources,[[15]](#footnote-15) yet even he lends more weight to those found in the archives.[[16]](#footnote-16)

If we adopt this approach consistently, then all studies of nondemocratic regimes made before they disintegrate, and their archives are pried open are very likely or even certainly wrong. This is because they are based on mere smoke and mirrors, and the truth lies in the archives. We would need to trash all the existing histories of Communist China, Egypt since 1952, and Baʿthist Syria, to mention only three examples, leaving a huge black hole. I will argue that these three historians are mistaken in thinking that the Baʿth public media statements and policymaking initiatives are such traps. Despite dismissing the regime’s public records, all three ironically seem to show blind faith toward the regime’s revealed archives. As Helfont puts it most explicitly, they “provide straightforward information.”[[17]](#footnote-17) I will show how this approach in all three is a methodological mistake.

**Baʿthism’s Baseline: Was Its Christian-Born Founder a Secularist or a Closet Islamist?**

Helfont argues that the founders of the Baʿth party, from its beginnings in the 1940s, were enthusiastic about the Muslim faith and that its founding father and seminal thinker, Michel ʿAflaq (1910–89) “clearly had a deep love for Islam”[[18]](#footnote-18) throughout his political life. Helfont therefore argues that what looks like a shift toward Islam in the 1990s was no shift at all, rather a late “instrumentalization” of an old dream.[[19]](#footnote-19) Sassoon andFaust understood from the archives that the Baʿth was and remained hostile to Islam.[[20]](#footnote-20) I argue that, while Sassoon and Faust are correct in arguing that, until the early 1980s, the Baʿth was secularist, even in some ways anti-Islamic, the pressures of the Iraq-Iran War and Saddam’s perception of a growing religiosity in Iraq and the Arab world induced him to immerse country and party in Islam. This meant that, under Saddam, the Baʿth was ideologically transformed.

To understand what really happened between the 1940s and 1990s it is necessary to delve briefly into the Baʿth’s ideological bases. Helfont’s claim of ʿAflaq’s “deep love for Islam” presents two difficulties. Firstly, ʿAflaq, a Christian-born-and-educated Damascene, completed his higher studies in the Sorbonne in Paris, was enamored with Marxism, and close to the French Communist party (though, back in Damascus, he abandoned Communism because the French Left had forsaken Syria).[[21]](#footnote-21) On that basis, it is more than hard to believe that he wanted Islam involved in his founding of the Baʿth. Secondly, the ʿAflaqite branch of the Baʿth established a highly secular political system soon after they came to power in Baghdad in 1968,[[22]](#footnote-22) as even Helfont admits. Why, then, did the Baʿth not set up its own form of Islamic rule straightaway rather than waiting until Saddam did so in the 1990s?

ʿAflaq’s public lectures in the 1940s and early 1950s and the Baʿth 1947 founding constitution are the best sources for the founder’s early thinking, with supporting evidence in the writings and memoirs of Baʿth veterans. What these indicate is that, rather than loving Islam, ʿAflaq was terrified by it. One party veteran points out that his Christian background “gave a pause to many, and was used against the party in conservative circles.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Another senior Baʿthist reported that the Islamists accused ʿAflaq of being both an atheist and a Christian missionary and so, either way, an enemy of Islam.[[24]](#footnote-24) Whether he loved or feared Islam, the Christian-born “founding father” of the Baʿth praised Islam profusely anyway, convincing Helfont of ʿAflaq’s “deep love for Islam.” Whether through fear or love, ʿAflaq also urgently sought young Muslim-born party recruits. Thus, a senior Iraqi party member remembers that, in 1959, ʿAflaq received a young religious Muslim recruit from Baghdad in Beirut and assured him of “the connection between the Baʿth and Islam and the fear of God,”[[25]](#footnote-25) whatever that meant.

Helfont correctly argues that ʿAflaq’s homage or lip service to Islam in the 1940s and 1950s sometimes went very far. Thus, for example, in 1943 he could be understood as calling for Salafist Islam, a return to the imagined pristine Islam of the forefathers when he said: “Every Arab presently is capable of living the life of the Arab Messenger;” likewise, when he said: “Muhammad was all the Arabs, may all the Arabs today be Muhammad.”[[26]](#footnote-26) This could be Salafism but, equally, something else. If every Arab could be “living the life of the Prophet,” rather than, say, “follow in the Prophet’s footsteps,” then Muhammad was not all that special. This could be seen as demeaning the Prophet. ʿAflaq said: “The Islamic movement as represented by the life of the esteemed Messenger is not a mere historical event for Arab life” but “a true form and total, eternal expression of the nature of the Arab soul.”[[27]](#footnote-27) He also prophesized: “The Christian Arabs will [one day] know … that Islam to them is national culture with which they must fill themselves until they … love it” so that they “will be as dedicated to it as to the dearest thing in their Arab identity,” adding: “There will come a day when the Arab nationalists find themselves as the only defenders of Islam.”[[28]](#footnote-28) This may be understood as Islamizing Arab nationalism, but also as a call to save Islam and keep it purely spiritual by separating it from politics and turning it into a personal matter. It may also reflect a modernist belief in secularization, that is, the eventual disappearance of Islamic religiosity in favor of Islam as mere national-cultural-historical-spiritual heritage. Indeed, in later years ʿAflaq expressed this notion when he replaced “Islam” with “heritage” (*turāth*).[[29]](#footnote-29) ʿAflaq makes it crystal clear that “[t]he secularism (*al-* *ʿilmāniya*) that we demand for the state” would succeed in “liberating religion from the vagaries of politics.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

ʿAflaq also argued: “As long as there is a tight connection between Arabism and Islam and we see in Arabism the body, whose spirit is Islam, there is no room for fear that the Arabs will be separated from their pan-Arab nationalism (*al-qawmiya*)*.*”[[31]](#footnote-31) Does this imply that Arab nationalism equates to Islam? If we go no deeper, we can make Helfont’s mistake of reading such quotations as indeed “love” for contemporary Arab Islam.[[32]](#footnote-32) However, ʿAflaq’s close associates understood this as love for the historical legacy of Islam that brought the Arabs to great heights, rather than as a wish to practice it.[[33]](#footnote-33) Yet, such expressions brought many to suspect that he converted to Islam.

To avoid such an interpretation, ʿAflaq also emphasized that Islam was only one phase in the glorious history of the Arab nation. “This nation,” he explained, “expressed itself … many different times, in Hammurabi’s [Babylonian] enactment, *jāhiliya* poetry, Muhammad’s religion, and the civilization of al-Maʾmun’s [rationalist] era.” In all those great epochs, the Arabs had “one sentiment” and “one purpose.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

Likewise, in a lecture in ‘Abd al-Nasser’s Cairo in 1957, he proclaimed: “Calling for pan-Arab nationalism does not mean at all that we ignore or discard the heritage of the Pharaohs.”[[35]](#footnote-35) Arab “heritage” was Islam but other cultures too. This means that heathen Babylon, Pharaonic Egypt, polytheistic Arabia, and the religion of that Arab man, Muhammad, represented the same “sentiment” and “purpose.” Apparently, God had nothing to do with Islam, which was one of many displays of Arab power, humanity, and creativity throughout 4,000 years of history. In his doctoral thesis and his book Helfont does not take these and many other secular or even atheistic parts in ʿAflaq’s lectures into account,[[36]](#footnote-36) but detractors of the Baʿth did. The Shiʿite Islamic Daʿwa party, for example, dubbed the Baʿth regime “neo-*jāhilī*.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

ʿAflaq offered his most explicit support for secularism when he discussed the daily lives of the Baʿthists. He rejected atheism because it was toxic in the Arab world of the 1940s and 1950s, as shown by the limited success of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and the Arab communist parties. However, he also rejected the Islam of the *sharīʿa*: “Maybe we [Baʿthists] are not seen praying with the ones who pray or fasting with the ones who fast, but we believe in God because we are in dire need and painful yearning for Him.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Helfont relates to this sentence writing that “Aflaq’s ideas departed significantly from traditional interpretations and practices of Islam” and that “[h]is Islam did not rest on the scriptural or legal base of the Islamic tradition.”[[39]](#footnote-39) This is obfuscating ʿAflaq’s message.

In the first place, in this sentence ʿAflaq implies that the Baʿthists believe in God not because He exists but because they need Him. This comes very close to atheism. In another lecture, ʿAflaq exposes something else beneath his ostensible demonstration of piety: “The Muslim Arabs at the dawn of Islam won with a small number because God sent for them unseen warriors that the enemies could not see.” Nowadays, however, “the unseen warriors fighting alongside the pioneers are the interests of the majority.”[[40]](#footnote-40) This seems to mean that God’s miracles are no longer needed.

Secondly, by exempting the comrades from religious duties ʿAflaq is draining Islam of its main content. Islam’s most important precepts are widely considered to be its “five pillars”: Reciting the *shahāda*, praying, observing the Ramadhan fast, carrying out the *ḥājj* pilgrimage, and paying the *zakat* religious tax. *Zakat*, however, is paid only once a year and not by the poor. The *ḥājj* is required only once in one’s lifetime and only from those who can perform it. The *shahada* is included in prayers. Islam is a social religion, and its practicing needs to be seen in public. Therefore, joining the collective Friday prayer is very important. Eating during daylight during Ramadhan, especially in public, is sinful. ʿAflaq was fully aware of all of that. By suggesting that party members maybe neither fast nor pray, he suggested that maybe they were not practicing Muslims.

Furthermore: in Islam, alongside “commanding acknowledged virtues” (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf*), there is also “forbidding evil” or “forbidding from sin” (*al-nahī ʿan al-munkar*), from anything forbidden (*ḥarām*), like daylight eating during daytime in Ramadhan or consuming alcohol. Q 5:90 says that alcoholic beverages (*al-khamr*), among other things, “are all evil of Satan’s handiwork. So, shun them so that you be successful.” The Baʿthists drank alcohol. In his memoirs, Hani al-Fukayki complains that the Baʿth leadership was extremely strict—“close to Hanbalis”—in their demand that members must be respected and fully accepted members of their societies. Part of this was that members must not be known to heavily indulge in drinking alcohol (*al-shirāb*),[[41]](#footnote-41) so moderate drinking was acceptable. Indeed, al-Fukayki tells us also that his first taste of arak zahlawi was in a party meeting in a member’s private home in Deir al-Zor in eastern Syria,[[42]](#footnote-42) so party veterans introduced new recruits to alcohol, it seems. This evinces no “deep love for Islam.”

ʿAflaq was trying to recruit his young Muslim-born disciples through ostensibly exhilarating Islamic symbolism and rhetoric. He invoked their Muslim childhoods’ emotional world in the service of his secular pan-Arabism. He was clearly walking a fine line between nurturing his followers’ Arab Islamic identity and rejecting Islam as a political identity and religious practice. “Islam,” he explained, “is the spiritual heritage” of Arab nationalism and its “inspiration, its spiritual source.” At the same time, though, referring to the Islamists, he warned, “the religious ideologies … are not serving the national cause, nor will they lead to a positive result.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

I agree with Hanna Batatu when he suggests that what ʿAflaq did was “the harnessing of the emotions called forth by Islam in the service of the Arab national movement.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Still, he took a risk. Two of the four main movement slogans that ʿAflaq formulated were double-edged swords. “Nationalism is love before anything else”[[45]](#footnote-45) is not inspired by Islam. It seems to be inspired by the ancient Greek concept of *agape* that was developed by Christianity. “Unity, Freedom, Socialism” is also a non-Islamic slogan. Yet “one Arab nation with an eternal message” (*umma* ʿ*arabiyya wāhida dhāt risāla khālida*)”[[46]](#footnote-46) is very different, as is “Arab nationalism is an eternal truth” (*haqiqa khālida*).[[47]](#footnote-47) *Umma* has been used since the Prophet’s days to denote the Islamic nation and *risāla* is redolent of Muhammad the messenger (*al-rasūl*)’s message, with *khālida* having strong religious connotations too. ʿAflaq stopped short of fully endorsing the most secular slogan that many Baʿthists believed represented the party, though he did not reject it either: “Religion is God’s, the homeland is everyone’s” (*al-dīn l-illāh wa-l-waṭan l-il-jamīʿ*).[[48]](#footnote-48) This is very secular because it means complete separation between religion and state. In the 1940s, when the party was a tiny group of young men in opposition to the old social order, this separation was a popular slogan. In 1976, after it became itself the social order, ʿAflaq had to be more careful.

Al-Fukayki tells us that upon reading ʿAflaq’s call to the Arab youth—“Let all the Arabs be Muhammad!”—he felt as if every Baʿthist was a little prophet:

I shuddered … as if I heard the [divine] revelation again … I saw perfection and omniscience and loftiness and prophecy in every Baʿthist. Despite my belief in secularism, I found no separation between pan-Arab nationalism and Islam. As little prophets, our eternal message meant the resurrection of the Arab nation.[[49]](#footnote-49)

As ʿAflaq very soon found out, this secular-religious mix was combustible. Already in July 1957, a restricted-access report prepared by a special party committee revealed that “in the minds of many, the meaning of the [Baʿthist] ‘Arab Mission’ has become confused with Islam.”[[50]](#footnote-50) As I show later, this came back to haunt ʿAflaq in Baghdad until his death in 1989.

What was Arab nationalism and secularism to ʿAflaq? Educated in France, it is likely that it was the stricter version of secularism, the French *laïcité*. In his early lectures an unambivalent definition of secularism is rarely given, but is still detectible: “The Arabs today,” he said emphatically, “do not want their nationalism to be religious, because religion … is not the unifying connection for the nation (*al-umma*). Rather, it is the opposite: it might separate the one people (*al-qawm*).”[[51]](#footnote-51) ʿAflaq introduced this idea even more clearly into the most binding document of the Baʿth, the party’s 1947 founding constitution, which says:

The national bond (*al-rābiṭa al-qawmiya*) is the only bondexisting in the Arab state … which struggles against all other loyalties, [like] denominational and sectarian solidarities [*al-*ʿ*asabiya al-madhhabiya wa-l-tāʾifiya*] … [and] tribalism.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The party’s constitution also promises explicitly full equality to all religions in the future Arab state. Namely, there will be no religious state symbols and laws. The founding constitution urges members “to aspire to a more glorious and exemplary (*amjad wa amthal*) future than the Arabs had ever achieved.”[[53]](#footnote-53) Because Sunni Muslims see the era of the Prophet as the peak of humanity’s past and future alike, calling upon the comrades to go beyond was close to blasphemy. God, Islam, and the *sharīʿa* are not mentioned once, even when education, family, and social values are discussed. Thus, for example, under “Social Policy,” procreation is “a trust given … to the family and then to the state” and “marriage is a national duty.” Under “The Party’s Policy in Education,” education will be “based on scientific reasoning, free from superstition and reactionary traditions.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

Helfont overlooks this evidence, including the point about “the only bond.” Some 30 years later, in a party discussion in Baʿthist Baghdad, a comrade asked ʿAflaq: “How shall we reconcile the positive position towards religion with Baʿth secularism?” The founding father stated clearly that “Islam is our history and our heroism” and spoke of “an organic connection between Arabism and Islam,” yet opined that “secularism means that the constitution and the laws do not prefer one faith (*madhhab*) over another.”[[55]](#footnote-55) As will be shown below, in the 1990s many new laws did favor one faith over others. Helfont also ignores the fact that the Baʿth founding constitution left out God and Islam: It is implicitly atheistic.

