

The Charm of Saddam: Part 2

Trial, Execution & Aftermath

By Gary Kern

Michael A. Newton & Michael P. Scharf
Enemy of the State: The Trial & Execution of Saddam Hussein
St. Martin's Press. 320 pp. \$7.99 (Kindle)

Will Bardenwerper
The Prisoner in His Palace: Saddam Hussein, His American Guards and What History Leaves Unsaid
Scribner. 247 pp. \$26

Lisa Blaydes
State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein
Princeton University Press. 354 pp. \$35

Ali Khedery
“Why We Stuck with Maliki—and Lost Iraq”
The Washington Post, 3 July 2014;
Frontline Documentaries: “Losing Iraq,” July 2014 & “The Rise of ISIS,” October 2014, updated 2015.

James Risen, et al.,
“The Iran Cables: Leaked Iranian Intelligence Reports Expose Teheran’s Vast Web of Influence in Iraq”
The Intercept, November 2019

The Arraignment

On the morning of 1 July 2004, Saddam Hussein was taken by helicopter from Camp Cropper to Camp Victory and escorted, probably by Humvee, to a building he knew as the Baghdad Clock Tower, which put on display all the gifts he received as president. Recently, however, it had been converted from museum into courtroom, and he entered dramatically to television cameras, reporters, and a newly assembled team of jurors. He was dressed in an outfit that would mark his public transformation: a dark suit and a starched white shirt without tie; his black hair combed, his whitening black beard trimmed, his leaner body looking almost dapper.

This transformation had been effected by his keepers at the prison. Notified two weeks in advance, they had requested special funds, obtained his measurements and those of his eleven co-defendants, and purchased new suits, shirts, belts, shoes, and socks for the lot, plus stylish sunglasses with brand names, probably knock-offs. (FBI Special Agent George Piro bought the suit; another agent clipped the beard and hair.) The purpose was not to pamper Saddam but to show the world that the prisoners fared well in American hands. This was no Abu Ghraib. At the door, as cameras snapped, Saddam stood handcuffed between two burly guards. Tense at first, since he might have expected to face a death sentence, he loosened up when the handcuffs were removed in the courtroom and he learned for sure that he was only being arraigned for a trial. Thereupon, as in his first interrogation, he tried to take charge.

Asked to state his name by Judge Ra'id al-Saedi, a sturdy thirty-five-year-old graduate of Baghdad Law School, sixty-seven-year-old Saddam replied: "I am Saddam Hussein, president of Iraq." The judge sought to correct him: he was the former president of Iraq. Saddam replied that he was still the current president—by the will of the people. Then he asked the judge by what authority he presumed to try him. Judge Ra'id explained that he presided over the Iraqi High Tribunal (IHT), also known as the Iraqi Special Tribunal, a court established under the US-led occupation. (More specifically, it was established by the Iraqi Governing Council under the Coalition Provisional Authority.) Saddam inquired: "So you represent the coalition?" The judge answered that no, he was an Iraqi citizen representing the Iraqi judicial system. He proceeded to read the charges against Saddam: gas attacks on Kurdish villages, mass murders to suppress uprisings, political assassinations, and the invasion of Kuwait. Saddam scoffed: "I don't want to make you feel uneasy, but you know that this is all a theater by the criminal Bush."

And there was the crux of the forthcoming trial: on the one side, the people's striving for justice, the right of the oppressed to form a court and try their captive oppressor; on the other, the formal legitimacy of the head of a sovereign state overthrown by a massive bombing campaign undertaken by a foreign power under false premises. Saddam would insist throughout the trial that the proceedings were a sham, an example of the law of the victors; but the Iraqi jurists would steadfastly observe all the proprieties of a fair legal system, acting in conformity with the principles of its own civil tradition and with those of developing international law. The process was intended as more than the trial of one

tyrant and his accomplices. In the eyes of the jurists it was a step toward a system of justice for the nation and the world. Yet everyone knew the inevitable outcome.

Michael Newton and Michael Scharf, authors of *Enemy of the State: The Trial & Execution of Saddam Hussein*, describe this dynamic beautifully. In an early chapter, “Hammurabi Was an Iraqi: The Creation of the Iraqi Tribunal,” they remind us that it was the ruler of Babylon who produced the legal code that is the historical foundation for law in the Western world. In the 18th century BC the Code of Hammurabi established the principle that an accused person has the right to a fair trial based on evidence and is considered innocent until proven guilty. Hammurabi, like all ancient kings, was merciless to his enemies and generous to his friends, but he planted the seed of justice. Saddam built a palace on the ruins of Babylon in 1987 to emphasize his heritage, but he, too, was merciless and generous as he saw fit. Consequently, the Iraqi legal system was highly refined and produced lawyers of fine sensibilities, but could not live up to its words under Saddam. Under Saddam, most state trials were arbitrary and short. Now the legal system had its chance, and the longing of the highly educated Iraqis for justice was fierce. After Saddam, the other eleven High Value Detainees (HVDs), headed by Ali Hassan al-Majid (“Chemical Ali”), were read the charges against them and unlike their leader remained meek and submissive. Al-Majid even complimented the court. All the accused plead not guilty.

What the Iraqi system lacked for this trial was international law, in particular the categories of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. And so forty-two judges chosen for the Iraqi High Tribunal—Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds—had to learn the legal proceedings of the Nuremberg Court (1945-1946), the Yugoslavia Tribunal (1993), the Rwanda Tribunal (1994), and the International Criminal Court (1998), whose codes and statutes were translated into Arabic; then they had to be trained in current legal practice by a team of international lawyers, including the two authors, by means of lectures, discussions, and mock trials. Meanwhile the Ba’athist insurgency, the Al Qaeda terrorist campaign and the Iraqi civil war were raging. The common people had seen the television coverage of the arraignment and were excited, but wanted swift justice. Under these circumstances, the team of international jurists began the training of Iraqi judges in England.

Building 114

After the hearing, Saddam returned to his cell and yellow notepads at Camp Cropper. The FBI interrogations ended abruptly, but George Piro stuck around until 21 July to help Saddam transition to the new situation. Before leaving, he had a last cigar with him in the courtyard, and felt awkward when the bigger man embraced him and gave him the traditional three kisses on the cheeks. “I never forgot what an evil man he was,” Piro told Garrett Graff, author of *The Threat Matrix*.

Meanwhile, outside of Camp Cropper, in the Green Zone, surrounded by explosions, ambulance sirens, and streets full of wailing people, a new Iraqi government was being formed. Until now, the power in Iraq had been held by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), established by the US Department of Defense in May 2003, following the March invasion. Administrator of the CPA, Bush's man in Baghdad and therefore *de facto* ruler of Iraq had been Paul Bremer, former US Ambassador to the Netherlands. His first two orders, abolishing the Ba'ath Party and the Iraqi army, put tens of thousands of armed men, and also school teachers, out of work and immediately led to the Sunni resistance. Now, a year later, and only three days before Saddam's hearing on 28 June 2004, Bremer had transferred official executive, legislative, and judicial authority to the Iraqi Transitional Government, also created by the CPA. The new body was intended to rule until a democratically-elected government could take over in the new year. Its head was Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, a moderate Shiite, former Ba'athist and expatriate secularist, who would help put an Iraqi face on subsequent events. As the first Iraqi head of state after the removal of Saddam Hussein, he reinstated capital punishment and claimed legal custody over his predecessor. Yet he affirmed that he would not interfere in the judicial process so long as he considered it fair.

This turn of events produced a new legal environment. Bremer returned to the States, having formally ended the occupation before the US election in November, as President Bush had wanted. Of course, the CPA under the US Central Command remained in place with full military power and control in Iraq. Yet the Interim Government had a say in things. It put an end to the FBI interrogation of Saddam and arranged that henceforth Judge Ra'id would interview him and his eleven co-defendants with their lawyers present, so as to compile a dossier of statements for use by the prosecution. Also new National Security Adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie announced the Iraqi government's list of most wanted criminals of the old regime, with Izzat al-Douri standing at No. 1 and Saddam's daughter, Raghad Hussein, at No. 16. She had been granted asylum in Jordan and established her residence in Amman, but despite her most wanted status she succeeded in hiring a team of lawyers for the defense and was managing her father's legal affairs from abroad. Thus the mechanism was put in place for Saddam to be tried under Iraqi law, and ultimately also, in the case of a guilty verdict, to be delivered into Iraqi hands for punishment.

