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The Iraqi Ba'th Party: Inexorably Tied to Saddam

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The Iraqi Ba'th Party: Inexorably Tied to Saddam [REDACTED]

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Summary [REDACTED]

The Arab Socialist Ba'th Party has ruled Iraq for 34 years. *It fulfills political, security, and propaganda functions that are important to Saddam Husayn's personal rule, but its demise in a post-Saddam era would probably have little or no impact on Iraq's economic, financial, social, or political recovery.* The Party's ability to survive Saddam's departure intact or in a new form would depend on the nature of his removal and the political permissiveness of the post-Saddam environment. Many Iraq observers believe the majority of Iraqis would abandon or oppose the Party after Saddam.

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- The Ba'th Party was founded in the mid-1940s as a supra-nationalist movement espousing pan-Arab unity, socialism, and anti-imperialism. The only legal party in Iraq, over the past two decades it has ceased to function as a political entity and has instead become a rubber stamp and enforcer for Saddam's policies.
- Despite Saddam's attempts to shore up party loyalty, morale within the Ba'th has deteriorated due to the declining status associated with membership, dwindling benefits, and a general sense of malaise [REDACTED]

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The status of the Ba'th Party after Saddam would depend on the nature of regime change.

- If Saddam died of natural causes and a prominent regime figure, such as his son Qusay, assumed power, the new leader probably would continue to use the Party as a means of control.
- If a senior military officer or Party official without personal ties to the current leadership removed Saddam, he might dismantle the Party to distance himself from Saddam's atrocities. If the Ba'th Party survived either as the ruling party or as a partner in the new administration—the original party tenets of socialism, anti-imperialism, and Arab nationalism would undermine Washington's ability to promote reform. [REDACTED]

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A US role in removing Saddam and establishing a successor government would create a period of political dynamism with competing groups maneuvering to fill the leadership vacuum and press their agendas. Surviving remnants of the Ba'th Party might try to assume the role of the

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opposition, obstructing reforms, capitalizing on a new administration's mistakes, and availing itself of the first opportunity to re-take control.

• The Ba'th Party in its current form is unlikely to endure in a successor government because the Iraqi people would view retention of the Ba'th political structure as an unacceptable continuation of Saddam's legacy.

• Nonetheless, *government ministries providing critical services will need to be retained in some form after being purged of Saddam loyalists and restructured to eliminate the Ba'th Party's oversight mechanisms.* Many technocrats who joined the Ba'th Party to attain their positions are probably not ardent supporters of Saddam and could probably remain.

• We do not know much about the loyalties, party affiliation, or potential criminal activities of most Iraqi military officers and government bureaucrats [redacted]

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[redacted] Most would have to be investigated and vetted before being allowed to continue in their positions. [redacted]

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**The Iraqi Ba'th Party:
Inexorably Tied to Saddam**

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A Rocky Beginning

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Lebanese and Syrian intellectuals founded the Arab Socialist Ba'th (*Renaissance*) Party in the mid-1940s in Damascus as a supra-nationalist movement espousing pan-Arab unity, socialism, and anti-imperialism. In 1949 Iraqi engineer Fuad Rikabi co-founded the Iraq Regional Command of the Ba'th Party, which was a branch of the Syrian Ba'th Party from 1952 until 1966. [redacted]

In the wake of the 1958 Revolution, the Iraqi Ba'th Party capitalized on a surge in Arab nationalist sentiment to recruit and organize adherents. Nevertheless, infighting and jockeying for power stymied attempts to dominate the political landscape for the next decade.

- The Party was ousted after a brief term in power in 1963, splintered into several factions, and was banned the following year for coup plotting. [redacted]

The Ba'th seized power again in July 1968, with General Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr assuming the presidency. His distant relative, Saddam Husayn, was named deputy secretary general of the Party in 1966 and in 1969 became vice chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the government's highest executive and legislative body.

- Saddam increased his power throughout the 1970s by manipulating Baghdad's security apparatus to eliminate potential rivals. He engineered Bakr's resignation and assumed the presidency in 1979. [redacted]

Ba'th Party Today: Marginalized and in Decline

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Saddam has molded the Iraqi Ba'th Party into an instrument of control and repression. The Ba'th Party is the only legal party in Iraq and during the past two decades has ceased to function as a viable, transnational political entity. Saddam has instead used to the Party to rubber stamp political decisions, as a propaganda tool, and as an organization for enforcing domestic security by monitoring the activities of the military and the populace. For years the Party's leadership has consisted of military and security officials chosen for their loyalty rather than their professional credentials or their interest in promoting the Ba'thist ideals.

