

*DISCOURSE OF WARS AND CONFLICTS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SADDAM IN
THE IRAQ-IRAN WAR IN THE US PRESS*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the US press discourse during the Iraq-Iran war and answer the following question: ‘how was Saddam Hussein discursively constructed during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988)? To achieve this, the study employed a triangulation of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis represented by the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). The analysis revealed that Saddam Hussein was viewed by the media as playing on the early historical and religious enmity between the Arab and the Persians to mobilize and encourage the Iraqi people to continue the conflict with Iran. This negative representation was further elaborated by portraying Saddam as long coveting a military voice in the Gulf region in addition to constructing his personality cult coercively through his military/forces, portraits/pictures, or the media or State television station. Further to this negative representation, Saddam was linked negatively to the personality cults of Stalin and Kim Il Sung in North Korea. Furthermore, the US press reported that neither Saddam’s (Iraq) nor Iran’s victory were desired by the US government as the former was portrayed as an ambitious, local bully to the Arab gulf countries in general, and Israel in particular. Similarly, an Iran victory was perceived as destabilising the entire Gulf region by spreading its Shiism and influencing other Shiites minority countries; thereby threatening US interests in the region.

Keywords: Saddam, Iraq-Iran war, construction, US press, corpus linguistics, CDA

1. Introduction

There is a number of studies as Keeble’s (2004) that argue that the coverage of Saddam in general in the media in the Fleet Street was positive and rare during the eight-year war with Iran when Saddam was a close ally with the West. At that time, there were many critics who stressed Saddam’s dictatorial nature since the 1970s. The demonized nature, according to Keeble (2004), was only brought to the fore in the 1990s when it has become an essential part of the US propaganda with the aim to manufacture an enemy state. Keeble (2004) adds that Iraq’s image in general and Saddam’s image in particular in the media has changed after the Iraq-Iran war immediately in (1989). For instance, Iraq’s army was described as “the fourth

largest in the world”, and as being “1 million-strong”. Similarly, following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Saddam was represented as the “butcher of Baghdad”, the “new Hitler”, and as the “Monster Saddam”. This demonised depiction of Saddam remained constant in the press even in the newspapers known for their criticisms of the attacks conducted by the US in 1993, 1996, 1998, and 2003 (Keeble, 2004).

The importance of this study lies in examining the discourses of the US press in terms of its coverage of Saddam Hussein during the Iraq-Iran war with the aim of answering the main study-guiding question: How was Saddam discursively constructed during the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988)? This study comes to establish the ground and to act as a springboard to other researchers to examine Saddam’s constructions in the US press before the US radical shift after the Iraq invasion of Kuwait.

2. Data and Methodology

2.1 Data selection, collection and description: building a corpus

The collection and selection of data for the current study were based on four criteria: availability, coverage, specific discourse concentration, and periods of time. The availability criterion was determined by the availability of US newspapers in the LexisNexis1 database. With regard to the coverage criterion, the ‘Major US Newspapers’ (see Table 1) were chosen. The reason behind this selection is that the ‘Major US Newspapers’ shown in Table 1, according to LexisNexis website, are among the top 50 newspapers in circulation in US2 as well as they are already categorised and named under ‘Major US Newspapers’ label in LexisNexis which makes it easy to access and download.

¹ www.nexis.com

² <https://www.nexis.com/results/shared/sourceInfo.do?csi=307574>

No	Major US Newspapers
1	Daily News (New York)
2	Journal of Commerce
3	Los Angeles Times
4	Newsday (New York)
5	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
6	St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)
7	Star Tribune (Minneapolis MN)
8	Tampa Bay Times
9	The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
10	The Baltimore Sun
11	The Buffalo News (New York)
12	The Christian Science Monitor
13	The Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City, OK)
14	The Denver Post
15	The Hartford Courant
16	The New York Post
17	The New York Times
18	The Orange County Register
19	The Philadelphia Daily News (PA)
20	The Philadelphia Inquirer
21	The Tampa Tribune (Florida)
22	The Washington Post
23	USA Today

Table 1: The major US newspapers

With regards to the discourse concentration, the US press discourse on the Iraq-Iran war period was considered. In order to avoid irrelevant documents when compiling the Iraq-Iran corpora specific query words were chosen:

Iraq! OR Saddam Hussein OR Saddam! AND Iran! OR Khomeini!

The exclamation mark (!) acts as a wildcard for searching the word variation because it finds the root of words and all the letters that are added to it. For instance, searching for *Iraq!* retrieves all the articles that contain *Iraq*, *Iraqi* and *Iraqis*. The AND connector is used to look for words that are far apart from one another in the same article, whereas OR is used to find documents that have either or both of the words linked by the connector OR.

Table 2 shows the total number of articles and words in the final corpus of data retrieved from the query words specified for the Iraq-Iran period.

War	Period	Major US Newspapers Corpora	No of Words
Iran-Iraq War	22/09/1980- 08/08/1988	11160 articles	7.484.773

Table 2: The number of articles retrieved from the UK and US newspapers

2.2 Methodological Approach

The methodology used for this study is the combination of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis represented by Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). With a corpus of 7.484.773 words, it would have been impossible to examine the data manually. Thus, various corpus linguistics tools were used as a method of triangulation to achieve better results.

The frequency analysis was used to direct the researcher's attention to particular peaks or plunges in the data that might lead to something of interest. This was followed by the examination of the collocations of *Saddam*. The concordance lines of these words were then expanded to enable the researcher to examine the whole context. These three tools served to reduce subjectivity as well as to allow more patterns of interest to be marked up.

Similarly, DHA has various strategies that can be employed to answer different research questions. I began by using the CL more quantitatively through deriving frequencies and collocates, as the research progresses the approach became qualitative where the concordances lines (context) of these collocates are looked at into more details to identify Wodak and Meyer's (2016) DHA's predicational, referential and argumentative strategies (see Table 3). This was followed by categorising the predications, references according to their semantic meaning to see how the query word under question is talked about and referred to as seen in the themes (see Sections 3.1-3.5).

