

Day three of US media coverage of Hussein's capture: no let-up in the hysteria

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The hysteria of the American media's coverage of the capture of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and its aftermath shows no signs of letting up. On the contrary, having failed so far to contaminate the public at large with its own bloodlust, the media has lost all sense of restraint, not to mention decency.

Talk of "killing" and "torture" and "death" fills the airwaves and newspaper columns. An epidemic of homicidal rage seems to have overtaken the entire media. No one, it seems is immune. Even the ever so proper Diane Rehm of National Public Radio, who is often heard discoursing on such topics as the proper way to cultivate roses in New England, devoted her Tuesday morning show to an examination of the best way to dispose of Hussein. Among her guests was Henry Kissinger, who, perhaps because of his own checkered past, seemed less enthusiastic about the death penalty for the Iraqi leader than Ms. Rehm.

The American media has made much of the miserable conditions to which Hussein had been reduced after months of eluding his pursuers—a hole in the ground barely large enough to lie down in. He was not even able to communicate by telephone.

Senator Jay Rockefeller, Democrat from West Virginia and vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, conceded, "Given the location and circumstances of his capture, it makes it clear that Saddam was not managing the insurgency, and that he had very little control or influence. That is significant and disturbing because it means the insurgents are not fighting for Saddam, they're fighting against the United States."

Indeed, there has been no decline in the number of attacks on US forces and Iraqi collaborators, despite the claim that the country's nationalist resistance has lost its unifying "symbol." The last is a dubious assertion at best. Numerous analysts have pointed out that, on the contrary, many Iraqis were hesitant about joining the opposition to US occupation lest they be tarred with the "pro-Hussein" brush.

Iraqis and American soldiers continue to die. In an incident reminiscent of a massacre on November 30—during which US forces blasted away indiscriminately in Samarra's center, killing an undetermined number of civilian bystanders—American troops killed 11 "Saddam loyalists" in the same city on December 15. One must assume the claim that

insurgents used a group of children leaving school "as a cover" means that the military was preparing a defense if and when dead innocents were found lying on the ground. A US soldier died when a convoy was struck by a roadside bomb north of Baghdad Tuesday; three more Americans were wounded in an explosion in Tikrit.

The American media coverage of the Hussein arrest, so heavy-handed, so "over the top," contains a pathological element. It becomes more unrestrained in proportion to the lack of response, except in the most depraved and disoriented quarters. Whatever political and even moral confusion may and certainly does exist in America, it is clear that the capture of Saddam Hussein did not send some electrical charge surging through the population.

The general reaction in the US has been benumbed indifference. No one capable of thinking believes that the seizure of Hussein changes anything, either in Iraq or in America.

The sheer weight of the media barrage indicates an element of resistance. The voices become shriller and shriller as they fail to find the desired audience reaction. The propaganda campaign has failed to break down resentment and suspicion in the US. Popular skepticism is proving "a tough nut to crack."

Hussein's capture is presented as somehow justifying the entire illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq. But the war was "sold" to the population as the only defense against the Iraqi regime's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). None have been found, and it is widely understood that this was merely a cynical propaganda ploy.

The course of the war has discredited every claim and argument of the American media and political establishment—about WMD, about the Iraqi-Al-Qaeda connection, about the desire of the Iraqi people to be "liberated" by US cruise missiles and Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

The media and the government may turn a blind eye to the consequences of all this, but it has had an impact on public consciousness. Even if one takes the official poll figures seriously, more than 40 percent of the population opposes the war.

Wide layers of the American population intuitively "smell"

something corrupt and dirty about the Iraq war; they sense that this is a conflict about oil and big money, launched by and for Bush and his friends in corporate America. Many know about US-Iraqi relations in the 1980s, including Donald Rumsfeld's visit to Hussein in December 1983 as a representative of Ronald Reagan. Hussein was one of those "friends" of the US who later fell afoul of its geopolitical ambitions.

When Hitler or Mussolini met their fates, there was genuine popular celebration around the globe. These were individuals perceived as ferocious enemies of democracy and working people. Saddam Hussein, the dictator of a small, underdeveloped country, simply does not belong in the same category.

Despite the efforts of the media to lie about and conceal all the critical facts, the truth—or portions of it—has seeped through to a certain section of the population. And the general conditions of economic hardship for millions, made more painful by the knowledge that the super-rich are living like never before, have fatally undermined patriotic blind faith in America.

The media coverage is as sick, ugly and vindictive as the individual who resides in the White House.

George W. Bush's comments at his celebratory press conference Monday were stupid and false, as one would expect. He bid "good riddance" to Hussein and announced, "The world is better off without you, Mr. Saddam Hussein. And I find it very interesting that when the heat got on you dug yourself a hole and you crawled in it. And our brave troops, combined with good intelligence, found you. And you'll be brought to justice, something you did not afford the people you brutalized in your own country."

In terms of human personality types, is Bush, the bully, moral weakling and sadist, superior to the former Iraqi president? Indeed, as a social type—the spoiled and incompetent rich kid whose "success" has depended entirely on family background and personal connection—Bush is not all that different than the corrupt elements within the Iraqi ruling circles who formed part of Hussein's personal entourage, including his now dead sons. The circumstances of their political careers were different, and Bush now has more battalions on his side. Other than that...

The US president called Hussein "a deceiver, he's a liar." But who is the liar?

Hussein claimed that Iraq had no WMD and no connection to Osama bin Laden. On this question, he was telling the truth. On the other hand, George W. Bush on March 8, 2003, in his weekly radio broadcast, declared: "Iraqi's dictator has made a public show of producing and destroying a few prohibited missiles. Yet, our intelligence shows that even as he is destroying these few missiles, he has ordered the continued production of the very same type of missiles. Iraqi operatives continue to play a shell game with inspectors, moving suspected prohibited materials to different locations every 12 to 24 hours. And Iraqi weapons scientists continue to be

threatened with harm should they cooperate in interviews with UN inspectors."

Bush was lying, and he knew it, along with everyone else in his criminal regime. Only days before the invasion was launched, on March 15, the US president claimed, "We know from prior weapons inspections that Saddam has failed to account for vast quantities of biological and chemical agents, including mustard agent, botulinum toxin and sarin, capable of killing millions of people. We know the Iraqi regime finances and sponsors terror. And we know the regime has plans to place innocent people around military installations to act as human shields."

All lies.

The gloating response of the American establishment to the Hussein capture reveals a great deal. Contained in the repellent and unrestrained reaction is a great deal of accumulated frustration over the course of the war, the unexpected difficulties and obstacles, principal among them Iraqi popular resistance and the lack of enthusiasm within the American people.

Beyond that, there is the character of the American bourgeoisie, which is, at heart, thuggish. What was one of the Iraqi president's chief crimes, after all? That he thumbed his nose at the US, at Bush senior and junior, and set an example for others to follow. Such things cannot be forgiven. Trotsky noted nearly 80 years ago: "American imperialism is in essence ruthlessly rude, predatory, in the full sense of the word, and criminal."

The line between "legitimate" American business and gangsterism has become increasingly negligible, to the point that it must now be measured in microns. The disgraceful hoopla over seizing Hussein tells us far more about the US elite than it does about either the former Iraqi president, the ongoing disaster in his country or the geopolitical situation in the Middle East.

One is obliged to ask: After Hussein, then who? Which foreign leader, whose name is now unknown to the overwhelming majority of the American population, is the next candidate for demonization? Against whom will the vast, ignorant and violent propaganda machine be directed? Which unhappy nation is next to be "liberated" by tens of thousands of US troops? One thing is beyond doubt—the plans have already been drawn up.



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