

Bush calls for Hussein's execution: a portrait of sadism and ignorance

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Media reports on the nationally televised interview with George W. Bush broadcast by ABC News Tuesday night focused on the American president's call for the execution of Saddam Hussein. "Zap rat Saddam, sez Prez," was the way the New York *Daily News* summed up the contents of Bush's remarks.

The general portrayal was one of a tough-talking leader moved by feelings of personal outrage to demand that the former Iraqi president pay the "ultimate penalty" for his crimes.

Those who actually sat through the interview and who know Bush's record, however, may not be so impressed. When he was governor of Texas, the "ultimate penalty" was altogether routine. He presided over 152 executions, more than any other governor in US history, and once allowed that he spent an average of just 15 minutes reviewing cases before giving the order to put human beings—including the mentally ill—to death.

After becoming president, he has resumed the use of the federal death penalty for the first time in the US since 1963, ordering the execution of a Persian Gulf War veteran on the very eve of launching the invasion of Iraq last March.

For Bush, imposing the death penalty is less a matter of moral outrage than vicarious thrill. His personal sadism and the "kick" he gets from exercising this ultimate power was revealed most noxiously in his public mimicking of the plea for clemency by a condemned Texas woman, Karla Faye Tucker, before ordering her state murder.

"This is a disgusting tyrant who deserves justice, the ultimate justice. But that will be decided not by the president of the United States but by the citizens of Iraq in one form or another," said Bush, who defensively added, "You don't want a kangaroo court."

But that is precisely what Washington is preparing. The "citizens of Iraq" will decide nothing. They are subjects of a US military occupation, without an elected government and without even the prospect of a vote for years to come. The US will create the instrument that will render Hussein's verdict based on the time-honored American principle of "give him a fair trial and hang him."

The Bush administration has no intention of allowing any court that is not under its unrestricted control to bring Hussein to trial. Having revoked a previous treaty committing US support for the International Criminal Court, it is determined not to legitimize any such body. It justifiably fears that Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Tommy Franks and others could some day be brought before such a tribunal on war crimes charges stemming from the war of aggression against Iraq and the deaths of tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens.

While international courts have ruled out the death penalty as a barbaric punishment, with an Iraqi puppet court, the US can put Saddam Hussein speedily to death while claiming that it is merely doing the will of the Iraqi people.

The other advantage of such a procedure is that dead men tell no tales. Hussein can be denied the one defense he would inevitably make before an international court: that the greatest crimes of which he stands accused—the Iran-Iraq war, the gassing of the Kurds and suppression of the Shiites—were carried out with either the direct support or tacit approval of US administrations in Washington.

Whether Bush himself even grasps these political issues behind the US handling of Hussein is unclear. The image that came across in what was an exceedingly rare extended interview was that of a politically ignorant and vindictive individual.

His interviewer was Diane Sawyer, a virtual state institution, whose “journalistic” credentials are rooted in her having served as a flack in the Nixon White House and then having followed the disgraced president to San Clemente to help him write his memoirs. But even the gentle probing of such a trusted ally seemed to be an ordeal for Bush.

His peculiar facial expressions and nervous body language suggested an inner fear that each and every question would press against the outer limits of his scant knowledge, driving him to seek refuge in the few stock phrases that he has picked up from his speechwriters and political handlers.

Thus, when Sawyer opened up a line of inquiry concerning the failure of the US military to turn up any trace of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the pretext for launching the administration’s predatory war, Bush became badly flustered.

Sawyer asked about his administration’s claims that the Iraqi regime was close to producing nuclear arms and had hundreds of tons of chemical and biological weapons. Bush responded, “Look, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein was a dangerous person, and there’s no doubt we had a body of evidence proving that, and there is no doubt that the president must act, after 9/11, to make America a more secure country.”

When Sawyer tried to pursue the question, Bush replied childishly, “Well, you can keep asking the question and my answer’s gonna be the same. Saddam was a danger and the world is better off cause we got rid of him.” The former White House aide moved accommodatingly to a different subject.

In one extraordinary exchange, Sawyer asked Bush about his statement that his sole source of news is briefings prepared by his staff. “I get my news from people who don’t editorialize,” he said. “They give me the actual news, and it makes it easier to digest on a daily basis, the facts.”

Asked by Sawyer whether he did this because he found it “harder to read constant criticism,” Bush responded: “Why even put up with it when you can get the facts elsewhere? I’m a lucky man, I’ve got ... all kinds of people in my administration who are charged with different responsibilities, and they come in and say this is what’s happening, this isn’t what’s happening.”

Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the US president’s political backwardness and personal

indifference to the world outside the White House. His disdain for reading newspapers reflects a lack of any ability or even interest in developing a political orientation based upon a study of competing interests and conflicting policies as they are reflected through the press. Making such analyses is a key task of any serious politician, but Bush is not such a figure.

His subjectivism and limited intellectual capacity make him easy to manipulate. His subordinates and advisers feed him the “facts” that favor the policies they seek, and Bush, with his unconcern about political debate in the wider world, is not even in a position to grasp the aims of antagonistic forces within his own administration and staff.

Given such an individual as the titular chief executive, it is not hard to understand the colossal blunders the administration has made in its war in Iraq, policies that continue to cost the lives of both Iraqi civilians and young American soldiers on a daily basis.

Within US ruling circles, the fact that Bush is grossly unqualified for the position that he holds is well known. For the gang of corporate criminals that dominate his cabinet and serve as his principal political base, his lack of any knowledge or intelligence make him a malleable instrument for the pursuit of their profit interests.



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