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/events and processes/actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership categorization devices, deictics, anthroponyms, etc. • Tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches pars pro toto, totum pro parte • Verbs and nouns used to denote processes, actions etc.
Predication	Discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events/processes and actions (more or less positively or negatively)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g., in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctive clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups) • Explicit predicates or predicative nouns/adjectives/pronouns • Collocations • Explicit comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms) • Allusions, evocations, presuppositions/implicatures etc.
Argumentation	Justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topoi (formal or more content-related) • Fallacies

Table 3: A selection of discursive strategies (Wodak and Meyer, 2016)

3. 'Saddam's' themes

Before examining the way Saddam was reported and constructed in the US press, the word frequency of *Saddam* in the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) period was derived. The frequency list is a helpful starting point for getting an idea about the word distribution in the whole corpus. The word frequency highlights where the words are used the most or the least during the war period. Thus, if the frequency is proportionally increased, this probably tells us more about it than those with a lower frequency. The increase in frequency could reveal something of importance in the press data. For instance, if there is an increase of the query word such as Saddam in a particular period rather than another period, it is possible that the coverage of Saddam in this period has increased as a result of the increased report on Saddam. This increase

could be an event or something of importance that led to this coverage. Thus, in Figure 1, below, which shows the frequency of Saddam between 1980- 1988, the fluctuation in the frequency of the query word is apparent.

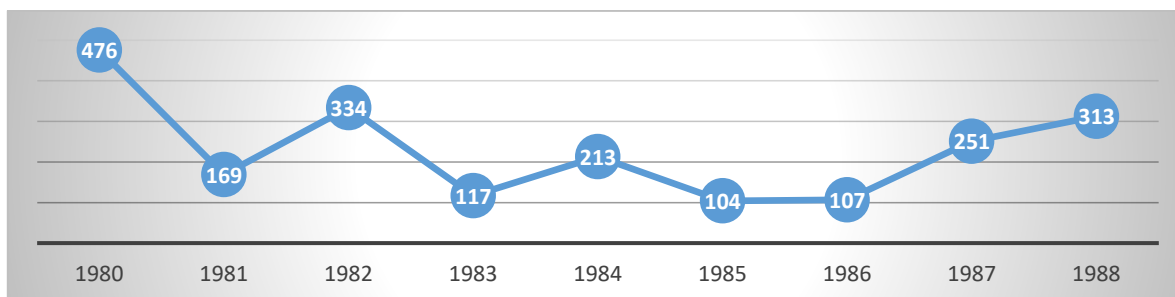


Figure 1 The frequency of Saddam in the Iraq-Iran War

It is interesting to note from the line graph above that the frequency of Saddam was at its highest level in 1980. The rise, having examined the concordances lines of Saddam, was due to reporting the confrontational discourse between Iraq and Iran and to some border skirmishes between the two countries which was developed into a full-scale war, with the Iraqi army attacking Iran. The frequency plummeted in 1981 to rise again in 1982, the year when the Iranian army entered Iraqi soil with the intention of overthrowing Saddam. The frequency then went up and down over the next few years, during which the US press reported the Iranian calls to remove Saddam regime which continued throughout the war period and at some points these calls were toned down by the Iranian side. Another notable change also occurred in 1987 and 1988, when the second largest increase can be found which is owing to the use of the collocates in relation to Saddam's removal.

Having calculated the frequency, the collocates of Saddam were then derived in the whole corpus. To achieve this, following Baker et al. (2013, p. 37), a statistical measure³ of a significance threshold was considered that combines a mutual information score (MI) ≥ 3 with

³ The reason for using this combination of statistical measures, according to Baker *et al.* (2013, p. 37), is that it works on "extracting collocations that are both lexically interesting and statistically significant"

a log-likelihood score, which should be at least ≥ 6.63 . The window span is restricted to ± 5 around the node (the query word).

After deriving the collocates in the whole corpora, they were then categorised according to their semantic fields based on the most salient meanings they expressed in the context: For instance, religious-related collocates of Saddam such as ‘*atheist*’, ‘*infidel*’ and ‘*non-believer*’ were grouped together and put under the Religion label as shown in Table 4. This categorisation was done automatically by loading the collocates into a Wmatrix3, web-based corpus analysis tool used to carry out the semantic tagging with 21 major discourse fields. Semantic tagging helps to highlight the broad themes and topics as well as the overused semantic meanings in the corpus as shown in Table 4.

Semantic categories	Saddam's Collocates
In power	overthrow, overthrown, strongman, overthrowing, leader , ordered, dictator, king, ruler, leadership, victory, autocratic, power, supervised, presided, depose, ousted, deposed, toppled, topple, toppling, topples, fall, removal, removed, uproot, ousting, ouster
Speech acts	referring, vowed, proclaimed, announced, reference, persuading, apologized, wooed, welcomed, quoted, demanded, declared, urging , sworn, suggested
Violent/Angry	feud , threatens, outraged, threatened
Warfare, defence and the army; weapons	war, army, embattled, aggressor, invaded, launched
Social Actions, States And Processes	visiting, rallying, visited, nurtured,
Formal/Unfriendly	foe, unfriendly
Danger	gamble
Law and order	abrogated, rule, punish, punishment
Religion	infidel, Sunni, atheist, secular, godless, Yazid, cult, holy
Disease	crazy
Government	president, government, regime
Crime	crimes
Wanted	wants, urged, ambitions
Arts and crafts	pictures, posters, portrait, portraits, arch
Help	support, supporting
Time: Beginning	initiated
Politics	socialist
Miscalculation	misjudged, miscalculated
Speech: Communicative	speech, reiterating, appeal, reiterated

Table 4 Semantic categories of Saddam's collocates in the whole period

However, a disclaimer needs to be made here: sometimes words that belong to the same semantic meaning were labelled differently when they were loaded into the WMatrix online software. For instance, words such as ‘overthrow’ were tagged as being In power label, whereas ‘deposed’ and ‘ousted’ are labelled as Giving; possession. However, they can be placed in the same category according to the context to mean overthrowing Saddam. Therefore, the researcher’s input is present in this categorisation. Similarly, sometimes two different words that do not belong to the same semantic meaning could form a semantic theme. The categorisation of the collocates according to their semantic meaning is largely dependent on the context. Therefore, it is important to expand the concordance line for each collocate. These categorised collocates will be studied according to their themes, for instance, overthrow/ overthrown, topple/toppled/ toppling, ouster /ousted, depose/ deposed can constitute a theme as shown in section 3.1.

