

Two more barbaric state executions in Iraq

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The latest executions in Baghdad exemplify the barbarism that prevails in US-occupied Iraq. Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti, the 56-year-old half-brother of Saddam Hussein and former head of his regime's intelligence service, and Awad Hamed al-Bander, the 61-year-old former chief judge of the Baathist Revolutionary Court, were hung in the early hours of Monday morning.

American troops woke the two men in the dead of night and flew them by helicopter to the execution chamber in Baghdad. Masked Iraqi executioners bundled them to dimly lit gallows, shackled, disorientated and dressed in the infamous orange prison uniforms issued by the US military. At 3a.m., they were hooded, nooses put around their necks and dropped to their deaths. Whether on purpose or due to incompetence, the hangman rigged the rope in such a manner that it tore off Barzan's head. Horrifying video footage allegedly showed his decapitated body lying on the ground in a pool of blood, as Bander's corpse swayed above. Their families claim they were not informed of the executions and only found out about the deaths from the television news.

The executions took place just over two weeks after the hanging of Saddam Hussein, which had the character of a sectarian lynching. Members of the Shiite fundamentalist parties that dominate the US puppet government chanted Shiite slogans and insulted the former dictator as he stood on the gallows. Spokesmen for Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki have claimed that Barzan and Bander were not subjected to the same indignities, but the political purpose was the same. The Maliki government ordered their execution in a bid to shore up its waning support among Shiites oppressed under the Sunni-based Baathist regime. Maliki ignored calls by Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, the UN and human rights organisations for a stay of execution.

Sunni Arabs have responded to the killings with

anger. Some 3,000 people assembled for the men's burial near Hussein's own grave in his home city of Tikrit. A banner on the main mosque declared: "The people of Tikrit mourn the two martyrs killed by sectarian hands." The beheading of Barzan intensified the bitterness. Barzan's son-in-law denounced the mutilation as "the grudge of the Safavids"—a term used to denigrate Shiites as stooges of Iran.

In Shiite and Kurdish areas of Iraq, the reaction to the executions was generally muted. Among many people, there is a growing awareness that such barbaric acts of revenge have nothing to do with genuine justice for the many Iraqis who suffered under the Baathists. A Shiite interviewed by Associated Press in Mosul told the newsagency: "What they've done incites people to sectarianism even more. Whether they were executed or not, what's the use?"

The Bush administration gave the green light for the hangings as a clear warning that it is prepared to physically dispose of anyone who gets in the way of US plans for global hegemony. At the same time, the White House had hoped the trial and execution of Hussein and his colleagues for crimes against humanity would give a veneer of legitimacy to the illegal US occupation of Iraq.

Instead, the political murders of powerless and largely broken prisoners—Barzan, for example, was dying of spinal cancer—have served only to evoke disgust among millions of people around the world and reinforce their view that the entire US operation in Iraq is criminal to the core. Even Bush has felt compelled to distance himself from Hussein's hanging, describing it yesterday as "fumbled".

The trial of Hussein, Barzan, Bander and five others has become another debacle for the White House. In international legal and human rights circles, it has been widely assessed as a kangaroo court and a travesty. A judge was removed for allowing defendants to speak

too much and three defence attorneys were assassinated—most likely by pro-occupation death squads.

The prosecution of Saddam Hussein and a few of his inner circle for the 1982 killing of 148 Shiites in the village of Dujail was not motivated by concerns for justice. Rather the restriction of the trial to this atrocity was deliberately designed to block evidence of Washington's long association with Hussein and its direct involvement in the crimes of his regime. US administrations backed the Baathist massacres of Communist Party members in the 1960s and 1970s, supported Hussein in his war against Iran in the 1980s, and deliberately turned a blind eye to his suppression of Shiite and Kurdish opponents.

The US occupation drew up the legislation under which Hussein was tried. The law included the death penalty and the stipulation that it be carried out within 30 days of the first and final appeal being rejected. Hussein's guilty verdict for the Dujail killings therefore guaranteed he would take embarrassing details of his relations with the US to his grave.

Kurdish nationalist leaders who have fully collaborated with the US invasion have been forced to publicly condemn Hussein's speedy execution. Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish parliamentarian, stated earlier this month: "It was very important to keep him alive so that we could know the full details of what happened during all the atrocities that were committed. We need to know how and why he did what he did and who helped him by providing political and material support to his regime."

Like Shiite politicians, Kurdish leaders had planned to try Hussein for the repression of Kurds in the so-called Anfal campaign of the 1980s in order to bolster their own tenuous credibility among the Kurdish masses. As a result of his execution, all other charges against Hussein have had to be dropped.

The reality of what is taking place outside the courtroom doors made the executions even more of an outrage. The US invasion is responsible for a level of death and destruction that exceeds the most nightmarish periods of Hussein's rule. Tens of thousands of Iraqis have been killed or imprisoned. The US military has levelled entire cities in its attempt to crush resistance to the occupation.

The Bush administration's policy of promoting Shiite

and Kurdish factions at the expense of Sunni Arabs has unleashed vicious sectarian warfare. At least 650,000 Iraqis have lost their lives under the US occupation. The violence has turned more than 2.5 million Iraqis into refugees.

On Sunday alone, police found 40 mutilated corpses in different parts of Baghdad. Many had been tortured before being murdered. The main city morgue alone processed over 16,000 unidentified murder victims in 2006, most of whom are believed to have been killed by death squads operated by the predominantly Shiite security forces. In the five boroughs of New York, by contrast, with a population far larger than Baghdad, there were 579 homicides last year.

The escalation of the Iraq war ordered by President Bush last week will lead to tens of thousands more deaths—both Iraqi and American. There are clear signs the administration is also preparing for war with Syria and Iran as well, which would drive the death toll into the millions.

The Bush administration and its political allies such as Britain's Tony Blair and Australia's John Howard have no right to prosecute anyone. Rather they should be in the dock. They are responsible for an illegal war of aggression and mass killing in Iraq and should be held to account for their war crimes.



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