

Anne Applebaum

Hussein in His Place

The Dictator's Regime, and the West's Misreading of It, Followed a Familiar Pattern

Hitler shot himself before capture, Stalin received a grand state funeral and Pol Pot died while under house arrest. Just last week, the brutal leader of Turkmenistan, Saparmurad Niyazov, died of natural causes. In fact, when the noose tightened around his neck early Saturday morning, Saddam Hussein became one of a surprisingly small number of modern dictators executed by their own people: Benito Mussolini, Nicolai Ceausescu — and now the man who once called himself Iraq's president for life. Of those three, Hussein is the only one who had anything resembling a trial.

Other than that, there is no reason to view Hussein as an exceptional or unusual heir to the 20th-century totalitarian tradition. Certainly he saw himself as part of the pantheon of modern dictators. Allegedly, he boasted to KGB agents in Baghdad of his personal admiration for Joseph Stalin. And he took their advice: Historians who have worked on Iraqi documents captured during the Persian Gulf War have told me that they show how Hussein's secret police force was clearly organized along Soviet lines.

More to the point, Saddam Hussein kept his people in a state of constant terror, as did Hitler and Stalin at the height of their powers. The Iraqi writer Kanan Makiya, whose book "Republic of Fear" remains the definitive account of Hussein's Iraq, estimates that in 1980, one-fifth of the economically active Iraqi labor force were members of the army, the political militias, the police or the secret police: One in five people, in other words, was employed to carry out institutional violence. The result was a country in which the families of political victims received their body parts in the mail; in which tens of thousands of Kurds could be murdered with chemical weapons; and in which, as Hussein's truncated trial demon-

strated, the dictator could sign a document randomly condemning 148 people to death — among them an 11-year-old boy — and feel no remorse or regret. As his defense team argued, he believed this was his prerogative as head of state.

Yet if Hussein's life and death prove anything, it is that in the 90-odd years since modern totalitarianism first emerged in Europe, neither the United States nor anyone else has learned to understand such regimes or even to recognize them for what they are. When Hitler emerged, the outside world's instinct was to appease him. When Stalin emerged, Americans and Europeans admired his economic planning. When Hussein emerged, our impulse was to ignore him — and then, since he seemed a useful counterweight to the Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran, to support him. During his horrific and unnecessary war with Iran, millions of Iraqis and Iranians died — and the United States, reckoning Iran the greater threat, backed Hussein with weapons and intelligence. Germany, France, Russia and others also saw Hussein as a useful trading partner and, later, as a source of corrupt profits.

Only after his invasion of Poland was Hitler considered a threat to the rest of Europe; only after his occupation of Central Europe was Stalin's internal terror taken seriously. Twentieth-century history has proved, again and again, that the ambitions of revolutionary, totalitarian leaders are rarely confined to their own countries. Yet only after he invaded Kuwait was Hussein, long a threat to his own people, perceived as anything worse than a local nuisance.

Belatedly, we identified him as a totalitarian dictator, but by then it was too late for our discovery to have much of an impact, in Iraq or anywhere else. In the Arab world, most assumed that America's overdue crit-



The since-toppled statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad's Firdaus Square in 2002.

icism represented yet another political calculation on the part of self-interested Americans, whose memories could not possibly be so short as they pretended.

Even now, in the wake of his execution, our instincts are to argue about what Hussein meant to us, not what he meant to Iraqis. His death is being analyzed for its impact on Iraq's civil war and therefore for its impact on our troops. The chaos of his trial and execution are another excuse to attack the White House. Write that Hussein really was an evil man, and you'll be thought an apologist for George W. Bush. Write that his regime resembled Stalin's, and you'll be called a right-wing ideologue.

Someday, perhaps, when Iraq's civil war is over, and when Iraqis have achieved a meas-

ure of personal safety — an even more basic human requirement than political freedom — it may be possible for Iraqis, at least, to think objectively about the physical and psychological damage that Hussein's regime did to their country and about the ways in which that damage helped feed the insurgency. The record compiled by the Iraqi human rights tribunal will help, particularly if Iraq's judges continue to prosecute other defendants.

Maybe someday Americans or Europeans will also find ways to discuss Hussein as something other than a pawn in their own games, or as a figure in their own political debates. But I doubt it.

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Robert D. Novak

A 'Surge' Faces Trouble In the Senate

Even in GOP, Few Back the President

Sen. John McCain, leading a blue-ribbon congressional delegation to Baghdad before Christmas, collected evidence that a "surge" of more U.S. troops is needed in Iraq. But not all his colleagues who accompanied him were convinced. What's more, he will find himself among a dwindling minority inside the Senate Republican caucus when Congress reconvenes this week.

President Bush and McCain, the front-runner for the party's 2008 presidential nomination, will have trouble finding support from more than 12 of the 49 Republican senators when pressing for a surge of 30,000 troops. "It's Alice in Wonderland," Sen. Chuck Hagel, second-ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, told me in describing the proposal. "I'm absolutely opposed to sending any more troops to Iraq. It is folly."