Figure 2 shows the main discourses on Saddam based on the collocates categorisation and their expanded concordances lines.

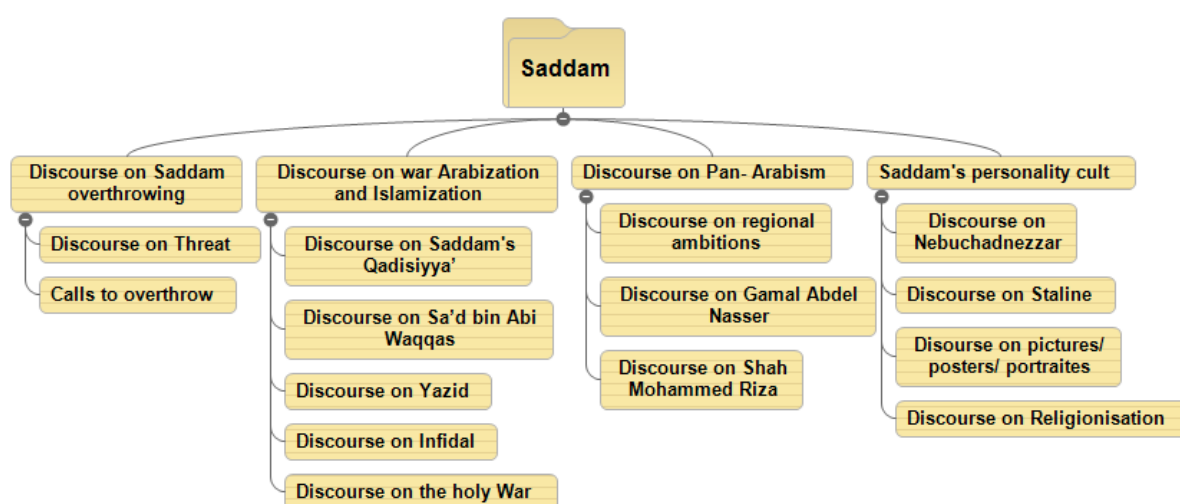


Figure 2 The encapsulation of widespread discourses on Saddam in Iraq-Iran

3.1 The theme of Saddam's overthrow

From Table 4 above, it can be clearly seen how collocates such as overthrow, depose, topple, removal and oust are used frequently with their spelling variation across all the years

in the corpus. The frequency of these collocates varies in different years, referring to different topics in relation to the construction of the figure of Saddam. Thus, before the invasion of Iraq and during the war, such collocates were used to signal Khomeini's attempts to export his revolution through calls for the Iraqi people in general and the Shiites in particular to revolt against the Ba'athist regime and overthrow Saddam as shown in the concordance lines in **Error! Reference source not found..**

Khomeini began calling on the Shiites in Iraq, [...], to	overthrow	President Saddam
Khomeini's persistent calls for the	overthrow	of Saddam Hussein
Iraqi Dissidents Form 'Supreme Council' [...]to work for the	overthrow	of Iraq's President,
At the start of the invasion, Tehran radio broadcast an appeal by Khomeini in Arabic to Iraq's Shiites to join the Iranian forces and	overthrow	Saddam
Khomeini appealed strongly to Iraqis to join forces with the invading Iranians and.	overthrow	Saddam Hussein
Al Dawa [...] received strong support from Iran and was dedicated to the	overthrow	of Saddam Hussein

Table 5: Concordances of OVERTHROW

Prior and at the beginning of the war, the period was portrayed in the US press as one of confrontational discourse between the two countries, who had gone to war through words before the real war began. For example, according to The New York Times, October 7, 1980, Iraqi officials described the Iranian rulers as 'a clique of ignorant vile liars', 'racist Persian tyrants' and 'Zionist stooges'. The views on Iraqi officials expressed on Iranian radio and television were similar, where they were described as 'the enemies of God and Islam' and 'a bunch of atheist charlatans', as well as Saddam's invasion being described as an attempt to defend 'the throne of the Iraqi Shah, the Zionist American stooge, Saddam Hussein'. In these examples, each party resorted to attacking the ethos of his rival to construct him as a bad character through attaching negative attributes to the enemy. It is worth mentioning that the common discourse between Iraq and Iran in their conformational discourse was the focus on the words of religious and historical nature as will be shown in the subsequent sections (3.1.1 and 3.1.2). Looking at the above predications as well as drawing on the analysis in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, 'Persian', used by Iraqi politicians as an ideologically prejudiced loaded word that conjures up collective memories of centuries of historical and religious enmity that are

circulated and continuously fed in the minds of many Arab. Similarly, Iran saw to disassociate Saddam from being a Muslim and attributing atheist-like words to Saddam as will be seen in subsequent sections.

As the war continued, the ousting of Saddam became one of Iran’s repeated demands, along with the call for him to pay war reparations and to return all the occupied territories, as well as for him to be named as the aggressor, this being one of Iran’s conditions for a cease-fire. However, in the last years of the war, the demand for the overthrow of Saddam was reported by the US press as having been toned down or even disappeared by Iranian officials as shown in the table below.

Iran was no longer seeking the	overthrow	of Saddam Hussein as a condition for making peace
Tehran did not insist on the	overthrow	of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein as a condition

Table 6 Overthrowing Saddam as a condition

3.1.1 The Topos of the threat of Iranian-style government

Through these collocates, a fear of toppling Saddam and of a hypothetical Iranian victory was explicated and constructed in the US press. The possibility of a spread of the Iranian fundamentalism or the Shiism that would destabilise the Middle East, coupled with the fear that other Iranian-style governments would be installed in Iraq or other countries, was viewed as a threat to both US interests and those of the Gulf countries as illustrated in Table 7.

In predicational terms, Iran victory was discursively constructed negatively because it was seen as a ‘fundamentalist government’, a danger to the ‘pro-western Arab Sheikdoms’, a ‘non-Arab’ country that could establish an Iranian-like government next door to Arab countries. This could result in a threat to the stability of Arab countries by spreading Shiism into the Gulf countries.