Two weeks later the new government's Human Rights Minister, Bakhtiar Amin, went to observe the former president at Camp Cropper. The US Army still held him, and was not about to release him, but the Iraqi government intended to assert its authority. Amin, educated in Sweden and France, spoke to the press a couple of weeks later, describing Saddam with disdain as a hermit in purple robes tending a tree. "He put some stones around it, and he waters it," said Amin. "It's ironic when you see it, because Saddam is a person who decapitated hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of palm trees." The reference is to the clearing of palm groves in Dujail and elsewhere. Amin also noted that the man who lived in palaces and used to disinfect his hands was now limited to a cot and a shower twice a week. Yet he was healthy, and therefore "he will not escape the trial."

The liaison officer at Camp Cropper was not happy to learn that Amin had named and described the secret facility in the newspapers (i.e., the *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 2004), but it didn't really matter, since plans were underway to move the ex-president to a maximum security prison. The Abu Ghraib scandal was still roiling anti-American sentiment in Iraq, and there was fear that there might be an attempt to free him at Camp Cropper. The choice for his new location was inspired. In his day, Saddam had built nine palaces around the Baghdad International Airport, which then bore his name: the grandiose al-Faw palace in the center for himself and his family, a palace for his Republican Guard, and other palaces and villas for relatives, government officials, and visiting foreign dignitaries. The grounds were adorned with lawns, gardens, and man-made lakes stocked with Tigris carp. The whole layout was designed as a Eastern resort radiating opulence and power, but few visitors could fail to descry the kitsch and shoddy construction suggestive of Las Vegas and its casinos. Saddam, who slept in different locations to avoid assassination, spent less time in this resort than did his sons. It is supremely ironic that one room in the villa known as Uday's palace would turn out to be his last retreat.

When the US-led coalition moved into Baghdad, they seized the area of nine palaces for their center of operations, took Saddam's palace for headquarters and set up Camp Victory. Then, as other military bases arose nearby, they surrounded the whole site with twenty-seven miles of concrete walls and concertina wire, and called the enclosure the Victory Base Complex (VBC). During the period of the US occupation (2003-2011), the VBC was home to tens of thousands of troops, vehicles, weapons, and containerized housing units (CHUs), plus a dining hall, a hospital, an electrical grid, a water purification plant, an incinerator, sports fields, swimming pools, tents with telephone and internet access, American and Turkish department stores, and a row of American chain restaurants including Burger King, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell. The VBC operated as a small city, with "rhino" (reinforced) bus and helicopter transportation between the camps. Camp Cropper was one of the latter, six miles from Camp Victory North.

Uday's palace, redesignated Building 114, was on a little island in one of the lakes inside the latter camp; it was connected to shore by a drawbridge. The building had been hit by a rocket in the first days of the war, but the US military left the exterior in shambles as a subterfuge and built a maximum security prison inside it, with a steel door to Saddam's cell, designated Vic 9D. It had see-through slits at eye level and a sliding slat at belt level for delivery of meals. Behind the door, the white cinder-block room was roughly 8 feet wide, 10 feet long and 12 feet high, without windows. It was exceptionally bare, consisting of a high concrete shelf for the bed, a cylindrical stainless steel sink with a press button for water, and a low stainless steel toilet attached to the sink. Security cameras monitored the cell round the clock. This was the new home that Saddam would have to make his own; he was particularly aggrieved to be watched while sitting on the toilet.

A second plain room—"18 D"—was reserved for Ali Hassan al-Majid ("Chemical Ali"), a third for interrogation and a fourth for random needs. There were no other prisoners. A way down the hall a sharp turn to the left led to an angular concrete

enclosure with a concrete floor below and the open sky above covered by chain link fencing and metal poles: there was no easy access for birds. This misshapen pen would be Saddam's recreation yard. Eventually rectangular boxes of dirt would be added so that he and Chemical Ali could plant flowers and vegetables—with their hands. No gardening tools were allowed.

The remains of the prison can be viewed online in a fifteen-minute video produced by Bob Calvert of TalkingwithHeroes.com. In the video Lt. Col. Jerry Brooks conducts a tour of the abandoned premises in October 2011, two months before the whole Camp Victory Complex was turned over to the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Brooks reports that Saddam was interrogated a total of 65 hours at Building 114, and the sessions were filmed so as to provide proof that he was well treated. These films have not yet come to light. It is not clear who asked the questions, no doubt representatives of the Iraqi government and the Iraqi High Tribunal (IHT). From signs in the video it appears that the US Maryland National Guard and Task Force 134 were involved in the care and security of the two HVDs.

Saddam was moved to the facility some time between the 5th and the 23rd of August 2004, while his caretaker, Robert Ellis, was attending his brother's funeral in St. Louis. Upon his return to Baghdad, Ellis remained at Camp Cropper and was no longer responsible for Victor. He paid a visit to leave some information for the new doctor and was not pleased by the look of the prison. He couldn't believe that the American taxpayers would get stuck with a bill for one million dollars for such a drab makeover. The administration at Building 114, it seems, was not friendly to the old hand and told him that Saddam had had it too good at Camp Cropper. Ellis came back a couple more times, the last time apparently in September. Saddam sat in the cell, cut his supper in half and shared it with him, then guards hustled Ellis away, as some Iraqi officials were coming. Ellis put in a word that Saddam had requested a curtain for privacy while sitting on the can, but never heard back that he got it. This was their last meeting; thus Saddam was unable to fulfill his promise to be his keeper's brother.

Preparations for the Trial

The period after Saddam's move to Building 114 in August 2004 and before the start of his second trial in July 2006 leaves a blank spot in the history of his incarceration. Apparently Ellis and the 439th MP Detachment remained at Camp Cropper and attended to the other HVDs there for the rest of 2004. The Pennsylvania guards, on the other hand, seem to have transferred over to the new prison with Saddam, also till the end of the year. They told *GQ* magazine how their living conditions improved—no rats!—when they moved to a new facility, date and location withheld. Also how Saddam had attempted to maintain his privacy by draping a towel over his red plastic chair and putting it in front of the toilet before he went to the can in his room. And also how Saddam had watered the rec yard so much that the concrete got slippery: Specialist O'Shea nearly stepped on an exposed electrical cable, and Saddam grabbed him and pulled him away, claiming

afterward that he had saved his life. All these accounts seem to refer to the cold concrete prison.

Both the 439th and Charlie Company from Scranton left Iraq at the start of 2005. No account has been found as to who was involved in the daily life and handling of Saddam from that point to the middle of 2006. The external events in his life, however, are well documented for this period. They consist of the preparations for his trial, amply described by Newton and Scharf, and the trial itself, in which Saddam speaks in his own defense and is seen by the world. The period from mid-2006 up to the end of the year is covered in detail by Will Bardenwerper, in *The Prisoner in His Palace*, as we shall see.

After the arraignment on 1 July 2004, it was determined that the Clock Tower would be too small for the larger and lengthier event, so a former Ba'ath Party headquarters, with great marble walls and high ceilings, was remade into a modern and secure court with offices, conference rooms, detention facilities, closed-circuit cameras, internet access, and other enhancements.

Judge Ra'id had been televised only from the back at the arraignment, because he had signed a warrant for the arrest of Muqtada al-Sadr and was already a target for Shiite revenge, but for the trial the judge should be seen from the front, and that called for someone with equal fortitude. White-haired, mustachioed Rizgar Mohammed Amin, a forty-seven-year-old Kurdish regional judge, not a member of the Ba'athist Party, was willing to run the risk of Sunni revenge. The four judges who would sit with him, two on each side, would not be televised from the front. These five judges would decide the guilt or innocence of the defendants. The new courthouse was inside the International Zone (the "Green Zone"), six miles from Camp Victory, but still had to be surrounded by barriers, checkpoints, guards. A system of surveillance, transportation and passes had to be designed. The multiplicity of problems was such that the trial could not get started for a full year and three months.

