

SADDAM'S DEMISE – DO YOU REALLY FEEL SAFER?

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Cynics say it was always just a matter of time. Indeed, the real story is not about Saddam Hussein's capture, but about how he managed to survive so long, given all the forces that were arrayed against him.

There is also the dismal possibility that, despite his capture, the Iraqi resistance may continue to **escalate** its attacks, especially on other Iraqis. Indeed, at least in the first few days after Saddam's arrest, this is precisely what has happened.

Furthermore, the tactics that were applied to "get him" may be largely inapplicable to "**real terrorists**" like Osama bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who have already targeted thousands of US civilians, yet remain free. From their standpoint, on the one hand, they **never got very much (or perhaps any** -- the evidence is very sketchy) **support** from Saddam, and as President Bush has admitted, there is no evidence that he was involved in 9/11. On the other hand, they are probably delighted to see the US tied down in this costly military venture in Iraq, rather than focusing on them.

Finally, of course, the **direct costs** of this "arrest" have been **astronomical**. As of this week, this most recent US-backed effort to invade Iraq and eliminate Saddam has, according to most recent estimates, cost the lives of more than 543 Coalition troops, 8-10,000 Iraqi civilians, another 8-10,000 Iraqi combatants during the first month of battle, and at least that number of combatant lives since then. The number

of Coalition wounded is now at least 3100, while the number of Iraqi wounded can be conservatively estimated at 50,000 (about 2 times the minimum number of Iraqi fatalities).

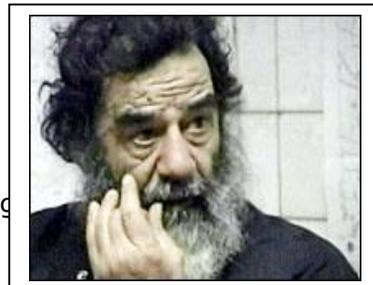
In addition, it now looks as if **former Bush economic advisor Larry Lindsey was absolutely right**: the **financial cost** of the Second Iraq War and the reconstruction to follow will easily reach **\$166-\$200 billion** by the end of 2004. By comparison, the USG's entire foreign aid budget in 2004 for all other countries is **less than \$20 billion**.

Compared with these costs, it is now clear that **the best way** to have avoided Saddam's menace might have been to have **not assisted his rise to power in the first place** in the 1960s and 1970s, or at least to have **not armed him to the teeth** in the 1980s, or at least to have not prevented UN coalition forces from **removing him** in 1991, after the Gulf War.

In short, while it would be perverse not to celebrate Saddam's capture, this development is surely no panacea, and the "**opportunity costs**" of abetting Saddam's rise and fall appear to have been very high. Let's hope that the US at least learns something from this very expensive tutorial about **the long-run costs of coddling dictatorships**.

In hindsight, it really does appear incredible that Saddam has lasted as long as he has. After all, it is not as if he is without enemies in Iraq, even apart from the US. And the effort that the US has devoted to "getting him" has been truly stupendous:

At the war's outset, in March 2003, Saddam was targeted by several "decapitation" air strikes that employed the latest "smart bombs," eavesdropping equipment, remote-controlled flying drones, and satellite intelligence. On March 19, for example, one of his compounds near Baghdad University was hit by four 2000-lb. bunker-busters and 40 cruise missiles. President Bush rejoiced that "Saddam at the very minimum was severely wounded," but that remark proved to be premature. On April 7, a B1 bomber dropped four more 2000-lb. bombs on a



Baghdad restaurant where Saddam was supposed to be hiding with his two eldest sons. US investigators spent weeks going through the rubble, searching in vain for Saddam's DNA. They did find the DNA of 14 deceased Iraqi civilians.

✎ **After** the war's official end on April 9, Saddam was pursued for nine months by up to 1500 US "elite" troops who were members of **black ops**" units like "**Task Force 20,**" "Gray Fox," and "Task Force 121." They moved pretty freely throughout the country, carrying out more than 400 raids and detaining several thousand Iraqis for questioning, including several dozen members of Saddam's extended family. Last July they succeeded in killing two of his three sons, Uday and Qusay. (No one ever says much about Ali, the third son born out of wed lock.) These elite forces also managed to kill at least a half dozen more Iraqi civilians and **25-30 gasoline smugglers** who were chased 25 miles into Syria on a false tip.

It is worth noting that, contrary to the **expectations** of senior US military officers, killing Uday and Qusay had no noticeable effect on the Iraqi resistance – indeed, it grew rapidly after their demise.

✎ **From** July 3 on, Saddam had a \$25 million bounty on his head – about 20,000 times the average Iraqi's annual income. Apparently such bounties may have helped produce information that **helped to locate Saddam's sons**. But it is doubtful that the bounties had anything to do with Saddam's capture. Just last week in Baghdad, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld admitted that the reward had not produced any useful information, and conceded that he was "**dumbfounded.**" And US General Ricardo Sanchez's report on Saddam's capture also suggests that US troops did not rely on big bounties – though they probably made use of smaller payments.

So after months of the big bounty/ special ops approach, as of mid-November the hunt for Saddam had stalled. When Bush visited the UK on November 18, he got lots of caustic comments about precisely this issue – **Glenda Jackson**, the former minister and actress, asked, 'Why is George Bush being given a triumphal ride down Whitehall when Saddam is still roaming free?' And **Air Marshal Sir Timothy Garden**, of the Institute of Strategic Studies, hardly a screaming loony, **declared** that it was 'totally unacceptable' and "down to incompetence" that Saddam was still at large.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi resistance took off. November saw 109 fatalities and nearly 400 wounded among coalition forces, the **worst month** since March. Even more

important for the country's stability and the resistance's future, the number of ***Iraqi civilian casualties*** was soaring.