What to do about Iraq poses not only a national policy crisis but profound political problems for the Republican Party. Disenchantment with George W. Bush within the GOP runs deep. Republican leaders around the country, anticipating that the 2006 election disaster would prompt an orderly disengagement from Iraq, are shocked that the president now appears ready to add troops.

The recent McCain congressional delegation was composed of sophisticated lawmakers who have made many previous visits to Iraq. They do not minimize the severity of sectarian civil war. They left their meeting with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki doubting any "sense of urgency" after advising him that he must disarm the militias. They recognize that the national police, corrupt and riddled with radicals, constitutes an unmitigated disaster.

McCain has long called for more troops in Iraq. He was supported within the delegation by his ally Sen. Lindsey Graham (S.C.) and by Sen. Joseph Lieberman, the only Democrat on the delegation (though he now calls himself an "Independent Democrat" after losing the Democratic nomination in Connecticut and being elected with Republican votes). But Sen. John Thune (S.D.) calls his support for the surge "conditional." Sen. Susan Collins (Maine) returned from Baghdad opposing more troops. Rep. Mark Kirk of Illinois, the only House member on the trip, is described as skeptical.

How big and how long should a surge be? The 7,000 or 8,000 troops that were first mentioned now have grown to at least 30,000. Congressional advocates talk privately about an infusion of manpower ending about halfway through this year. But retired general Jack Keane, who has become a leading advocate of additional troops, wrote in *The Post* last week: "Increasing troop levels in Baghdad for three to six months would virtually ensure defeat."

I checked with prominent Republicans around the country and found them confused and disturbed about the surge. They incorrectly assumed that the presence of Republican stalwart James Baker as co-chairman of the Iraq Study Group meant it was Bush-inspired (when it really was a bipartisan creation of Congress). Why, they ask, is the president casting aside the commission's recommendations and calling for more troops?

Even in Mississippi, the reddest of red states, where Bush's approval rating has just inched above 50 percent, Republicans see no public support for more troops. What is happening inside the president's party is reflected by defection from support for his war policy after November's election by two Republican senators who face an uphill race for reelection in 2008: Gordon Smith of Oregon and Norm Coleman of Minnesota. Coleman announced his opposition to the idea after returning from a trip to Iraq that preceded McCain's.

Among Democrats, Lieberman stands alone. Delaware Sen. Joseph Biden, as Foreign Relations Committee chairman, will lead the rest of the Democrats not only to oppose a surge but to block it. Bush enters a new world of a Democratic majority where he must share the stage.

Just as the president is ready to address the nation on Iraq, Biden next week begins three weeks of hearings on the war. On the committee, Biden and Democrats Christopher Dodd (Conn.), John Kerry (Mass.), Russell Feingold (Wis.) and Barack Obama (Ill.) will compete for intensity in criticizing a troop surge. But on the Republican side of the committee, no less probing scrutiny of Bush's proposals will come from Chuck Hagel.

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Sen. Chuck Hagel

Alasdair Roberts

The Bush Years, in a Word

"Congressional oversight for intelligence — and counterterrorism — is now dysfunctional."

Sept. 11 commission report, July 2004

"I know I've said Louisiana and New Orleans was dysfunctional, but you know what? We were dysfunctional, too. ... And so the whole thing became this dysfunctional mess."

Former FEMA director Michael Brown, before the House select committee on Hurricane Katrina, February 2006

"This is the worst possible time to have a dysfunctional political system, and Congress is dysfunctional."

Norman Ornstein, American Enterprise Institute resident scholar, July 2006

"The ethics process, frankly, in the other body of Congress has been dysfunctional."

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, March 2006

"The interagency process is completely dysfunctional."

A Republican former Cabinet secretary with decades of foreign-policy expertise quoted in a *Post* op-ed, September 2003

"Armitage was growing increasingly restive. He believed that the foreign-policy-making system ... was essentially dysfunctional."

Bob Woodward, "Plan of Attack," April 2004

"[M]any other factors have further diminished U.S. influence abroad, including an unnecessarily pugnacious, often deliberately insulting style that is peculiar to certain members of the current sometimes dysfunctional national security team."

Former U.N. ambassador Richard Holbrooke, *Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2006

"They turned out to be among the most incompetent teams in the postwar era. Not only did each of them, individually, have enormous flaws, but together they were deadly, dysfunctional."

Former Defense Policy Board member Kenneth Adelman on the Bush national security team, *Vanity Fair*, January 2007

"For too long the CIA has been ignoring its core mission activities. There is a dysfunctional denial of any need for corrective action."

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence report, June 2004

"McCain told Goss the CIA is 'a dysfunctional organization. It has to be cleaned out.'"