One area of intense preparation was the collection of evidence. Like the Nazis, the Ba'athists were meticulous in recording all of their legal decisions and actions, so they inadvertently piled up evidence for the future against the leader and his subordinates. In the early 1990s, during Operation Desert Storm in the south and Operation Provide Comfort (the no-fly zone) in the north, US forces and human-rights researchers collected literally tons of materials in Kurdistan, Kuwait, and Southern Iraq. After the March 2003 invasion, US forces added more tons of materials from government buildings, Ba'ath Party headquarters and Mukhabarat archives in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities. The combined materials included state documents, photographs, videotapes, audio recordings, blueprints, personal testimonies, and so on, including Al-Majid's plans for eradicating the southern marshes. As appropriate, these materials were collated, scanned, catalogued, and combined into the Secure Evidence Unit under the purview of the CPA, which drew funds from \$128 million provided by the U.S. Congress for the project of building the IHT. There was no shortage of condemnatory material. There was, in fact, too much.

Therefore, rather than try Saddam for everything at once and run the risk of producing a prolonged and ineffective trial such as the war crimes trial of former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, then proceeding in The Hague (2002-2006), the IHT decided to try Saddam for one discrete case in which the huge body of evidence was absolutely conclusive. That case was the persecution and obliteration of Dujail, a village off of Highway 1 halfway between Baghdad and Tikrit in the north. It was named after a tributary of the Tigris River, which ran through it, and was devoted to farming. The authors describe it idyllically: “In a country largely made up of vast deserts of gritty sand, Dujail was known as a lush place of palm groves, citrus trees and grapevines Shiites and Sunnis lived together in peace, and the people of Dujail enjoyed a good standard of living”

There was, however, a problem. The oppositional political party, al-Dawa al-Islamiyah (“The Islamic Call”), had taken root in the village. It was founded in 1957 at the end of the pro-British monarchy for the purpose of attracting the Shiite youth, dissuading them from joining the Communist and Ba’ath parties, and promoting a resurgence of Islamic faith and culture in the country. Its long-term aim was to counter secular and socialist currents in society and ultimately to establish a Shiite theocracy in Iraq. After Saddam’s rise to power, it waged an underground war against his regime and suffered massive harassment and persecution in response. In early 1979, it supported the success of the Iranian revolution and moved its headquarters to Tehran. The following year, in March, Saddam’s Revolutionary Command Council banned the party, made membership in it a capital offense and sentenced those who fled abroad to death in absentia. In April, al-Dawa retaliated with an assault on Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, wounding him and killing several others with a grenade in central Baghdad. Eight days later the Mukhabarat arrested, tortured, and executed one of the founders of al-Dawa, the theologian and scholar Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, who had been living under house arrest. He was reportedly forced to watch the torture and execution of his sister before himself enduring a fiendish killing too horrible to describe. In September 1980, Iraq went to war with Iran, adding the attack on Aziz to the list of its causes. During the war, al-Dawa sided with Iran and carried out terrorist operations against Iraqi targets.

It was a sunny day in early July 1982 when Saddam decided to stop by the village of Dujail on his way up north. What happened that day was filmed, what happened afterward was recorded in official documents, and the progressive obliteration of the village could be observed by satellite. Survivors were available more than 20 years later to lend their personal testimony to the prosecution of a crime against humanity. Saddam came to Dujail in a five-car convoy, riding in a white Mercedes with bulletproof windows. He wore his familiar green beret, khaki uniform, and insignia of an army general. The people gathered, children were let out of school, shopkeepers closed shop and joined the throngs. All smiled and cheered. Saddam got out of his car near the Ba’ath headquarters, mingled with the crowd, and gave a speech from the second floor. Then he returned to the car and headed north for a scheduled stop at a newly built clinic. Shots rang out from behind a wall in a date grove. Saddam’s guards shot back, the attackers escaped, and Saddam, seemingly unperturbed, continued on to the clinic, where he gave another speech and assured the terrified villagers that there would be no reprisals. “We

distinguish between the people of Dujail and a small number of traitors in the village,” he said.

Yet he began at once to question people and have them taken away. An hour later his half-brother, Barzan al-Tikriti, head of the Mukhabarat, arrived with tanks and helicopters, and blasted the town and the farms; military units sealed off the village. Saddam left, but Barzan continued to make arrests and conduct interrogations for the next three days. Three hundred people—men, women, and children—were sent to the Mukhabarat’s dreaded Hakimiya prison in Baghdad; some died there; more than a hundred confessed to a conspiracy and were sent to Abu Ghraib for processing. Three months after the attack, the orchards and vineyards of Dujail were uprooted and removed, and the ground was bulldozed. Five-thousand acres of farmland were turned into wasteland, and two thousand villagers—those not killed—turned into beggars. Hundreds went into exile.

In 1984 Saddam signed 148 men, including more than a dozen boys, over to the Revolutionary Command Council Court, and the court (without a trial) found them guilty of conspiracy against the state and sentenced them to be hanged. In 1987 al-Dawa tried again to kill Saddam, but failed. In court he and his co-defendants would argue that the state had reacted legally to an attempted assassination of the head, but neither the state’s right to defend itself, nor the leader’s right to defend himself, was called into question. It was the outsized nature of the response, the arbitrary and indiscriminate use of force that was the crime against humanity.

The Dujail Trial

The Dujail trial began on 19 October 2005 and lasted until 27 July 2006, with thirty-six sessions held over the nine-month period. Saddam was tried with seven others, four being low-level functionaries who carried out orders, three being high officials who gave them. The four low functionaries sat in the back bench of the dock; two of the three officials sat in the middle bench. The latter were Barzan Ibrahim al-Hassan al-Tikriti, head of the Mukhabarat, which conducted the interrogations; and Taha Yassin Ramadan, head of the Popular Army, which destroyed the farms and orchards of Dujail. The third of the three officials, Awad Hamad al-Bandar, sat in the front row next to Saddam; he was the head of the state court responsible for the verdict and sentencing of the 148 accused. Although the action of al-Bandar was not a military attack, it was regarded as integral to “a widespread and systematic attack directed against a civilian population,” and therefore qualified as a crime against humanity. Saddam and the top three would all be found guilty and executed; three of the lesser four would receive lesser sentences; one of the four would go free for lack of evidence. (Chemical Ali and three others were reserved for the Anfal trial, which began on 21 August 2006.)

In the first session in October 2005 Saddam disputed the legitimacy of the trial, but after harassing the court at length entered a plea of not guilty. The prosecution announced

that it would enter into the record orders signed by Saddam for the punishment of Dujail, indicating that he would be convicted on the basis of documental evidence. The defense requested more time to prepare its case and received a continuance of forty days. The next day a lawyer for Awad al-Bandar was pulled from his car in the city and shot, and in early November a lawyer for Taha Ramadan was also shot. The court had to take up these problems when the second session began on 28 November, offering various methods of protection for the defense. The court also played the government film of that fateful day in Dujail for those present and for the world audience following the television broadcast with a twenty-minute delay. The trial was off to a bumpy start, and it would get bumpier still.

One of Saddam's lawyers was Ramsey Clark, an attorney general in President Lyndon Johnson's administration, who, after leaving office in January 1969, had joined the anti-Vietnam War movement and begun to espouse progressive and radical causes.

Clark specialized in representing unpopular and even detested figures, such as exiled Liberian President Charles Taylor (in 1984); Bosnian Serb General Radovan Karadžić, called "the Butcher of Bosnia" (in 1995); and President of Serbia and Yugoslavia Slobodan Milošević (2002-2006). When he saw the captured Saddam on TV being subjected to a dehumanizing search for lice, Clark immediately feared that he would not get a fair trial and volunteered to represent him.

"I did it," he told the *Observer*, "because obviously these cases are extremely important in terms of history and in terms of reconciliation of peoples, and in terms of belief in truth and justice as a priority over force and violence. It's about addressing the concept of victor's justice, which is only the exercise of power. If you really want peace, you have to satisfy people about the honor of your purpose."

Clark met with chief attorney Najib al-Nuaimi, chosen by Saddam's daughter, and was added to the team. It was his view that it was not Saddam Hussein who should be on trial, but the United States of America—for its unlawful invasion, its bloody siege of Fallujah, its torture at Abu Ghraib prison, and the death and destruction it spread everywhere. Accordingly, on the second day of the trial, he and al-Nuaimi raised the question of the legitimacy of the trial and were stopped short by Judge Rizgar's polite assurance that this question would be answered at the proper time. In the judge's mind, however, the proper time meant at the end of the trial. Newton and Scharf comment that had the court's decision been produced at the start, the defense would have been forced to attend to the actual charges against them. As it was, they were stuck with their protest and continued to make it over and over again. Here and there they disputed details of the charges, but they failed to present a consistent and coherent counter to the steady advance of the evidence.

