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Bush and Blair should join Saddam
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So Saddam has been convicted of crimes against humanity and sentenced to death. Few people will be shedding tears for the monster. The result was as unsurprising as the trial itself being hardly fair. Judges were replaced if they seemed like they were doing their job and being impartial. Lawyers and human rights organisations noted that it was prone to political interference and reduced to farce on occasion.

Equally unsurprisingly, the Shia and Kurds celebrated the news while Sunnis protested and promised revenge. In Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, Sheikh Fawas Hamed al Tikriti, one of the city's leading figures, said the verdict was "arbitrary and politicised" and would provoke violence. "It is all in the interests of the US elections, and this will not pass without revenge." The pro-Saddam demonstrators were attacked by the Iraqi army while the Salahiddin and Zawra TV channels that were showing the pro-Saddam demonstrations were shut down by order of the government before Iraqi security forces raided them.

Considering the state of Iraq, is it really the best time to execute Saddam, particularly after an obviously unfair trial?

Does turning Saddam into a martyr make sense? Well, may be not for Iraqis but for others it did have its benefits. In early October, the “sovereign” Iraqi court postponed the delivery of the verdict in Saddam Hussein’s trial from October 16th to the November 5th, the Sunday before the US mid-term elections. This meant that the headlines on the day before the elections were filled by reports about Saddam’s fate. A complete coincidence, of course (and any Iraqi officials who claim otherwise have been smoking too much rope).

Significantly, the trial was not about Saddam’s mass killings but rather for the massacre of 148 men and boys from Dujail, the site of a 1982 assassination attempt against him. The death sentence does have a 30-day automatic appeal but the verdict does put a damper on Saddam’s genocide trial for the ethnic cleansing campaign against the Kurds in the late 1980s. Here, again, the current sentence does have advantages — for some. By effectively short-circuiting the genocide trial, a whole host of questions about how the Reagan Administration supported and funded Saddam will not have to be asked and so no awkward answers about why America (and Britain) supported him while knowing about his atrocities (and even supplying the means).

Unsurprisingly, during the Dujail trial Saddam was formally forbidden from discussing his relationship with Donald Rumsfeld, now Bush’s Secretary of Defence, and about the support he received from the Reagan and Bush Snr Administrations. According to a 1994 US Senate’s Committee report, the US government-approved shipments of biological agents by American companies to Iraq from 1985 or earlier. It also indicated how the US provided Saddam with “dual use” licensed materials which assisted in the development of chemical, biological and missile-system programmes. The UK also exported WMD material during the same time.

So you can understand why Saddam was gagged on this issue. And why the US-UK may not want him to discuss why

the CIA, immediately after the war crime against Halabja, told US diplomats in the Middle East to claim that the Iranians had done it. Or why the US-UK were silent during ethnic cleansing campaigns he is now on trial for. Or how Saddam went from being our ally to being a war criminal (and the latest “new Hitler”).

That Saddam Hussein has been found guilty in an Iraqi court is hardly surprising. He is now officially what we always knew he was: a war criminal. Yet this was not why the war was started. The Bush Junta and Blair both said that he could stay in power if he disarmed. Over 650,000 Iraqis, over 100 British people and over 2,800 Americans have not died to produce this verdict. We went to war over WMD which did not exist and which, before the invasion, the Bush Junta argued Saddam did not have. Or was it to contain a rogue state which, months previously, Bush’s own officials had declared had been fully contained by sanctions?

Or could it be, just possibly, because the Bush Junta knew all this and thought it would create a US-client state at the heart of the Middle East’s oil fields? That the UK and USA were using Saddam’s tyranny as a (belated) rationale for the invasion (once WDM were dismissed as obvious nonsense) should not fool anyone for a moment. The last thing the US wanted was a genuine popular revolt against the regime (as their non-activity in 1991 proved beyond doubt).

One thing is sure. The US-UK invasion has made life even worse than under Saddam. At best, it may be argued that Saddam was more evil and immoral than the occupying forces but that is hardly a strong defence. The US only sexually abused, tortured and killed a fraction of the prisoners compared to Saddam’s regime.

We did, however, illegally invade a country that cost hundreds of thousands of lives. Putting this in context, the numbers killed by Saddam during in 23 year regime range from 150,000 to 300,000. Taking the upper figure, that is about 13,000

a year. According to the recent Lancet study, the invasion has resulted in over 650,000 Iraqi civilian casualties since 2002. This over ten times as much. Even if we take the flawed Iraq Body Count of over 51,000 civilian casualties, that is 12,750 a year. So, at best, Bush and Blair can say their policies have resulted in 250 fewer deaths a year.

All of which hardly gives them the moral high ground. If there were any justice, Bush, Blair and their cronies would have been in the dock with Saddam. Not that anarchists support the death plenty. Allowing the state to kill is not something to be welcomed, even for scum like Saddam. The fate of Mussolini would be much more preferable for him as, at least, his victims would have taken their revenge and the state institutionalisation of murder would not arise.

So this is not a turning point, any more than all the others (with all those turning points, no wonder Iraq is spiralling out of control!). The deaths of Saddam's psychotic sons, his own capture, the "recapturing" (i.e. flattening) of Fallujah, the elections and referendum and all the rest have not affected the ongoing conflict. Neither will Saddam's death, particularly as no one in Iraq thought he was the leader of the insurgency. The same can be said of the many killings of "Al-Qaeda" leaders as the insurgency is a home grown resistance movement to foreign occupation (a recent poll by WorldPublicOpinion.org, showed that 71% Iraqis want the withdrawal of US-led forces within a year, while 92% of Sunni and 62% of Shia approve of attacks on US-led forces). The only way to start to end the violence is to end the occupation.