

# Saddam at the End of a Rope

What's Good for Saddam May Be Good for Mubarak or the Saudi Royals

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It was symbolic that 2006 ended with a colonial hanging--- most of it (bar the last moments) shown on state television in occupied Iraq. It has been that sort of year in the Arab world. After a trial so blatantly rigged that even Human Rights Watch---the largest single unit of the US Human Rights industry--- had to condemn it as a total travesty. Judges were changed on Washington's orders; defense lawyers were killed and the whole procedure resembled a well-orchestrated lynch mob. Where Nuremberg was a more dignified application of victor's justice, Saddam's trial has, till now, been the crudest and most grotesque. The Great Thinker President's reference to it 'as a milestone on the road to Iraqi democracy' as clear an indication as any that Washington pressed the trigger.

The contemptible leaders of the European Union, supposedly hostile to capital punishment, were silent, as usual. And while some Shia factions celebrated in Baghdad, the figures published by a fairly independent establishment outfit, the Iraq Centre for Research and Strategic Studies (its self-description: "which attempts to spread the conscious necessity of realizing basic freedoms, consolidating democratic values and foundations of civil society") reveal that just under 90 per cent of Iraqis feel the situation in the country was better before it was occupied.

The ICRSC research is based on detailed house-to-house interviewing carried out during the third week of November 2006.

Only five per cent of those questioned said Iraq is better today than in 2003; 89 per cent of the people said the political situation had deteriorated; 79 per cent saw a decline in the economic situation; 12 per cent felt things had improved and 9 per cent said there was no change.

Unsurprisingly, 95 per cent felt the security situation was worse than before. Interestingly, about 50 per cent of those questioned identified themselves only as "Muslims"; 34 per cent as Shiites and 14 per cent as Sunnis. Add to this the figures supplied by the UNHCR: 1.6 million Iraqis (7 per cent of the population) have fled the country since March 2003 and 100,000 Iraqis leave every month, Christians, doctors, engineers, women, etc. There are one million in Syria, 750,000 in Jordan, 150,000 in Cairo. These are refugees that do not excite the sympathy of Western public opinion, since the US (and EU backed) occupation is the cause. These are not compared (as was the case in Kosovo) to the atrocities of the Third Reich. Perhaps it was these statistics (and the estimates of a million Iraqi dead) that necessitated the execution of Saddam Hussein?

That Saddam was a tyrant is beyond dispute, but what is conveniently forgotten is that most of his crimes were committed when he was a staunch ally of those who now occupy the country. It was, as he admitted in one of his trial outbursts, the approval of Washington (and the poison gas supplied by West Germany) that gave him the confidence to douse Halabja with chemicals in the midst of the Iran-Iraq war. He deserved a proper trial and punishment in an independent Iraq. Not this. The double standards applied by the West never cease to astonish. Indonesia's Suharto who presided over a mountain of corpses (At least a million to accept the lowest figure) was protected by Washington. He never annoyed them as much as Saddam.

And what of those who have created the mess in Iraq today? The torturers of Abu Ghraib; the pitiless butchers of Fallujah; the ethnic cleansers of Baghdad, the Kurdish prison boss who boasts that his

model is Guantanamo. Will Bush and Blair ever be tried for war crimes? Doubtful. And Aznar, currently employed as a lecturer at Georgetown University in Washington, DC , where the language of instruction is English of which he doesn't speak a word. His reward is a punishment for the students.

Saddam's hanging might send a shiver through the collective, if artificial, spine of the Arab ruling elites. If Saddam can be hanged, so can Mubarak, or the Hashemite joker in Amman or the Saudi royals, as long as those who topple them are happy to play ball with Washington.