The authors of *Enemy of the State* describe all the disputation, tactics, high and low points of the thirty-six sessions. Saddam had studied the Milošević trial and adopted similar tactics for disrupting the proceedings. The defense tried repeatedly to turn the trial into a farce, and often succeeded. The public was confused by the liberties allowed the

defense and did not understand the court's tactic of being fair to a fault. Pressure was put on Judge Rizgar for his indulgence, and he resigned in January 2006. His replacement, Rauf Rashid Abdul Rahman, took a belligerent approach, prompting louder protests and even boycotts from the defense. The change of personnel and approach produced greater confusion and doubt among the public.

The IHT failed to foresee the need for an outreach program and left the public in the dark. Yet the evidence kept piling up, and Saddam, with his pride, got tired of the haggling over who was responsible.

He had a problem: to disclaim responsibility and leave the impression that he had not been in charge, or to insist that he had been in charge and indict himself. He took the second option. On 1 March 2006, the fourteenth day of the trial, he declared:

If I hadn't wanted to, I wouldn't have sent them [the villagers] to the Revolutionary Court. But I did, and they were charged according to the law When a person says he's responsible, why go to others and search? Saddam Hussein was the leader, and he says: 'I'm responsible.'

Again, on 26 July 2006, the 35th day of the trial, he insisted: "The Iraqi army is without a single plane that could fly without my order." Thus he claimed the responsibility and argued the losing position that the court had no right to try him. He had no less doubt about the outcome than did the public. His purpose was to make a memorable last stand.

In addition to Saddam's self-incriminations, the prosecution presented a mass of documents to prove its charges that Saddam had ordered the attacks on the village of Dujail, its buildings and its palm groves; the obliteration of its fields and waterways; and the arrest, detention, and interrogation of hundreds of its residents. He awarded the men who carried out his orders and signed the protocols for the execution of 148 men and boys. Since there was so much documentation, the closing statement of the prosecution was brief, while the closing statements of the defendants came in the nature of personal complaints.

Excerpts from the Dujail trial can be watched in the C-SPAN video archive and on YouTube. At least two documentary films can be watched online: the ten-minute "Tragi-Comedy of Saddam's Trial" (2006), and the hour-long "America at a Crossroads: The Trial of Saddam Hussein" (2008). The trial's difficulties and especially the ragged execution of Saddam produced a bad impression internationally, and Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and other human-rights organizations declared that the proceedings did not meet the minimal standards of a fair trial.

Nevertheless, the authors of *Enemy of the State* argue for its success. The most important fact was that the trial actually took place, the dictator whose word was law was brought into a courtroom and made to submit to a higher law, and this was instructive to everyone who saw the broadcast. Saddam, of course, played to the cameras and often

scored points with his sharp repartee. He made self-serving statements and railed against the foreign invaders, yet he could not talk away the overwhelming evidence of his guilt, and even gave testimony against himself. These plain facts could not easily override the immediate impressions of a messy affair, but they might endure. The authors recall that the Nuremberg trials of the Nazis, today considered a monument of jurisprudence, were considered a travesty of justice in their time, an arbitrary verdict imposed on the defeated by the victors. Only decades later did they acquire their present status as a foundation for the rebirth of Europe and a guide to a code of universal justice. And so the authors and like-minded humanists hold out hope for the trial of Saddam and the future of the Middle East.

The Last American Guard

During the Dujail trial, from October 2005 to July 2006, Saddam was guarded at Building 114 and taken to and from the IHT courthouse by military personnel not yet identified. Once this trial was concluded, the writing was on the wall, and Washington feared again that there might be attempts at a rescue. At the same time sectarian strife had escalated to a fever pitch, and assassination attempts were conceivable. Accordingly, a special force of military police (MPs) was assembled in Baghdad that summer, most of its members young army men who, like interrogator Eric Maddox and some of the Pennsylvania Guardsmen, had been inspired by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to volunteer for service, but wound up in Iraq. They lived in CHUs and familiarized themselves with the territory by guarding convoys, hospitals, and the US Embassy, not knowing their ultimate assignment. Receiving that assignment in August, they were told that they could not tell anyone, could not keep any notes, and should not fraternize with the prisoner. Amazed by the high-level task for which they'd been chosen, they took it head-on, calling themselves "the Super Twelve."

Their story is told by Will Bardenwerper in *The Prisoner in His Palace*. It is an exceptionally fine piece of writing, thoroughly researched, concisely narrated, with a sensitive, even poetical appreciation of the people and issues involved. Unlike much other writing on Saddam, it is very specific as to locations, procedures, and details. Some of the author's discoveries, based on more than a hundred interviews, have informed the preceding account.

Regarding the prison fortress with moat, the Super Twelve called it "the Rock," making reference to Alcatraz. They noticed the sign "Vic 9D" outside his cell and decided that "Vic" stood for "Very Important Criminal." They were assigned to eight-hour stints of watching him round the clock. Generally this meant one man sitting in the hall at a guard station (desk and chair) close to the cell with the door left open or ajar. Other men were close by, down the hall. There was no fear that Saddam would try to break out. He knew exactly where he was (as he had hinted to Ellis), and therefore could surmise that there were soldiers at the moat, on the bridge, and for miles and miles around. During his stay, the Super Twelve supplied him with the necessities and made

sure the prison was secure, both inside and out. They were kept alert by mortar fire that sometimes came into the base.

While the Dujail trial was awaiting its verdict, a second trial began on 21 August 2006 for one of Saddam's larger crimes. Now he, together with Chemical Ali Hassan and three others, was charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes for his role in the Anfal military campaign against the Kurds, resulting in 50,000-100,000 deaths from 1987-1988. At this point the Super Twelve became responsible for transporting him to and from the IHT courthouse in the Green Zone. Leaving the Rock, they would give Saddam a twenty-minute notice, since he got cranky if he had to rush, and, besides, he wanted to water the weeds before leaving; and then, carrying his duffel bag and his garment bag with two suits, all provided by the Army, they would conduct him to a Humvee waiting outside. Even though surrounded by the huge base, they were in full battle rattle, their automatic rifles locked and loaded. Half the group secured the territory outside the Rock, then the other half came out with the prisoner.

The drive to the landing pad took only a few minutes, and the flight in two Black Hawk helicopters took only ten. After sundown they wore night-vision goggles. Only Saddam was taken anywhere by helicopter; the other HVDs in the Dujail trial were consigned to a Humvee or rhino bus. (It would seem that Chemical Ali, confined in the same prison, would have flown with Saddam for the second trial, but I could find no confirmation.)

At the IHT courthouse, when the sessions were day by day, Saddam stayed overnight in an underground prison so dark and creepy that the Super Twelve called it "the Crypt." It had a concrete hallway with a row of single cells, the side of each made of concrete from the floor to waist level, then with Plexiglas from there to the top, so that the prisoner could be observed from a distance at all times. In addition there were closed-circuit cameras for the cells so that the entire set could be observed on a panel at a monitoring station above.

For the Anfal trial, Saddam's co-defendants were those involved in the dreadful campaign, notably Chemical Ali, who drew up the plan for al-Anfal ("The Spoils of War"). Saddam's cell was at the end of the corridor. At night one of the Super Twelve was required to sit near the cell and keep visual contact with him during an eight-hour shift. The others slept in dark quarters at the other end, awaiting their turn.

The monitoring station kept watch, and a roving guard would stop by from time to time and check up on the watcher. During the day, Saddam was under constant guard by court bailiffs, but was able to consult with his old henchmen and with his lawyers in a conference room.

Once Saddam returned to the Rock, the regime became more relaxed. At first the crew kept to orders and didn't communicate with him except through his bulky Lebanese interpreter called "Joseph." But occasionally he would ask a question through Joseph about one or another of them: Where are you from? How are things going? The soldiers

were told to keep their ward content so he would go smoothly through the trial—so they responded. Brief conversations began. Bardenwerper relates a story that Tucker, the youngest of the Twelve, told about Saddam:

I'd seen him on TV, waving AKs up in the air and stuff. And now he's in a cell. And I just looked at him. Then he'd look up at me, and I'd look away real quick . . . and then he'd look at me real fast. He was messing with me. He finally looked up at me real fast, and he said: 'I got you!' Then he started laughing. And I was like, 'Yes, sir!'

This moment broke the ice. Tucker was surprised not only by the childish game, but by Saddam speaking English. They started chatting. In the course of the late summer they were talking like buddies.