Predication of overthrow/overthrown, depose, ousted, , toppled, topple, toppling, topples	Iranian- style government
	- the installation of an Islamic fundamentalist government similar to the one in Iran led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini
	- install a carbon-copy Islamic republic in Baghdad.
	- establish a government in Baghdad sympathetic to his Islamic revolution
	threat to the Gulf and US
	- could endanger pro-western Arab sheikdoms along the gulf
	- the border between the Arab world and the Islamic but non-Arab East would effectively disappear.
	- could threaten the stability of the Persian Gulf region and have far reaching consequences for the United States, the Soviet Union and other nations.
	threat of Shiism expansion
- The revolutionary impulses of the Shia branch of Islam would sweep again down the western shore of the Persian Gulf and into the Levant. Even before the Iranian thrust across the Shatt al Arab	

Table 7 Predicational strategy representing the fear of overthrowing Saddam by Iran

3.1.2 *Topos of Threat of an Iranian or Iraqi Victory*

Neither an Iraqi nor an Iranian victory was desired by the US. Any victory had been constructed to be a threat and danger for the entire region. However, an Iranian victory was viewed being as far more dangerous to U.S. interests and that of the Arab countries, and to the stability of the region than an Iraqi victory. Although the notion of an Iraqi victory was seen to be far-fetched and impractical, Iraq was viewed as representing a conventional strategic threat and playing the role of a local bully for the Gulf States. Furthermore, it was seen to be a threat to Israel, whose fears stemmed from the fact that an Iraqi victory would give it a stronger voice among the Arab countries, enabling it to form alliances among them and uniting them against Israel.

1. **Israeli concern stems from general fears that an Iraqi victory over Iran would give it a stronger voice in Arab councils**, pulling such moderates as Jordan and Saudi Arabia toward less flexible policies. In addition, an Israeli diplomat said, closer Jordanian-Iraqi ties raise the possibility of Iraqi troops being stationed in neighbouring Jordan or perhaps even an Iranian attack on Jordanian targets near the frontier with Israeli-occupied territory.

The Washington Post, October 10, 1980

2. **Most of the smaller Gulf sheikdoms have had enough memories of Iraqi bullying** and subversive tactics in the '60s and '70s to stifle any desire for an Iraqi victory.

The Washington Post, July 24, 1988

On the other hand, an Iranian victory was constructed as an ideological threat that could upset the whole Gulf region, because it would spread the fundamentalist religion that could ‘sweep’ the Arab countries of the Middle East, as well as destabilising the region by inciting the Shiites of other Gulf States, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, to revolt. Therefore, the victory of ‘Khomeinism’ is represented in the news as ‘contagious’, and as a ‘tide’ that could ‘open the floodgates’ and unleash a ‘surge’ of Islamic fundamentalism in the Gulf.

3. France was not alone in fearing that an Iranian victory over Iraq would **send a shock wave down the gulf**.

The New York Times, July 22, 1987

4. An Iranian victory could **spread Khomeini's fundamentalist revolution all along the Arab side of the gulf**, toppling friendly, stable regimes as far as Saudi Arabia and placing more than half the world's oil reserves in potentially hostile hands. As a victor, Iraq would probably be the local bully, but an Iranian victory could upset the strategic balance in the Middle East. And it's Iran, not Iraq, that is closer to winning.

St. Petersburg Times (Florida), July 5, 1987

5. The Americans have been worried that an **Iranian victory could cause trouble for the Persian Gulf oil producers such as Saudi Arabia**, which have supported Iraq. “A victory by a radical Iran would be a major setback for U.S. interests in the region,” Mr. Murphy said in Congressional testimony on Aug. 15.

The New York Times, August 26, 1986

3.2 The theme of Arabisation and Islamisation of the war

One of the main recurring referential themes in the discourse on the Iraq-Iran war in the US press is the portrayal of the way the two adversaries constructed each other through the use of topoi of history to serve their own propaganda. The names of early Islamic and Arabic events and figures, as well as other related terminologies, were propagated by Iraq and Iran. The line in Iraq is presented as being nationalistic and religious, playing upon the historic enmity between Arabs and Persians and dwelling unceasingly on the leadership of Saddam. By contrast, the theme in Iran is completely religious. The battle is portrayed as being for Islam

and against an irreligious government. These ideological factors and the vitriolic propaganda were viewed in the US press as being used by each side against the other to achieve their war purposes. Figure 3 represents the main discourses on Arabisation and Islamisation which were derived from Saddam's collocates *infidel*, *Yazid*, *holy* and *Qadisiyya* and through a more in-depth examination of their concordance lines.

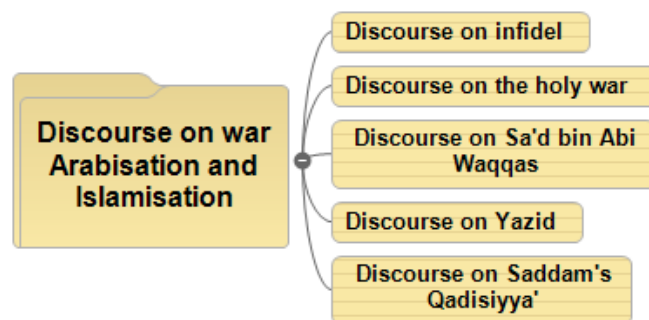


Figure 3 Discourses on Arabisation and Islamisation

The US press also portrayed each side as demonising the other and that the main legitimising force in the war for both sides has been drawing on Islam and de-legitimising of the other as a non-believer. For Iran, such claims were seen as a continuation of Khomeini's successful revolution against the Shah and therefore, Saddam and his regime were referred to as 'Infidel', the atheist Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, *The New York Times*, October 20, 1980, shows how the war of words in the two countries accelerated to another level. This included mosques in Tehran and Baghdad where Muslim clergymen broadcasted live and condemned each other. The clergymen in Baghdad were quoted as calling Khomeini 'an imposter who is seeking to lead the Muslim people of Iran astray'. At the same time, in the Iranian capital, the worshippers, quoted in the press, repeated after an ayatollah a prayer asked God to 'strike down this infidel, Saddam Hussein, and send him to the burning fires of hell'.

