

Saddam Hussein verdict: US politicians, media applaud the gallows and the noose

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It is, in its own way, entirely fitting that a show trial followed by a hanging should be hailed by the US media and both major parties as symbols of Washington's "democratic" mission in Iraq.

Politicians, Republican and Democratic alike, were unanimous in their celebration of the verdict. George W. Bush called the death sentence "a milestone in the Iraqi people's effort to replace the rule of a tyrant with the rule of law" and "a major achievement for Iraq's young democracy and its constitutional government."

This from a president who has presided over the slaughter of more than half a million Iraqis, who refuses to recognize any constitutional restraints on his own power, and who has overseen the establishment of a legal framework for police-state rule within the United States.

The leaders of the "opposition" party in the US, the Democrats, joined with Bush in celebrating Hussein's sentence. Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean called the court's decision "a great verdict," adding that Hussein "is a war criminal and he's getting what he deserves."

Senator Hillary Clinton of New York claimed that the verdict was a new chance for the Bush administration to improve its performance in Iraq: "Now that Saddam is finally held accountable for his misrule of that country, I hope people will be able to move forward." Senator Charles Schumer of New York told "Meet the Press" that Hussein "was a brutal, evil dictator" who is "getting the punishment that he deserves."

The American media followed suit. The more respectable press added layers of hypocrisy to the depravity of its views.

The *New York Times* grumbled that while in the best of all possible worlds the Hussein trial might have been "an exemplary exercise in the rule of law," the actual court proceeding "fell somewhere short of that goal." In indicating the deficiencies, the newspaper provided a sketch of what was, in fact, a grotesque mockery of judicial procedure: "More seriously, powerful politicians regularly tried to influence the outcome, judges were not allowed to rule

impartially, and defense lawyers were denied security measures and documents they need." ("Denied security measures" was the *Times*' diplomatic allusion to the assassination of three defense lawyers in the course of the proceedings.)

Still and all, the "newspaper of record" had no problem swallowing the verdict and tacitly welcoming the coming hanging as "exemplary punishment."

The *Washington Post* adopted the same cynical approach, acknowledging that the trial was not "the model of fairness that the Bush administration and many Iraqis hoped for," but concluding, "There nevertheless can be little doubt that justice was delivered."

The *Chicago Tribune* claimed that "Unlike other modern tyrants, Hussein stood trial in his own country and was judged by his own people. That is a stirring accomplishment for this fledgling democracy." *USA Today* echoed this line: "For all its flaws, the trial of Saddam Hussein was the first time in memory that a nation has tried and sentenced to death a dictator who terrorized its people. For all the messiness of the nearly three-year-long process, that is no small thing."

The Iraqi people had nothing to do with the trial of Saddam Hussein. This was a kangaroo court proceeding, illegally held under the gun-barrels of a foreign occupier, whose outcome was entirely scripted and predetermined.

The puppet prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, confidently predicted last month, "This criminal tyrant will be executed." The US and Britain selected the judges, who were sent to London for training; "rehearsals" were staged in Italy and the Netherlands. Any judges who showed signs of impartiality were dismissed. Three defense lawyers and one witness were kidnapped and executed during this farce of a tribunal, held deep in Baghdad's Green Zone behind bulletproof barriers and under armed guard.

This blatant exercise in victors' justice is what the American press refers to as "deficient," "flawed" and "messy." Involved here is not simply a matter of suppressing the facts, but an utter lack of concern for or

commitment to democratic principles. These people could care less whether justice is served in Baghdad or any American courtroom.

The more extreme right-wing press was in its element after the verdict. Rupert Murdoch's gutter rag, the *New York Post*, ran the headline "Good Noose—Saddam Sentenced to Hang," while its fellow tabloid, the *New York Daily News*, proclaimed, "Next Stop Hell!" It is a measure of the current state of American political life that no one at the *News* apparently thought twice about the headline of a related article on the impact of the sentence, "Death Sentence May Give the GOP New Life."

There is something deeply diseased about a political and media elite that publicly and shamelessly advertises its sadism and blood lust. At no other point in modern American history has the word "kill" been so popular with politicians, generals and editorialists. This pervading sickness, the delight in death and destruction, and, in the present case, in the gallows and the noose, is not something that the replacement of one wing of this elite by another in an election will alter.

Why are these people hailing the Hussein verdict? First of all, their enthusiasm reveals the actual mentality of the American ruling elite.

It expresses the vindictiveness of those who for years viewed the Hussein regime (after the Iraqi dictator ceased to be an American ally) as an obstacle to the unfettered sway of the US over the region. The American ruling elite believes that its "national interest" grants it a divine right to plunder Middle Eastern oil reserves. No opposition will be brooked.

Unable to beat down the resistance of the Iraqi population and achieve their aims, despite the most cruel violence and repression, the US political and military elite are all the more determined to take out their rage against whatever targets fall into their hands.

More generally, the Hussein death sentence is a politically calculated effort to remind governments and populations around the world that America bestrides the world like a colossus, or intends to. The image of a former national leader's hanging is meant to serve as an object lesson, a warning, a demonstration of American power and what happens to those who challenge it.

Bush and his allies in the Democratic Party and the media want to demonstrate the supposed invincibility of American imperialism. This is a message aimed at Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, as well as the Russian, Chinese, Pakistani and, for that matter, European elites.

It is no accident that the *Times*, in approving Hussein's "exemplary punishment," borrowed a phrase previously associated with the methods employed by the Nazis.

Saddam Hussein was guilty of many crimes, but it is not for American imperialism and its puppets to try or sentence him. It is the province of the Iraqi working class to mete out justice to its former oppressors.

If Hussein is responsible for "crimes against humanity," then what should be the charges against Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and the rest? They have destroyed an entire country, razing cities and causing an estimated 655,000 deaths. They have let loose the American military on an unsuspecting population, resulting in torture, rape and abuses beyond counting. Abu Ghraib, Fallujah, Haditha—these names are already infamous. How many more past crimes have yet to be exposed, how many more are still to be committed?

Between the Clinton and Bush regimes, if the various scientific studies are correct, American imperialism has been responsible for the deaths of more than one million Iraqis. All in the pursuit of the country's vast oil reserves. If Hussein is a war criminal, what does that make the US political elite?

And the American media, which concealed the deadly consequences of US-imposed economic sanctions in the 1990s and the Bush administration's motives for invading Iraq, which promoted all the lies about "weapons of mass destruction" and "ties to Al Qaeda," now covers up for the brutality and criminality of the ongoing occupation. With the *New York Times* in the lead, the media has suppressed the damning Johns Hopkins University study on Iraqi deaths. These are the self-proclaimed guardians of morals.

The US wants Saddam Hussein dispatched as quickly as possible. They do not want him around for another trial. In particular, Washington has no interest in seeing Hussein testify in a case involving the events in the Kurdish region in 1988. The Iraqi military, then engaged in a war with Iran, launched chemical attacks on the Kurdish population, including the people of Halabja, with the knowledge and complicity of the American government. It would be far more convenient to hold such a trial without the presence of Hussein, who might raise embarrassing questions. As every gangster knows, dead men tell no tales.



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