Helfont is deeply impressed by ʿAflaq’s wish to reform Islam: “Aflaq maintained that Baʿthism was a return to a clear and sound religion which is completely applicable to its original goals.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Helfont believes a Christian-born secularist, Communist-leaning, probably an atheist, intended to reform Islam. However, the Islam for which ʿAflaq felt “deep love” was not Islam at all, because it was strictly personal, not communal, separate from politics, and free from religious precepts. The only aspects of Islam that ʿAflaq urged were the cherishing of historical memory, spirituality, and a nebulous belief in some kind of god because the Baʿthists emotionally needed one.

Perhaps ʿAflaq’s most bewildering sentence on this topic was: “[T]here is no Arab who is not a Muslim.” So, the Christians, the Druze, and the ʿAlawites, whose mother tongue is Arabic, are all Muslims too. A careful reading of the text, though, reveals it is not what it seems. The Baʿth situated Islam, he explains, “as a decisive moral, intellectual and social revolution in history.” As such, Islam is “at the heart of Arab nationalism.” “In this meaning, there is no Arab who is not a Muslim … Arabism means Islam in that sublime interpretation.”[[57]](#footnote-57) So, Islam to Arab nationalists is a cherished cultural heritage, but did all his readers fully understand this? Because of his equivocal rhetoric and profuse praise of Islam, ʿAflaq left an ambiguity in his wake that has beguiled and bewildered many, including Helfont.

Around half a century after he had sculpted the strictly secular founding constitution, ʿAflaq, in a 1986 secret pan-Arab leadership discussion, expressed an uneasy suspicion that Saddam could take advantage of his past ambiguous statements. He said, “I recently understood,” why, in its early days, “the party turned Islam into the most important thing in its platform.” He admitted that in this way the party “expressed the popular … need.” However, he warned, the Baʿth did this “without having the intention to practice it.”[[58]](#footnote-58) So, this was the same, true ʿAflaq after all those decades. He was a committed secularist to the end; He wanted no religious precepts, no *sharīʿa*, and no Islamic state symbols. He wanted Islam removed from politics, as a historical memory, as a central part of Arab cultural and emotional worlds, but with the clerics and their rites confined to the mosques. So, how did his disciples interpret him when the Baʿth came to power in Baghdad in 1968?

**Did the Nascent 1968 Baʿth Regime Perform a Reluctant “Retreat” from Islam?**

Helfont offers a highly innovative analysis of the Baʿth regime’s approach to state-Islam relations during their first decade or so in power. When it came to power in 1968, because ʿAflaq felt such “deep love for Islam,”[[59]](#footnote-59) the Baʿth aspired “to tie the regime’s legitimacy to Islam.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Yet, they did not. Why? As Helfont tells us, they did not dare satisfy their craving for Islam for fear that this would empower the “religious opposition” who “attacked Baʿthism as unislamic,” according to Helfont. “After clashing with these religious leaders,” we are told, “the Baʿthists made a tactical retreaton matters of religion and attempted to remove Islam from the public sphere.”[[61]](#footnote-61) So, because the Baʿth was very weak, vulnerable, and timid and the “religious opposition” was strong and domineering, instead of conceding ground to the religious opposition, the Baʿthists decided to protect themselves by hiding their genuine Islamic inclination and becoming very secular, even anti-Islamic. Another reason for the tactical retreat from Islam, we are told, was the regime’s wish for Soviet favor.[[62]](#footnote-62)

 There are a few difficulties with this theory. Most importantly, Helfont forgets to tell his readers that no document has ever been found in the archives to support this thesis. To prove that the Baʿth performed such a momentous tactical retreat from devotion and commitment to Islam into fake, anti-Islamic secularism, he bases himself only on the open media. Nor is there either archival or open media evidence that the Soviets encouraged the Baʿth regime to shift reluctantly to secularism.

Helfont relies only on open-source evidence to prove his “retreat” thesis. This is inconsistent with his dismissal of open-source material but, as I see it, this is still perfectly legitimate. The problem with his evidence is that it is not based on solid historical grounds. The first historical evidence that Helfont provides to prove that the Ba’th desired Islam galore but retreated is the first (1968) Iraqi constitution under the Baʿth. Indeed, as he reports, it has many elements of Islam in it, including *sharīʿa*.[[63]](#footnote-63) However, this had nothing to do with the Baʿth party’s “profound love for Islam” or wish “to tie the regime’s legitimacy to Islam.” Our historian forgot to consider the power balance in the ruling elite during the first months of Baʿth rule. The 1968 constitution was dictated by the most powerful state institution, the five-man Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), with all five middle-aged generals. President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and the others were all religious Sunni Muslims. Not all five joined the party and even those who did, did so at a relatively ripe age (for example, al-Bakr was 46 when he did). Their connections with the party were tenuous. Nine months after a 1963 Baʿth-‘Arif coalition gained power, the “Baʿthist” al-Bakr collaborated with General ʿAbd al-Salam ʿArif to remove the Baʿthists from the government and tossed many, including Saddam, into jail. In 1968, the Baʿthists swallowed their pride and collaborated with al-Bakr against the ʿArif regime, but al-Bakr was not a Baʿthist. My suggestion is that the RCC generals were in a hurry to issue a constitution in July 1968 and therefore borrowed almost the entire text on state-Islam relations from the constitution of their predecessor, the religiously-minded ʿAbd al-Rahman ʿArif. This I conclude from the fact that, in terms of state-Islam relations, the similarity between the two constitutions (‘Arif’s and the Baʿth 1968) is striking.[[64]](#footnote-64) Whatever the reason, the 1968 constitution was not Baʿthist.

In November 1969, the Baʿthists, who already controlled the party’s Iraqi branch—the Regional Leadership (RL)—assumed control of the RCC as well, with security chief Saddam becoming Iraq’s vice president and deputy RCC chairman. Thus, the two leading institutions, the RCC and RL, came under the control of the young Baʿthists, ʿAflaq’s disciples. The second constitution, that came in July 1970, was composed by Saddam and those younger Baʿthists, including, for example, (the Christian) Tariq ʿAziz, ʿIzzat Ibrahim al-Douri, Taha Yassin Ramadhan, and ʿAbd al-Khaliq al-Samarraʾi. As a result, in the new constitution Islam was eradicated almost entirely. The young Baʿthists used this change as a battering ram against radical religious circles, whether inside or outside of Iraq, rather than in any way out of purported fear of their so-called formidability.

Helfont uses also the Baʿth’s 1963 rule in Baghdad to support his claim that the nascent party was Islamically inclined. During that period, he argues, it “repealed the Personal Status Law of 1959 because it was not in accordance with Islamic law.”[[65]](#footnote-65) In fact, the short-lived 1963 ʿArif-Baʿth coalition never repealed the law. It only introduced limited changes regarding polygamy and removed the non-Islam-compliant articles granting women equality in inheritance. All other provisions favorable to women remained in force.[[66]](#footnote-66) Most importantly, the main clause of the 1959 law that had essentially moved matters of personal status from the religious to the state courts remained in place. Helfont seems unaware also that the 1963 regime was not Baʿthist but a coalition with Arab nationalist officers like ʿArif, most of whom were religious Sunnis. This meant that the Baʿthists had limited clout within the 1963 regime. Helfont seems likewise unaware that, because the party considered them a deviation from Baʿth doctrine, the changes in the law caused a profound rift in the ruling coalition. According to an RL member at the time, the RL objected strongly even to these limited changes. However, the religious generals overrode Baʿth objections to force them through.[[67]](#footnote-67) So, unlike what Helfont says, the Baʿth party was against repealing even one secular clause of the 1959 Personal Status Law.

Finally, the very concept of retreating from Islam out of fear of the Islamists is counterintuitive. We can learn what happens when a secular Arab regime is truly worried about Islamist opposition from the example of the Baʿth regime in 1970s Damascus. In 1972, President Hafiz al-Assad erased the sentence stating that “Islam is the state religion” from the constitution. Following massive Sunni demonstrations that threatened the regime, he backtracked and introduced a sentence stipulating that “the religion of the president of the republic is the Islamic religion.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Had the Baghdad-based Baʿthis feared the Islamists, as Helfont claims, they would have tried to appease them as al-Assad did. Instead, they became flagrantly secularist and crushed the Islamists with arrests, mass expulsions, and executions. Unsurprisingly, their secular policies enraged religious circles, Sunni as well as Shiʿite.[[69]](#footnote-69) Had the Baʿth retreated into secularism to protect themselves against formidable “religious opposition,” as Helfont suggests, it would have been suicidal.

**The Baʿth Regime 1968–83 and Islam: What Really Happened?**

Sassoon and Faust explanation of the secularism of the Baʿthi regime in its first 15 years that is diametrically opposed to Helfont’s. Faust states that, in 1968, the Baʿth was genuinely highly secularist and “pursued expressly anti-religious policies in line with the party’s original national, socialist, secular ideology.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Among their anti-religious policies, he mentions “attacking the Shiʿi religious establishment, expelling … students and preachers, murdering Sunni and Shiʿi clerics … arresting the clerics’ supporters … banning the call for prayer, [and] allowing the sale of alcohol in Shiʿi shrine cities.”[[71]](#footnote-71) All of this does not sound like the fear of the religious opposition Helfont claims. Sassoon implies a similar line to Faust’s when he says that, in the 1990s, “behind the scenes, [Saddam] continued to be anti-religious.”[[72]](#footnote-72) According to Helfont, all those secular policies came about because “[t]he difficulty the Baʿthists faced – at least in Saddam’s mind – was that their Party’s view of religion was widely misunderstood.”[[73]](#footnote-73) In other words, the comrades did not understand Saddam’s and ʿAflaq’s “love for Islam.” Here again, Helfont provides no evidence for that from archival or open sources.

I agree with Faust and Sassoon about the 1968–83 period in that when they got into power, the Baʿthists understood ʿAflaq and Saddam well and sought a secular state. Limited concessions to Islam notwithstanding, they achieved one. In 1969, the young Baʿthists introduced an entirely secular penal code[[74]](#footnote-74) and, as already pointed out, the July 1970 Interim Constitution eliminated almost all mention of Islam.

In 1974, the state’s coffers were filled with petrodollars, the economy was booming, and the Baʿth was rich and powerful. By the mid-1970s, they had developed highly secular cultural and educational systems, with the latter downgrading religious studies to the lowest level. Cultural programs celebrated figures like Ishtar (Astarte), the Sumero-Akkadian goddess of sex and war, Hammurabi, Nebuchadnezzar, and the ʿAbbasid wine poet Abu Nuwas, displeasing religious circles.

By 1975, the Baʿth regime had made a successful peace agreement with the Shah of Iran, who ceased his limited support for the Shiʿite religious opposition in Iraq through the young generation of the Hakim clerical family. Regardless, the South exploded in massive Shiʿite anti-regime demonstrations in 1977. A decade later, in a closed-door meeting, Foreign Minister Tariq ʿAziz reminded his comrades why Saddam had defined the Baʿth secular doctrine more clearly than ever in the 1970s: “We had a powerful religious [Shiʿi] movement that hit us with bullets,” he stated, “[s]o, it became imperative … that we present an ideological position against it.”[[75]](#footnote-75)

Indeed, in 1977, in a series of internal lectures to party cadres that were soon made fully public, Saddam, like ʿAflaq before him, paid homage to Islam and dissociated himself from atheism. At the same time, though, he warned against any attempt to imitate the religious parties and mix religion with politics: “We should go back to the origin of our ideology,” he said. What was “the origin of our ideology” to Saddam in 1977? The party, he explained, should be “proud of religion, without adopting policies for religion.” He fulsomely rejected the *sharīʿa*, arguing that the Baʿth must not build “the theory of modern life … on the teachings of ancient jurisprudence,” arguing:

We should not force our treatment of the present worldly aspects of life into a framework of religious jurisprudence*.* The current social problems that we face … are quite different from those of the early Islamic times when the rules of jurisprudence were laid down … This [religious jurisprudence] … cannot be the rule for present life.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

This is consonant with the party’s origins in ʿAflaq’s statement that “maybe” the Baʿthists were not practicing Muslims and in the text of the 1947 Baʿth Founding Constitution. A few years later, in the early 1980s, Saddam even denied any need by the Baʿthists for “religiosity” in meetings behind closed doors. What was needed, he said, was pride in the heroic achievements of early Islam. He also told his top aides that “Allah is neither Sunni nor Shiʿi, … neither Catholic nor Protestant.” He opined that most people were no longer religious, rather following “other philosophies.”[[77]](#footnote-77)

The last time the party issued a secular, even anti-religious communiqué was in June 1982.[[78]](#footnote-78) A sub-chapter in a party report entitled “The Religious-Political Phenomenon in Iraq”[[79]](#footnote-79) is an atheistic psychological analysis of people who turn to religion and a broadside attack on all religions. Confronting the allure of Khomeini’s Islamic Republic, veteran Baʿthists tossed ʿAflaq ’s cautious claim to a non-specific, non-binding belief in God aside: “The religious phenomenon … among the youth and other social strata is … normal … given the romantic aspect distinguishing most of the youth during the adolescence.” For them, religiosity was the result of immaturity. The report adds that a “drastic transition from one era into another creates a state of confusion, tension, and imbalance. … In such conditions, many phenomena, including the religious one, appear.” It further argues: “Religion and the religious attitude form an … atmosphere for attracting … negative cases”[[80]](#footnote-80) and that “[h]ere [in religion], an individual confused and puzzled by social transformations can find psychological ease.”[[81]](#footnote-81)

In “The Attitude Towards the Religious-Political Phenomenon,” the party’s Ninth Congress is more caustic about the situation in Iraq.[[82]](#footnote-82) Its resolutions are scathing against “some party members who are trying to appear religious.” The party expresses concern that “[r]eligious concepts began … to overcome Party concepts”[[83]](#footnote-83) and that the “religious-political phenomenon” is growing “at all levels of the party.”[[84]](#footnote-84) The report asks: “If the religious conception and practices were considered by some comrades as moral and ideological alternatives to the Arab Baʿth Socialist Party … why did they choose the Baʿth party?”[[85]](#footnote-85) This religiosity contradicted the party’s ideology, as there was not “any basis for this in the party’s doctrine and tradition.”[[86]](#footnote-86)