Thus, when the war broke out, it had already been viewed and presented by Iran as not merely a self-defence of territorial or material things, but rather as a spiritual conflict - as a war between Islam and blasphemy. This was articulated in the reporting of Khomeini's speech:

6. You are fighting to protect Islam and he is fighting to destroy Islam. At the moment, Islam is completely confronted by *blasphemy*, and you should protect and support Islam. You should resist. Defence is something which is obligatory to all. Every person should defend Islam according to his ability. **They have attacked Islam and we have to defend Islam.** There is absolutely no question of peace or compromise and we shall never have any discussions with them, because they are corrupt and perpetrators of corruption and we will not have any discussions with such people. Otherwise, so long as they have weapons in their hands, our weapon is faith, our armory

The New York Times, October 1, 1980

According to this extract, Iran shows that Islam is represented by Iran. Thus, invading Iran is not just invading a geographical place: it is an attack on Islam, and since Saddam invaded Iran he is, therefore, an infidel and represents blasphemy. For Iran, the war is constructed as being between the good (Iranians) who have to 'protect', 'support' and 'defend' Islam against the evil (Saddam) who wants to 'destroy' Islam and has 'attacked' it. Also, the Iraqis are portrayed as being 'corrupt and perpetrators of corruption'; therefore no 'peace', 'compromise' or 'discussions' are to be held with them.

For Saddam Hussein, it seemed more convincing to throw the same accusations of being un-Islamic back at Iran than to prove his fidelity. Therefore, many references were made focusing on the ethnic strain between Arabs and Persians and evoking the glory of early Islam, symbolised by the Qadisiyya battle. Thus, the war was called 'Saddam's Qadisiyya', in reference to the battle in 636 A.D in which Arabs, under the flag of Islam and led by Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas, defeated the Sasanian Empire and conquered the Persians, led by Rostam b. Farrokh-Hormzod, the Iranian commander. From then on, according to Lewental (2014), Qadisiyya came "to represent a synecdoche for the conquest of Iran as a whole" (p. 892).

7. the Iraqi leader personalized the struggle, calling it "Saddam's Qadissiya" after a 7th century Arab victory over the Persians at a battle near Baghdad.

The New York Times, July 15, 1982

The discourse of Islamism and Arabism was also exploited by Saddam and other Iraqis, and Iraq radio, through what Wodak and Reisigl (2001, p. 50) term as 'ethnification', 'linguification' and 'religionisation' i.e. Self- Othering strategy via Arabic language and the religion of Islam, disassociating Iran from both Islam and Arabism. The religionisation was done through Saddam's denouncement of Khomeini's regime as 'a non-Islamic revolution' stripping him from being Muslim. The 'linguification' and 'ethnification' strategies were represented in Saddam's statement. This is quoted in The New York Times September 28, 1980 edition, that 'the Koran was written in Arabic and God destined the Arabs to play a vanguard role in Islam'. This means that Saddam emphasised Iraq's pan-Arabism by showing that the Koran is written in Arabic rather than in the Persian language and rebuts Khomeini's pretensions to world Islamic leadership .It is worth mentioning that similar results were found by KhosraviNik and Sarkhoh (2017) study on the self-other representation of the perceived Arabic identity and a Persian one on social media which showed that both Arabic language and Islam were pivotal constituents of the Arab collective identity of legitimacy. On the Iran side, KhosraviNik and Zia (2014) showed how the Persian identity, nationalism and the anti-Arab discourse were employed in Iranian Facebook discourse in relation to legitimising the name of the Persian Gulf vs the claims of Arab use as Arab Gulf.

In the same vein, Saddam referred to the Iranian in racial stereotypically names, according to *The Washington Post, September 28, 1980*, as "al ajem". '[a] ajem', is a term, according to Adib-Moghaddam (2007, p. 66), often used in a pejorative sense to describe non-Arab nationalities, In particular, this refers to the Iranians to mean 'illiterate'. The term also has another connotation in distinguishing ethnically and geographically the Iranians from Arabs as well as giving Arabs superiority over the Iranians within the domain of Islam.

Similarly, the US press shows that the war was referred to as ‘jihad’ or a ‘holy war’ by both countries to legitimise the self and to question the legitimacy of the other religious orientation. The press viewed Saddam as portraying himself as waging a holy war and thereby constructing himself as the true upholder of Islam and the defender of the Arab countries. This move was viewed as an attempt to rally the Iraqi people as well as the public opinion in the Arab countries around him. On the other hand, Khomeini viewed Saddam as a Sunni leader who ‘was not a true believer’ and thus Iran had launched the holy war into Iraq ‘to enforce Islamic law’ as seen in example 8 below. Table 8 shows the predicational strategies representing Saddam as utilising the discourse of Islamisation through the use of collocates *holy war*.

8. Iran’s chief justice said his country has launched a *holy war* into Iraq *to enforce Islamic law* and called on the Iraqis to “annihilate” the government of President Saddam Hussein, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported. “*We are Moslems and we want to enforce the decrees of the Koran,*” Ayatollah Mousavi Ardebili said in a sermon at Tehran University.

The Washington Post July 24, 1982

Holy war	Legitimisation
	- was intended to legitimize the conflict and to portray Iraq as the true defender of Islam, thus challenging the authority of Ayatollah Ruhollah
	Populism
	- to bolster public opinion at home and to cultivate new allies in the Arab world
	Islamism
	- by proclaiming the conflict a Moslem holy war, or jihad , to reimpose true Islan [sic] on the "herjectic" mullahs who rule Iran.
	- against the Iranians because of their alleged transgression from what he has interpreted as the "true" word of Islam's founder, the Prophet Mohammed.
	- Hussein proclaimed [...] to restore true Islamic practice in the land of the revolutionary ayatollahs.
	- to question the legitimacy of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who is a leader of the smaller Shiite faction of Islam
	- to "defend the ideals" of the Prophet Mohammed.

