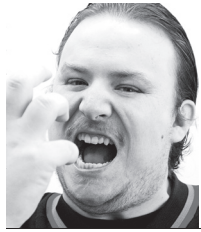


Hussein hanging: knot cool or old noose?

In Saddam's case, the punishment fits the many, many crimes



PATRICK
ROSS

point

Personally, I've never been one to celebrate the death of another human being, and I'm not about to start now. That said, it's hard to think of the execution of Saddam Hussein as anything other than a good and necessary thing. I also find it impossible to fault Iraqis for the so-called "brutality" of his execution.

While many Iraqi expatriates in Canada and abroad greeted the news of Hussein's execution jubilantly—including a local group taking to Jasper Avenue to fly Iraqi flags triumphantly from their cars—worldwide reaction, as expected, seems to be evenly split.

A video taken with a cellphone camera and released via YouTube has provoked a reaction of near-universal disgust at the way Saddam's executioners treated him. On the video, he was seemingly taunted by onlookers, and reportedly hung before he could even complete his final prayer.

Certainly this treatment of a condemned prisoner would never be tolerated in Western society, nor should it be. However, those who have criticized Iraq for Saddam's treatment have forgotten an important fact: this isn't the Western world we are discussing—this is Iraq. And this isn't just any condemned prisoner we are discussing—this is Saddam Hussein.

Hussein's barbarism is common knowledge. In 1988, he ordered the use of chemical weapons against his own citizens in the Kurdish village of Halabja. Earlier that year, the Anfal

campaign began under orders from Hussein, which would eventually claim over 100 000 Kurdish lives. Iraqi soldiers were also reported to have killed more than a thousand Kuwaitis during the occupation that led to the Gulf War. In 1991, Saddam suppressed post-war uprisings to the tune of 30 000–60 000 lives. On top of all this, there was the systematic suppression of his political opponents throughout.

Another well-known fact about Hussein is that he never cared much about how condemned prisoners were treated under his rule. In fact, his two favourite pit bulls—sons Qusay and Uday—got their first taste of mortal power by ruthlessly executing political prisoners under the careful supervision of their father. Hussein's sons were also well known for their brutal treatment of the hapless women they exploited as their primary source of sport and pleasure.

There's little doubt they learned this behaviour from their father, who authorized the rape of women related to anyone his regime suspected of being disloyal. Finally, Saddam was also known to have ordered the intimidation and killings of Shi'a clerics, making it difficult to believe that he was a religious man.

Given all this, it's understandable that so many Iraqis should be so angry. This seems like a simplistic explanation, but those of us who have lived our lives enjoying the freedom and safety provided by the Western world could never understand the experience of living under a brutally oppressive regime like that of Saddam Hussein.

It's terribly convenient for us to judge Iraqis for their vengefulness—but then again, we've never lived under Hussein's reign of terror. Ultimately, it should be hard to begrudge Iraqis for their "brutality." If anything, they are merely acting on the example that their former leader himself set.

Human rights apply to everyone—even ruthless dictators



SCOTT
LILWALL

counterpoint

It's not out of line to say that Saddam Hussein was a Class-A asshole. Of course, asshole doesn't begin to describe him adequately—the word can only act as a placeholder, a substitute for the fact that I cannot think of a proper word to express how despicable the man was. Anyone fond of metaphorical language could say that the man was a monster, that he was less than human.

Metaphorically, that works. Literally, however, Saddam possessed the right DNA and knew the secret handshake, so technically he was a human being. As such, he was the proud owner of a fabulous set of human rights, just like anyone else born on this planet. While he might have been guilty of unspeakable evil and countless atrocities, his brutal, inhumane execution was neither necessary nor justified. Nor did it do the world any good.

You're right in saying that we haven't lived through what the Iraqis have been through—obviously, our life in a democratic Canada is nothing compared to what they've had to live through under Hussein's bloody fist. I can certainly understand why Iraqis would celebrate his death so joyously and wish to see him done away with in such a brutal way. But just because it's understandable doesn't mean that it's something we as Canadians should agree with or condone.

The man was paraded before a crowd and hanged while still reciting a prayer. The moments before his death were captured on official video,

while the actual hanging has been spread through the Internet with the speed of a poisonous gas cloud. The atmosphere didn't seem to be one of the killing of a war criminal, but rather that of an 18th-century witch-burning. And what were the benefits of having the man hanged? Of having him suffer and expire in a public forum, instead of spending the rest of his miserable existence in a tiny cell?

Those reasons certainly weren't to benefit Iraq. Saddam's execution hasn't seemed to break the resolve of the supporters of the dictator. In fact, many are saying that he's quickly gone from leader to martyr, and that insurgent violence in the region will likely increase in the following months. As well, I might have to take a quick perusal through my old Civics textbooks, but I don't think a trial criticized by outside observers as being unfair, followed by a rushed, brutal execution, is really the best first step for a nation supposedly on the road to democracy.

So that pretty much leaves us with revenge. Saddam should have been brutally killed because he was an evil son-of-a-bitch, goes the argument, as his own actions stripped him of the right to be treated like a human being. Unfortunately, by deciding arbitrarily who deserves basic human rights and who doesn't, we're using the logic of a dictator. Surely Saddam felt justified when he committed his crimes. Whatever the twisted logic, he felt that it was his right to decide who was deserving of intense suffering. In short, it's hypocritical for the rest of the world to demand the protection of human rights unless they're willing to extend them to every single human being—even those who make our collective stomach turn with their monstrous deeds.

It might be true that those who put Saddam to death were simply following his example. And, considering how despicable an example it was, that's precisely the problem.

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