So, between the 1940s and the early 1980s, there was, indeed, a secular continuity and Khomeini’s rise to power in Tehran changed little. Until early 1982, Saddam was still very optimistic that Iraq would win the war and thus saw no need for any political or ideological concessions to mass religious sentiment. The June 1982 military withdrawal from Iran and the ensuing stalemate changed everything. The Shiʿite danger burgeoned rapidly, and Sunnis were strongly influenced by the victory of Islam across the border. The military stalemate tainted the Baʿth’s prestige, and the economy was hit hard. Saddam’s original sacrifice of Baʿth secular ideology on the altar of popular support was cynical, but the later years of a shocking military defeat in Kuwait, international embargo, and a renewed threat of a US invasion prompted signs that maybe some religiosity was growing on him.[[87]](#footnote-87)

**Saddam’s “Faith Campaign”: Preamble**

The first foretaste of a deviation from Baʿthist secularism came at an international “Popular Islamic Conference” the regime convened in Baghdad in April 1983. This was a crisis moment in the Iraq-Iran war, with Iraq forced to withdraw its forces from Iranian territory. The conference’s politicization of Islam represented a major departure from established party doctrine. As Helfont describes well, Saddam went even further when he addressed the conference. Not only that the very convening of the congress was an deviation from Ba’th ideology; Saddam also promised that he would accept its resolution on how to end the Iran-Iraq War even before he knew what that decision was. To justify this, he argued that consensus (*ijmāʿ*) among Muslims was a central principle of Islamic law, it superseded secular considerations and, therefore, announced that it would be the basis for one of his regime’s most vital political decisions, whether to end the war. “In doing so,” Helfont explains, Saddam “suggested that Islamic law overrode secular law.” Saddam admitted what he was doing was highly unusual and even apologized for it. His justification was that a consensus among Muslims “must be the right one.”[[88]](#footnote-88) Saddam went on to organize more such Islamic conferences in 1985, 1987, and 1990.

Helfont points out that this was nothing short of accepting “the Iraqi regime’s references and allusions to Islamic law as a binding set of rules.”[[89]](#footnote-89) He is correct, but this is very clearly irreconcilable with the Baʿth’s foundations, as already shown, and seemingly why Saddam apologized for it. Bizarrely, however, Helfont does not see it as a deviation from the Baʿth doctrine and insists that the Islamic conference was consistent with ʿAflaq’s legacy.[[90]](#footnote-90)

In July 1986, Saddam made an additional overture toward Islam at another crisis point in the war. This happened in the aforementioned meeting of the party’s pan-Arab leadership but, surprisingly, he met with strong opposition. He suggested an alliance with a hated and feared enemy, the powerful Egyptian and Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood (MB(. This had become necessary, he explained, as people were turning to Islam: “There is a public that is being influenced by what the men of religion are saying.” The “men of religion” had “power to influence the people. Their ticket now has risen.” In people’s eyes, they have become “more precious than before.” Religiosity had penetrated even into the ruling Arab regimes, he warned. Had Nasser been alive today, he implied, even he would have demonstrated more religiosity. This necessitated winning over the MB.[[91]](#footnote-91)

One member supported the president, but most remained silent. Helfont offers that meeting as proof that ʿAflaq supported Saddam’s suggestion, further proving his original leanings toward Islam. Helfont sees befriending the MB as consonant with the party’s original “deep love for Islam.”[[92]](#footnote-92) However, Helfont ignores ʿAflaq’s tortured ambivalence evident throughout that meeting. For example, after keeping silent for a long time he jibed: “If we compromise, they [the MB] will not compromise as much.”[[93]](#footnote-93) Later he made it clear that befriending the MB was the opposite of the existing party policy: “We are coming close to laying down strategy for decades … Therefore, we need to establish base rules that the religious trend is not our enemy … We want to have a dialogue with them and strengthen those [among them] who are the least bad and least mistaken.” So, to ʿAflaq the MB are all “bad” and “mistaken,” but some of them are less so. Then he implied reluctance and surrender: “when we understand the strategic guidelines, we will have no other choice but to proceed along these [Saddam’s new] lines.”[[94]](#footnote-94) As already shown above, ʿAflaq explicitly warned in the discussion against the state “practicing” Islam.

Helfont also ignores the strong opposition to Saddam’s suggestion from two leadership figures. Foreign Minister Tariq ʿAziz and Secretary of the Sudanese Baʿth Badr al-Din al-Muddathir were emphatic that the MB was an existential threat and that no ties with it were possible. Their concerns must have already been aroused during the 1983 Islamic conference and Saddam’s early articulations of political Islam and so they turned their fire on the MB’s core concept: The Islamic state. They argued forcefully that the MB’s “religious state” and the Baʿth’s “national state” were mutually exclusive.[[95]](#footnote-95) ʿAziz reminded participants that the Baʿth was committed to the “democratic, national, pan-Arab (*qawmiya*) state and that Saddam himself had given speeches in the 1970s making it clear that the Baʿth position was diametrically opposed to that of the Brethren’s “religious state.”[[96]](#footnote-96) Saddam had to calm his comrades’ fear that he was jumping the secular ship, declaring: “We are establishing a state not through religion but rather a state for life.” He assured them that the Baʿth “believes in religion,” but only “as rituals.” The Baʿth, he emphasized, “is not interpreting [politics] according to religion.”[[97]](#footnote-97)

Only in 1995, as part of his “Faith Campaign,” Saddam made a landmark announcement that the Baʿth no longer opposed the Islamic state and pan-Islamic unity, provided that Arab unity came first.[[98]](#footnote-98) This was only one of many other ideological changes that, as will be shown below, Saddam introduced in his 1990s Islamic “Faith Campaign.” Even though Helfont uses this 1986 document in his Ph.D. dissertation, he missed these parts of it. He insists that, for the Baʿth since its inception, in the choice between the pan-Arab or the pan-Islamic state, “Precedence is the key word. The ideas were notmutually exclusive.”[[99]](#footnote-99) But in the 1986 meeting ʿAflaq, Saddam, ‘Aziz and Muddathir thought otherwise. Even this ideological change alone between 1986 and 1995 means that, contrary to Helfont’s thesis, after 1986 there was a meaningful “ideological shift.”[[100]](#footnote-100)

On February 23, 1988, the regime launched the first of eight stages of a war against the rebellious Kurds. The code name given to this series of battles was *Anfal*, or “Spoils of War,” being the name of the seventh Qurʾān Sura that celebrates an early victory in 624 CE of the Prophet’s army over the Meccan idol worshippers. Legitimizing a bloody operation that cost the lives of tens of thousands of civilians by implying that the Kurds were idol worshippers was another public indication of which way the regime was going.

In 1988 Saddam established Saddam University for Islamic Studies to educate a new generation of clerics who would “counter Khomeinism” and confront the Iranian regime’s “widespread activities” devised to “attract some young men.” The University was to belong to the Baʿthi and Saudi-sponsored Organization of the Popular Islamic Conference. **[[101]](#footnote-101)** The establishment in Iraq of an international Islamic organization and an Islamic university was unprecedented under the Baʿth rule.

That something even stranger was happening in Baghdad became evident in June 1989, when Baghdad announced the death of Michel ʿAflaq. The pan-Arab leadership issued a communiqué that, prior to his death, “the late ʿAflaq … embraced Islam as his religion.” He and his comrades in the command did not want to announce this, out of … concern that this … would be given a political interpretation.”[[102]](#footnote-102) Had the leadership not wanted to give it “a political interpretation,” it could simply have refrained from any mention of this death-bed conversion. As was disclosed to this author by Ambassador April Glaspie, who had served in Baghdad in 1989, ʿAflaq’s elder son told her that he was taken by complete surprise: his father never told him of his conversion.[[103]](#footnote-103) Apparently, having a Christian founding father became a cross too heavy for Saddam to carry.

In June 1990, on the eve of his occupation of Kuwait, Saddam provided the most indicative hint that he was entering an Islamic era. His speech at the 1990 Popular Islamic Conference that he convened in Baghdad could not sound more distant from his 1977 advocacy of a *sharīʿa*-free state. “We are the party of God (*hizballah*) here and the party of God is the greatest and most powerful of all parties,” he exclaimed. By 1990 Hezbollah, Khomeini’s creation in Lebanon, had already earned worldwide renown, so Saddam’s choice of identity for the Baʿth was nothing short of breathtaking:

We here, my brothers, are the party of God. I am one of you and whatever the Muslim clerics (*al-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimūn*) will decide we shall turn into our way! … Whenever any local law clashes with the supreme law (*al-qānūn al-aʿlā*), the local law must be declared null and void … Whenever state patriotism (*al-waṭaniya*) in Iraq clashes with the supreme principles of Islam, it will be declared null and void … Whenever the practice (*sulūk*) that comes under the definition of pan-Arab (*qawmī*) practice clashes with the supreme principles of Islam, this pan-Arab practice must be changed and declared null and void in favor of the general [Islamic] law.[[104]](#footnote-104)

So, the *sharīʿa* must reign supreme both in Iraq and across the Arab world. None of the three historians discussed here mentions this speech, but in it, Saddam unequivocally advocates political Islam and a complete departure from the party’s secular doctrine. And this was only the preamble.

**The Islamic “Faith Campaign” in Full Swing 1993–2003**

Sassoon provides a report of the regime’s “Faith Campaign,” as reflected in its archives. In the 1990s, Sassoon reports, as part of the campaign, the Baʿth regime “publicly supported all religious activities and called for more conservatism and religiosity.” Saddam, Sassoon goes on, adopted Islam “as part of his political oratory and used it to great effect.”[[105]](#footnote-105) There is also information on policies that go far beyond oratory. New mosques were built, and repairs were made to existing ones. Saddam even initiated the construction of the Mother of All Battles Mosque in Baghdad, intended to be the largest mosque in the world, and a 605-page copy of the Qurʾān with a text written with his blood. This Pharaoh-style mosque-building spree began during the international embargo years that caused a severe economic crisis. Sassoon also reports that the Iraqi flag was redesigned to include the inscription a*llāhu akbar*. (Sassoon does not mention it, but Saddam’s Iraq was the only Arab state other than Saudi Arabia in 1991 that had an Islamic motto on its national flag.) The rules about opening restaurants as well as nightclubs and bars during Ramadhan were also tightened and broadcasters were ordered to allot an hour a day to religious programs. Important religious dates such as the Prophet’s birthday were celebrated under the auspices of the president.[[106]](#footnote-106)

In 1994 the president established the Saddam Institute for the Study of the Holy Qurʾān that would soon become “part of the hierarchy of the party. At a graduation ceremony, Vice President ʿIzzat Ibrahim announced that the Baʿth was “not a religious party” but then declared: “We are the party of the Islamic message(*risāla*) and of the Arab message.” The Institute’s dissertations were on a mixture of religious and political topics.[[107]](#footnote-107) Hundreds of its students were middle- and higher-middle-level party cadres. Moreover, these party activists were given a year or two of leave to devote to studying at the Institute.[[108]](#footnote-108) So, Sassoon is fully aware that Saddam went beyond oratory and invested a great deal of the party’s manpower, time, and treasure in his Islamization of the party cadres. As will be remembered, already in 1957, to the leadership’s chagrin, many Baʿthists confused the party’s secular “eternal message” with the Islamic one; Ibrahim’s embrace of the Islamic message was a dramatic about-face.

Sassoon overlooked some archival evidence worth reporting on. For example, some show how the entire state school curriculum was imbued with an Islamic spirit and children had to study the Qurʾān throughout their school years. He also failed to consider laws forcing judges and major merchants to pass tests in the *sharīʿa* or lose their licenses.[[109]](#footnote-109) Sassoon also overlooks the party’s internal order to members “not to charge interest (*al-ribā*)” on loans because these are “the instructions of Islam.”[[110]](#footnote-110)

Sassoon neither studied the open Iraqi media nor did he interview Iraqis on this subject, but doing so would have added much, such as about what happened inside the party as reported by General Hussein Kamil, Saddam’s close aide and the son of his paternal first cousin, who defected to Amman in 1995. In a meeting with United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) officials, he stated: “The government of Iraq is instigating fundamentalism in the country … Every party member must pass a religious exam. They even stopped party meetings for prayers.”[[111]](#footnote-111)

In the summer holidays, elementary and high school students were sent to regime-approved mosques to memorize the Qurʾān and study simple exegesis in a traditional way. Pupils were taught how to pray, but only in the Sunni fashion.[[112]](#footnote-112) The regime’s media reported on the new RCC Decree No.82 of July 7, 1994, that closed all places of entertainment throughout the year. Even though alcoholic drinks were still on sale in special shops, consumption of them in public was banned, with offenders punished severely.[[113]](#footnote-113) In the public media, leading clerics endorsed the decree for bringing the Iraqi people back to Islam, thus implying that beforehand both people and leadership strayed from the right path.[[114]](#footnote-114) To disarm those Baʿthists who were still secularists, the regime’s media provided also a social justification for the bans, arguing that the places of entertainment tempted the youth into crime.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Surprisingly, Sassoon also fails to mention the law imposing the amputation of the right hand at the wrist for theft.[[116]](#footnote-116) This was the first in a host of measures from the *sharīʿa* that Islamized the secular Baʿthi 1969 Penal Code. In a later closed-door meeting there was a proposal made to brand the amputees’ foreheads. Saddam provided a secular argument that amputation and branding would curb widespread property-related crimes. Replying to questions, however, the president stressed that amputation was what the Qurʾān commanded, end of story. Saddam was no Qurʾānic scholar, so must have prepared himself well, because he quoted the relevant Qurʾānic verse precisely.[[117]](#footnote-117) The letter of the law did not mention the *sharīʿa* as such, but the Iraqi media justified amputation in the same two ways: As a measure to end property crimes and as a fulfillment of the Qurʾānic ordinance.[[118]](#footnote-118) Gory photography of bleeding amputated wrists and the shocked amputees appeared on Iraqi television.[[119]](#footnote-119) Even in the Baʿth archives, one finds cases of “thieves” having their hands amputated.[[120]](#footnote-120)

**Do the Regime’s Archives Invalidate Credence in Its Public Media?**

The claim by our three historians that the 1990s “Faith Campaign” represented no ideological change is supported by little evidence in the archives.

