

## Saddam a victim of vendetta?



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

### SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

The entire episode will be counter-productive for the US and Britain. The division between Sunnis and Shias has certainly widened, putting the Arab world into a highly uncertain political situation. The most damaging will be the future of Iraq. Under the present situation, there is hardly any chance to keep Iraq in one piece.

**S**ADDAM Hussein was executed on December 30 at 6 pm local time when Iraqis and all Muslims all over the world were preparing for Eid through prayer and sacrifices. Saddam's execution was a festival for some and sad sacrifice for some others.

Saddam was handed over by US army to Iraqi hang-men just minutes before he was executed. Even US army understood the repercussions and the possible fall-out effect of Saddam's execution and that is why US army reportedly cautioned against quick execution, as this would have serious backlash from the Sunni community. But US army warning was ignored.

It was Nuri-al-Maliki who was determined to carry out the execution. He himself signed the execution order at midnight on Friday, December 29, as he earlier vowed publicly that Saddam would not live to see the light of the New Year 2007.

But according to Iraqi constitution it was the president of Iraq who was to sign the execution order. Maliki reportedly talked to President Jalal Talabani who refused to sign the order on capital punishment i.e. execution by hanging. This is why Maliki himself took the responsibility to sign the execution order. It was a personal vendetta -- execution carried out with full vengeance.

No US representative was directly present at the execution, but it probably watched from the wings. Bush administration wanted to make sure that this was the execution of an Iraqi by Iraqis in Iraq -- and Maliki was most eager to make it happen.

Regardless of what happened, Saddam was undoubtedly a dictator and he died as a dictator. He would have done better, perhaps, if he had fought the occupying forces and been killed in action.

Saddam's execution order was confirmed not only by the specially appointed Iraqi court, but also finally by President Bush before he went to bed on December 30 at

his ranch in Crawford, Texas. Maliki informed the US ambassador in Baghdad, who informed the White House and the White House informed President Bush who was holidaying at his ranch.

Bush, as it seems, gave final nod to the execution and went to bed, obviously for a good sleep (after all it was a personal revenge not only for Maliki but for President Bush too). However, he left a message saying it was a fair trial, an important milestone on the road to establishing democracy in Iraq.

Saddam's defense lawyer Ramsey Clark said that Saddam's execution "was a tragic assault on the truth and justice." Indeed, the defense lawyers did not get enough opportunities to put up the truth before the court -- truth like which country supplied the gas and anthrax in 1980s.

Three defense lawyers were assassinated, reportedly by state-run death squads. Judges were changed on the plea that some were not fit to deal with Saddam (at least one judge was found to be somewhat lenient). So

changes were made until one was found who was truly fit for the job i.e. to ensure Saddam's death.

It was a bizarre trial where the judge visibly showed high temper to the accused and turned him out of the court. This was a trial by enemy judges and by enemy government headed by the enemy Maliki, a key leader of the Dawa party, who had to remain in exile for long after the party was banned for attempting to assassinate Saddam.

All these facts were known to the US and the world, but the trial was allowed to continue with the sole purpose of putting Saddam to death in the quickest possible time.