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- Husayn Kamil, the former director of military industries, had no background in engineering or manufacturing and no apparent understanding of Ba'thist principles. He achieved his position because of his ruthless loyalty to the regime as a security officer and because he married Saddam's daughter.

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- Saddam appointed trusted aides to run all government ministries and military commands. Party members rigidly adhere to Saddam's directives and report suspected anti-regime activity. [redacted]

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This assessment was prepared by the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Iraq Issue Manager, NESAs, on [redacted]

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Membership Has Its Privileges [redacted]

Political and family connections are required for party membership, which is awarded after a long probationary period—between five to eight years for full membership—requiring political indoctrination and demonstrated service.

[redacted] most Iraqis who join the Ba'th Party do so for economic and professional reasons rather than because of ideology.

[redacted] as of 1999, there were about 700,000 people associated with the Ba'th Party, although only 13,000 to 15,000 were full members—the remainder were lower ranking, such as "sympathizer" or "supporter," who had not yet completed the requirements for full membership.

- Party membership is a prerequisite for obtaining better food rations, education, employment, land, and housing. Senior positions in the government and military require Party membership.

Iraq, where they are frequently targets of assassination.

- Attendance at party meetings has plummeted in the past decade, in part due to members' disillusionment, but also because economic hardship has forced most members to work several jobs.

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Saddam in recent years has tried to bolster flagging morale within the Party by promising incentives for leaders, stepping up indoctrination, and calling for a greater party role in daily life. He also has emphasized the need to recruit the younger generation of Iraqis to give the Party a modern face.

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- In a bid to persuade Iraqis that he was working to improve their lot, Saddam held an unprecedented series of meetings with Ba'th members at all levels in mid-1999 when Iraq experienced a severe heat wave and drought, electricity shortages, and heightened Shia unrest.

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- At the same time, [redacted] the regime continued to retire potential adversaries from the Party and execute members suspected of disloyalty.

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Despite Saddam's attempts to shore up party loyalty, morale within the Ba'th has deteriorated in recent years due to the declining status associated with membership, dwindling benefits, a lack of opportunities for personal advancement, and a general sense of malaise. Saddam's replacement of key Ba'thist tenets with his cult of personality has marginalized the Party.

The Mechanics of Oversight [redacted]

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The Ba'th Party operates a series of bureaus that parallel government ministries to ensure that they operate according to Party directives and are responsive to Party guidance. The most influential bureaus cover the military, security, tribal affairs, agriculture, finance, and foreign relations. These bureaus oversee their corresponding ministries providing direction and monitoring performance and loyalty. Prominent regime figures head most Ba'th Party bureaus.

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- Members are required to serve in the Ba'th Party militia, a paramilitary security force used for suppressing urban unrest and external threats to the regime. Most members resent these duties, especially in restive areas of Baghdad and southern

- Saddam's younger son Qusay became the Deputy of the Ba'th Party Military Bureau in May, 2001,

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complimenting his other posts as Commander of the Republican Guard, the Special Security Organization, and the Special Republican Guard. The Military Bureau sets policy for the administration and operation of the armed forces, and assigns "political officers" to military commands to monitor loyalty and indoctrinate the rank-and-file.

- Saddam's former bodyguards, Rukan Razuki Abd al-Ghafur and Jamal Mustafa, direct the Bureau of Tribal Affairs. This bureau cultivates regime relations with key tribes, dispensing government largess in return for loyalty with the implicit threat of repercussions for opposing the regime. [redacted]

- The Party launched several "faith campaigns" to portray the regime in a pious light, calling for the expansion of Qu'ranic teaching programs, the closure of nightclubs, and a ban on public consumption of alcohol.

- The regime is constructing the world's largest mosque in Baghdad, according to press [redacted] and Saddam reportedly donated his blood to serve as ink for printing a copy of the Qu'ran.