Evidence Number One: Using the archives as his *Punctum Archimedis*, in a 2012 article Helfont reports that,contrary to the conclusion of pre-archives’ historians, Saddam’s “Faith Campaign” was neither an ideological change nor was it Islamism. Rather, it was mere “instrumentalization of Islam.”[[121]](#footnote-121) The main evidence for that is the fact that Islamization was limited to Iraq’s foreign relations. Helfont seems to believe that, as such, it did not apply to the Iraqis. This brings him to the conclusion that the regime’s Islamization lacked “ideological conviction.”[[122]](#footnote-122) However, even in the same article, and much more so in his Ph.D. dissertation, Helfont admits that there was also extensive domestic Islamization during the “Faith Campaign.”[[123]](#footnote-123) Apparently, there was some “ideological conviction” behind the Islamization after all. If so, then there was an ideological change from the 1970s.

 A secondsupposed “behind the scenes” piece of evidence that convinced Helfont that what you see in the public media is not what you get is a 1996 closed-door meeting. In it, Saddam related to Louis Farrakhan’s Islam: “By God, I do not like them. I do not like those who engage in politics under the guise of religion. I don’t trust them.” Helfont comments that this shows that “public appearances were misleading.”[[124]](#footnote-124) Namely, Saddam was secretly dead against his own public political Islam. This is very confusing because if Saddam was such a closet secularist, this contradicts Helfont’s main thesis that, from its inception, the party and Saddam always wanted “to tie the regime’s legitimacy to Islam.”[[125]](#footnote-125) Helfont does not even try to explain how Saddam could be, at the same time, a closet secularist and a closet Islamist, dreaming of tying his regime’s political legitimacy to Islam.

Even if we ignore this research problem, this author does not agree that one secular quip in a classified meeting proves that a decade of Islamist speeches, laws, education, and culture “were misleading.” Helfont is telling us, for example, that Saddam induced schoolchildren to believe that he was a latter-day Caliph or prophet.[[126]](#footnote-126) But if Saddam was against using Islam in politics, why did he allow such Islamization of Iraq’s education? Helfont is further muddying his thesis: “Fortunately, with the regime’s internal documents,” he is telling us, “we can differentiate between Saddam’s “tactical … views on religion” and his “more foundational stances upon which the regime based its *actual policies*.”[[127]](#footnote-127) What was ”tactical?” What was “foundational?” What was “actual?” Was chopping off the hands of “thieves” “tactical” or “foundational?” Was it “actual” or “tactical?” Does Saddam’s quip mean that he could not trust people like himself?

Still, a historian must ask, why did Saddam denounce his own policy behind closed doors, even if only once? Saddam had to be aware that many in the party were uneasy about his Islamic “Faith Campaign.” This is why he did not define his campaign as “Islamic,” but vaguely as “Faith.” He was given notice about the party’s old-timers’ objection already in the 1986 meeting of the pan-Arab leadership. ʿAflaq’s warning against “practicing” Islam in that meeting made it clear that no Islamization can take place as long as the founding father was alive. Conveniently, ʿAflaq died in 1989.

In the 1990s the Iraqi public had a good indication of continued opposition in the party to Islamization in Saddam’s elder son’s *Babil,* the most popular daily in Iraq. ‘Uday protested his father’s efforts to plant “an Islamic heart” in secular “national pan-Arab Iraq.” He feared that Iraqi girls would soon “put on the veil,” and that the glorious Baghdad of Harun al-Rashid and Arabian Nights “will turn into a city similar to Saudi cities.”[[128]](#footnote-128) In the closed-door meeting where he referred to Farrakhan, Saddam was trying therefore to tell the comrades that he was still the old Saddam, the Baʿthi. He implied, therefore, that, unlike Farrakhan, he, Saddam, was *not* “engaging in politics under the guise of religion.” We doubt that this convinced the comrades, but no one was ready to risk calling the spade a spade. Saddam’s bizarre alibi did, however, manage to convince Helfont that the Iraqi leader was against “politicizing religion.”[[129]](#footnote-129) The Farrakhan quip betrayed a dilemma Saddam still had, but it did not change the regime’s new Islamic ideology.

A thirdarchival item that convinced Helfont that the party never changed its ideology is very important and should give us a pause. This item, though, contradicts Helfont’s thesis and supports that of Sassoon’s and Faust’s, as it suggests that the party was and remained “to the end” anti-religious. As late as 1997, well into the Faith Campaign, Helfont found in the curriculum of party courses that the Baʿth retained some of its secular ideology.[[130]](#footnote-130) Helfont reports that a course on Islam included four “books” by Michel ʿAflaq from the mid-twentieth century, one “book” from 1977 by Saddam, and part of the 1982 report of the Ninth Baʿth Congress.

As we showed above, in ʿAflaq’s 1940s lectures his readers could find anything they wanted. They could find an apparent call to go back to the imagined pristine Islam of the Prophet’s era, but also a demand for a secular state. The most interesting and confusing lecture, “In Memory of the Arab Prophet” (1943), is among those that were included in the curriculum.[[131]](#footnote-131) In it, ʿAflaq says: “Muhammad was all the Arabs, let all the Arabs today be Muhammad,” and more such Islamist-sounding sentences. But he also says: “Maybe we are not seen praying with those who pray or fasting with those who fast.”[[132]](#footnote-132) When found in a 1997 curriculum, this clashed head-on with Saddam’s Faith Campaign.

The 1977 lecture by Saddam that was found on the course reading list[[133]](#footnote-133) has the usual ʿAflaq-style homage to Islam but, also, that the party “is not and should not be a religious party.” Most importantly, he defined the Islamic jurisprudence as *passee de mode.* This, too, clashed with his Faith Campaign. A fourth source for the party’s course on Islam was the anti-religious chapter titled “The Religious Question” in the resolutions of a 1982 party congress.[[134]](#footnote-134) The party warned that “Religious concepts” began “to overcome Party concepts.”[[135]](#footnote-135) The growing “religious-political phenomenon” was spreading “at all levels of the party.” This led to ideological confusion when the party was facing the “hostile religious-political phenomenon.”[[136]](#footnote-136) Also, as shown above, the report includes an atheistic attack against the very essence of religion.[[137]](#footnote-137)

Helfont’s interpretation of those secular and anti-religious texts is nothing short of breathtaking. He sees all of them as blueprints for Saddam’s Islamic “Faith Campaign.”[[138]](#footnote-138) But can Saddam’s 1977 no-*sharīʿa* doctrine be a blueprint for his June 1990 commitment to implement the *sharīʿa* in all walks of life? Can the party’s Congress’ assault on all religions be a blueprint for Saddam’s 1990s mosque-building spree or forcing school children into the mosques? If anything, those documents may show that Sassoon and Faust are correct and that in the 1990s Saddam had a secret anti-religious ideology.

Assuming that these reading assignments were taught, and not just left on the list, an explanation is in order. One possible explanation is that this was the initiative of an angry senior Baʿthist old-timer, or many angry old-timers, who protested in this way the leader’s Islamization. There was enough disorder in the party in the 1990s that such an initiative could slip through the net. More likely, though, is the possibility that the curriculum was approved by Saddam himself. Saddam’s Iraq was not the USSR under Stalin. Unlike Stalin in his 1938 *The History of the All-Union*[*Communist Party*](https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/political-parties-and-movements/communist)*(Bolsheviks) - Short Course,* Saddam never tried to change the party’s history to suit political expediency. For example, he never eradicated from the party’s records the names of central comrades whom he later ordered executed or assassinated.[[139]](#footnote-139) Likewise, he never disowned his own speeches and decisions, even when they became politically awkward. He regarded the preservation of the legacy of the party as a matter of honor even when it became null and void.[[140]](#footnote-140) So, it is possible that the party tutors told the young recruits that secularism had been the Baʿth doctrine but under the “Faith Campaign” it changed. If that was the case, and if everyone in the party was aware of the quiet opposition to the campaign, then we can only imagine the confusion of a junior party recruit.

There is a fourth piece of evidence arguably hidden in the archives that convinced Sassoon and Faust that their pre-archives predecessors erred, and there was no ideological change. They believe that Saddam’s Islamic “Faith Campaign” was a smoke screen, behind which he “continued to be anti-religious and to repress any sign of real religiosity.”[[141]](#footnote-141) The evidence was that, despite the Islamizing ***façon,*** the regime continued to repress religious activists, movements, and practices.[[142]](#footnote-142) The repression was indeed real, but there are three questions that the two historians refrain from asking. Firstly, who exactly did the regime repress, and, secondly, was the repression secret, so that we are learning about it only from the secret archives. If it was *no*secret, then their predecessors must have already factored it in. Thirdly, was Saddam exceptional? Were there also other regimes that were generally recognized as Islamic, that repressed religious activities? If so, then maybe we cannot define Saddam of the 1990s as “anti-religious.”

Sassoon tells us: “Religious ceremonies and special religious processions during Muharram … particularly in southern Iraq,” were “mostly prohibited by the security organization, because they attracted large gatherings that could not be easily controlled. These were “anti-religious activities.”[[143]](#footnote-143) However, the reader is ***not*** told that “southern Iraq” is almost entirely Shiʿi, and that there are only Shi*ʿ*i mass gatherings on Muharram, mainly the *‘Ashura.* This is the mourning of the murder of the most beloved Shi*ʿ*i Imam, al-Hussein bin ‘Ali, at the hands of the “Sunni” Umayyad Caliphate. These are potentially anti-Sunni events. Because the Baʿth regime was Sunni-hegemonic, anti-regime demonstrations on the *‘Ashura* were common. So, prohibiting it had nothing to do with “suspicion” of “any person with religious beliefs.” Rather, this was about suspicion of any Shiʿi person who participates in those mass gatherings. We are also told that the authorities “were concerned [even] about funerals, realizing that large processions could develop, especially if the coffin was being taken to Karbala.”[[144]](#footnote-144) Here we are not told that Karbala is a Shiʿi holy town and a traditional world Shiʿi burial place. So, again, we are notalerted that the limitations are imposed only on Shiʿi religious mass gatherings. We are told also that the regime defined certain religious ceremonies as “negative,” or “deviant” practices that represented “defiance of Islam.”[[145]](#footnote-145) Indeed, many internal security instructions explain why such practices must be stopped.[[146]](#footnote-146) However, again, we are not told that these derogative descriptions were applied exclusively to Shiʿi religious ceremonies, never to practices that are common to all Muslims. No derogative expressions were ever directed against the Ramadhan fast-breaking (*Iftar*) evenings, or the two great festivals of *‘id al-Fitr* and *‘Id al-Adhḥa,* or the Prophet’s birthday. Sassoon also reports that there were orders to prevent “the spread of pictures of prophets and imams.”[[147]](#footnote-147) Again, Sassoon does *not* tell us that no Muslim would produce the Prophet’s pictures, and only the Shiʿis print and hang pictures of their imams and religious leaders.

All those reports of restrictions imposed on religious gatherings, however, clash with reports by the same scholar of other archival revelations according to which the regime generously supported other religious gatherings. This is confusing. For example, we are told that the important religious occasion of the Prophet’s birthday was given lavish official support.[[148]](#footnote-148) This is an accurate report, but many similar reports appeared in the open Baʿthi media. From where, then, is the surprise, and where is the regime’s repression of “any sign of realreligiosity?” The answer is that, in contrast to the Shiʿi religious mass-occasions, the Baʿth regime provided rich support for celebrations of all-Islamic festivals, even in the Shiʿi holy cities.[[149]](#footnote-149) Also, the reader is not told that, unlike the Shiʿi *‘Ashura* and *Arba‘in,* the generic Prophet’s birthday, *‘Id al-Fitr* and *‘Id al-Adhḥa* have no sectarian anti-Sunni (and in Iraq anti-regime) connotation whatsoever. Therefore, no Shiʿi riots against the Baʿth regime could be reasonably expected. Defining the regime as being “anti-religious” because it suppressed Shiʿi religious mass-occasions is a mistake. Furthermore, the reader is not told that the Prophet’s birthday has been turned by the Sunni community in modern Iraq into a very central religious festival, as a counterbalance to the mass Shiʿi ones. The Iraqi monarchy already introduced it as a national holiday on 12 Rabi’ al-Awwal. Al-Fukayki reports that the Sunnis “were pushed to exaggerate” celebrating the Prophet’s birthday, when the Shi’i migrants flooded Baghdad under Qassem, as a Sunni response to the Shi’i mass-commemorations in the capital’s streets.[[150]](#footnote-150) For the Baʿth Sunni-hegemonic regime, supporting the all-Islamic, but Sunni-colored Prophet’s birthday was therefore a useful way to demonstrate generic Islamic religiosity.

 Another mistake is relating to this suppression as a hidden fact, that only the archives revealed to the new historian who was the first to have access to the new archives. This suppression was anything but a well-guarded regime secret. The proof of that is hidden in plain sight in Sassoon’s account. He reports of “[v]iolence by the regime’s apparatus” and that “thousands were arrested and tortured for sheltering activists.” This “made any opposition very difficult” in the “[Shiʿite] south and the [Kurdish] north.” The regime “made an example of anyone caught giving help” to the opposition.[[151]](#footnote-151) If mass coercion was meant to make an example of offenders, it had to be exercised fully in the public eye.[[152]](#footnote-152) The archives add details, but nothing new in the policy picture. Sassoon claims that “the [archival] documents … clearly indicate that the declared policies … had other dimensions of which we were unaware.”[[153]](#footnote-153) While lionizing the archives and the new historian, the claim that the archives exposed hidden dimensions that show that the regime repressed “any sign of realreligiosity” represents a methodological mistake.

