

Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge - Unveiling the Man Behind the Myth

Book Review

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The dangers of revenge in politics

Theorising Xi Jinping's Anticorruption Campaign: The Politics of Revenge, Steven P. Feldman, London: Routledge, 2023, 196 pp., eBook ISBN: 9781003331063.

Given the intriguing title of the book, my review of Professor Steven Feldman's book commenced at its Appendix comprising a three-page Methodology outlining the theoretical construction of the research and how it was conducted. This reveals an interpretive study based on fieldwork carried out between June 2015 to July 2016 focused on five broad areas: economic reform, land reform, state-owned enterprise reform, the political system and innovation in China. While doing the fieldwork Professor Feldman identified that Xi Jinping's Anticorruption Campaign was the central political and social event taking place in Chinese society at that moment.

He conducted 146 semi-structured interviews in Beijing (96), Singapore (27) and Hong Kong (23). These involved business executives, professors (of management, law and social sciences), lawyers, accountants, journalists and non-profit executives. A small (undisclosed) number of Communist Party officials were included. These interviews comprise 75% of the total data collected with 25% based on observation while Feldman was working at Peking University and living in Beijing. All the observation data are gathered from Beijing.

A key to the book is the empirical patterns that emerged in the data, including:

- the domestic popularity of the Anti-Corruption Campaign
- the portrayal of General Secretary Xi in ideal terms
- the enthusiasm with which business leaders and professionals often depicted the fall of the so-called corrupt 'tigers' and other officials, and
- a discernible pleasure in the population about the punishment of officials.

These patterns led Feldman to choosing the theory of 'resentment' for his interpretive framework, drawing on Scheler's (2003) classic work which viewed resentment as originating in violations to self-esteem arising from subordination. The choice of this theory was shaped by a cluster of assumptions found in the research that resonated with the emerging empirical patterns, including: (1) 'repressed feelings' in the population fitting with the broadly observed pattern of self-censorship in China; (2) a sense of 'hopelessness' fitting with the pervasive fear of overwhelming state power; and (3) the 'fantasy to deny oppression' fitting with the belief that Xi's concentration of power would raise the people's status. Feldman wisely identifies that other concepts would also be needed to analyse such a complex phenomenon, and he turned to the concept of 'status reversal ritual' to further develop his use of 'resentment' – to contribute to a deeper understanding of Xi's anti-corruption campaign.

Saddam Hussein, the enigmatic and ruthless dictator of Iraq, remains a controversial figure long after his demise. His reign of terror and the subsequent U.S.-led invasion of Iraq have left an indelible mark on the

Middle East and the world. In the gripping and meticulously researched book *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge*, historian and journalist Toby Dodge delves into the intricate tapestry of Hussein's life and regime, offering a nuanced and provocative account of one of the most influential leaders of our time.



Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge by Saïd K. Aburish

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 2910 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 416 pages



A Journey into the Heart of Darkness

Dodge begins his narrative by tracing Hussein's rise to power, from his humble beginnings in a rural Iraqi village to his ascent to the presidency in 1979. Along the way, he paints a vivid picture of Hussein's early influences, including his violent and abusive father, and explores the psychological and political factors that shaped his character and worldview.

The author reveals how Hussein's experiences during the Iran-Iraq War profoundly impacted his political outlook, fostering a deep-seated paranoia and a relentless pursuit of revenge against those he perceived as enemies. Dodge dissects Hussein's military strategies, his complex relationship with the United States, and the brutal tactics he employed to maintain control over his own people.

Anatomy of a Tyrant

Beyond the political machinations, *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge* provides a penetrating analysis of Hussein's personality and motivations. Dodge draws upon extensive interviews with former Iraqi officials, diplomats, and other individuals who have had close encounters with Hussein. The book offers a multifaceted portrait of a man who was both cunning and insecure, ruthless yet charismatic.

Dodge examines Hussein's personal life, his relationships with his family and close associates, and the elaborate cult of personality he cultivated around himself. He explores the ways in which Hussein's personal vendettas and desire for retribution influenced his political decision-making, leading to disastrous consequences for his own people and the region.

The Legacy of a Dictator

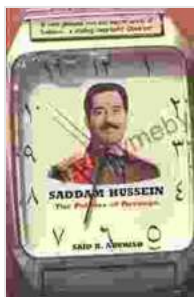
The final chapters of the book delve into the aftermath of Hussein's overthrow and the ongoing challenges facing Iraq and the Middle East in the wake of his regime. Dodge argues that Hussein's legacy extends far beyond his physical demise, and his policies and actions continue to reverberate across the region.

The author examines the role that Hussein's sectarianism and repression played in fueling the rise of ISIS and the ongoing instability in Iraq. He also analyzes the complex relationship between the United States and Iraq, and the challenges of rebuilding a nation shattered by war and tyranny.

Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge is a masterful work of historical scholarship that provides a comprehensive and deeply insightful account of one of the most enigmatic and consequential figures of our time. Toby

Dodge's meticulous research and keen eye for detail paint a vivid and nuanced portrait of Hussein, his regime, and his lasting impact on the Middle East.

This book is a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the complex reality of the Middle East, the rise and fall of dictators, and the enduring consequences of political violence. Dodge's incisive analysis, coupled with his vivid storytelling, makes *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge* a compelling and thought-provoking read that will resonate with readers long after they finish its pages.



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