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- In the wake of Shia unrest following the 1999 regime-sponsored murder of the paramount Iraqi Shia cleric, Saddam dubbed the Ba'th Party the "Party of Faith and the Commander of the Faithful," probably attempting to placate their disquiet. [redacted]

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Manipulating the Ba'th to Maintain Control

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Saddam has periodically refocused Ba'th Party doctrine and policy to strengthen his internal position. The Party worked to stamp out tribalism in the 1970s, considering it an anachronism and obstacle to modernization. Nevertheless, Saddam—in an attempt to woo tribal leaders and bolster security in outlying areas—has extolled since the Gulf war traditional tribal values, even referring to the Ba'th Party as "the tribe of the Iraqi tribes."

Saddam also has exploited the secular, inclusive vision of Ba'thist ideology to extend control over restive or disgruntled segments of the population by recruiting token members of these groups to shore up sectarian loyalty. For example, the Ba'th has periodically courted Shias to assuage their disaffection or to quell heightened religious fervor, most notably in the wake of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Saddam also has tailored, with limited success, Ba'thist rhetoric to rally popular support in times of crisis. [redacted]

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- Saddam has capitalized on the Iraqi population's growing dependence on tribal and family ties for survival during the past decade of economic sanctions. As part of his trademark carrot-and-stick system of control, he rewards loyal tribal leaders with material benefits, in turn holding them responsible for members' actions and meting out severe punishment for disloyal behavior. [redacted]

The Ba'th Party After Saddam [redacted]

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The status of the Ba'th Party after Saddam would depend on the nature of regime change. If Saddam died of natural causes and a regime insider—a prominent Ba'th Party official, one of Saddam's sons, or a high-level military officer—assumed power, he would undoubtedly use the Party's infrastructure to consolidate his rule. The new leader undoubtedly would cull the party ranks and re-stock the organization with loyal supporters, as Saddam did in the 1970s.

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In direct contrast to the Ba'th's historic espousal of secularism, the Party adopted a religious veneer in the past decade, beginning with a bid to re-establish Iraq's legitimacy with regional Muslims in the wake of the Gulf war. To this end, Baghdad added "God is great" to the national flag, appropriated religious slogans, and televised Saddam at prayer.

- Unless a true Ba'thist ideologue took power, the Party probably would continue to function—and decline as a political entity—as it did under

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Saddam. A successor not steeped in the Party's founding tenets would value the Party less for its political potential than as a security apparatus for ensuring internal stability.

Saddam recently secured a prominent position in the Party for his son Qusay—who oversees Iraq's security and intelligence apparatus and appears to be his father's choice as successor—suggesting that Saddam is trying to bolster the Ba'th's viability while he can and to establish an enduring legacy.

- In May 2001, Saddam engineered Qusay's election to the Ba'th Party Regional Command. After the election—the first since 1995—Qusay also became deputy of the Party's military bureau, according to press reports.



Syrian President Bashar al-Asad Trying to Maintain Ba'th Party Rule

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The succession process in Syria, the world's only other Ba'thist government, suggests that even a smooth transfer of power in Iraq to a regime loyalist would create challenges for the post-Saddam Ba'th Party.

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During the 30 years of President Hafez al-Asad's highly personal rule, the military-security establishment—dominated by Asad loyalists—gradually supplanted the Syrian Ba'th Party. The Party was further discredited by the blatant greed and corruption of the ruling class, the failure of efforts toward Arab unity, and the bitter rivalry between the Syrian and Iraqi branches of the Party that led to their split in 1966.

- Since assuming power in July 2000, Asad's son Bashar has achieved mixed results in his attempt to harness the Party to his reformist agenda and inject it with new life by elevating younger, more progressive members and bringing in outsiders.

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- The Party continues to be hampered by ideological rigidity, and there is discontent at the Party's grassroots over government corruption, cronyism, and lack of accountability.

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If an official or military officer with nominal Ba'th credentials and without close ties to the leadership removed Saddam in a coup, he might ban the Party and dismantle its organization, retaining portions of the existing government structure—notably functional ministries like agriculture or tribal affairs—and populating them with members loyal to him.

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- He probably would prohibit high-ranking Ba'th officials with ties to Saddam's from participating in a successor administration to avoid any association with Saddam's legacy.

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• [redacted] the Ba'th Party would not survive Saddam because of widespread popular resentment of Ba'th privilege and mistreatment of other Iraqis under his regime.

