

# Exploiting Islam

Saddam Hussein tries to harness feelings of solidarity among Muslims to his advantage. By portraying himself as a devout believer and invoking the name of Allah in his struggles with the international community, he seeks to frame his conflicts as an Islamic struggle and fashion himself as standard-bearer for Muslims. Images of Saddam in prayer or extolling Saddam's dedication to Islam appear on billboards in Iraq and are circulated in pictures, publications, and videos.

One 1990 analysis concluded, "In recent years, the Baathists have not hesitated to exploit religion as a mobilizing agent; and from the first months of the war with Iran, prominent Baathists have made a public show of attending religious observances. Saddam Hussein is depicted in prayer on posters displayed across the country. Moreover, the Baath Party has provided large sums of money to refurbish important mosques."<sup>22</sup> This is a departure from the secular origins of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. Baathists view Islam as a product of Arab culture and a bridge to pan-Arabism, and until 1990, Iraq was the only officially secular state in the region. Over time, the personality of Saddam Hussein has supplanted Baath Party doctrine, but one factor has not changed: The key figures in Iraq's regime and ruling party remain non-religious or even non-believers.



According to *Daily Telegraph* (London) editor Con Coughlin, author of *King of Terror: A Biography of Saddam Hussein*, in a November 8, 2002, interview with *CNN American Morning*:

"Saddam is an opportunist. He's not really a devout Muslim. But when it suits him, he portrays himself as a Muslim leader. And I think when your correspondents go to Baghdad, they see all these pictures of Saddam the nation builder, the general; Saddam the religious leader."

**November 2002: Women in Baghdad wait for a cab in front of a mural of Saddam Hussein in prayer. [AP/Wide World]**