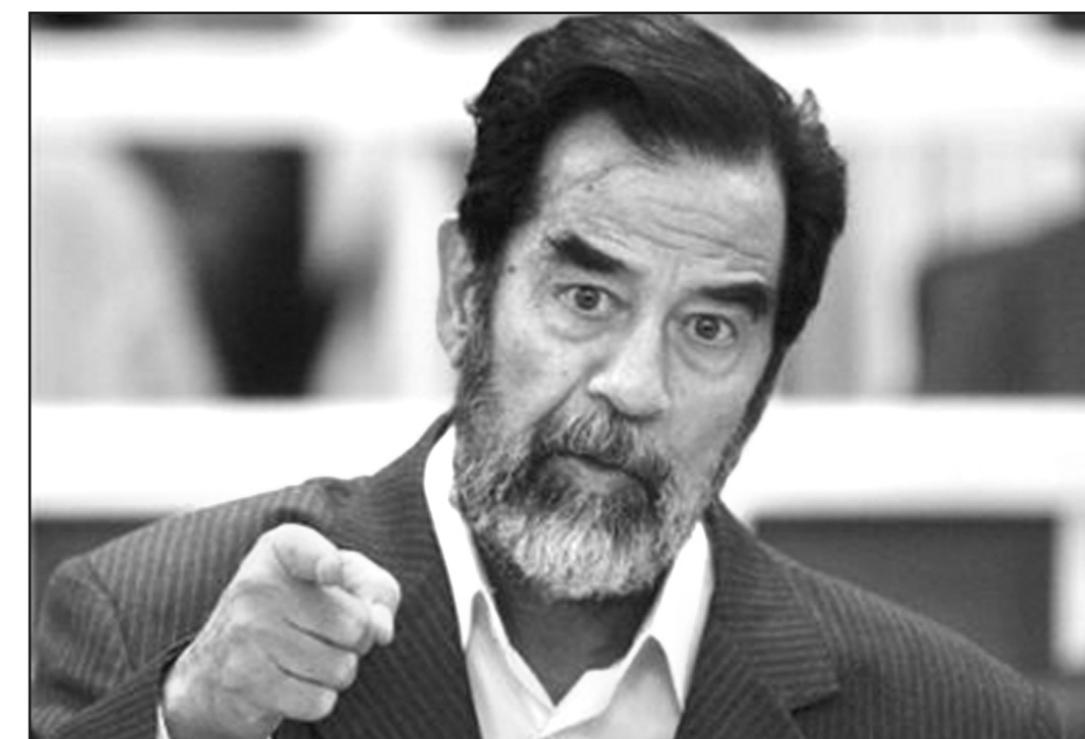
One has to wait and see how the American public in the days ahead reacts to such a miscarriage of justice. American public finally realizes the truth, but it takes time, as they are often not provided with the facts on time. Anyway, having known all the facts himself, President Bush said it was a fair trial, though his military's understanding about the trial was apparently different.

Apart from the fact that majority of Americans disapprove of Bush's war against Iraq, majority of the US military stationed in Iraq also disapprove of President Bush's handling of Iraq war (42% disapprove and only 35% approve). This puts a dark spot on the wisdom and the intention of a president of a super-power and undoubtedly diminishes the prestige of a country which has been known to the world for its fair justice system.

There were not very many responses from the Arab governments. However, Saudi Arabian government reportedly criticized the execution as it was carried out on a holy day of Eid. Iran said it would increase ethnic tension, but be good in the long run. Hamas said it was a political assassination.

There have been serious reactions from the Muslim communities around the world and more security measures were taken against all US embassy personnel. Undoubtedly, the US will continue to be blamed for such a hasty and unfair trial against the president of a country, regardless of his past brutality. Many brutal heads of states were and are still good friends of successive US governments.

The way the trial was conducted and execution was carried out with so much hurry and with so much open vengeance, finally turning into ethnic brutality by a leader of one community against



another, it would haunt US administrations for a long time to come.

The same world looked for a trial of Saddam in the international court at the Hague under internationally accepted judges. If Milosovich could be tried at the Hague, why not Saddam?

It did not happen as both the US and Iraqi regime wanted to have it within Iraq through their own specially appointed judges in the quickest possible time so that other issues like involvement of other countries in Saddam's

Iraqi Shia regime will join Iran and thus Iran's hand will be strengthened in the Middle East. As Iran is likely to unofficially join the nuclear club soon, this would create serious strategic problems for the US and Israel. With Middle-East being virtually in civil war, the political situation will continue to remain terribly unsettled.

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## Vengeance of the victors



FAREED ZAKARIA

writes from Washington

many puzzles of the Bush administration's foreign policy.

Some of the decision making was motivated by ideology: Baathism equaled fascism, so every school teacher who joined the Baath Party to get a job was seen as a closet Nazi; state-owned enterprises were bad, the new Iraq needed a flat tax, etc.

Some of it was influenced by Shiite exiles who wanted to take total control of the new Iraq. Some of it simply reflected the bizarre combination of ignorance and naivete that has marked the policies of Bush's "tough guys."