In addition to suppressing religious mass gatherings, we are told that the regime also suppressed Islamic movements and individuals. We are told that the archival documents “give a remarkable insight into Saddam’s obsession with the activities of religious groups in spite of the faith campaign.” Those secret documents also reveal that “[R]eligious activities of any kindwere considered dangerous, and all mosques were kept under surveillance.”[[154]](#footnote-154) The archives, we are told, uncover “the suspicion with which the regime regarded any person with religious beliefs*.”*[[155]](#footnote-155)The regime “monitored mosques … wrote reports on both large and small religious movements in Iraq and … abroad that might influence Iraq.”[[156]](#footnote-156) This monitoring was applied equally to Sunnis and Shiʿis alike, we are told. The party and security organizations were “constantly on the lookout for the movement’s supporters.”[[157]](#footnote-157)

These facts are well-founded, but not the analysis. The security organizations “were constantly on the lookout” not because the groups were “Wahhabi” or Salafi, but because they were suspected of hostility to the regime. There is evidence from Vice President ‘Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri that the regime even sponsored at Saddam’s Islamic University at least one radical Salafi Sunni, maybe a Wahhabi group and a Sufi Sunni group.[[158]](#footnote-158) This way the regime was trying to fight fire with fire. This support for Sunni Salafis or “Wahhabis” could also be found in the regime’s open media. It was made public by ‘Uday Saddam Hussein, who criticized his uncle, Minister of the Interior Watban Ibrahim Hassan al-Tikriti, for allowing “Wahhabis” to assemble and operate freely.[[159]](#footnote-159) Unreported by Sassoon, even the archives confirm this phenomenon. For example, in a 2000 private letter to the president, Barazan Ibrahim Hassan al-Tikriti, Saddam’s half-brother, objected to the president’s policy of encouraging radical Salafi Islam.[[160]](#footnote-160) There is also a recording in the archives of a private conversation between Saddam and a senior party official who complains that “Wahhabis” are being tolerated, even allowed to preach from the pulpit in (Sunni) mosques. Saddam did not seem surprised.[[161]](#footnote-161)

Sassoon reports that “Wahhabism was banned from the early 1990s and the death penalty imposed on its followers.”[[162]](#footnote-162) While Wahhabism was, indeed, banned, and some Wahhabis were even executed, our historian cannot provide any evidence of any law that imposed “the death penalty” on Wahhabis. This is very meaningful information, because, by contrast, RCC Decree No. 461 of March 31, of 1980 imposed capital punishment for membership in the Shiʿi al-Daʿwa Islamic Party.[[163]](#footnote-163) The execution was automatic. Not so for real or presumed Wahhabis. Put in a somewhat simplistic way, to the security organs there were good “Wahhabis” and bad “Wahhabis,” but only bad Shiʿi opposition activists. So, contrary to what Sassoon says, executions of Sunnis and Shi’is were not even remotely “egalitarian.”[[164]](#footnote-164)

Finally, Saddam and the Baʿth regime were not unique in suppressing hostile religious movements. The same practice was adopted even by regimes that were originally carried to power on Islamist wings. Thus, for example, soon after he came to power, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini repressed the Mujahidin Khalq and the Hojatiyya, both very religious Shiʿi groups. Likewise, in 1989 the Sudanese Islamic *coup d’état* of General Omar al-Bashir and Hassan al-Turabi arrested Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi and his supporters. Al-Mahdi was hardly a secularist: he was imam of the Ansar, a Sufi order that pledges allegiance to the deceased Sudanese *mahdī*. In 1999, al-Bashir ousted his former ally Hassan al-Turabi, the leader of the Sudanese sister movement of the Muslim Brethren. The Saudi regime, too, has suppressed religious movements. And yet, no historian claimed that Khomeini, al-Bashir, or the Saudi royal house were “anti-religious” and “repressed any sign of religiosity.” It is suggested here, therefore, that, however cynical Saddam may have been about his religiosity during the last decade of his rule, Iraq of his “Faith Campaign” was more Islamic by far than Iraq had ever been since it became a nation-state in 1920.

**Deception and Truth in the Archives and the Open Media**

Explicitly or implicitly, Sassoon, Faust, and Helfont suggest that the public media cannot be trusted on state-Islam relations and ideology in general, and the archives are the fountain of truth. This author disagrees. While many areas in any regime cannot be studied in depth without their classified archives, regime ideology is not one of them. The dictator has no other means but his public media to educate or indoctrinate the people on how he wants them to think and behave. To complete the picture, the people and the historian can also observe the regime’s “operational ideology,” namely, its policy effects on the ground. This makes it possible to gauge the regime’s commitment to its rhetorical ideology. The public may accept or reject the leader’s values or question his sincerity and image. Thus, for example, when Saddam’s Republican Guard occupied Kuwait, people could question the sincerity of the Baʿth public commitment to voluntary pan-Arab unity. Both aspects of this action were public and, as such, of the most crucial importance for the public and historians. By comparison, no matter how interesting it is, whatever the dictator says to his close associates behind closed doors carries far less weight. In terms of regime ideology, if we find a contradiction between the public and the classified, as long as the classified remains classified, preferring it over the public is a methodological mistake.

Are the archival records straightforward? On the value and limits of the Baʿth archives an experienced historian, who had the opportunity to study archives before, has this to say:

What emerges [from the Baʿth archives] … is a picture of a state and a party awesome in their ability to monitor and control dissent and … to reward loyal citizens... But that is more a picture that the state and the party wanted to believe than it is reality … however, these documents do provide valuable information on Iraq society, not only on … the Ba’th. One often has to read them against the grain … to mine them for the information about the people they ruled.[[165]](#footnote-165)

Both the regime’s open media and its archives are often misleading, and both must be read critically. The contribution of the archives is tremendous, but they are anything but inclusive, as we have only parts of them. Moreover, they are anything but “straightforward.”

Internal reports coming from the bottom to the top are sometimes false, designed to please the boss or push embarrassing facts under the carpet. At the same time, we sometimes find embarrassing confessions in the archives that ring true. While the open media usually provides regime propaganda, whether explicitly or implicitly, it often provides also more reliable information. One rule of thumb on how to identify a more credible report is to gauge how embarrassing it is to the regime. The more embarrassing the report, the more truthful it is likely to be because it exposes chinks in the regime’s armor.

One example is refuting the party’s claim that for the Baʿth, all Arabs, Sunnis, and Shiʿis alike, are equal. In an audio recording of a private meeting with Saddam, a senior party official complains that only Shiʿi, but no Sunni Islamists are being executed.[[166]](#footnote-166) This is very embarrassing because it exposes the regime’s hypocrisy. Ergo, this is very likely true. At the same time, taking at face value internal party officials’ reports to the boss can be a mistake. For example, Sassoon accepts as true the archival reports that, following the 1991 Shiʿite mass uprising, the state of the party was good. As he puts it, the internal reports “do not indicate a fundamental change in the party’s role, or that it was weakened, as some have argued.”[[167]](#footnote-167) Yet, even as late as 1994, Saddam and a few senior party officials told the whole nation on the radio and television, and in the press that the party was going through a devastating crisis.[[168]](#footnote-168) In such cases, this author’s advice is to believe Saddam and his public media, but the historian must at least always suspect sanguine internal reports and not paste over public statements that contradict his interpretation.

Another example of deception in the archives is that of party membership numbers. Sassoon again accepts the internal reports at face value. “Many have argued that the party weakened after the 1991 uprising, but the statistics clearly illustrate that recruitment continued at an intensified pace.”[[169]](#footnote-169) Indeed, following the 1991 uprising, the party bosses urged each branch to mass recruit.Yet, even two years after the uprising, the party’s public daily newspaper complained that many of those counted as members shirked activities.[[170]](#footnote-170) Even four years after the uprising, Saddam and senior officials still complained in the public media that many of those recruited were not committed Baʿthis.[[171]](#footnote-171)It is possible thatafter the Oil for Food program kicked in (the first shipments of food arrived in March 1997), things began to improve, but the public disclosures of the regime’s luminaries between 1991 and 1995 contradict the internal reports. Publicly admitting failure was not easy. This author suggests that, unlike Sassoon, Saddam and his senior comrades were not fooled by the sanguine reports of their underlings. Apparently, they thought that papering over the profound crisis in the party may end in disaster.

A case in which the secret archives corroborate highly sensitive information that had appeared in the regime’s public media is that of the sectarian profile of the party. Sassoon reports from the archives that even after the 1991 Shiʿite uprising, “many Shiʿis were [still] part of the system to the [2003] end.”[[172]](#footnote-172) This information is correct. Sassoon is mistaken, however, in his conviction that this archive-based conclusion represents an innovation. Basing themselves on the regime’s open media, two pre-archives’ historians found out that Shiʿis had meaningful representation in the party’s leadership already in 1977 and at least until 1995. They reached that conclusion 15 and 23 years respectively before Sassoon discovered it in the archives.[[173]](#footnote-173) A fascinating case where the public Iraqi media revealed an embarrassing event that was ignored by the internal communication is where Saddam’s strong hostility to homosexuals and transvestites as offensive to Iraqi and Arab honor, was challenged publicly in 1994. Likewise, while ignored by the internal recirds, 1998 students protested the leader’s new Islamist conservatism.[[174]](#footnote-174)

A case where the international open media and the Shiʿi opposition are the historian’s only guides is that of the blood-drenched repression of the Shiʿi March 1991 uprising. Sassoon says that the archives taught him that some of his pre-archives predecessors “overstated the Sunni-Shiʿi chasm.”[[175]](#footnote-175) He also opines that “Sadam Hussein was almost ‘egalitarian’ in his treatment of anyone considered or suspected of disloyalty.”[[176]](#footnote-176) However, while both the archives and Sassoon discuss the uprising, neither of them mentions its bloody suppression.[[177]](#footnote-177) It involved the killing and mass execution of 100,000–250,000 Shiʿites.[[178]](#footnote-178) A similar massacre took place in Kurdistan, but no such cataclysmic event took place in the Sunni-Arab areas. Size matters. Perhaps Sassoon’s predecessors did not “overstate the Sunni-Shiʿi chasm” after all. Consulting open sources would have provided Sassoon with the information that was too embarrassing for both the party’s secret correspondence and open Iraqi media to report.[[179]](#footnote-179)

Unquestionably trusting the internal reports led Helfont to conceive his most central thesis. As he describes it, “the Iraqi archival records reveal that Saddam’s increasing instrumentalization of Islam should not be attributed to an ideological shift.”[[180]](#footnote-180) The trap for the unsuspecting historian in this case was the sanguine internal party reports of the 1990s that the Baʿth officials managed to create a loyal cadre of *ʿulamāʾ*. According to Helfont’s thesis, what enabled Saddam in the 1990s, at long last, to implement the party’s original dream of an Islam-rich regime, was the “integration of Iraq’s religious landscape” into the regime’s system. By that “integration,” Helfont means creating many “reliable” and “loyal” Baʿthi “Islamic scholars.”[[181]](#footnote-181) The new Islamic state institutions, he tells us, “focused on ensuring that all students and staff were loyal to the regime and possessed the correct political orientation.”[[182]](#footnote-182) “[T]he regime could [at long last] fully indoctrinate these budding religious leaders” and “weed out those who had other agendas.”[[183]](#footnote-183) Only in the 1990s, when this process was complete, claims Helfont, could Saddam launch the party’s original dream of Islam galore. This, Helfont insists, is why between the 1940s and 2003, there was no “ideological shift” and no “Islamism,” as claimed by some of his pre-archives predecessors. Rather, “the Iraqi archival records reveal” that there was only “instrumentalization of Islam.”[[184]](#footnote-184)Helfont repeats it multiple times, occasionally a few times in one page, as if repetition is evidence.[[185]](#footnote-185) For Helfont, because legitimacy through Islam was the party’s original ideology, its implementation in the 1990s “Faith Campaign” represented no new ideology. Moreover, Saddam only needed a critical mass of “loyal” ʿulamāʾ, or “religious landscape,” to implement the party’s original Islamic dream. Once he had it – he launched his “Faith Campaign.”

Helfont’s account of the indoctrination, monitoring and organization of the regime-sponsored clergy is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the regime. There is no reason to doubt his report that party officials reported both their activities and success.[[186]](#footnote-186) He failed, however, when he took those reports at face value. What if Saddam did not? What if he knew or thought that those “loyal” and “reliable” clerics were, in fact, his enemies? Helfont himself is telling us that the first phase of recruitment failed: the regime tried to convince Baʿthis to become clerics, but they refused.[[187]](#footnote-187) Apparently, in its secular days, the party did a thorough job hammering anticlerical views into the members’ consciousness. Having failed to recruit comrades, the regime turned to other, less loyal, and more religious men. Unlike Helfont, Saddam was not fooled by his underlings’ reports. He thought that, despite his deep concessions to Islam, the efforts to “Baʿthify” the clerics failed. One of his last orders in 2003, before the US invaded Iraq, reveals his true judgment. He ordered that if the coalition forces entered Baghdad, in addition to destroying the country’s infrastructure, the comrades should infiltrate and “assassinate the imams and preachers of the Friday mosques and [other] mosques.”[[188]](#footnote-188) Had Saddam trusted his “loyal” *ʿulamāʾ*, he would have ordered to protect them, so that under the American occupation they could use the pulpits to demand his return to power, but he did the opposite. So much for Saddam’s trust in his “loyal” and “reliable” clerics.Helfont’s whole thesis hinges on the theory that Saddam delayed the implementation of an alleged original Baʿthist Islamic dream until he had a “loyal” cadre of *ʿulamāʾ*. Given Saddam’s mass assassination order, this whole theory collapses under its own weight. This means that, Helfont’s undeniable contribution to the understanding of Iraq’s history, there had to be another explanation for the Islamic “Faith Campaign.”

Remarkably, Saddam provided the explanation in the 1986 pan-Arab leadership meeting. As shown above, he explained that there was a need to befriend Sunni Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood because the public had become more religious and the clerics more prestigious. Already then, some comrades feared that he was contemplating Islamization to win popularity. However, to impose his version of Islam, he needed a collaborating cadre of ʿulamāʾ. Helfont got everything in reverse. Instead of nurturing a cadre of “loyal” ʿulamāʾ to implement an old Baʿthi dream, Saddam did the opposite. In his search for popularity in a difficult moment, he decided to implement a massive deviation from the Baʿth secular tradition. To assist him in this endeavor he tried to create a loyal cadre and failed.[[189]](#footnote-189)

**Misunderstanding the Baʿthist Codes**

The Baʿth party and later its Iraqi branch under Saddam developed specific codes. By immersing oneself in their public media any researcher can easily crack these codes because they were meant to be cracked. However, in important cases, the three historians studied here did not do this. One of the phenomena that convinced Sassoon that “many” of his pre-archives’ predecessors “overstated the Sunni-Shiʿi chasm”[[190]](#footnote-190) is that there is no “Sunni or Shiʿi” rubric in the party’s “official forms in the archives.” So, for Sassoon, the Sunni-Shi’i problem was less significant than what his predecessors thought.[[191]](#footnote-191) Sassoon is surprised. He confesses that he “could not understand … why sectarian identification was not referred to in the audiotapes of the leadership’s private meetings when the Shiʿi [1991] intifada … was discussed.”[[192]](#footnote-192) There were cases of such mention in unscripted closed-door meetings that Sassoon missed,[[193]](#footnote-193) but such cases were indeed rare. It is correct, also, that the terms “Shiʿi” and “Sunni” appear even more rarely in the party’s written documents. Sassoon is puzzled: “My first reaction,” he reports, was that “a high official had ordered these words to be excluded.” That is, this exclusion was the initiative of a creative individual official. Sassoon’s other guesses are that some senior Shiʿi officials might be offended and that Saddam emphasized “loyalty rather than religious affiliating.” This does not explain what could be so offensive to a senior Shiʿi official if the definitions “Shiʿi” and “Sunni” are part of an application form. Finally, Sassoon says that Saddam’s “persecution and repression of the Shiʿis stemmed from his incorrect belief that many would be influenced by the ideology of … Ayatollah Khomeini.”[[194]](#footnote-194) If the Shiʿis were indeed suspected as a collective, then including “Shiʿi” in party application forms and personal reports could serve as a useful security screening or warning, but this never happened.