Saddam broke the ice with each man, so that all discovered his friendly, down-to-earth side. They marveled at his ability to enjoy the simple pleasures: The omelette they brought him each morning, which he insisted should be in one round piece and not "torn." He ate it, then a muffin, then fruit. The old radio he acquired, which picked up Iraqi and American pop music. His books and the yellow pads on which he incessantly scribbled. An exercise bike: when he used it he joked that he had to keep in shape to be ready for his escape.

He also had a little heater that he carried out into the rec yard when it was cold. The yard was closed in by high concrete walls topped with chain link fence, but it gave a view of the sky. Here again he watered weeds, this time in a planter box. He was given seeds for flowers and vegetables. In the evenings he sat in a plastic chair cushioned by a puffy jacket to protect his bad back. A couple of guards would join him and Joseph, and they would all tell stories and reminisce.

With the Special Twelve he was given the freedom to come and go from his cell—the door was usually left open. He could access his things in the spare cell and walk to the rec yard pretty much as he wished. He would go and invite others in, as though he were the host and they his guests. Often he would offer a cigar—a Cohiba, his favorite. His daughter sent him "Care packages" from Jordan that were assumed to include cigars, but still it was curious that he always had a supply.

After his demise the unit's expense for cigars raised an inquiry. The Field Ordering Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel William Steele, explained that High Value Detainee #1 got whatever he wanted, including dry cleaning before his court appearances. His Cuban cigars were considered "Mission Essential." Unfortunately, Steele also allowed Saddam and other detainees to use his cell phone to make unauthorized calls in Arabic. In October 2007 he was discharged from the US Army and sentenced to two years in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Saddam had a special look that could influence people. Bardenwerper quotes a woman who was close to his family in her childhood:

When you did something to cause Uncle Amo's admiration, he would shine his eyes on you. We all knew that shining-eye look and sought it out. It was the prize, the deposit you put in the bank against a dry spell.

Everyone, of course, wondered whether he was being played, but ultimately began to feel that the peasantry old man was real, or a real other side of the coin. Bardenwerper cites many instances of his baffling duality of character. Most amazing was his transformation from raging president in the courtroom to laughing comrade of his guards in the crypt. He would come out of the courtroom full of bluster and rage, and laugh heartily when he joined the guards in the elevator. In the courtroom he had called for the insurgents to kill the foreign invaders, but going down he would tell the Americans it was all just for show.

The Verdict

Given the abundance of documents, recordings and testimony, plus his own self-incriminating statements, it is no wonder that Saddam Hussein was found guilty by unanimous decision of the court and sentenced to 10 years for torture, 10 years for forced deportation, and death by hanging for the willful killing of men and boys from Dujail. His plea at the end of the Dujail trial to face a firing squad as "a military man," and not be hanged "as a common criminal," was rejected. The sentence was read on 5 November 2006, more than three months after the trial had ended. Saddam, forced to stand for the verdict, held up his finger to the Court and yelled: "Long live the people! Long live the Arab nation! Down with spies!" And the rallying cry: "God is great!"

As the judge ran on at great speed, he yelled out sporadically, shaking his green Koran: "Damn you! You are the enemies of humanity . . . You are puppets!" Ushered from the courtroom, he kept on yelling: "Long live the Kurds! Long live the Arabs!" Judge Rauf Abdul Rahman also sentenced Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti, Saddam's half-brother and head of the Mukhabarat, and Awad al-Bandar, head of the Revolutionary Court, to death by hanging for crimes against humanity.

As of this date, 5 November 2006, he was already well into the second trial, begun on 21 August. On 3 December the defense appealed the sentencing of Saddam and the others to the Appeals Chamber. The appeal process was expected to take long enough for the Anfal trial to conclude, but already on 26 December the appeal was denied and the sentence upheld. Consequently, the charges against Saddam in the Anfal trial were dropped so that his punishment for Dujail could proceed forthwith. It was mandated to take place within 30 days.

The Shiite Execution

With the denial of the appeal, John Nixon was put on Saddam watch at CIA headquarters in Langley. The American government was committed to turning Saddam over to the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki, but had asked it to delay the execution until after the year-end religious holiday, Eid al-Adha (“the Feast of the Sacrifice”). As Nixon understood the situation, both the State Department and Defense Department had to approve Saddam’s release, but both the US ambassador to Iraq and his deputy were in America for Christmas, and the acting ambassador was left with instructions to sign nothing until they returned. Nevertheless, she signed the release. Nixon opines that the US Army in Iraq wanted to unload him as soon as possible and be done with him, and the Shiite government of al-Maliki, one of the leaders of the al-Dawa Party, couldn’t wait to get their hands on him. But possibly Nixon lacked inside information. According to the documentary “America At a Crossroads,” Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice provided the override to end all controversy. Of course, she could not have made this decision on her own. It was a presidential decision.

The men at Camp Victory in Baghdad received the news on the evening of Friday, 29 December, just as Saddam was finishing his supper—unexpectedly his last meal. The men had fetched him lobster tails from the Coalition Café. The execution was set for the next morning, a date disrespectful of the religious holiday. No one told him the news, so that he could enjoy his usually peaceful sleep. One of the Super Twelve disabled his radio so that he wouldn’t unexpectedly hear a report. At about 3 AM, 30 December, Joseph the interpreter entered his cell, turned on the light and delivered the bad news: it was time to get ready. Saddam took it with equanimity. He bathed in cold water at his sink to purify himself, chose his socks carefully, and doused himself with cologne. Then he sat down and looked at his cell, “as if taking an inventory of his small collection of belongings,” writes Bardenwerper. He made a check of his yellow pads, filled with poems and memoirs, then left them, instructing the American team to collect his possessions and turn them over to his lawyers so that they could be delivered to his family.

Bardenwerper describes a series of poignant farewells: Saddam selects his best suit, notices the men gathering near his cell, shakes the hand of each and praises them as the best friends in the world. Finally he insists on giving “Hutch” his expensive Raymond Weil watch, holding his hand and wrapping it from his wrist to Hutch’s. (The watch must have been sent by his wife or daughter through his lawyers after Piro left with his power watch.) He stands tall and says he will die like a soldier.

Then they go out into a bitterly cold morning in full battle rattle, maintaining the standard drill. The men, however, are on even higher alert, aware that if there’s going to be an attempted escape, it will be now. They take a Humvee to the landing pad, two Black Hawk helicopters to Camp Justice, located in the Kadhimiya district of Baghdad next to the Tigris River, then a rhino bus to an old Iraqi military intelligence headquarters set up as a gallows. Saddam gets out stiffly, with head high, wearing handcuffs and clutching the Koran he had flourished in court. There are a dozen men waiting: officials, guards, executioners, camera men.

The Super Twelve were ordered not to enter the building so that there could be no mistake as to who was conducting the execution. They were also told that they could not interfere in what took place after they released him. Saddam had providentially told them that he did not blame them for any duty they had to perform—it's just a job. At about 5:30 AM, they turned "Vic" over to al-Maliki's national security advisor, Mowaffak al-Rubaie, one of the directors of the al-Dawa Party.

For him the morning would be a personal triumph. He had been tortured three times by the Mukhabarat in the 1970s and fled to London in 1979, after which he was sentenced to death in absentia. Returning to Baghdad after the US invasion, he was appointed by the CPA to the Iraqi Governing Council, and now was acting as liaison with the American authorities. His was the honor of leading Saddam to the gallows. It was a ramshackle affair, made of cinder block and metal slats, leaving gaps in the structure so that the Super Twelve could hear a lot and catch partial glimpses of the proceedings from outside.

Al-Rubaie took Saddam to a room where a judge read him the sentence. Al-Rubaie asked Saddam if he was ready and treated him with respect. Then three executioners took him up a flight of stairs to the scaffold with a thick dangling noose and a trapdoor. They wore ski masks and ordinary jackets and pants. An Iraqi government cameraman standing on the platform started filming the moment they reached the top of the stairs and continued as they led him slowly to the trapdoor and placed a soft cloth, then the rough noose around his neck. He refused the hood and stood erect, so that his person stood out against the shorter, anonymous men.

One of the executioners, in the foreground, checked to make sure the noose was tight and stood back with his outstretched right hand still touching it. Here the video freezes and stops. This silent film is a minute and a half long and can be viewed online. But it doesn't show the whole thing. Someone smuggled in a cell phone, which was prohibited, and it began filming a minute earlier from the bottom of the stairs and stopped filming after the ritual was done. It is two and a half minutes long, has sound and can also be viewed online.