The administration has never fully understood the sectarian nature of its policies, which were less "nation building" than they were "nation busting" in their effects. It kept insisting that it was building a national army and police force when it was blatantly obvious (even to columnists) that the forces were overwhelmingly Shiite and Kurdish, mostly drawn from militias with stronger loyalties to political parties than to the state.

The answer to these fundamentally political objections was technocratic: more training. But a stronger Shiite Army made -- makes -- the Sunni populace more insecure and willing to support the insurgency.

Iraq's Sunnis are not the good guys in this story. They have mostly behaved like self-defeating pests. The minority of Sunnis who support al-Qaeda have been truly barbarous.

The point, however, is not their vices but our stupidity. We summarily deposited just Saddam Hussein but a centuries-old ruling elite and then were stunned that they reacted poorly.

In contrast, on coming into power in South Africa, Nelson Mandela did not fire a single white bureaucrat or soldier -- and not because he thought that they had been kind to his people. He correctly saw the strategy as the way to prevent an Afrikaner rebellion.

It has now become fashionable among neoconservatives to blame the Iraqis for everything that has happened to their country. "We have given the Iraqis a republic and they do not appear able to keep it," laments Charles Krauthammer.

Others invoke anthropologists to explain the terrible dysfunctions of Iraqi culture. There may be some truth to all these claims -- Iraq is a tough place -- but the Bush administration is not quite so blameless. It thoughtlessly engineered a political and social revolution as intense as the French or Iranian one and then seemed surprised that Iraq could not digest it happily, peacefully and quickly. We gave them a civil war.

Modern-day Iraq has a chilling history of rulers falling to the fury that brought down their regime. King Faisal and Karim Ben Kasem being notable among them. With these two, the human cost did not overwhelm the nation and the bloodletting stopped with them. Saddam's path to the gallows is splattered red with the blood of the innocent and there are already portents of a grislier human toll to come.

Even in his death he has not been vanquished. It took the mightiest coalition of the world the United

that the Islamic Republic would collapse if Saddam sent his legions across the border -- and the Pentagon was instructed to assist Iraq's military machine by providing intelligence on the Iranian order of battle. One frosty day in 1987, not far from Cologne, I met the German arms dealer who initiated those first direct contacts between Washington and Baghdad -- at America's request.

"Mr Fisk ... at the very beginning of the war, in September of 1980, I was invited to go to the Pentagon," he said. "There I was handed the very latest US satellite photographs of the Iranian front lines. You could see everything on the pictures. There were the Iranian gun emplacements in Abadan and behind Khorramshahr, the lines of trenches on the eastern side of the Karun river, the tank revetments -- thousands of them -- all the way up the Iranian side of the border towards Kurdistan. No army could want more than this. And I traveled with these maps from Washington by air to Frankfurt and from Frankfurt on Iraqi Airways straight to Baghdad. The Iraqis were very grateful!"

I was with Saddam's forward commandos at the time, under Iranian shellfire, noting how the Iraqi forces aligned their artillery positions far back from the battle front with detailed maps of the Iranian lines. Their shelling against Iran outside Basra allowed the first Iraqi tanks to cross the Karun within a week. The commander of that tank unit cheerfully refused to tell

me how he had managed to choose the one river crossing undefended by Iranian armour. Two years ago, we met again, in Amman and his junior officers called him "General" -- the rank awarded him by Saddam after that tank attack east of Basra, courtesy of Washington's intelligence information.

Iraq's official history of the eight-year war with Iraq states that Saddam first used chemical weapons against it on January 13, 1981. AP's correspondent in Baghdad, Mohamed Salaam, was taken to see the scene of an Iraqi military victory east of Basra. "We started counting -- we walked miles and miles in this damn desert, just counting," he said. "We got to 700 and got muddled and had to start counting again ... The Iraqis had used, for the first time, a combination -- the nerve gas would paralyze their bodies ... the mustard gas would drown them in their own lungs. That's why they spat blood."