Robert D. Novak, *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 2004

The "biggest challenge will be getting his or her arms around a huge, dysfunctional bureaucracy."

Former Homeland Security inspector general Clark Kent Ervin on the department's new secretary, *USA Today*, December 2004

The Department of Homeland Security "remains a second-tier agency in the clout it commands within President Bush's Cabinet. ... Pockets of dysfunction are scattered throughout the 180,000-employee agency."

"Current and former administration officials," *The Post*, February 2005

"The mission of his department is to protect the United States from terrorist attacks. This could not be more important."

Yet the organization he now runs is seriously dysfunctional."

Rep. Henry Waxman on the challenges confronting Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, June 2005

The problem in Iraq, Condoleezza Rice told Iraq adviser Robert Blackwill, was "the dysfunctional U.S. government." He soon understood what she meant."

Bob Woodward, "State of Denial," October 2006

Alasdair Roberts, an associate professor at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, is writing a book about the Bush administration's response to Sept. 11, 2001.

Fareed Zakaria

Bush's Nation Busting

The saga of Saddam Hussein's end — his capture, trial and execution — is a sad metaphor for America's occupation of Iraq. What might have gone right went so wrong. It is worth remembering that Hussein was not your run-of-the-mill dictator. He created one of the most brutal, corrupt and violent regimes in modern history, something akin to Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China or Kim Jong Il's North Korea. Whatever the strategic wisdom for the United States, deposing him began as something unquestionably good for Iraq.

But soon the Bush administration dismissed the idea of trying Hussein under international law, or in a court with any broader legitimacy. This is the administration, after all, that could see little advantage in a United Nations mandate for its own invasion and occupation. It put Hussein's fate in the hands of the new Iraqi government, dominated by Shiite and Kurdish politicians who had been victims of his reign. As a result, Hussein's trial, which should have been the judgment of civilized society against a tyrant, is now seen by Iraq's Sunnis and much of the Arab world as a farce, reflecting only the victors' vengeance.

This was not inevitable. Most Iraqis were happy to see Hussein out of power. In the months after the American invasion, support for the Coalition Provisional Authority topped 70 percent. This was so even among Iraq's Sunni Arabs. In the first months of the insurgency, only 14 percent of them approved of attacks on U.S. troops. (That number today is 70 percent.) The rebellious area in those early months was not Sunni Fallujah but Shiite Najaf.

But during those crucial first months, Washington disbanded the Iraqi army, fired 50,000 bureaucrats and shut down the government-owned enterprises that employed most Iraqis. In effect, the United States dismantled the Iraqi state, leaving a deep security vacuum, administrative chaos and soaring unemployment.

We did not give Iraqis a republic. We gave them a civil war.

That state was dominated by Iraq's Sunni elites, who read this not as just a regime change but a revolution in which they had become the new underclass. For them, the new Iraq looked like a new dictatorship.

Why Washington made such profound moves with so little forethought remains one of the many puzzles of the Bush administration's foreign policy. Some of the decision making was motivated by ideology: Baathism equaled fascism, so every school teacher who joined the Baath Party to get a job was seen as a closet Nazi; state-owned enterprises were bad, the new Iraq needed a flat tax, etc. Some of it was influenced by Shiite exiles who wanted to take total control of the new Iraq. Some of it simply reflected the bizarre combination of ignorance and naivete that has marked the policies of Bush's "tough guys."

The administration has never fully understood the sectarian nature of its policies, which were less "nation building" than they were "nation busting" in their effects. It kept insisting that it was building a national army and police force when it was blatantly obvious (even to columnists) that the forces were overwhelmingly Shiite and Kurdish, mostly drawn from militias with stronger loyalties to political parties than to the state. The answer to these fundamentally political objections was technocratic: more training. But a stronger Shiite army made — makes — the Sunni populace more insecure and willing to support the insurgency. Iraq's Sunnis are not the good guys in this story. They have mostly behaved like self-defeating thugs. The minority of Sunnis who support al-Qaeda have been truly barbarous.

The point, however, is not their vices but our stupidity. We summarily deposed not just Saddam Hussein but a centuries-old ruling elite and then were stunned that they reacted poorly. In contrast, on coming into power in South Africa, Nelson Mandela did not fire a single white bureaucrat or soldier — and not because he thought that they had been kind to his people. He correctly saw the strategy as the way to prevent an Afrikaner rebellion.

It has become fashionable among Washington neoconservatives to blame the Iraqis for everything that has happened to their country. "We have given the Iraqis a republic, and they do not appear able to keep it," laments Charles Krauthammer. Others invoke anthropologists to explain the terrible dysfunctions of Iraqi culture.

There may be some truth to all these claims — Iraq is a tough place — but the Bush administration is not quite so blameless. It thoughtlessly engineered a political and social revolution as intense as the French or Iranian one and then seemed surprised that Iraq could not digest it happily, peacefully and quickly. We did not give them a republic. We gave them a civil war.

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