A new government established by an internal coup would need to distance itself from Saddam's oppressive policies. Although the Party could reconstitute itself, perhaps taking a new name and returning to its founding tenets or by altering its message to resonate with present-day aspirations of the Iraqi people, it is probably too closely associated with Saddam to endure.

- A more popular platform probably would include glorification of Iraqi nationalism and steadfastness, clear programs for economic recovery, emphasis on balancing traditional, tribal, and Arab values with modernization, a call for nationwide participation in rebuilding the country, and a commitment to pluralistic, representative government.
- After an initial period of indecision some Ba'thist exiles and seasoned political figures who fled during the past three decades might return to Iraq in hope of participating in a new government. Although their long absence could weaken their influence, they might be more acceptable to some segments of the Iraqi populace because of their perceived ability to bring a broader political perspective and their lack of association with Saddam's regime.

Romania After Ceausescu: Ex-Communists Still Hold Reins of Power

Romania's political transition provides some instructive parallels to the situation in Iraq.

The 1989 ouster of Romanian President Nicolai Ceausescu ended twenty years of authoritarian rule centered on his personality cult. The ruling Communist Party—the embodiment of Ceausescu—splintered into numerous political parties that moved to win legitimacy by dissociating themselves from his regime.

The principal successor to the Communist Party was the Party of Social Democracy (PSD), which currently holds power and whose predecessors alternately served as the ruling and opposition party in the three post-Ceausescu elections.

- Despite several transformations and name changes during the past decade, the PSD is still dominated by hardline former mid-level Communist Party officials from Ceausescu's era who have slowly adopted Western-style economic and democratic reforms while continuing to employ some authoritarian tactics and the old *nomenklature* hierarchy of power.
- The Party's newest generation of leaders largely adheres to the powers outlined by the Romanian constitution but continues the cycle of corruption and abuse of public power by manipulating the government's weak system of checks and balances. Thus far, the Party has successfully quashed reformist elements within its ranks that advocate more democratic, Western policies.

Substantial support from Western states and international organizations—especially the EU, NATO, and the IMF—has been crucial to Romania's modest democratic and capitalist development. Without the combination of Western pressure and incentives, the PSD would have been less inclined to pursue political or economic reforms.

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Creating Legitimacy [redacted]

After Saddam, nascent political organizations will be hampered by Iraq's years of social isolation, lack of exposure to positive political models or modern political trends, and the death, aging, or exile of an educated class of politicians not associated with Saddam. This will be further compounded by a repressed and poorly educated generation from which to draw potential leaders and an absence of a tradition of legitimate, elected, representative government. Since Iraq's independence, the people have never chosen their national leader.

- Throughout Iraqi—and indeed Middle Eastern—history, the acquisition of political office has been heavily dependent on patronage and familial ties, and the ruling class has been rife with graft and corruption.
- The current generation knows nothing of political normalcy, only Saddam's rule—eight years of which were spent at war with Iran and twelve of which Iraq has suffered under economic sanctions since the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.
- Many of the core elements of Ba'thism—especially its authoritarian history and the secretive nature of the party hierarchy—conflict with US ideals of an open, transparent political system.
- Political alliances formed after Saddam's demise are likely to be based on tribal, ethnic, religious, or geographic bases; their ability to flourish will depend on the new administration's openness and ability to control the populace. [redacted]

A US military role in removing Saddam and establishing a successor government probably would usher in a period of political dynamism with long-suppressed domestic and exiled groups rushing to fill the gap and press their agendas. A resurgent Ba'th Party that tried to remake a new administration adhering to original Party tenets of socialism, anti-imperialism, Arab nationalism, and hostility to the West could complicate US efforts to shape the post-Saddam environment.

- The Iraqi Ba'th Party is too closely associated with Saddam to endure in any successor government. Its tight-fisted control over the military and civilian ministries, embodied in its "political officers" and security organs responsible for oversight, are closely associated with Saddam's oppression and any surviving manifestation would undermine legitimacy.
- Nonetheless, many current Ba'th Party technocrats who serve in functional ministries providing key services for the Iraqi population—such as agriculture, public works, culture and information—could probably be retained in their technical capacities if they were innocent of regime atrocities and not closely identified with Saddam.
- Government ministries providing critical services will need to be retained in some form after being purged of Saddam loyalists and restructured to eliminate the Ba'th Party's oversight mechanisms. Many technocrats who initially joined the Ba'th Party to attain their positions are probably not ardent supporters of Saddam and could probably remain.