At the time, the Iranians claimed that this terrible cocktail had been given to Saddam by the US. Washington denied this. But the Iranians were right. The lengthy negotiations which led to America's complicity in this atrocity remain secret -- Donald Rumsfeld was one of President Ronald Reagan's point-men at this period -- although Saddam undoubtedly knew every detail.

But a largely unreported document, "United States Chemical and Biological Warfare-related Dual-use exports to Iraq and their possible impact on the Health

Consequences of the Persian Gulf War," stated that prior to 1985 and afterwards, US companies had sent government-approved shipments of biological agents to Iraq. These included Bacillus anthracis, which produces anthrax, and Escherichia coli (E. coli).

That Senate report concluded that: "The United States provided the Government of Iraq with 'dual use' licensed materials which assisted in the development of Iraqi chemical, biological and missile-systems programs, including ... chemical warfare agent production facility plant and technical drawings, chemical warfare filling equipment."

Nor was the Pentagon unaware of the extent of Iraqi use of chemical weapons. In 1988, for example, Saddam gave his personal permission for Lt-Col Rick Francona, a US defence intelligence officer -- one of 60 American officers who were secretly providing members of the Iraqi general staff with detailed information on Iranian deployments, tactical planning and bomb damage assessments -- to visit the Fao peninsula after Iraqi forces had recaptured the town from the Iranians. He reported back to Washington that the Iraqis had used chemical weapons to achieve their victory. The senior defence intelligence officer at the time, Col Walter Lang, later said that the use of gas on the battlefield by the Iraqis "was not a matter of deep strategic concern."

I saw the results, however. On a long military hospital train back to

Tehran from the battle front, I found hundreds of Iranian soldiers coughing blood and mucus from their lungs -- the very carriages stank so much of gas that I had to open the windows -- and their arms and faces were covered with boils. Later, new bubbles of skin appeared on top of their original boils. Many were fearfully burnt. These same gases were later used on the Kurds of Halabja. No wonder that Saddam was primarily tried in Baghdad for the slaughter of Shia villagers, not for his war crimes against Iran.

We still don't know -- and with Saddam's execution we will probably never know -- the extent of US credits to Iraq, which began in 1982. The initial tranche, the sum of which was spent on the purchase of American weapons from Jordan and Kuwait, came to \$300 million. By 1987, Saddam was being promised \$1 billion in credit. By 1990, just before Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, annual trade between Iraq and the US had grown to \$3.5 billion a year. Pressed by Saddam's foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, to continue US credits, James Baker then secretary of state, but the same James Baker who has just produced a report intended to drag George Bush from the catastrophe of present-day Iraq -- pushed for new guarantees worth \$1 billion against the US.

In 1989, Britain, which had been giving its own covert military assistance to Saddam guaranteed 250 million to Iraq shortly after the arrest of Observer journalist Farzad

Bazoft in Baghdad. Bazoft, who had been investigating an explosion at a factory at Hill which was using the very chemical components sent by the US, was later hanged. Within a month of Bazoft's arrest William Waldegrave, then a Foreign Office minister, said: "I doubt if there is any future market of such a scale anywhere where the UK is potentially so well-placed if we play our diplomatic hand correctly ... A few more Bazofts or another bout of internal oppression would make it more difficult."

Even more repulsive were the remarks of the then deputy prime minister, Geoffrey Howe, on relaxing controls on British arms sales to Iraq. He kept this secret, he wrote, because "it would look very cynical if, so soon after expressing outrage about the treatment of the Kurds, we adopt a more flexible approach to arms sales."

Saddam knew, too, the secrets of the attack on the USS Stark when, on May 17, 1987, an Iraqi jet launched a missile attack on the American frigate, killing more than a sixth of the crew and almost sinking the vessel. The US accepted Saddam's excuse that the ship was mistaken for an Iranian vessel and allowed Saddam to refuse their request to interview the Iraqi pilot.

The whole truth died with Saddam Hussein in the Baghdad execution chamber yesterday. Many in Washington and London must have sighed with relief that the old man had been silenced for ever.

Robert Fisk writes for the Independent, UK.

