

Iraqi prime minister calls for Saddam Hussein to be hanged before year's end

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In remarks that highlight the politically motivated and rigged character of the trial of Saddam Hussein, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki declared that Hussein is to be executed by the end of the year. Maliki made the statement in a televised interview with John Simpson of the BBC that was broadcast on November 7 from Baghdad.

When asked by Simpson whether he meant January or February next year, Maliki reiterated that he expected the execution to take place before the end of 2006.

Hussein was sentenced to death on November 5 in connection with the execution of 148 Shia men and boys from the village of Dujail in 1982. Under Iraqi law, a review of the sentence must be made by a nine-judge appellate court 30 days from the verdict. If the court upholds the rulings, the execution must be carried out within 30 days.

Maliki was letting it be known that the appeal would be dismissed and Hussein's execution would follow in short order. The very fact that he so brazenly preempted a judicial ruling is indicative of the fraudulent character of the "democracy" and "rule of law" that Washington claims to be establishing in occupied Iraq.

Originally, the court, created and controlled by the US, planned to hold a series of trials dealing with separate charges of criminal actions by Hussein against the Iraqi population, with the pre-determined death sentence to be enacted after all of the verdicts had been handed down. Already underway is the second trial, stemming from the "Anfal" military campaign of 1986-1989, which Hussein ordered to suppress the Iranian-backed Kurdish rebellion in the north at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, and which included the use of poison gas against civilians.

Maliki's timetable means that he and the Bush

administration have abandoned the original plan and decided to hang Hussein first and carry through any further proceedings after the chief defendant had been dispatched.

In a November 9 article on Maliki's BBC interview, the *New York Times* notes, "According to Iraqi court officials, nothing in Iraqi law would prevent Mr. Hussein being executed before the Anfal trial ends." The *Times* article describes the calculations of Iraqi officials in moving quickly to execute Hussein. What it reports underscores the nakedly political character of the proceedings against the deposed president.

The *Times* writes, "Maliki and other Shiite leaders have made no secret of their desire to see Mr. Hussein executed as soon as possible. They say that Mr. Hussein's survival could help to rally the Sunni Arab-led insurgency that has been trying to drive American forces out the country and topple the Shiite-dominated government. He periodically issues written messages from his cell at an American military detention center here exhorting insurgents to continue their resistance."

After explaining that "American and Iraqi officials had originally planned to prosecute Mr. Hussein in a series of trials," the article continues, "But with the conflict worsening, senior Iraqi officials, including Mr. Maliki, now say they would rather eliminate Mr. Hussein as a source of inspiration for the Sunni insurgents than use the trials to prove his personal responsibility for atrocities during his 24-year rule."

The *Times* freely admits that Hussein's fate is to be determined by the political exigencies of maintaining the occupation of Iraq and suppressing the insurgency. This is made all the more necessary under conditions in which opposition amongst Shiites as well as Sunnis to the US presence continues to escalate.

In his interview, Maliki was unabashed in pointing to

the political considerations behind his determination to execute Hussein as swiftly as possible. “Political realities rely on what happens on the ground,” he told Simpson.

These political realities include growing demands from Washington that he deal ruthlessly with insurgent forces, not only amongst the Sunnis, but also within the majority Shia population. For weeks, American political and military officials have been pressing for Maliki to back a full-scale attack on Moqtada al-Sadr, the anti-American Shia cleric, and his Madhi Army militia—which means a bloody assault on Sadr City, the impoverished Shia district in Baghdad that is Sadr’s main base of popular support.

Maliki has been resisting such a move because his government is dependent on the support of Sadr, whose movement has a substantial delegation in the Iraqi parliament and representatives in Maliki’s cabinet, and because he fears that any frontal attack on the Madhi Army would inflame Shia sentiment against both the US occupation forces and himself.

Already, attempts by the US military to arrest prominent representatives of Sadr’s movement and the setting up of US military checkpoints around Sadr City have fuelled anti-American sentiment among Shiites and undermined Shia support for Maliki’s government.

In pressing for Saddam Hussein’s execution as quickly as possible, Maliki and his US controllers hope to boost the Iraqi government’s standing amongst Shias whilst ensuring that the former dictator does not become the focal point for Sunni opposition to the occupation. At the same time, Maliki hopes that a display of ruthlessness against Hussein will bolster his standing with Washington, under conditions in which American political and military officials have let it be known they are considering dispensing with him and installing a military government of “national salvation” that will include prominent Sunni members of the ousted Baathist regime.

Washington is anxious that Saddam be executed as soon as possible in part because the US is implicated in the suppression of the Kurds for which Hussein is now on trial. A trial on this case with Hussein in the dock runs the risk of exposing American support for his regime in the war against Iran, including his use of chemical weapons.

So flagrant are the political calculations behind the

legal lynching of Hussein that even the timing of last week’s verdict was determined by the immediate political needs of the Bush administration. The announcement of his death sentence was timed to coincide with the eve of the US midterm election, in the hope that it would bolster support among American voters for the Republicans.

Britain’s former Conservative Party foreign secretary, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, said as much on the BBC’s “Question Time” on Thursday evening. He told moderator David Dimbleby, “I would like to believe that it was a pure coincidence that it was announced the day before the American congressional election. I don’t believe it was. I think he was convicted several months ago and... I deeply suspect it was requested by the US as an attempt to help influence these elections. It didn’t work and it shouldn’t have been tried.”



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