Table 8: The predicational strategies representing Saddam through the use of collocates holy war

On the other hand, the US press has also shown how Iran capitalised on the religion through drawing on Shiites history through the use of the story of Karbala⁴ which is believed to touch the heart of Iranian faith. A strategy used by Khomeini to mobilise and encourage his population to fight. Such stories “remained at the heart of the Shiites’ collective consciousness, to be reinvented for any number of immediate political ends” (cited in Mitchell, 2012, p. 56). This story is viewed by one scholar as the “[S]ymbol of [J]ustice [V]ersus [T]yranny in the ideological makeup of the devout Shi’i” (Ram, 1996, p. 70).

9. Iranian Shiites who sacrifice themselves on the battlefield believe **they are following in the footsteps of Hussein, grandson of the prophet Mohammed. It was at Karbala in A.D. 680 that Hussein, his infant son, and 72 companions** were massacred by vastly superior forces supporting a rival claimant to the caliphate. Hussein’s legend helps instill a potent religious motivation among Iran’s Revolutionary Guards that is not found in the secular Iraqi Army. The Revolutionary Guards believe they must right the injustices done to Hussein and his father Ali by “liberating” the holy Shiite cities in Iraq and overthrowing the “godless” regime of President Saddam Hussein. Iranian attacks on Iraq in September and October were codenamed **Karbala I, II and III**. Iranian tanks are daubed with the slogan “**to Karbala**”.

The Washington Post, October 29, 1986

The Karbala paradigm has become a living reality which happened once in the dawn of Islam and continued in the consciousness of Shiites to influence their destinies: “it is not symbolic but rather a direct expression of reality” (Ram, 1996, p. 70). As an Iranian scholar puts it: “What happened to Hussein thirteen centuries ago is repeated today whenever and wherever Shiites live and find themselves oppressed” (Chelkowski, 1989). There is also a well-known saying among the Shiites that “every place is Karbala and every day is Ashura” (Campo, 2009, p. 423). This is why some of the battles were codenamed Karbala I, II and III. Therefore, the Karbala paradigm is pictured as a struggle between the injured self and the oppressive other,

⁴ The place where the third Imam, Hussein bin Ali, and his followers were martyred during an uneven battle that took place on the tenth day of Muharram (the Muslim month) in 680 AD. The Imam’s suffering at the hands of the Ummayyad caliph Yazid ibn Mu’awiya had come to be a symbol of injustice that was committed against the grandson of the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) (Ram, 1996, p. 69) (See also **Error! Reference source not found.**)

a fight between oppressed Hussein who is on the God side and a tyrannical Yazid who is on the dark side.

In continuation with the religious construction, the US press also highlighted another way of Iran portraying Saddam through likening him with one of the most hated figures in the Shiites history, Yazid as shown in Table 9. **Yazid** is regarded by Shiite Muslims as the leader of the false Caliphate that slew Imam Hussein, the rightful successor to the Prophet, in the desert at Karbala. Khomeini’s Saddam-Yazid metaphor is an attempt to represent Saddam negatively through making an association with Yazid who is already well known in the mind of Shiites.

Iranian diatribes compare Iraq's President Saddam Hussein to	Yazid,	a general in the forces that became leaders of the mainstream Sunni branch of Islam.
In the struggle to succeed the prophet Mohammed, the hated General	Yazid	slew Mohammed's descendant, Hussein, who thus became the most important Shiite martyr. In recent
Iran's enemy in the Gulf war, Iraq's Saddam Hussein, is often portrayed in Iranian rhetoric as	Yazid	, the general of the Sunni army at Karbala
In Iranian propaganda, Iraq's President Hussein is often portrayed as	Yazid,	the general of the Sunni army at Karbala.
At the Friday prayers in this besieged city, the worshipers have added a new coda to the traditional Moslem liturgy wishing good health to the Prophet Mohammed and his family. "Margh bar Saddam	Yazid	Kohfer!" the men, bearded, many with rifles beside them, cried. "Death to Saddam Yazid , the Infidel!"

Table 9 Saddam- Yazid concordances

3.3 The theme of Saddam’s Pan-Arabism/ Nationalism

It has been shown in the above section how the war was portrayed as being religious by both sides of the conflict. According to the press, Saddam had also always appeared determined to become ‘a military voice’ and power in the region. This was realised through Saddam’s collocates *as ambition/s, leader, leadership* as shown in the following concordances Table 10.

Although Saddam Hussein has yet to achieve the sort of clear-cut battlefield victory in Iran he sought to enhance his	ambitions	to make Iraq a major Arab military force,
the border war between Iraq and Iran appears to have as much to do with President Saddam Hussein's.	ambitions	to be the leader of the Arab world as it does with the few miles of disputed territory
Its 280,000-man military force - the principal base of President Saddam Hussein's	ambitions	for regional leadership - is the largest in the Persian Gulf.
another major factor is Saddam Hussein's own	ambitions	to establish his nation of 12.5 million people as the major power in the Persian Gulf region -- once dominated by the late shah of Iran

Table 10 Saddam's ambition

Similarly, Saddam was viewed by the US press as having ambitions for regional leadership or Pan-Arabism. This was done through references to the pan-Arab Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian president, showing Saddam as being ‘a longtime admirer’ of Gamal, or to the fact that Saddam ‘has long coveted’ his (Nasser’s) role and through claims that he ‘dreams of being the successor of Nasser’ and ‘regards himself as the new Nasser’.

10. Behind that goal, however, **lay the naked ambition of Saddam**, as the 42-year-old ex-gunman and lawyer is popularly known. He is determined **to wrench the pendulum of Arab political power away from Cairo toward Baghdad by offering a modern version of Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arab crusade.**

The Washington Post, September 28, 1980

Furthermore, for Saddam to become a pan-Arab was a move that was constructed to be at the expense of the Egyptian leader, Anwar Sadat, when the Arab countries decided to isolate Egypt over Sadat’s peace agreement with Israel at Camp David in 1978⁵. This shocked all the Arab world and caused strains in the inter-Arab countries’ relationship as Israel is seen by Arab countries as an occupier of an Arab country Palestine. Therefore, any settlement with Israel was seen to be at the cost of Palestine. The press showed that his accord boosted Saddam and gave him a more influential role in inter-Arab politics and in calling for an Arab summit in

⁵ Camp David accords are the agreements brokered by the US president Jimmy Carter that were signed by the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin held on September 17, 1978 (Quandt, 1986). According to Telhami (1992) this accord ended the hostility between the two countries that lasted for three decades who have fought four wars and established the peace foundation between the two countries.