Once the noose was around Saddam's neck, his Shiite captors burst out shouting: "Muqtada! Muqtada!" (A reference to Muqtada al-Sadr.) Saddam chastened them: "Do you consider yourself men?"—and smiled mockingly. The captors yelled back, lights flashed and sense was lost in an exchange of insults. Then Saddam turned away from the noise and began to recite the Shahada, the Islamic credo: "There is only one God . . ." On the second verse, the trapdoor was released, and his body dropped with startling speed. It remained hanging and apparently swinging for some moments while the cell-phone camera swirled around under the scaffold, catching frames of the head and crooked neck as lights flashed, then all went black. What followed was that a doctor, probably al-Rubaie, a neurologist, listened to the chest with a stethoscope and pronounced Sadam Hussein dead at 6:03 AM. Then the body was cut down, wrapped in a white sheet and dragged outside.

Outside, the Super Twelve heard a tremendous crash and saw the body being dragged to the Humvee. Bardenwerper describes the scene from the memories of the American guards:

Before the corpse could be loaded [into the Humvee], though, a crowd of frenzied Iraqis formed a conga line around it, dancing wildly, chanting with unrestrained joy, and spitting on and kicking the wrapped flesh of the leader they'd loathed. Specialist Rogerson couldn't believe they had to stand by idly as the Iraqis were "shooting into the sky, screaming, carrying him, kicking the shit out of his dead body . . .

A photo later emerged that showed the neck of the body ripped open, either by the rough noose or a knife. There were also reports that the body had been stabbed multiple times, but al-Rubaie and another official present at the event denied it. Yet another video appeared of the scene outside the gallows where the Shia are dancing and the body appears inside a vehicle with windows. It is shown at the end of the film "America at a Crossroads."

In the last chapter of *The Prisoner in His Palace*, Bardenwerper lists the lasting psychological effects on the men forced to stand and allow sacrilege to the body of an old prisoner they had guarded and couldn't help but admire. One after the other they would experience post-traumatic stress, marital problems, unemployment, incommunicability. Shortly after the execution, the Iraqi government released its film to TV networks around the world. But the secretly recorded video was released immediately afterward, and it went viral on the Internet. Nixon saw it and was appalled: "We had come to Iraq saying that we would make things better. We would bring democracy and the rule of law," he wrote in *Debriefing the President*. "And here we were, allowing Saddam to be hanged in the middle of the night."

George Piro saw it and was appalled. "When the most dignified person at an execution is the person being executed," he remarked, "it does not speak well of the event." President Bush saw it and said he got no satisfaction from it. "I'm not a revengeful man," he told CBS's *60 Minutes*. No one who saw the video could escape the impression that Saddam's executioners were a lynch mob and the tyrant maintained his pride and his poise. He had changed in prison, like a Shakespearean king, and though unrepentant he played his death for the ages.

The Super Twelve drove back to Camp Victory and Building 114, and the body was taken by helicopter to Prime Minister al-Maliki's residence in the Green Zone. Al-Rubaie made the delivery and received his superior's blessing. Then the body was flown north to Tikrit and turned over to the head of the Al-Bu Nasir tribe, to which Saddam belonged. Subsequently it was buried in a prepared vault in the nearby village of Al-Awja, Saddam's precise birthplace, next to his sons, and the mausoleum became a site of pilgrimage for his followers. Chemical Ali Hassan, found guilty of genocide and hanged in January 2007, was buried in the same cemetery.

Meanwhile al-Rubaie requested the noose, got it and kept it as a trophy. He put it in a corner of his office, around the neck of the 200-pound head that had been broken off from Saddam's statue in Firdos Square, and dragged by a chain through the street as people batted it with their shoes. That was on 9 April 2003.

Rubaie had collected the head after a US soldier was stopped trying to ship it home on a C-130 transport plane. In a *Time* magazine photo of his corner, it looks restored and painted. Years later, in 2014, according to Bardenwerper, Al-Bu Nasir tribesmen in Al-Awja feared the approach of Shiite militias with bad intentions, so they moved Saddam's remains to a secret location, after which the Shiites arrived and thoroughly devastated and desecrated the grave. According to Wikipedia, Saddam's mausoleum was blown to bits during the 2015 battle of Tikrit between the armies of the new Iraq and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). (Al-Sham means the Levant.) After six weeks of fighting, the government of Iraq retook the city and the forces of ISIS moved elsewhere.

The State and Its Subjects

The dichotomy in the life of Saddam Hussein, displayed again and again, is that of a good man and a horribly bad man in the same body. A compassionate man, sympathizing with another he calls his brother; an inhumanly callous man, insisting that an offender's tongue be cut out at the root. Could it be that a man can embody two seemingly incompatible states of mind, two modes of behavior, for two different kinds of situations, and can perform them sincerely when one or the other applies? Could he be the same as you and I, as George Piro said—a common man, and then a very rare man, a dictator? If so, could each of us be a dictator, charmed by absolute power over a body politic, over an individual body, if we had the chance?

The charm of Saddam is worrisome, because we like men with charm and attribute good things to them. Could this charming dictator be the same as a Western-style president, save that he lacks the experience of a democratic congress or parliament, a free press and a free electorate, and also of the restraints they impose? Even with these restraints, the democratic president, especially in the form of commander-in-chief, can make decisions that kill great numbers of people for reasons of state. What if these restraints were removed? One way or the other, whether democrat or tyrant, the head of a superpower state in modern times seems to involve killing in the thousands. Usually the dictator kills thousands of people at home who are regarded as dissidents, while the democrat kills thousands of people abroad who are regarded as enemies, or friends of enemies.

The question of what motivates these actions often looks beyond the scope of the individual head of state and considers the large-scale, supra-personal forces of history, economics, and political necessity that hold the state together, and also the human forces that constitute the citizenry—their ethnicities, cultures, languages, religious beliefs,

needs, and demands. This is the approach of *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*. Author Lisa Blaydes presents her study as two books in one. The first is a description of the “autocratic governance structures” operating in Iraq under the Ba’ath Party of Saddam Hussein; the mechanics of its gaining, maintaining, and ultimately losing the “investment” (allegiance) of its subject population; and the effect of its actions, including repression, on the ethnic, sectarian, and tribal identities of groups within the population.

Supporting the description is an apparatus of empirical data: statistics, charts, and graphs, but also personal testimonies and illustrative accounts of individuals involved in this interactive process. Since the reader must often imagine the human experience and suffering behind the numbers, percentages, and selected testimonies, this layer forms a sort of “shadow book” about the life of a nation ruled by a ruthless dictator. In other words, the book focuses on the macro-forces, and the reader must imagine the micro: the human beings struggling within their own range of experience. The dynamic arising between these two sides, the state and its subjects, produces the history of Ba’athist Iraq from 1968 to 2003.

To construct this macro-history, Blaydes, author of an earlier book on Hosni Mubarak’s Egypt, pored through huge collections of Iraqi state documents captured during the 1991 Kurdish and Shiite uprisings and after the 2003 overthrow of the regime. These collections include the Captured Iraqi Secret Police Files housed at the University of Colorado (Boulder), seized by the Kurds, consisting of documents, military maps, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs (5.5 million pages, 18 tons); the Saddam Hussein Collection at the National Defense University (Washington, DC), consisting of government documents, tapes, and transcriptions of the leader conversing with senior officials (800 docs/29,000 pp.); the Ba’ath Party Records at the Hoover Institution in Palo Alto, California, consisting of administrative, investigative, and personnel records (11 millions docs); and the oral history project of the Iraq Memory Foundation, also at Hoover (recordings of 190 individuals).

In addition, she lists roughly 300 publications—books and articles—on modern Iraq, including the book by John Nixon and the FBI memos generated by George Piro. The result is a scholarly exposition with specialist terminology, such as “endogenize,” “exogeneity,” and “cross-sectional variation,” but in the main a concisely worded analysis, with clear and simple concepts, of the complex and monumental disaster of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

Its main thesis, repeated with variations in every chapter of the book, is that an autocratic state needs ample funds and resources if it is to win the investment of its subjects, which it can do with public works, state employment, and an equitable distribution of goods and services for the general public; but if funds dry up, the investment of its citizens recedes, and the state tries to recover it by exhortation, propaganda, regulation, and force. In the case of Iraq, when the wealth was there, the state spread it in a way that gained the allegiance of the people across the spectrum of ethno-sectarian divisions; when, however, the resources were reduced by shocks to the

system, namely, wars, fluctuations in the global market, and economic sanctions imposed on the state from without, then the unequal allocations of goods and rewards, the uncomfortable restrictions in the standard of living, and the burdensome demands made on some sectors of the society produced various forms of non-compliance or resistance, and in some cases inspired rebellious feelings and violent unrest.