In fact, the policy of silence over sect, Sunnis versus Shi’is, existed in the regime’s public media from its inception. This was also the case in Baʿthi Syria. The split among Arabic speakers along religious lines, Christian versus Muslims, had been treated extensively by ʿAflaq in his early days, but even he avoided the Sunni-Shi’i-‘Alawite-Druze divide. The 1947 Constitution recognized the problem, but the solution was just to forbid “sectarianism,” and that was that. Both in Baʿthist Syria and Iraq there was a minority sect in hegemony. In Iraq, Shiʿites represent three out of every four Arabs. At first, there were no Shiʿis in the two highest institutions, the RCC and the RL. Since 1977, some Shiʿites appeared there, but the regime remained Sunni-hegemonic. It was convenient, therefore, to stick to the party’s silence code, implying that because all Arabic speakers were just Arabs, the sectarian affiliation of the leadership was irrelevant. Still, Saddam understood that he had to satisfy Shi’i expectations to see Shi’is in the leadership and therefore appointed Shi’i party old-timers to significant positions. However, because he could not describe them explicitly as “Shi’is,” he made sure that their names, birthplaces, and careers, would be enough to indicate their Shi’i affiliation. This was another part of the Baʿthist code. Most or all Iraqis easily cracked it because it was meant to be cracked, but not every historian did.

Another example of misunderstanding the Baʿthi codes is Helfont’s reading of a closed-door meeting in March 1979. From that meeting, he concludes that, after a decade of reluctant secularism, Saddam at long last revealed his deep love for Islam.[[195]](#footnote-195) But Helfont misunderstood Saddam’s code. The document shows that Saddam was worried about the influence of Khomeini’s rise to power in Tehran on the Iraqi Shiʿa. However, rather than coming out of the closet and revealing his secret love for the mosque, as Helfont suggests, he ordered that the party’s most qualified spies infiltrate the mosques more than before. This conclusion is supported by Sassoon’s evidence that in the following three years, Saddam and his comrades still expressed anti-religious views in closed-door meetings.[[196]](#footnote-196) Helfont read Sassoon’s book but missed this part.[[197]](#footnote-197) The problem with Sassoon’s reporting here is that he thinks that Saddam’s secular, even anti-religious approach remained “to the end.”[[198]](#footnote-198) In fact, while rejection of mixing religion with politics could still be found, since the second half of the 1980s no anti-religious expressions were found.

**Conclusion**

This article tries to answer mainly two questions. First, in terms of regime ideology, what should be the relative weight of open versus archival sources? Second, does the Islamic “Faith Campaign” of the 1990s represent a Baʿthi continuity, or is it an ideological “shift” or even volte-face?

**Should Open or Archival Records be Our Main Source for the Writing of History?** This depends on the subject. The archives are indispensable in the study of intelligence and internal security systems, how decisions were made, the collective profile of the party’s lower rungs, and several other topics. However, this article shows that when it comes to regime ideology, open records and interviews are the best sources. The same is very likely the case concerning culture, education, and gender issues.[[199]](#footnote-199) As opposed to the secret records, the regime’s open media and *modus operandi,* oroperational ideology*,* were what the people saw and experienced in their daily lives, and what the publicbelieved to be the regime’s ideology. Secret meetings and operations, together with classified party indoctrination programs, represent part of the picture, but the public record is the main source that represents the regime’s ideology.

A few examples of the impact of the regime’s public ideology and policies on the daily lives of the Iraqis may help to demonstrate this. When car thieves, but then also money changers and even private bankers began losing their healthy right hands, the public understood that the regime had changed its ideology. When party officials could no longer have social meetings over a bottle of arak, they reached the same conclusion. This is also what happened when parents of primary school kids heard that classes became gender-separated, that their children could not understand matrimony Qurʾān *surah*s, that *surah*s about hell gave them nightmares, or that they were sent to the mosques.[[200]](#footnote-200) When even Manal Yunis, the Baʿthi head of the women’s union, began to wear a *hijāb,* this was a sign of the new times.[[201]](#footnote-201) The regime’s ideology was in the first place what the public saw and experienced. It was far less, if at all, what Saddam whispered to his underlings behind closed doors, or even what books were included in an internal party course.

The way the public saw the new system was not as “anti-religious,” “repressing any sign of religiosity” or “suffocating Islam.” Some Shiʿites believed that Saddam’s Faith Campaign was meant to impose on them Sunni Islam.[[202]](#footnote-202) Other Shiʿis found that the Faith Campaign made it easier to lead a religious life.[[203]](#footnote-203) At least in Mosul, a Sunni-majority city, Sunni Islamists took the “Faith Campaign” beyond Saddam’s intent and began to demonstrate strong sectarian bigotry, including anti-Christian attacks.[[204]](#footnote-204) Approvingly or reluctantly, many Iraqis saw the Faith Campaign as the new regime’s ideology.

As we saw, one of the three historians argues that his pre-archives predecessors were casualties of the assumption “that one can read public statements and surmise from them an ideology.” The two other historians are less emphatic but they, too, dismiss the critical relevance of public rhetoric and policy to the “real” ideology of the regime. This article tries to show that this is a methodological mistake. Furthermore, it is argued here that with very few exceptions, the information in the archives confirms what we saw earlier in the public media. The claim that “behind closed doors” we hear things that annul what we saw in the public domain is mistaken.

 **Ideological Continuity or Metamorphosis?**

This article’s conclusion is that, whether Sadam’s motivation was utilitarian or the result of a personal transformation, in the 1990s, Iraq saw a meaningful ideological metamorphosis, from secularism to political Islam. Saddam’s Islam was not that of the Muslim Brotherhood, Khomeini, or the Wahhabis. Suffice it to say that one could legally purchase a bottle of arak in Iraq and that Saddam would not retreat from his fascination with the glory that was heathen Mesopotamia. His Islam was unique: a post-Baʿthi compromise with the *sharīʿa.* And yet, he introduced political Islam, or Islamism and, for the Baʿth, this was a new ideology. ‘Uday Saddam Hussein’s complaint that his father was turning Baghdad into a “a Saudi city” was an overstatement but a dramatic about-face did take place.

None of the three historians reviewed here denies that the regime was secular in the 1970s. None of them denies that during the Islamic “Faith Campaign” Saddam imposed Islam to a large degree. All three believe, though, that this did not represent an ideological change. Helfont is convinced that ʿAflaq, then Saddam, craved an Arab Islamic state from the outset. For him, the “Faith Campaign” represented no change of ideology, only an implementation, or “instrumentalization” of an old Islamic dream.[[205]](#footnote-205) But Helfont missed so much. To mention only some examples, he ignored ʿAflaq’s 1940s demand for a secular state. In 1986 he missed ʿAflaq’s warning not to “practice” Islam. He missed the Baʿth 1947 Constitution’s objection to religion in politics, and Saddam’s 1977 rejection of the *sharīʿa*. Likewise, he missed the highly provocative culture that Saddam encouraged in the 1970s, from presenting Abu Nuwas, the Abbasid-era wine poet, as a cultural symbol, to inviting young couples to spend their honeymoons in the temple of Ishtar-Astarte, “the ancient Babylonians’ goddess of love,” where they will be inspired by “the atmosphere of love.”[[206]](#footnote-206) This does not look like a desperate secret longing for Islam.

Sassoon and Faust say that throughout its history the party was and remained staunchly secular, even hostile to Islam, and that the Islamic “Faith Campaign” was mere smoke and mirrors. This article argues that from its inception until 1983, the party was indeed very secular. However, in 1983 Saddam began his odyssey from secularism to Islam. At least initially, Saddam’s intention was cynical. Yet, as shown above, the result was Islamization of the public sphere and even the party. Faust argues that the regime “embraced” Islam “in order to suffocate it.” The result, he believes, was that Saddam’s regime “did not so much ‘Islamize’ the Baʿth, as it “Baʿthize[d] religion.” [[207]](#footnote-207) Sassoon concludes that “the Baʿth regime succeeded to a large extent in forcing the majority of individuals to adjust their values in order to survive.”[[208]](#footnote-208) Had this been the case, by 1990, most Iraqis would have become more or less secular. Instead, as Saddam himself admitted in the 1986 Leadership meeting, the opposite happened: the public became more religious. As this author sees it, unable to beat the Islamic trend, Saddam decided to join it.

Faust’s evidence of the “suffocation” of Islam is the regime’s “cracking down hard” when it “felt threatened by a preacher or [Islamic] practice.” This is essentially also Sassoon’s view.[[209]](#footnote-209) However, as shown above, religious activities and movements were repressed only when they were seen as threatening. All other Islamic activities were tolerated and often encouraged. Even if Saddam’s Islamization was purely cynical and utilitarian, it is difficult to see the regime as anti-Islamic. Saddam created his own Islam, but he allowed other interpretations if he considered them supportive or innocuous. Finally, Faust claims that evidence found in the archive suggests Saddam’s regime “did not so much ‘Islamize’ in the 1990s as expand its ongoing policy to Baʿthize religion***.”*** [[210]](#footnote-210) It is the view of this author that the opposite is the case: Saddam “Islamized” the Baʿth far more than he “Baʿthized” Islam. He imposed Islam on state symbolism, law, culture, and education. He “Baʿthized” religion only by tolerating few non-Islamic practices.[[211]](#footnote-211) Either way, world Islam and devout Muslims in Iraq were not “Baʿthized” in any way, while the Baʿth party and regime were significantly Islamized. By 2002 they were no longer secular.

For those historians who believe that Baʿth ideology was always Islamic-oriented, or that Saddam’s policies remained anti-Islamic “to the end,” here is archival evidence in Saddam’s own voice. In a private discussion in 2002 with a visiting Sudanese Islamist cabinet minister, Saddam was frustrated. “Because the [Faith] Campaign went very smoothly,” he complained, “our Arab and Muslim brothers did not notice the extent of the revolution (*al-inqilāb*) that we caused in the lives of the Iraqi people.”[[212]](#footnote-212) His use of *inqilab* is significant. In the early years, ʿAflaq used it to describe the profound mental *inqilāb* that he expected from the Baʿthists as the pioneers of the Arab Revolution. Before the party can revolutionize the nation, he explained, it must itself become the incarnation of the revolution. This “revolution,” *al-inqilāb* he preached, must create a Baʿthi with “a new mentality, a new spirit, a new noble character.”[[213]](#footnote-213) Saddam was well-versed in ʿAflaq’s writings. What he meant to say was probably that he had forced Iraq into a kind of mental metamorphosis, and he was frustrated that it was not recognized abroad. Was he hinting that without Henry VIII-style executions, no one in the Islamic world would pay attention? Then he charged into the details: different from the past, pupils and students would now study religion from the first grade of primary school. All the judges must learn the Prophet’s Tradition and Qurʾān, and anyone who failed the examination would be excluded from the bench. The fate of the top cadre of state and party depended on the results of Qurʾān tests.[[214]](#footnote-214) From his grave, Saddam himself challenges those historians who believe that there was no ideological “shift.” Saddam wanted people to believe that he introduced an Islamic “revolution.” As shown above, both his open media and archives confirm that he did. The three historians reviewed here could argue that Saddam was lying to impress his visitor, but none of them mentions this archival document. Information coming from an Iraqi Shi’i scholar who lived there at the time supports it. He tells us that indeed, in the 1990s Saddam introduced an Islamic about-face that astonished people.[[215]](#footnote-215)

**List of References**

*Primary sources*

Baʿth Regional Command Collection (BRCC), Stanford University, Hoover Institution. Saddam Hussein Collection, Conflict Research Records Center (CRRC), National

Defense University.

*Secondary sources*

Abu Jaber, K.S. (1966). *The Arab Ba’th Socialist Party – History, Ideology and*

*Organization*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

ʿAflaq, M. (1974). *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth* [On the path of the Baʿth], Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa.

ʿAflaq, M. (1976). *Al-Ba*ʿ*th wal-Turāth* [The Baʿth Party and heritage], Baghdad: Dar al-

Huriya.

Al-Aqeedi, R. (2016). “The Once and Future Mosul,” *The American Interest* online,

https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/09/26/the-once-and-future-mosul/ accessed August 20, 2023.

Al-ʿAysami, S. (1973). *Fil-Thawra al-*ʿ*Arabiya* [On the Arab Revolution], 4th ed., Beirut:

Dar al-Taliʿa.

Al-Fukayki, H. (1993). *Awkār al-Hazīma: Tajribatī fī Ḥizb al-Ba*ʿ*th al-*ʿ*Iraqi* [The sources

of defeat: My experience in the Iraqi Baʿth Party], London and Cyprus: Riadel Rayyes Books.

Al-Jundi, S. (1969). *Al-Ba*ʿ*th*, Beirut: Dar al-Nahar.

Al-Wa’ili (ed.), I. (2004). *Dustūr al-Ṣadr: Majmū*ʿ *Khuttāb al-Juma*ʿ*a allatī Alqā-hā al-*

*Shahīd al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ṣadr fī Masjid al-Kūfā* [Al-Ṣadr’s constitution: An anthology of the Friday sermons delivered by the martyr Muhammad al-Ṣadr in the Kufa Mosque], Najaf: Maktabat Dar al-Mujtaba.

Amnesty International (1993). “Iraq: ‘Disappearance’ of Shi’a clerics and students,”

https://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/mde140021993en.pdf, accessed July 18, 2022.

Anderson, J.N.D. (1960). “A Law of Personal Status for Iraq,” *International and*

*Comparative Law Quarterly*, 9, 542–63.

Arab Baʿth Socialist Party of Iraq, (1983). *The Central Report of Ninth Regional*

*Congress June 1982*,Lausanne: SARTEC (translated from the Arabic).

Baram, A. (1989). “The Ruling Political Elite in Baʿthi Iraq 1968–1986,” *International*

*Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*,21, 447–93.

Baram, A. (1991). *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Baʿthi Iraq*

*1968–89*,New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press.

Baram, A. (2014). *Saddam Husayn and Islam 1968–2003 – Baʿthi Iraq from Secularism*

*to Faith*,Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press.

Batatu, H. (1978).*The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movement of Iraq*,

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Blaydes, L. (2018). *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*,Princeton, NJ:

Princeton University Press.

Efrati, N. (2005). “Negotiating Rights in Iraq: Women and the Personal Status Law,”

*Middle East Journal*, 59, 4.