Moreover, with less than a year to go until the 2004 US Presidential election, the proportion of Americans who felt the war was going well had fallen from 86 percent in May to 42 percent. Fully 55 percent disapproved of Bush's "post-combat" management of Iraq situation. Despite the fact that the economy was showing signs of recovery, several polls taken during the first two weeks of December, showed that Bush's approval rating had fallen to just 50 percent, its lowest level since before 9/11, with record disapproval levels.

Responding to all these developments, the US military, under strong pressure from Washington, decided to unleash much more aggressive tactics on the ground, especially in the Central Provinces around Tikrit. Ultimately it was these harsher tactics that turned the trick.

To begin with, according to **Seymour Hersch's report** just this week, US special forces like "Task Force 121" were recently authorized to engage in proactive tactics that resemble the **CIA's Phoenix Program** in Vietnam and Israel's tactics against the Palestinians, including the use of assassination, kidnapping, and torture against civilian insurgents.



Even more important, in mid-November, the 4000-person **First Brigade of the US Army's 4th Infantry Division** in Tikrit, under the command of Colonel James Hickey, started to resort to the use of West Bank/Gaza -like tactics, complete with giant Israeli D-9 bulletproof bulldozers and Israeli advice on counter-insurgency tactics. These new tactics included late-night house-to-house searches, military checkpoints, razor wire cordons, curfews, the detention of suspected insurgents' relatives, and house demolitions.

It appears that these strong-arm tactics, especially the mass roundups and family interrogations, really helped to produce the information that finally resulted in Saddam's capture. In particular, it now appears that the critical information that led to Saddam's capture was produced not by voluntary cooperation, but by the interrogation of a detainee.

Whether the benefits of flushing Saddam out of his spider hole are ultimately worth the undoubted damage that such tactics may have rendered to US relationships in Iraq and the Middle East in general is debatable. But one point is clear -- unless the US invades Pakistan, these strong-arm tactics will not be available to use in the lawless regions of Pakistan's [Northwest Frontier Province](#), where Osama bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, and former Taliban chief Mullah Omar are reportedly [holed up](#).



In other words, even if the bounties on these proven terrorists in Pakistan are increased (the bounties on Osama and **Al-Zawahiri** are already [\\$25 million each](#)), and even more "special ops" units are diverted to search for them, Osama and his associates are unlikely to ever be captured. Of course these folks are the only ones who have ever been shown to have launched catastrophic attacks against US civilian targets -- unlike Saddam Hussein. And they are all holed up in Pakistan, an unstable country that really does have weapons of mass destruction – and instability. Indeed, **just yesterday**, even as Saddam was being processed after his arrest, Pakistan [almost lost President Musharraf](#) to a terrorist attack.

But the day after Saddam's capture, President Bush was in no mood to focus on such complexities. He lost no time in [trumpeting](#) Saddam's capture, pledging that it meant that "a dark and painful era in the history of Iraq is finally over." Characteristically, Donald Rumsfeld was even more [hyperbolic](#), asserting that "The Iraqi people have now been liberated in spirit, as well as in fact."

They might eventually prove right, but their ability to predict Iraq's future has so far not exactly proved to be spot-on. In particular, there's no evidence that Saddam exerted anything like the influence that Bush and Rumsfeld imply he did with respect to the Iraqi resistance. He was widely detested, even by his fellow Ba'athists. He had no communications equipment with him when he was captured, so it is doubtful whether he could have played much of a role in coordinating the resistance. Most important, the resistance is likely to continue until there is a genuine representative government in Iraq – sometime that will not happen until next summer, at the earliest. With Saddam gone, however, and [just 13 people left](#) on the Coalition's "top

55" most-wanted list, at least this theory of the resistance can now be decisively tested.

One of the more surprising aspect of Saddam's capture, by the way, was its pacific character. Actually, we should all feel a bit grateful for the fact that this putative "monster" was captured alive. Apparently Saddam's faith in the afterlife did not match that of other members of the Iraqi resistance. This will permit him to receive a fair trial -- a salutary exercise for Iraq's first post-Saddam government. And he may also be able to use his remaining time on this earth to help us solve a few riddles about the past, such as what really became of his WMDs, his alleged connections with al-Queda, and the history of his relationships with foreign powers during the 1980s. Naturally we trust the Bush Administration to share all his candid responses with us. (According to Time, Saddam has reportedly already told American interrogators that Iraq never had weapons of mass destruction.)

So good riddance to Saddam. One cannot but hope that this will indeed prove to be a turning point in Iraq's struggle for democracy, peace, and independence.

To the triumphalists in the Bush II Administration, however, we also need to insist that Saddam's capture really becomes a turning point for the First World. It should henceforth be unwilling to help such dictators rise to power in the first place.

In particular:

- Saddam's removal might have been undertaken 13 years ago, at much lower cost, by the UN-backed international coalition that was assembled by Bush I.
- Even before that, during the first Reagan Administration, in which Rumsfeld served, and the Carter Administration, Saddam might have been discouraged from invading Iran, and he might have been provided with far fewer weapons and key ingredients for WMDs.
- Before that, the Nixon Administration and Henry Kissinger might have refused to betray the Kurds when they tried to resist Saddam in the 1970s.
- Before that, in the 1960s, the Kennedy /Johnson Administrations and the CIA might have declined to help install Saddam's Ba'athists in Iraq in the first place.

Of course all these were complex judgments, made under the acute pressures of the time. But it is important for us to be reminded of our own deep responsibility for the Saddam "monster."

For the moment, however, conventional news coverage will probably just continue to celebrate Saddam's capture like some medieval morality play. This doesn't do justice to the history, but at least it helps television news compete with its increasingly close substitutes -- the all-movie and all-wrestling channels.



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