The regime, sensing this turn, sought to identify resistant or dissident groups, but since minorities, speakers of foreign languages, and dwellers in remote or poorly accessible regions of the country were not entirely “legible,” and therefore frustrated attempts at monitoring, the government resorted to “collective punishment” in an attempt to stamp out dissent. The police state emerged in all its brutality and arrested whole families to catch one slacker or deserter, punished a whole tribe to stop one unknown critic or disseminator of rumors, depopulated mountain villages in the north and drained marshes in the south to prevent the ferment of rebellion. Under assault, the people adopted survival strategies that ranged from armed opposition to silent resistance, from insincere cheering to opportunistic volunteering, from cynically joining the party to collaborating with its hated policies. The regime at this stage trusted no one and aimed for totalitarian control, but with depleted resources could only increase its brutality and inspire counterrevolution and assassination attempts.

This thesis, combined with the great wealth of data assembled by Blaydes, produces a downhill trajectory for the history of Saddam’s Iraq. In the early 1970s the Ba’ath regime embarked on a project of nation building funded by oil revenues. The oil industry was nationalized in 1972, and the price of oil went up on the international market in 1973, so that it was possible to pave roads, expand electrical grids, and extend free health care and education to the people. All the social benefits for which Saddam claimed the credit in his FBI interrogation came at this time. (Blaydes takes note of the FBI memo.) This was a period of high public investment in the regime: people welcomed the secular welfare state, depended on it, and nurtured rising expectations for the future. In 1979, Saddam, then vice-president, took over the Ba’ath Party with his Stalin-style coup, and the personal element entered into the macro-equation with a category that Blaydes calls “miscalculation.”

Reacting to the Iranian revolution, the militancy of al-Dawa, and the Shiite attempt to assassinate Tariq Aziz, he decided to go to war, assuming that Iraq, with its superior technology and military arsenal, could roll over Iran, failing to account for Iran’s greater population—three times the size of Iraq’s. The object of the invasion in September 1980 was not only to punish Iran for political machinations and border violations, but also to reclaim certain water rights and to seize the province of Khuzestan, which had a large Arab population and a long coastline that could be used to export oil.

On the battlefield, however, mass waves of Iranian soldiers swept over the Iraqis and, despite heavy losses, began to push them back, so that the war lasted far longer than expected and turned from foreign conquest into defense of the homeland. At the same time it ate up the profits from oil production faster than they could be replenished. When the price of oil fell on the world market in 1986, the bottom fell out of the state budget,

and Iraq became a borrower nation. By war's end two years later, the military adventure had consumed more than twice the oil revenues collected in the preceding sixty years, beginning the war with a \$35 billion surplus and ending with an \$80 billion debt. The nation-building project was finished.

Here again the category of miscalculation or hubris worsened the situation. Saddam decided to occupy and pillage Kuwait, which had refused to forgive billions of dollars of debt and to join the OPEC cartel in an agreement to slow down oil production and drive up the international prices. At first he consulted with his military commanders, but they were hesitant to express reservations for his plan. Even so, "hundreds of officers," reports Bayles, were "killed" later in the year 1990, evidently for incurring his displeasure. She does not mention the significant meeting in July 1990 between Saddam, Tariq Aziz, and American Ambassador April Glaspie, in which President George H. W. Bush's envoy stated: "We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait." Some commentators take this statement to be a "green light" given by Washington for Saddam to go ahead and attack. One week later, on 2 August 1990, Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait and began to plunder, but immediately felt the superior weight of US "Operation Desert Storm" in the form of 88,500 tons of bombs dropped on Iraq and Iraqi-occupied Kuwait, and suffered a humiliating defeat.

Retreating back to within its own borders, the broken Iraqi army witnessed the destruction of ninety percent of the nation's power stations, railroads, and other infrastructure, driving Saddam to the brink of a nervous breakdown. On 15 February 1991, the Iraqi people were encouraged by President George H. W. Bush "to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside and then comply with the United Nations' resolutions and rejoin the family of peace-loving nations." This encouragement was followed by a direct appeal to rise up and overthrow Saddam on The Voice of Free Iraq, broadcast from Saudi Arabia on 24 February 1991. On 1 March, one day after the ceasefire, the people did rise up in the south and the north. Saddam, however, was still armed. By the terms of the ceasefire, Iraq was forbidden to fly fixed-wing aircraft, but General Schwarzkopf had allowed that the government could fly helicopters to transport people and goods over areas with broken bridges and infrastructure. The regime used these helicopters as gunships to put down the rebellions people. Saddam remained in power, but everything was going downhill.

UN sanctions imposed on Iraq immediately upon its invasion of Kuwait lasted all through the 1990s, all the way up to the US invasion in 2003, resulting in "a humanitarian catastrophe," as Bayles calls it. The commonly stated figure of 500,000 children victims due to lack of medicines and food has since been called into question and possibly refuted, and the hardship endured by the people was lessened by a government program of rationing, yet children were turned into crying skeletons and the once-thriving nation became a broken-down wreck. No-fly zones in the north and south remained in effect until the bunker-buster bombs began the Shock and Awe Campaign of Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003, destroying the ancient capital.

In macro-scale and in micro, Bayles answers, as it were, the plea of John Nixon for a more sophisticated, cliché-free assessment of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Not only by placing "the Butcher of Baghdad" in the context of conflicting economic and state forces, but also in moving beyond the easy antitheses of supposedly monolithic Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish blocs, and discovering the heterogeneity in each group.

During the Iran-Iraq war, for example, Bayles shows that the people, by and large, were united against the foreign enemy, whom the regime unfailingly characterized as Persian, so as to induce the feeling of Arabian nationalism in the sectarian Muslim population. Shiite Iraqis responded to this appeal and showed little inclination to join with their Shiite brothers to the east. If members of their families suffered casualties, all the more they stuck to their Arabian Iraqi identity. The exception to this rule were the Iraqis of Iranian descent, whom the regime distrusted and deported by the tens of thousands. The Shia population, however, being the largest in Iraq, bore the brunt of the war, and the regime tried to alleviate their hardship with compensations to families of the fallen, honors, and ceremonial displays of respect and iconography, but this effort languished with the drop in the economy, producing a consequent increase in the grievance of the bereaved.

Likewise, not all Sunnis received the same treatment, as Saddam created an aristocracy of Tikriti folk, hiring and rewarding relatives, tribesmen, and people from that area for their supposedly greater loyalty to a son of the realm. When times got tough, Sunnis to the west resented their hardship and the favoritism shown to nominal members of their same group in the east. Even worse, Sunnis in the military, alarmed by unfair repressions and unequal treatment, planned preemptive coups and assassinations, especially toward the end of the Iran-Iraq war. But here government monitoring was more accurate than in the general population: Saddam had spies in the military. Anyone seeking to conspire could not talk with more than one or two friends without running the risk of revealing his thoughts to an informer, whereupon he could be surgically removed.

As regards collective punishment, Bayles demonstrates its effect in consolidating tribal, religious, and ethnic identities, since when a people are persecuted for a single identity marker all the people with that marker huddle more closely together, feeling that they're all in the same boat. Finally, Bayles shows that the massive repressions and persecutions of the Saddam regime were not a sign of its power to control every person, creature, and blade of grass, but rather the contrary: the flailing of a weak and failed regime unable to monitor the people accurately, to eliminate conspirators efficiently; and to provide the necessary programs and inspirations to unite a heterogeneous people into one. The multifarious miseries of a dictator emerge in bold relief and perhaps help explain why Saddam became so comfortable in prison, though he knew his end.

In the final pages of *State of Repression*, Bayles sums up her conclusions, discusses the social turmoil that followed the overthrow of Saddam's regime, and considers the prospects for reconstruction of the country and the formation of a national identity among its diverse population. Focused on macroscopic and theoretical questions, she neglects to remark on the most stunning and unwanted result of the overthrow, namely, the triumph

of the oppositionist al-Dawa Party and the ascendance of one of its leaders, Nouri al-Maliki, to murderous head of state.