Faust, A.M. (2015). *The Baʿthification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Totalitarianism*,

Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)-Near East and South Asia (NES).

Hamid, ʿA (2019). “Al-ʿIrāq min al-ʿilmāniya al-mutashaddida ilā al-Islām al-siyāsī

1968–2003” [Iraq from militant secularism to political Islam 1968–2003], Kabala, https://m.annabaa.org/arabic/authorsarticles/18970, accessed April 22, 2019.

Helfont, S.R. (2014). “Saddam and the Islamists: The Baʿthist Regime’s

Instrumentalization of Religion in Foreign Affairs,” *Middle East Journal*, 68, 3, 352–366.

Helfont, S.R. (2015). “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots of Saddam

Hussein’s Islam,”unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, Princeton University website, http://dataspace.princeton.edu/jspui/handle/88435/dsp01j6731609j*,* accessed February 12, 2018.

Helfont, S.R. (2016). “Saddam and the Islamists: The Baʿthist regime’s

instrumentalization of religion,” *Middle East Journal*, 68, 3, 352–66.

Helfont, S.R. (2018). *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the Roots of*

*Insurgencies in Iraq*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Helfont, S.R., & Brill, M. (2016). “Saddam did not create ISIS: Getting the terrorist

group’s origin story right,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 20.

Hizb al-Baʿth al-ʿArabi al-Ishtiraki [Arab Baʿth Socialist Party], (1971). *Niḍāl Hizb al-*

*Ba*ʿ*th al-*ʿ*Arabī al-Ishtirākī* ʿ*abra Mu*ʿ*tammarati-hi al-Qawmiya 1947–1964* [The struggle of the Arab Baʿth Socialist Party through its pan-Arab congresses], Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa.

Human Rights Watch (1995). “Iraq: Iraq’s brutal decrees – Amputation, branding and

the death penalty,” Human Rights Watch website, https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/IRAQ955.htm, accessed July 17, 2022.

Hussein, S. (1981). *On History, Heritage and Religion*, Baghdad: Translation and

Foreign Languages Publishing House.

Jabar, F.A. (2003). *The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq*, London: Dar al-Saqi.

Jordan, D. (2003). “State and religion in Iraq: The Sufi insurgency of the former Baʿth

regime in historical context,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 55, 344–352.

Kadhim, A. (2013). *The Hawza under siege: A study in the Baʿth Party Archive*,

Occasional Paper 1 (June), Boston, MA: Boston University Institute for Iraqi Studies.

Khoury, D.R. (2013). *Iraq in War Time*,New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Kingdom of Iraq (1936). *Dalīl al-mamlaka al-*ʿ*Irāqiya li-sannat 1935–36 al-māliya*

[Indicators for the Kingdom of Iraq for the 1935–36 financial year], Baghdad: Government Press.

Refworld.org (2023). “Iraq: Penal Code, No. 111 of 1969, July 1969,”

https://www.refworld.org/docid/452524304.html, accessed August 19, 2023

Rohde, A. (2010). *State-Society Relations in Baʿthist Iraq: Facing Dictatorship*, London

and New York, NY: Routledge.

Rohde, A. (2013). “Change and continuity in Arab Iraqi education: Sunni and Shi’i

discourses in Iraqi textbooks before and after 2003,” *Comparative Education Review,* 57, 4, 711–34.

Rohde, A. (2016). “Gays, cross-dressers, and emos: Nonnormative masculinities in

militarized Iraq,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies,* 12, 3, 433–49.

Sassoon, J. (2012). *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime*,

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (2009). “Mass graves,” Human Rights

Report, January 1–June 30.

Zeidel, R. (1997). “The Iraqi Baʿth Party 1948–1995: Personal and organization

Aspects,” Master’s dissertation, University of Haifa.

1. Helfont, S.R. (2015). “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots of Saddam Hussein’s Islam,”unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, pp. 23–24, http://dataspace.princeton.edu/jspui/handle/88435/dsp01j6731609j*,* accessed February 12, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Helfont, S.R. (2018). *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein, Islam, and the Roots of Insurgencies in Iraq*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sassoon, J. (2012). *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime*,Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Faust, A.M. (2015). *The Baʿthification of Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Totalitarianism,* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For example, Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 23–24; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 2; Samuel R. Helfont and Michael Brill, “Saddam did not create ISIS: Getting the terrorist group’s origin story right,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 20, 2016, 5; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3; Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Three other historians have a very different approach to archival and open sources: See Khoury, D.R. (2013). *Iraq in War Time*,New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; Baram, A. (2014). *Saddam Husayn and Islam 1968–2003 – Baʿthi Iraq from Secularism to Faith*,Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press; and Blaydes, L. (2018). *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*,Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3; Faust*, Baʿthification of Iraq*, p.131; Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 3 and 235; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 2–3; Helfont & Brill, “Saddam did not create ISIS,” 5. See the same implied attitude in Helfont, S.R. (2014). “Saddam and the Islamists: The Baʿthist regime’s instrumentalization of religion,” *Middle East Journal*, 68, 3, 352–66. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For example, see Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 3, 223–24, 264–65; Faust*, Baʿthification of Iraq*, pp.131–32; Helfont and Brill, “Saddam did not create ISIS,”5; Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 3 and 22–24; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 2–3. Helfont supports this view when it comes to Ba*ʿ*thist Iraq up until the 1990s,but his view about what happened in the 1990s is more difficult to decipher: See Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”pp. 21–22, 28–29, 235, and 244–46; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 21–22, 27, 183, and 189–90. More below. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”p. 35; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 27.

. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 3, my emphasis. See also Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 2–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 23. See also pp. 22–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 234–5, 247; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Helfont & Brill, “Saddam did not create ISIS,” 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For example, Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, pp. xviii, 5-6, 10, 40, 142-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For example, Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, p.129. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Helfont and Brill, “Saddam did not create ISIS,” 5. See also Helfont, “Saddam and the Islamists,” 352–66 for the same implied view. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 35; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p.17; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 2; See also Helfont “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp.i, and 2, 3, 11, 13, 14, 21, 23, 25, 30, 138, 139, 141, 144; Helfont *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 14, 105, 108, 110, 112, 113, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party* pp. 3, 223–24, 263–68; Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, pp. 131–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Batatu, H. (1978). *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movement of Iraq*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 725–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 28–29; Helfont *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 21–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Al-Fukayki, H. (1993). *Awkār al-Hazīma: Tajribatī fī Ḥizb al-Ba*ʿ*th al-*ʿ*Iraqi* [The sources of defeat: My experience in the Iraqi Baʿth Party], London and Cyprus: Riadel Rayyes Books, p. 63. Al-Fukayki consulted almost the whole leadership of the Ba’th of 1963, people like Hazim Jawad, Talib Shabib, Faysal Habib al-Khayzuran, Muhsayn al-Shaykh Radhi, and others, see pp. 11–12. See also Abu Jaber, K.S. (1966). *The Arab Ba’th Socialist Party – History, Ideology and Organization*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. A four-hour interview with Talib Shabib (1934–1997), a Baʿth Regional Leadership (RL) member and foreign minister of Iraq during the 1963 reign of the Baʿth and military officers’ coalition. The interview took place at the home of a Syrian UN diplomat in New York, on the night of September 19, 1994. See also *Al-Da*ʿ*wa Chronicle*, 22, February 1982, 1, accusing the Ba’th of adopting a “Christian and secular” ideology, with the intention of “the elimination of Islam as a political force.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Al-Fukayki, *Awkār al-Hazīma*, p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. ʿAflaq, M. (1974). “Dhikrat al-rasūl al-ʿArabi” (The memory of the Arab Messenger), in *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth* [On the path of the Baʿth Party], Beirut, Dar al-Tali’a, 1974), p. 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. ʿAflaq, “Dhikrat al-rasūl al-ʿArabi,”p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. ʿAflaq, “Dhikrat al-rasūl al-ʿArabi,”p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See for example a whole book dedicated to Islam as “heritage”: ʿAflaq, M. (1976). *Al-Ba*ʿ*th wal-Turāth* [The Baʿth and heritage], Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriya. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. ʿAflaq, “Dhikrat al-rasūl al-ʿArabi,”p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. ʿAflaq, M. in *al-Ba*ʿ*th*, No. 455, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 35–38, also 17, 20, 21, 31. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 27, also 28–29. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See for example the Druze al-ʿAysami, S. (1973). *Fil-Thawra al-*ʿ*Arabiya* [On the Arab Revolution], 4th ed., Beirut, Dar al-Taliʿa, pp. 150–51, 173–74. Yasin al-Hafez, a senior party activist, in a lecture in the party’s office in Deir al-Zor in eastern Syria, explaining that Islam is the pastimage of pan-Arab nationalism, *Al-Ba*ʿ*th* weekly, No. 406, Damascus, March 28, 1950. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. ʿAflaq, *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth,* pp. 98–99. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. ʿAflaq, *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth,* pp. 181–82. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See also ʿAflaq, *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth*, pp. 129–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. *Al-Da*ʿ*wa Chronicle* monthly by the party’s European Information Committee, No. 22, February 1982, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. ʿAflaq, *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth*, p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”p. 36. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. ʿAflaq, *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth,* p. 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Al-Fukayki, *Awkār al-Hazīma*, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Al-Fukayki, *Awkār al-Hazīma*, p. 144–45. Opening our NY meeting, Talib Shabib poured for both of us glasses of Johnnie Walker. This, at the home of a senior Syrian Ba’thi. As I did not drink mine, he drank them both. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ʿAflaq, M. (1976). *Al-Ba*ʿ*th wal-Turāth* [The Baʿth Party and heritage], Baghdad: Dar al-Huriya, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Batatu, *Old Social Classes,* p.733. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. ʿAflaq, *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth*, p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The two latter slogans appeared on the top left side of every issue of *Al-Thawra,* the party’s daily newspaper in Baghdad, 1968–2003*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Hizb al-Baʿth al-ʿArabi al-Ishtiraki [Arab Baʿth Socialist Party], “*Dustur Hizb al-Ba*ʿ*th al-*ʿ*Arabi al-Ishtirāki*, April 7, 1947” [The Constitution of the Arab Baʿth SocialistParty, April 7, 1947], in *Nidhal Hizb al-Ba*ʿ*th al-*ʿ*Arabi al-Ishtiraki* ʿ*Abra Mu*ʿ*tamarati-hi al-Qawmiya 1947–1964* [The struggle of the Arab Baʿth Socialist Party through its Pan-Arab Congresses] (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa, 1971), Article Three. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. ʿAflaq, *Al-Ba*ʿ*th wal-Turāth,* pp. 48–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Al-Fukayki, *Awkār al-Hazīma*, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Batatu, *Old Social Classes*,p. 823. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. ʿAflaq, *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth*, p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Baʿth, *Dustūr Ḥizb al-Baʿth,* 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Baʿth, *Dustūr Ḥizb al-Baʿth,* 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Baʿth, *Dustūr Ḥizb al-Baʿth,* 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. ʿAflaq,*al-Ba*ʿ*th wal-Turāth*, pp. 27–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 135; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. ʿAflaq,*al-Baʿth wal-Turāth*, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. A recording of a Baʿth Pan-Arab Leadership meeting, Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC) SH-SHTP-A-001-167, July 24, 1986, 73 to 75 minutes into the discussion. Helfont ignores this part of ʿAflaq’s words in his Ph.D. dissertation. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 35; Helfont *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 28–29. Helfont *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 21. See also p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”p. 29; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 21–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 29; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 28–29. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 21, see also 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. See the ʿArif constitution, *Al-Dustūr al-Muʾaqqat*, published in *Al-Waqaʾiʿ al-ʿIraqiyya* no. 949, May 10, 1964. For the biographies of the Iraqi Baʿth leaderships 1968-77 see Batatu, *Old Social Classes*, pp. 1086–88. For 1968–1986, see Baram, A. (1989). “The ruling political elite in Baʿthi Iraq 1968–1986,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*,21, 447–93. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”p. 28; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. *Al-Waqaʿiʾ al-ʿIraqiya*, 785 (21 March 1963), 1–2. For a detailed analysis see Anderson, J.N.D. (1960). “A law of personal status for Iraq,” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 9, 542–63; Efrati, N. (2005). “Negotiating rights in Iraq: Women and the Personal Status Law,” *Middle East Journal*, 59, 4, 581. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Al-Fukayki, *Awkār al-Hazīma,* pp. 129–30. This was confirmed in my interview with Talib Shabib, New York, September 19, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. A*l-Thawra,* February 21, 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See for example, Ayat Allah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in 1979 accusing the Baʿth of violating the sharīʿa as part of their enmity to Islam and calling for a united Islamic Sunni-Shi’i revolution, *Al-Daʿwa Chronicle,* No. 3, July 1980, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Faust*, Baʿthification of Iraq*, p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Faust*, Baʿthification of Iraq*, p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 3, 223–24, 259–60, 267–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 31; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. See *Iraq: Penal Code,* No. 111 of 1969, July 1969, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/452524304.html, accessed August 19, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. CRRC, SH-SHTP-A-001-167, July 24, 1986, around 50 minutes into the discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Saddam Hussein, “A View of Religion and Heritage,” A lecture to the Baʿth Culture and Information Bureau, in Saddam Hussein, *On History, Heritage and Religion* (Baghdad, Translation and Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1981), pp. 28–29. See also pp. 13, 24, 27–28, 30–31. For an identical approach see “*Al-ʿIlmāniya wa Jawhar al-Mawqif al-Baʿthi Min al-Dīn”* [Secularism and the essence of the Baʿthi approach to religion], *al-Thawra al-*ʿ*Arabiya*, the internal party magazine, July 1980, pp. 13–18. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 259–60. Sassoon does not acknowledge, however, that these atheistic views disappeared in the mid-1980s. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Arab Baʿth Socialist Party Iraq (1983). *The Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress June* 1982, Lausanne: SARTEC (translation from the Arabic), pp. 245–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, pp. 271–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, p. 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, pp. 274–75. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, pp. 279–82. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, p. 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, pp. 279–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, p. 281–82. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, p. 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. See, for example, Saddam’s 2002 secret letter to God, CRRC SH-PDWN-D-000-499, 43–44 in the original, 22–24 in the translation. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 255; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p.197. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 254–55; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. For example, Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-167, July 24, 1986, 65-70 minutes into the recorded discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-167, July 24, 1986, 29 minutes into the discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. CRRC, SH-SHTP-A-001-167, July 24, 1986, 39–41 minutes into the discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. CRRC, SH-SHTP-A-001-167, July 24, 1986, 31-34 minutes into the recording. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. CRRC, SH-SHTP-A-001-167, ‘Aziz, beginning 41 and ending 55 minutes into the recording. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. CRRC, SH-SHTP-A-001-167, 8 to 10 minutes into the recording. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. CRRC SH-SPPC-000-660, January 25, 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 235; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 183–84. Author’s emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. The archival record of the 1986 Pan-Arab Leadership meeting (CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-167) is an integral part of Helfont’s Princeton Ph.D. dissertation (“Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 20). He uses it to substantiate his main thesis that ʿAflaq and the party always wanted much Islam. The document, in fact, undermines this thesis. In Helfont’s 2018 dissertation-based book, the document disappeared into thin air. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. A report sent by the Ministry of the Endowment and Religious affairs to the Secretary of the President, BRCC 029-1-6-0088, May 30, 1988. See also BRCC, 029-1-6-0078, August 6, 1988.  [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. *Baghdad Voice of the Masses* in Arabic, June 24, 1989, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)-Near East and South Asia(NES), June 26, 1989, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. A three hours’ Interview with Ambassador April Glaspie, March 29, 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Saddam in a public televised address to an Islamic Conference in Baghdad, “al-Thawra, al-Jumhūriya,”June 19, 1990**.** See also *Baghdad Domestic Service in Arabic,* June 18, 1990, in *FBIS-NES*, June 19, 1990, 19–20, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. CRRC SH-PDWN-D-000-409, Saddam meeting with a guest, between April 27 and May 7, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. BRCC 01-2982-0000-0447, January 4, 1997. Helfont admits “the regime’s attempt to limit usurious loans,” and that usury is “traditionally forbidden in Islamic law.” Yet, he adds: “However, the Ba‘thists had forbidden these loans in their original constitution published in 1947.” See Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 196. This is strange: the 1947 Baʿth Constitution forbids usury due to the socialistideology of the party. Some 50 years later, legitimacy was deemed to grow from Islamic law. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. A meeting in Amman between General Hussein Kamil and UNSCOM Dr. Rolf Ekeus, August 27, 1995, http://www.casi.org.uk/info/unscom950822.pdf accessed March 7, 2024. Already in late 1988 Saddam stopped some meetings for prayer. Interview in London with the then British ambassador to Iraq Sir John Moberley, September 30, 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. A series of telephone interviews and e-mail exchanges in 2022 with Ban Ali, who was a primary school student in the 1990s. See also Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam,* 254, 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Front page, *Al-Thawra*, July 8, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. For example*: al-Qadisiyya*, July 9, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. For example: *al-Thawra*, July 8, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. RCC Decree No. 59 of June 4, 1994, a*l-Thawra, al-Jumhūriya*, June 5, 1994*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. CRRC SH-SPPC-D-000-448, 9–11, August 21, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. See, for example, the minister of *Awqāf* *al-Jumhūriya*, June 5, 1994; Uday Saddam Husayn (“Abu Sirhan”), *Babįl,* June 5, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. For example: Human Rights Watch (1995). https://www.hrw.org/reports/1995/IRAQ955.htm, accessed July 17, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. A party document “Arresting a thief: A car was stolen, his right hand was amputated,”

