

US-installed regime begins second Saddam Hussein show trial

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25 August 2006

The special tribunal established under US auspices in Baghdad began its second trial of former Iraq President Saddam Hussein and his Baath Party associates. The trial focuses on charges that Hussein authorized bloody massacres and the use of poison gas against the Kurdish population of northern Iraq during 1988, in a campaign known as “Anfal,” from the Arabic word for “spoils of war.”

Along with Hussein, those charged include his cousin Ali Hassan al-Majeed, military leader of the Anfal campaign; Sultan Hashem Ahmed, military commander of the campaign and later defense minister; Saber Abdel Aziz, director of military intelligence; Hussein Rashid al-Tikriti, deputy of operations for the Iraqi forces; Taher Mohammed al-Ani, governor of the northern city of Mosul; and Farhan al-Jubari, head of military intelligence in the north.

The charges do not include the single most notorious incident of Hussein’s rule, the use of poison gas against the Kurdish town of Halabja, in which 8,000 people died. This is to be tried separately.

Like its predecessor, the latest proceeding against Hussein is a gross violation of international law, which bars an occupying power from establishing new legal institutions in a conquered country.

From a political standpoint, the trial is an act of the utmost cynicism, since the Bush administration is guilty of crimes at least as heinous as those of Hussein. Moreover, in the events of 1988, the US government was a behind-the-scenes accomplice of Hussein in the Kurdish bloodbath.

The proceedings began August 21, and testimony by survivors of the Anfal campaign continued through Wednesday, followed by an adjournment until September 11. The testimony gave a glimpse of the mass suffering inflicted on the Kurdish people, but the political events surrounding the Anfal campaign, above all the tacit US

support for the massacres, were kept entirely out of both the proceedings and the press coverage.

Sustaining such a cover-up throughout a lengthy trial, especially during the period provided to the defense for rebuttal, may prove more difficult. Hussein has already proven himself able to exploit the vulnerabilities and contradictions of the posture adopted by the Bush administration and its Baghdad stooges.

There is little argument about what took place in the Kurdish regions of Iraq in 1987-88, during the last stages of the Iran-Iraq War (a war encouraged by successive US administrations, which saw Saddam Hussein as an ally who was bleeding their main antagonist in the region, the Iranian theocracy headed by the Ayatollah Khomeini.)

Kurdish *pesh merga* fighters, working in conjunction with Iran, staged an uprising in several provinces in the north and seized control in many mountainous areas. The Baghdad regime struck back with a bloody campaign of reprisals, including mass shootings, the use of poison gas, the destruction of villages and the uprooting of much of the Kurdish population, in order to deprive the guerrillas of a sympathetic base of support. The estimates for the death toll range from 75,000 to as many as 200,000.

Throughout this period, the Reagan administration in the United States maintained close relations with Baghdad—relations that had been cemented in 1983-84 in a series of visits by Reagan’s special emissary to Saddam Hussein, the once and future US secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld.

US intelligence agencies were supplying Iraqi military planners with strategic and tactical information gathered by spy satellites. This data was used in some cases to plan Iraqi chemical weapons strikes against Iranian troop concentrations, which caused devastating casualties in the final year of the war.

So close was the collaboration that when Iraq opened fire on an American warship, the USS Stark, while it was

on routine patrol in the Persian Gulf, the Reagan administration downplayed the incident.

If it was prepared to ignore the killing of 37 Navy sailors, the US government was certainly not going to quibble about the slaughter of Kurds. A few perfunctory statements of concern were delivered to Baghdad, but Saddam Hussein got the real message: he should do whatever it took to maintain his power against the Iranian threat.

The full story of US support for the Iraqi regime remains locked up in CIA and Pentagon archives. But there is ample evidence that the Reagan administration, in addition to satellite data and other military intelligence, provided Hussein with billions of dollars in credits, as well as giving the green light for US allies in Europe and the Middle East to provide military hardware and aid. American and European firms supplied Iraq with the essential ingredients for the development and manufacture of chemical and biological weapons.

In a 2002 article entitled “Who Armed Saddam?” British academic Glen Rangawala wrote: “During the Anfal campaign, the US escalated its support for Iraq. It joined in Iraq’s attacks on Iranian facilities, blowing up two Iranian oil rigs and destroying an Iranian frigate a month after the Halabja attack. Within two months, senior US officials were encouraging corporate coordination through an Iraqi state-sponsored forum. The US administration opposed, and eventually blocked, a US Senate bill that cut off loans to Iraq. The US approved exports to Iraq of items with dual civilian and military use at double the rate in the aftermath of Halabja as it did before 1988. Iraqi written guarantees about civilian use were accepted by the US commerce department, which did not request licenses and reviews (as it did for many other countries).”

The ongoing trials of Saddam Hussein and his closest associates have nothing to do with providing justice or accountability for the crimes committed by the Baathist regime against the Iraqi people. Their purpose is rather to politically justify the crimes being committed today by the Bush administration against that same oppressed and now occupied nation.

The American media has focused its coverage of Iraq this week on the evidence of the victims of the Anfal campaign, while saying nothing about the role of US officials like Reagan, Rumsfeld and Bush’s own father, then the vice-president, in supporting and facilitating that bloody repression.

Who is the United States government to be bringing

charges against Saddam Hussein? If an accurate tally could be produced, it would show that more innocent Iraqis have died as a result of Washington’s actions than as the result of the actions of the Baathist dictatorship. The death toll would include:

* One million Iraqis who died in the Iran-Iraq War (and an even greater number of Iranians), instigated by the Carter administration in 1980 and sustained by the Reagan administration for eight years

*An estimated 100,000 Iraqi soldiers and civilians killed by bombing and other direct US military action in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, waged by the first Bush administration

*One to 1.5 million Iraqis, the majority of them children, who died as a result of US-imposed economic sanctions that denied Iraq medicines and essential foodstuffs, as well as medical equipment, a blockade imposed by the first Bush administration and maintained by the Clinton administration and the second Bush administration

*The casualties of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the occupation which continues to this day, with estimates from 100,000 on upwards.

No one would deny that the regime of Saddam Hussein was a bloody, repressive dictatorship, although that did not stop successive US governments from maintaining close military and diplomatic relations when it served the interests of American imperialism.

But any trial in which Hussein plays the main role, while the leaders of American imperialism posture as the advocates of democracy, justice and human rights, can only be called a farce and a fraud. It is George W. Bush and his chief aides and accomplices, in government, in Congress, and elsewhere in the American ruling elite, who are the most deserving of facing a tribunal for crimes against humanity.



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