

## The Death of a Dictator

When Saddam Hussein faced the gallows in Iraq on the day before New Years Eve, he had been found guilty of crimes against humanity that had taken place nearly twenty five years earlier. When most people are asked what crimes the former Iraqi President is guilty of, no doubt many will say that it is torture and murder, maybe even genocide or an attempt at genocide. A lot of people will be able to name events such as Iraq's attack on the Kurdish town of Halabjah in March of 1988, or the Iraqi military operation "Anfal" which ran from February through to September of the same year. Around 5000 residents were killed in Halabjah through the use of poisonous gas and nerve agents. Ten to twenty times of that were killed during operation "Anfal". Another of the charges that could have been brought against the former President would be that of murdering thousands of Shia and Kurdish civilians in the aftermath of the Gulf war. Instead, the crime that saw Saddam Hussein face the death penalty was a relatively unknown act in 1982, when 148 people were slain in a town called Dujail, some 60km north of Baghdad.

Eighteen months after Iraq had begun the war against Iran, Hussein travelled to Dujail, a small town on one of the banks on the river Tigris. The war was not going the way that the Iraqi government had anticipated and the president had travelled to this town to rally much needed support. Many men, in the city that had a mixed civilisation of Shia and Sunni Muslims, were already fighting in the war; men that were dearly missed in a small town where people were tightly knotted together. This day, the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, became the day where one of the many assassination attempts on the former dictator's life nearly achieved success. A group of fewer than 20 men attacked the President and using simple weapons, killed and injured many of his bodyguards. However their main target was left unharmed. As a frightened Saddam and his men at first seemed to hastily leave the small town, no one was anticipating the vengeance that he would inflict on its population.

On his return the president made a speech where he stated that they were only there to round up a small number of suspects that they believed had infiltrated the town, his comments suggesting that they believed the guilty to be Iranians. What happened after would later be retold in the trial against Saddam, starting with a testimony from one of the people who witnessed the actions of a man who had no respect for the values of a human life.

The first witness that appeared in court on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2005 told a graphic story of torture and death. He spoke of the torture suffered by not only himself, but his brothers and friends. Razor blades were used to rip prisoners' skins. Sometimes their nails and teeth were pulled out, while one of his brothers had his arms and legs broken. There had also been pregnant women amongst those rounded up by Saddam's men. Women that were then forced to give birth in a prison where no help was given by the guards. Women that were forced to watch their babies die as they and those around them looked on in vain.

It is assumed that around 400 people were taken from the town of Dujail, after months of torture, 148 men were separated from the rest of the group. The remaining prisoners went on to face more torture and prolonged captivity. It would be years before they found out what happened to their family members and neighbours that had been taken away from them. Whilst living in uncertainty, those who had escaped with their lives intact hoped and prayed that their loved ones were safe, or at the very least alive. Later they learned the truth. Saddam had had all of them killed. The youngest of those chosen to die was 11 years of age.

News stations all over the world have shown the video of Saddam Hussein's last moments, they do however not show the execution itself. Despite this, all you have to do is to go to a site such as YouTube or Googlevideo to find a recording made by mobile phone which shows the hanging of the former dictator. A man who has committed many a crime against human rights is seen being brought to an undignified death by three men wearing ski masks; others are jeering him and yelling as he walks towards the rope.

I am not going to pretend that I understand what the population of Iraq has gone through under Saddam, because it is impossible for someone who has grown up in the safe environment of the Western World to even attempt to understand. However, never under any circumstances am I going to condone the Death Penalty. I understand that under Iraqi law it would be impossible for the government to execute regular criminals under the death sentence and then ignore someone who has caused as much pain as Saddam, but the way it was dealt with was nothing short of pathetic by the government of Iraq.

What has the world gained from the death of a dictator? Let us start with the Iraqi people. The people of Iraq no longer have to worry about being terrorized by a narcissistic maniac. In short, there should in theory be no more uncertainty, no more killing, no more fear and in the long term Iraq should become a country moulded to fit the western mould of perfection. To the Americans, and of course their great leader, Mr George W Bush, who is unlikely to even know how to spell Saddam, his death symbolizes victory. To the rest of the world it seems the opinions are split, some see it as justice being served. Others, myself included, are sceptical and concerned that the consequences might be higher than what was bargained for.

Allowing Saddam to die in the undignified way that he did has angered thousands of his followers. Saddam is now a martyr, some even say he is even more dangerous now he is gone than he ever was when alive. His followers will continue fighting for what they think is their right. Oppression, inequality, anything but peace with those who do not deem worthy of it. I would be surprised if the situation in Iraq will not improve for years yet. There will be many men waiting to lead those who at the moment stand without a leader, and I fear that there will still be many a life lost. I will not be surprised if Bush pulls out his men in Iraq before the real troubles start. Solving one problem, yet creating another before eventually turning their backs, is an American trademark.

There is no peace in the Middle East. I would like to compare what is happening in Iraq to what has happened in Northern Ireland in the past. There are more similarities between

the two than there are differences. In both you have two groups within what is simplified the same religion, although in Northern Ireland it was also split between English and Irish. In both nations, you also have a large group of people that do not wish to fight, that do not care whether their neighbour is catholic or protestant, Shia or Sunni. Is it not fair to say that the English rule in a part of which will always be Ireland is, or at least was, a dictatorship? That the release of the Republic of Ireland on the condition that the English get to keep the Northern Part, the area which is better for agriculture and has more riches, is not forcing death and poverty on the country and thus committing crimes against humanity. How about the English and their Colonies, the French and their Colonies, slave trade, wars and repressing other countries, why was there no punishment for that? After World War II, the western world was quick to punish the German people as a whole, despite many only fighting a war because they at least had one tiny chance of surviving, one tiny chance of seeing their families again. Despite all of this, despite their abilities of judging other countries, the Western World, America included will never once pass judgements on themselves.

Then there is the sweet irony of America starting a war against Iraq and Saddam Hussein, or starting a war against any dictator for that matter. Can anyone name a war started by an American government where they did not two years, five years or ten years earlier supply the same dictator with weapons, as long as he did what they wanted of course. It might be a dangerous accusation to make, but that does not mean it is not true. Apparently history isn't a compulsory course in American schools. Perhaps that's why the government can get away with repeatedly making the same mistakes.

For the hundreds who received their answers after the case against Hussein for his actions in Dujail, there are thousands who will never get any answers to the multiple incidents that have taken place in Iraq over the last thirty years. The Iraqi government, and Bush with them seems to have felt so much fear for a man that was in shackles, a man that no longer could fight or pose a threat that they killed him at the first legal opportunity. That doesn't show courage or a thirst for righteousness, it just makes you wonder what they really feared.

Then what would Bush have to fear... after all, there were Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq.

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