BRCC 001-5-2-0088, June 10, 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. See Helfont, S.R. (2014). “Saddam and the Islamists: The Baʿthist regime’s instrumentalization of religion in foreign affairs,” *Middle East Journal*, 68, 3, 352–366, in particular 352. The same thesis is very central also to Helfont’s 2015 dissertation and 2018 book. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Helfont*,* “Saddam and the Islamists,” 353. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Helfont, “Saddam and the Islamists,”352. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 1–2. Also: Abstract, I, 17, 20-23, 28, and more. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 2–3, 105, 113, 127. Already in 2012 Sassoon reported domestic heavy-duty Islamization, see his book, 265–67. Helfont had studied Sassoon’s book before he published his *Middle East Journal* article: See his “Saddam and the Islamists,” 354, notes 5,6,9. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 22, 235; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 28–29. Helfont *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 21, see also p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 249–51. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 193–94. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”pp. 234–35, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. “Abu Sirhan,” Uday’s pen name, *Babīl*, July 19, 1994 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Faust, for his part, was not fooled. His conclusion is that Saddam “tended to say the same things in public as he did behind closed doors.” See Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 21–22; 244–46. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 189–90. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. ʿAflaq, “*Dhikrat al-rasūl al-ʿArabī*,” pp. 122–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. ʿAflaq, “*Dhikrat al-rasūl al-ʿArabī*,” p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Hussein, S. (1981). “A View of Religion and Heritage,” A lecture to the Baʿth Culture and Information Bureau, in *On History, Heritage and Religion*, Baghdad: Translation and Foreign Languages Publishing House, pp. 23–34. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Arab Baʿth Socialist Party Iraq, *The Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress June 1982,* 245–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, 279–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, 280–81. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Baʿth, *Central Report of Ninth Regional Congress*, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 190. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Following the 1991 defeat in Kuwait, the mass-uprising of the Shi’a and the Kurds in March 1991, and the profound crisis in the party, Saddam ordered the publication of the party’s history, based on its internal records. All the names of past and present party luminaries and their roles appeared there with no attempt to twist or conceal any of it: See “*Aḍwā ʿalā Niḍāl al-Baʿth*” [Shedding light on the struggle of the Baʿth Party] in *al-Thawra*, October 4, 11, 1992; January 3, July 7, 1993; April 10, 1994, and much more. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. See, for example, his conversation with the Sudanese Islamist Hassan al-Turabi, CRRC SH-SPPC-D-000-217, July 18, 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3; Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 3, 223–24, 264–65; Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq* pp. 131–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 223–24. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. See, for example, a top-secret order to prevent the traditional “marches on foot” to the Shi’i holy places because this is “a non-civilized, un-Islamic phenomenon,” BRCC 01-3134-0002-0008; --0009; -00032; -00048, all in 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Sassoon*, Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 265, see also 223–24, 262–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. See Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam*, pp. 73–80. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Kingdom of Iraq (1936). *Dalīl al-mamlaka al-*ʿ*Irāqiya li-sannat 1935–36 al-māliya* [Indicators for the Kingdom of Iraq for the 1935–36 financial year], Baghdad: Government Press, 56, 772; Al-Fukayki, *Awkār al-Hazīma,* p. 124. Under the Baʿth regime see Law No. 110 of 1972, *Official Holidays*, published in *Weekly Gazette* 39, 6. For lavish celebrations see, for example, *al-Jumhūriya*, December 6, 1984; Saddam’s speech on the Prophet’s birthday, for example *al-*ʿ*Iraq*, October 12, 1989. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. See, for example, Isma’il al-Wa’ili (ed.) (2004). *Dustūr al-Ṣadr: Majmū*ʿ *Khuttāb al-Juma*ʿ*a allatī Alqā-hā al-Shahīd al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ṣadr fī Masjid al-Kūfā* [Al-Ṣadr’s constitution: An anthology of the Friday sermons delivered by the martyr Muhammad al-Ṣadr in the Kufa Mosque], Najaf: Maktabat Dar al-Mujtaba, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Sassoon*, Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 223 (author’s emphasis). [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Sassoon*, Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 224, also 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Interview and e-mail, May 28, 2019, 10:47 AM from Ambassador Miroslav Zafirov, who served as a UN diplomat in Baghdad in 2014 and 2015. Zafirov interviewed many Iraqis who had been in the know under Saddam. See also Jordan, D. (2023). “State and religion in Iraq: The Sufi insurgency of the former Baʿth regime in historical context,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 55, 344–352. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. *Babil,* June 12, 1994, 12, in FBIS-NES-DR JN1606122494, June 16, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Barazan’s diary, last entry, dated October 21, 2000, CRRC SH-MISC-D-000-950, 4 (65 in the original diary). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-574 A meeting of senior Baʿthis with Saddam, mid-1990s. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Amnesty International (1993). “Iraq: ‘Disappearance’ of Shi’a clerics and students,” https://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/mde140021993en.pdf, accessed July 18, 2022. The archives report many executions on the legal grounds of Daʿwa membership. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Khoury, *Iraq in War Time*, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. CRRC SH-SHTP-A-001-574, a meeting in the mid-1990s. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. For example*, al-ʿIraq*, April 12, 1994, bringing an historical speech by the leader from April 13, 1991, quoted by Ronen Zeidel, R. (1997). “The Iraqi Baʿth Party 1948–1995: Personal and organization aspects,” master’s dissertation, University of Haifa, 199–200; *Al-Thawra,* July 22, Aug. 19, 1991; Jan. 8, 13, 1993, in Zeidel, “Iraqi Baʿth Party,”204–07. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. *Al-Thawra*, May 28, 1993. Zeidel, “Iraqi Baʿth Party,”204–07. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. *Al-Thawra,* Feb. 26, Dec. 17, 18, 1993; Nov. 6, 1995; in Zeidel, “Iraqi Baʿth Party,”204–07. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. See Baram, “Ruling Political Elite in Baʿthi Iraq 1968–1986,” 447–93; Baram, A. (1991). *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Baʿthi Iraq 1968–89*,New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, p. 15; Zeidel, “Iraqi Baʿth Party.” Sassoon’s passion to demonstrate the omniscience of the archives and the treachery of the public media led him to misread and misreport Baram’s regime media-based analysis (compare Baram, *Culture, History, and Ideology*, 15, with Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3, note 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Rohde, A. (2010). *State-Society Relations in Baʿthist Iraq: Facing Dictatorship*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, pp. 116–17; Achim Rohde, A. (2016). “Gays, cross-dressers, and emos: Nonnormative masculinities in militarized Iraq,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies,* 12, 3, 433–49. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 2–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 259–60, 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. An interview with General Wafiq al-Samarra’i, Saddam’s Chief of Military Intelligence who fled Iraq, in *FBIS-NES-DR*, December 20, 1994. The numbers are rising, though. In 2009 officials at the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights indicated that there may be around 270 known but still-unopened mass grave sites in Iraq. See United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report*, January 1–June 30, 2009, “Mass Graves,” 10. For the human cost and destruction see also Jabar, F.A. (2003). *The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq*, London: Saqi Books, pp. 270–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Sassoon himself reports in other places that “after the 1991 [Shi’i] uprising, repression of the Shi’is increased significantly” (*Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 260). Also, Saddam “became obsessed” with the possibility of another Shi’i uprising (*Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 143). [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 15, 45, 48, also 1–2; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 124; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”p. 17. See also pp. i, 2, 3, 11, 13, 14, 21, 23, 25, 30, 138, 139, 141, 144; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 2, and more. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”pp. i, 2, 3, 11, 13, 14, 17, 21, 23, 25, 30, 129, 138, 139, 141, 144; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12’ 13, 14, 22, 28, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 2; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 124; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. CRRC SH-PDWN-D-000-012, January 23, 2003. A top-secret communiqué no. 549, from the Presidential Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Helfont studied the 1986 pan-Arab leadership’s meeting record, but he missed Saddam’s explanation: See “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. Sassoon*, Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 2–3*.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. See the excellent BRCC-based study by Abbas Kadhim, A. (2013). “The Hawza under siege: A study in the Baʿth Party Archive,” Occasional Paper 1 (June), Boston, MA: Boston University Institute for Iraqi Studies. Sassoon was unaware of this file. See also Saddam’s private conversation with a senior Sunni party member, CRRC SH‐SHTP‐A‐001‐574, mid-1990s. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” p. 19; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, pp. 22–24, basing himself on *BRCC*, 003-1-1 (0409-0414), March 12, 1979. See also Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 259–60. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Helfont, “Saddam and the Islamists,” 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 3, 223–24, 263–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. For example, for gender see Efrati, "Negotiating Rights in Iraq”;  for culture and gender, see Rohde, *State-Society Relations*; Rohde, “Gays, Cross-Dressers, and Emos”; Achim Rohde, A. (2013). “Change and continuity in Arab Iraqi education: Sunni and Shi’i discourses in Iraqi textbooks before and after 2003,” *Comparative Education Review,* 57, 4, 711–34; Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology*; for education, see, for example, Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,” pp. 248–51; Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam*, pp. 281–88. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Baram, *Saddam Husayn and Islam,* p. 256, based on *Alif Bā*, March 2, 1994, 16–18; *Al-Thawra*, January 9, 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Rohde, *State-Society Relations*, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Eleven telephone interviews with Iraqis through 2022. Due to the small sample this result is very rudimentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. E-mail from Dr. Achim Rohde, February 6, 2024. In 2008 Rohde conducted a workshop for Iraqi school principals in Germany in cooperation with UNESCO Iraq Office. Most were religiously observant Shi’is. Most related to the Faith Campaign with a degree of approval, as it became easier to live a religious life. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Al-Aqeedi, R. (2016). “The once and future Mosul,” *The American Interest* website, September 26, https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/09/26/the-once-and-future-mosul, accessed August 20, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Helfont, “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”p. 17; Helfont, *Compulsion in Religion: Saddam Hussein*, p. 2; See also Helfont “Compulsion in religion: The authoritarian roots,”pp. i, 2, 3, 11, 13, 14, 21, 23, 25, 30, 138, 139, 141, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. *Al-Thawra*, July 26, 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, pp. 131–32; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3. Along the same line Faust is also of the opinion that, by declaring the Baʿth Party to be “The Tribe of All the Tribes,” Saddam “Baʿthized the tribes as much as he tribalized the party” (Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, p. 145). This author thinks that, on balance, by incorporating the tribes, lock, stock and barrel, empowering their shaykhs, adopting their laws and values, and symbolically calling the party “tribe” he in fact tribalized party and regime more. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, pp. 131–32; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, pp. 3, 223–24, 263–64. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Faust, *Baʿthification of Iraq*, pp. 131–32; Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein’s Baʿth Party*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. The most important limit to Islamization was permission to buy spirits. Reportedly, this was the result of a warning Saddam received from his generals that “a total ban on alcohol will lead to a military revolt” (an interview with one of Saddam’s generals, Washington, DC, May 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. CRRC SH-PDWN-D-000-409, between April 27 and May 7, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. ʿAflaq, M. “The Party of the Revolution,” in *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth*, p. 59. See also “The Party Is the Revolution,” in *Fī Ṣabīl al-Baʿth*, pp. 61–66, 67–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. CRRC SH-PDWN-D-000-409. See also CRRC SH-PDWN-D-000-812, 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. See a critique by a scholar at the Research Center of Grand Ayatollah Shirazi in Karbala, analyzing Baram’s 2011 WWC provisional article, Hamid, ʿA. (2019). “Al-ʿIrāq min al-ʿilmāniya al-mutashaddida ilā al-Islām al-siyāsī 1968–2003” [Iraq from militant secularism to political Islam 1968–2003], Karbala, 2019, in <http://shrsc.com> and https://m.annabaa.org/arabic/authorsarticles/18970, accessed April 22, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)