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- We do not know much about the loyalties, party affiliation, or possible criminal activities of most Iraqi military officers and government bureaucrats. [redacted]

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[redacted] Most will have to be investigated and vetted before being allowed to continue in their positions. [redacted]

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Appendix A**Ba'th Party Regional/Iraq
Command Members** [REDACTED]

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***Saddam Husayn** – Ba'th Party Secretary General; Ba'th Party Iraq Command Secretary; Ba'th Party Military Bureau Chairman; Ba'th Party Foreign Relations Bureau Chairman; Revolutionary Command Council Chairman.

***Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri** – Ba'th Party Deputy Secretary General; Iraq Command Deputy Secretary; Revolutionary Command Council Vice Chairman.

***Taha Yasin Ramadan** – Revolutionary Command Council member.

***Tariq Aziz** – Revolutionary Command Council member; Foreign Relations Office Chairman.

***Ali Hasan al-Majid** – Revolutionary Command Council member; Central Workers Bureau Chairman; Salah al-Din Governorate Ba'th Party Chairman.

***Mizban Khidr Hadi** – Revolutionary Command Council member; Central Peasants Bureau Chairman.

Latif Nusayyif Jasim – Ba'th Party Military Bureau Deputy Chairman.

Muhammad Zimam Abd al-Razzaq al-Sadun – Ta'mim and Nineveh Governorates Ba'th Party Chairman.

Abd al-Baqi Abd al-Karim Abdullah al-Sadun – Baghdad/al-Karkh Ba'th Party Chairman.

Samir Abd al-Aziz Najm – Diyala Governorate Ba'th Party Chairman.

Adil Abdallah Mahdi al-Duri al-Tikriti – Dhi Qar and Muthanna Governorates Ba'th Party Chairman.

Aziz Salih Hasan Numan al-Hafaji – Baghdad/al-Rasafa Ba'th Party Chairman.

Qusay Saddam Husayn – Ba'th Party Military Bureau Deputy Chairman.

Yahya Abdallah al-Ubudi – Basrah Governorate Ba'th Party Chairman.

Uqlah abd Saqar al-Kubaysi – Maysan Governorate Ba'th Party Chairman.

Rashid Taan Kazim – Anbar Governorate Ba'th Party Chairman.

Fadil Mahmud Gharib al-Mashhadani – Babil and Karbala Governorates Ba'th Party Chairman.

Muhsin Khidr al-Khafaji – Najaf and Qadisiyah Governorates Ba'th Party Chairman.

Huda Salih Mahdi Ammask – Chairman, Student and Youth Bureau and Professional Bureau.

Ghazi Hammud al-Ubaydi – Wasit Governorate Ba'th Party Chairman.

* denotes Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) member.

Note: Taha Muhyi al-Din Maruf, while not a member of the Regional/Iraq Command, also is a member of the RCC.

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Appendix B**The Ba'th Party: A Rigid,
Effective Hierarchy** [REDACTED]

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Circle/Cell—the basic organizational unit of the Ba'th Party. Consists of roughly 15 members and operates at the neighborhood level. Serves as training grounds for prospective members and is designed to attract a broad following.

Division—the organizational unit for a small town or city section. Consists of 3 to 7 cells totaling some 45 to 100 members. Its function is to ensure popular compliance with instructions from higher echelons.

Sector—consists of two or more divisions and encompasses a major section of a city or large rural district. This probably is the most important administrative echelon in the party.

Branch—consists of two sectors. A branch can encompass a major city or an entire governorate. The branch is directly responsible to the Iraq Regional Command and elects its own secretary, unlike lower-level party units, which have appointed heads.

Party Organization—consists of several branches covering two to three governorates.

The Iraq Regional Command, also known as the Iraq Command—consists of Ba'th Party officials in charge of the provincial party organizations, as well as members of the Revolutionary Command Council. The Iraq Regional Command is responsible for all Ba'th Party activities in Iraq.

- The Iraq Command currently consists of 20 members, who are elected approximately every five years.

The Revolutionary Command Council—the most powerful ruling body in the government, currently consisting of seven members.

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