## Judge not lest the judge is judged

### SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

**S**ADDAM has been put to the gallows. Iraq's most formidable link to the blood and iron of the past thirty years has been removed. The fallen leader was surely a despot. Clemency and kindness was not the hallmark of his regime. There were many of his kind that ruled by brutality and the world will still have a handful left. They succeed so long time and the land is on their side. He is not the only Muslim ruler of the modern times to go to the gallows. Prime Ministers Adnan Menderes of Turkey and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan were also sent to the gallows.

Iraq will be even more divided in his death. For while many celebrate his death there will be others equally vengeful to swear by his name. In strictest fairness it cannot be said that the fall of Saddam's regime and his death is Iraqi people's own. He was hunted down by invading US and UK forces. Sadly there is no other way of characterizing the allied mission in Iraq for unlike the Gulf War mission it was not authorized by the United Nations.

However noble the mission is, it does not have the moral sanction to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a UN member state. It is a dangerous precedent for the civilized world order. Iraq is still under occupation in spite of the fact that elections have been held and a provisional government has been formed. It however does not exist

without the enforcing might of the occupying forces. The source of power that has bite operates from the green zone.

It may be said that the allied forces did not force its will on the trial. But it does not absolve the trial of the blemish that it was not held in free Iraq. That will make the voice of vindication to watch the proceedings with somber silence. Why, the fate of Saddam can evoke the images of martyr in the minds of his followers and the Sunnis. It can drive them on to plunge into sectarian strife with the fires of a wronged people. A dead Saddam will make it difficult for the allied forces to follow its timetable of withdrawing from Iraq in 2008.

Saddam had a quite number of vicious wrongs stacked against him -- killing of 148 Shites of Dujail in 1982, execution of 8,000 members of Barzani Kurdish clan in 1983, killing of 5,000 Kurds of Halabja by chemical weapons in 1988, Anfal campaign against the Kurds in 1987-1989 killing approximately 182,000 and the offensive against the Shites in the south killing 1,000 in 1991. On the other hand Iraq has seen the death of over 200,000 Iraqis and 3,285 allied soldiers since Saddam was toppled in April 2003. Iraqis are dying in hundreds

and almost everyday. The cumulative toll has the apocalyptic image of human fodder fed to the vaunted goal of establishing democracy in Iraq.

There was no democratic movement of note in Iraq prior to allied invasion. Nor was there any civil war vying for state power. The allied forces came as uninvited and not as emancipators. It was the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) as emphatically cited by the US President that led to the war on Iraq. Later it became the war on terror when no recognizable trace of WMD was found. Saddam was a tyrant but he was never a patron of terror if one means al-Qaeda or other Islamic fire-brands. He did not have any Islamic agenda nor was he a devout Muslim, gladly enjoying his hard liquor. After the drubbing at the Gulf War he inserted the holy inscription "Allahu Akbar" in the Iraqi national flag.

The stand of the allied forces was shifting all the time. Now it occurs to them that the Iraqi people have been brutalized and that they need democracy. In the past it was business as usual or constructive engagement with Saddam's Iraq for US and its lesser ally UK. The engagement and camaraderie as shown by the warmth of Donald

Rumsfeld continued when Iraq invaded Iran and till Saddam bumbled into Kuwait.

Saddam was gullible enough to believe that the US would condone its annexation of Kuwait in view of its sympathies on Iraq's grumbling against Kuwait for oil pilferage. The suffering that the Iraqi people endured after the Gulf War was due to the UN sanctions on Iraq. After the Gulf War debacle Saddam was a caged and clipped tyrant and vulnerable to levers of pressure that western powers could have exercised.

The purpose of all this is to say that we should trudge the path of judgment fairly. Even the devil may not be without its saving grace. Indeed Saddam committed vicious wrongs but the actions that pursued him to his downfall and aftermath are morally indefensible in its exercise of reason and fairness. The human toll is also reprehensible. We are left with three questions. Did he receive a fair trial, was it civilized to put him to the gallows on Eid day, and will the world see a united and democratic Iraq?

The first has invited doubt by the arbitrary and hasty nature of his trial. Almost all of his defense counsels boycotted the trial in disgust. World representation would have