Baghdad. He was also portrayed to be utilising the anti- Israel discourse to achieve his ambition as a regional power

11. After the 1978 Camp David peace agreement he called Arab League leaders to Baghdad to condemn the accords, and thereby to underscore Iraq's ideological purity in the "rejectionist" front opposing ending the Arab-Israeli conflict short of Israel's virtual capitulation.

The New York Times, September 28, 1980

Furthermore, the US press viewed Saddam as ambitious to be a military voice in the Gulf through appearing to be calling for a solution to Arab issues as well as getting close to the Arab countries to create alliances. Also, through defending the Arab rights by demanding that Iran return the three islands to UAE, Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tumbs claimed by Iran in 1971 under the Shah's rule.

12. He helped to end the conflict between the two Yemens. He took charge of Arab preparations for last fall's Havana conference of countries that call themselves nonaligned and was chosen to succeed Fidel Castro as head of the movement when it meets in Baghdad in 1982.

The New York Times, September 28

Saddam's ambition was also portrayed through showing Saddam's alleged determination to become the Shah's successor as the strongman in the Gulf. This was done through the use of phrases such as 'to succeed the late Shah', to play the 'Persian Gulf policeman', 'to be the Shah's successor as policeman of the Persian Gulf'

13. He also *seems determined to succeed the late Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlevi as the region's strongman*. The Shah, with plentiful oil and the United States backing, forced Iraq into a secondary role.

The New York Times, September 28, 1980

3.4 Saddam's personality cult theme

Personality cult is defined, according to Pao-min Chang (cited in Pisch, 2017, p. 63), as an elevation of a person's status artificially through the building, circulating and propagating his godlike image. On the other hand, from the point of view of religion, personality cult is

viewed, according to Árpád von Klimó (cited in Pisch, 2017, p. 63) as “a sum of symbolic actions and texts which express and ritualise the particular meanings ascribed to a particular person in order to incorporate an imagined community”. In the same vein, a more widely acknowledged definition of personality cult put by Heller and Plamper (2004, pp. 22-23) as the excessive glorification in a godlike manner of a political figure through the use of media. The common characteristics among these definitions are the manufactured image of a particular person through elevation, glorification, and rituals. Figure 4 shows the main discourse representing the personality cults. These discourses were highlighted through Saddam’s collocates *cult*, *pictures*, *posters*, *portrait*, *portraits* along with their concordances which explicated and highlighted more related discourses.

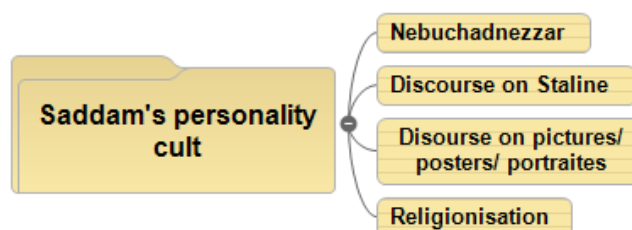


Figure 4 Discourses on Saddam's personal cult

The elevation and the creation of a god-like image of Saddam took place in the US press as incorporating the pre-Islamic ancient Mesopotamian history in creating and building his personality cult. Therefore, he was seen as aspiring to be viewed as Nebuchadnezzar through drawing comparisons between the ancient Mesopotamian leader and himself. This was realised through huge posters and banners that, according to The New York Times, February 4, 1988, “shows King Nebuchadnezzar offering tribute to Mr Hussein and promising to fight on his side”.

Another notable argument used by the US press to construct Saddam’s personality cult is through what Wodak and Reisigl (2001) name as ‘religionisation’ or ‘religionyms’ which

were realised through portraying Saddam as playing on the historical and religion enmity and figures, as mentioned earlier, as well as through identifying himself with the war through naming it with his personal name as seen in the Table 11.

Saddam's Qadisiyah	- depicted the war as his personal Qadisiyah,
	- the war is Hussein's own personal crusade
	- has made the war his greatest claim to Iraqi, and Arab, fame and leadership, so much so that it has been officially dubbed "Saddam's Qadisiyah," a reference to the decisive
	- the new war is called "Saddam's Qadisiya" to suggest that President Saddam Hussein is headed for an equally epochal victory over Iraq's enemies in what is today the Islamic Republic of Iran
	- the Iraqi leader personalized the struggle, calling it "Saddam's Qadisiya" after a 7th century Arab victory over the Persians at a battle near Baghdad.

Table 11: Predicational strategies of Saddam in relation to Saddam's Qadisiyah

Saddam's personality cult is also represented in the US press through the collocates *pictures, portraits and posters*. The predicational strategies of these collocates were constructed negatively through the use of body meronyms referring to Saddam's specific body fragmentation as 'mustache and toothy grin', the use of spatialisation as in 'everywhere' or 'inescapable', 'his portrait on everything', 'scarcely possible [...] without encountering a photograph' in a reference that such pictures/ posters are unavoidable. The negative representation has even included telling jokes as illustrated below:

Saddam personal cult through pictures/ portraits	- poses are plastered everywhere
	- President's penchant for plastering his portrait on everything has become a joke: Question: "What's the population of Iraq?" Answer: " Twenty- eight million. Fourteen million Iraqis and 14 million pictures of Saddam. "
	- His mustache and toothy grin are inescapable
	- Yet no aspect of Iraqi life is too insignificant for his attention
	- It is scarcely possible to walk the streets here for more than 20 feet without encountering a photograph or larger-than-life poster of Saddam
	- His photos are everywhere , showing him kissing babies, checking on public services.
	- his visage adorns nearly every vertical surface in a variety of guises
	- There is no escape from Mr. Hussein's picture , which adorns construction fences, offices, hotel lobbies, immigration booths at the airport, gas stations, buses and shop windows. Twelve-foot-high cutouts stand before some ministries.

Table 12 Predicational Strategies representing Saddam personal cult through pictures/ portraits

Saddam's personality cult was also seen through the government-controlled television station and in the press, where 'no word of criticism' was allowed, or they did not allow 'any rivals to emerge':

14. **No word of criticism of the** "leader President," as Mr. Hussein is often called, creeps into the state-controlled press [...] Mr. Hussein's image dominates television, greeting visitors, talking with children and exhorting troops, and vocal groups appear most evenings to sing rhythmic ditties praising his prowess.

The New York Times, November 23, 1983

Saddam's personality cult was also shown in the US press as being practised through a series of coercive procedures followed by his party or other security circles who arrested anyone who spoke critically of Saddam. Also, people were encouraged to join the party to show their loyalty, and if they did, they obtained privileges.

15. The president's principal source of power is the Mukhabarat or secret police, which is led by his half-brother, Barzan Tikriti. The police have an extensive network of informers, and private citizens who have spoken critically of the government have been arrested at night and disappeared, according to responsible sources living here.

The Washington Post November 23, 1982, Tuesday

Furthermore, as part of his personality cult Saddam was seen in a variety of apparel: he sometimes appeared dressed in the Bedouin costumes, Kurdish clothing, the traditional clothes of the Iraqi peasant, 'wearing an Arab headdress or smoking a cigar', 'in the formal regalia of a field marshal', or wearing 'a red-checked turban'. He was also constructed to portray himself as a religious man through praying 'a Shiite mosque'. This variation is seen as deliberately balanced, aimed at mobilising a strong consensus among the disparate elements of Iraq's social structure. What is more, Saddam's personality cult was compared to the North Korean Kim Il Sung and to Stalin's one and his rival Khomeini.

Saddam's personality cult	- President Hussein, whose personality cult is second only to that of North Korea's Kim Il Sung.
	- President Hussein, whose personality cult rivals Stalin's
	- built around himself a personality cult that approaches the one surrounding his mortal enemy, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the Iranian leader.
	- Posters showing him in uniform, holding a baby, smoking a cigar, grave in a business suit are everywhere. This is a cult of personality Stalin might have envied

Table 13: Predicational Strategies of Saddam's personality cult

3.5 The theme of Zionism and imperialism collusion

Both countries are viewed in the US press to use anti-Semitism words accusing each other of their cooperation with Zionists or acting as a tool in the hand of Zionists or America. The US press showed how the Iranian officials viewed Saddam as being incited by the superpowers. This is perceived through phrases such as ‘the Zionist American stooge, Saddam Hussein’, ‘the puppet and mercenary Iraqi Government’, ‘an American puppet’, ‘puppet Baathist regime of the infidel Saddam’, ‘a puppet Satan of the great Satan’ and ‘puppet of the Great Satan’. Through the use of these phrases, the press shows how Iran employed this discourse to mobilise the Iranian people through portraying Saddam and the USA/ Zionism as being in the same front that wants to attack Islam. The religious discourse was also employed as a way of mobilising the Iraqi Shiites to revolt and overthrow Saddam.

16. we shall continue the fight against the world criminals, led by America, as firmly as possible. When the **puppet Baathist regime** of the infidel Saddam has, at the incitement of the superpowers, imposed an aggressive war on the Moslem nation of Iran, we regard it our duty to go to the assistance of the proud fighters and valiant youth and actively participate in the field to teach a lesson to all **America's puppets**.

The New York Times, November 4, 1980

17. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who has variously described President Hussein as “**an atheist**” and “**a puppet satan of the great satan,**” meaning the United States, has been calling on the Shiite majority in Iraq to rise up and overthrow their leader.

The New York Times, November 20, 1980

On the metaphorical use of ‘great Satan’ in example 22, Dabashi (2015) explains “[t]here is scarcely a phrase more pointed and piercing than “the Great Satan” when Iranian authorities - beginning with the late Ayatollah Khomeini and now Ayatollah Khamenei - use it

as a code-name for the United States”. He adds that this is first used by Khomeini after the Iranian Revolution (1977-1979) and since then it has become a “cornerstone of the ruling ideology” in Iran which was later reiterated on many occasions. “As an absolute metaphor of the enemy, ‘The Great Satan’ is embedded in the Islamic Republic”. According to Dabashi, this metaphor is explained by Khomeini as being a way of showing that Iblis is the chief of all other Satans in the entire world and that what Iblis does is seduce people and ‘beguile’ them. The US not only seduces but also murders people. This metaphor, according to Dabashi (2015), since it was first employed by Khomeini, “has had a domestic function: to denounce and repress the forceful temptation of seductions “within” the Islamic Republic - forces that want and plot to open up to the US [...]”.

By the same token, the press showed how Iran viewed Saddam as doing an ‘imperialist service’ to the Americans; backing Iraq was also seen as part of an international conspiracy against the revolutionary Islamic government. In addition, the US support of Iraq was viewed by Iranian officials as ‘an effort to force the hostages’ release’, ‘an effort to force the captive Americans’ release’, ‘to gain the hostages’ release.’⁶

18. He reiterated oft-expressed Iranian charges that the “superpowers” were **backing Iraq** in an attempt to overthrow Iran’s Islamic Government. Mr. Bani-Sadr

The New York Times, January 10, 1981

4. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the ways in which Saddam was constructed in the US press in the Iraq-Iran war. The investigation of Saddam has shown that the press reported the confrontational discourse of Saddam and Khomeini and the way they constructed each

⁶ The Iranian hostage crisis broke out in 1979 when some Iranian students attacked the American embassy in Tehran, taking 60 embassy staff hostage with the support of the revolutionary government. The hostages were released in 1981 (Hodge and Nolan, 2007, p. 363).

other. It also showed how through such discourse the two parties positioned themselves as well as the course of events in the war. Therefore, Saddam was constructed as engaging in a ‘holy’ war through playing on the historical enmity between the Arabs and the Iranians to move his own people as well as those in other Arab countries and identifying himself with Islamic and other historical figures. In addition, he was constructed as an ambitious leader who had been for a long time seeking to play the role of the Pan-Arab Gamal Abdel Nasser and became a political and military voice in the region.

Furthermore, although Saddam Hussein was constructed negatively he was not demonised or criminalised with strong evaluative attributes and wordings as in the later wars as well as he was not linked and associated, as a person, with the use of CWs used in Halabja or against Iran. This construction comes in line with Keeble’s (2004) argument that it is only after the Iraq-Iran war Saddam was demonised.

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