Al-Maliki Ascendant

An article published five years ago in *The Washington Post*, “Why We Stuck with Maliki—and Lost Iraq” will provide a necessary addendum to the preceding account. Its author, Ali Khedery, an Iraqi-American from Texas, served as the Defense Department’s special assistant to the US ambassador and the Coalition Provisional Authority. In this capacity and as an Arabic speaker, he got to know al-Maliki pretty well, and in 2006 recommended him as a candidate for prime minister of the new Iraq. The US government was looking for someone tough who could stop the sectarian violence, restore order, and unite the nation under one banner. Al-Maliki was considered an honest and dedicated worker without a large following who would be acceptable to half the population (the Shiites), would be obliged to appeal to the other half (Sunnis, Kurds and others), and would therefore form a coalition government. It was noted that his background was “shadowy and violent,” but this feature was not considered unusual or disqualifying for the time and the place. Khedery and advisor Jeffrey Beals’s suggestion was taken, and in short order al-Maliki became prime minister of Iraq in May 2006. At the end of the year he signed the death warrant for Saddam, refused to extend it on appeal, and oversaw the execution.

Al-Maliki was unknown to the American public and received little investigative comment in the press at the time. Born 1950 in a village near the holy city of Karbala, Abu Isra al-Maliki was raised in a devout Shia household and took inspiration in his youth from the al-Dawa Party, particularly its idea of creating a Shiite theocracy in Iraq “by any means necessary,” as Khedery puts it. When Saddam banned the party in 1980, al-Maliki went into exile, lived in Iran and Syria, and became the head of al-Dawa in Damascus. Khedery associates him with the party’s attacks on foreign embassies and assassination attempts on Iraqi officials, including Saddam.

When the American invasion ended Ba’athist rule, al-Maliki and thousands of other Shiites in exile moved back to Iraq, crossing open borders, and got involved in politics and guerrilla warfare in and around Baghdad. Al-Maliki chaired a committee supporting the de-Ba’athification program, which served the Dawa cause and provided a legal means of carrying out reprisals against Sunnis. After the official transfer of authority to the Iraqi Transitional Government in June 2004, Ibrahim al-Jafari became prime minister with al-Maliki as his advisor. During this period, Khedery writes, the “new Shiite Islamist leaders concocted retribution schemes against Sunnis, resulting in horrifying episodes of torture, rape, and other abuses.” Nevertheless (or possibly unknowingly), Khedery thought that al-Maliki was best able to replace al-Jafari, take command of the situation, and become a parliamentarian.

As prime minister, Al-Maliki did his best to halt the violence, save the oil industry, and fight corruption. The year 2006 saw a peak of madness and murder in the streets, even after the chief instigator, Musab al-Zarqawi, emir of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), was blasted by a predator drone and F-16 jet fighter in June. Zarqawi's position was immediately filled by Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. The hydra head of terror, fanaticism, and revenge was quick to regenerate. The US surge of 2007 came in, stamped out many killers, and drove many others into hiding. General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker came to Baghdad and held daily meetings with al-Maliki for two years, with Khedery present as Crocker's special assistant. By 2008 al-Maliki had settled into the job, eluded assassination attempts, made political compromises, and to some extent stabilized business with international companies. But in his weekly teleconferences with President Bush he still complained that he needed more constitutional power. Bush told him to be patient.

Al-Maliki didn't take the advice and decided suddenly to eliminate a Shiite competitor. In March 2008, as Khedery writes, "he hopped into his motorcade and led an Iraqi Army charge against Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army in Basra." General Petraeus, holed up in the US Embassy in Baghdad, was forced to man the phones and back up Maliki with US Special Operations. The successful "Charge of the Knights" made the prime minister very popular in Baghdad; he was seen as the first Shiite premier, a militant and "patriotic nationalist," so he continued with US support to wipe out dozens of Iran-backed militias. Then he moved to consolidate his power, firing generals and government staff whom he considered unreliable, and replacing them with persons loyal only to him. By 2010 he had successfully created a new police state.

Finally Khedery was alarmed to the extent that he urged the US government to remove him. He made his plea directly to Vice President Joe Biden when the latter paid a visit to Baghdad in September 2010. Biden didn't want to hear of it and said that Maliki was the only option. But then a *deus ex machina* appeared to relieve the US of its quandary. General Qassim Suleimani, head of the Quds Force unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, summoned al-Maliki and other Iraqi top officials to Tehran and dictated the final arrangement, which all were obliged to observe, given that Iran had supported them for years and would become the chief political and trading partner of the Iraqi Shiite state. Al-Maliki would remain prime minister, Jalal Talabani would be president, and US forces would leave the country by the end of 2011.

With Iranian backing and Iranian-approved men, al-Maliki formed a new government, released hundreds of recently vanquished Sadrist, arrested Sunni parliamentarians, and reserved all the key positions for himself. He maintained secret intelligence organizations, prisons, and torture chambers, relied on kangaroo courts, and ignored term limits. Biden had expected al-Maliki to extend the Status of Forces Agreement that would allow the US military to stay in Iraq, but he didn't and wouldn't budge, so the US was obliged to retire at the end of 2011.

Khedery concludes his July 2014 article with a bitter assessment:

Maliki's one-man, one-Dawa Party Iraq looks a lot like Saddam Hussein's one-man, one-Ba'ath Party Iraq. But at least Saddam Hussein helped contain a strategic American enemy: Iran. And Washington didn't spend one trillion dollars propping him up.

ISIS: From Prison to Caliphate

The sequence of stressful and destructive events presented in Ali Khedery's article can be seen in motion in a *Frontline* documentary, "Losing Iraq," dating from the same month. Its disastrous denouement unfolds in a second *Frontline* episode, "The Rise of ISIS," dating from October 2014 and updated the following year, in which Khedery appears as a prominent commentator. Both programs can be viewed online. The following summary, together with more recent reports, will bring the dire state of Iraqi affairs up to date.

On the day after the US withdrawal from Iraq, al-Maliki accused the Sunni vice president, Tariq al-Hashemi, of planning a coup. Al-Hashemi's bodyguards were tortured into making filmed confessions, and in the immediate crackdown bloody bodies of his supporters were strewn in the streets. Meanwhile, the Ba'athist insurgents and Al Qaeda rabble who had been thrown into prisons and left to rot were congregating, festering, and growing in malice. The heart of these "jihadist universities," as someone later called them, is now believed to have been Camp Bucca in Umm Qasr, a port city in southern Iraq, with 20,000 inmates. There a well-mannered, studious doctor of Islamic studies with a fat face and bulging eyes, Ibrahim Awad al-Badry, who had been captured in Fallujah, was permitted to give lessons in the faith to the scruffy congregation. A model prisoner, he was released at the end of 2004 after eleven months incarceration. In 2010, the two emirs of AQI, al-Masri and al-Baghdadi, successors to al-Zarqawi, were blasted in turn by US drone strikes. The following year, while al-Maliki was slaughtering Sunnis in Baghdad, al-Badry was leading Al Qaeda forces west against Syria and attracting recruits from indigenous protestors bombed out by Bashar al-Assad's air campaign against his own people. For this reason President Obama refused to send weapons to the rebels for fear that they would fall into terrorist hands. Not noticed was the possibility that al-Badry had assumed the position of AQI emir.

The following year, 2012, al-Maliki denounced a very popular finance minister, Rafi al-Essawi, and arrested his bodyguards, stirring mass protests. But al-Maliki wouldn't be stopped—he arrested thousands and stuffed the prisons. Vice President Biden was tasked to call al-Maliki and beg that he observe democratic norms, but he ignored the appeal and stayed in place. Simultaneously Al Qaeda was expanding, receiving donations from Sunni states, seizing territories, seizing oil fields, and turning back from Syria toward Iraq. They launched a campaign called Breaking the Walls—overrunning prisons, freeing prisoners, and taking recruits. At this point Al Qaeda in Iraq assumed a new name, the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham: AQI became ISIS.

The forces of brutality are drawn together like magnets. In April 2013, al-Maliki's police gunned down a peaceful protest in al-Hawija on behalf of al-Hashemi and al-Essawi, leaving hundreds dead and wounded in the streets. The disaffected in Iraq were now convinced that peaceful protest was futile and only ISIS could provide the force and protection they needed. Three months later ISIS moved close to Baghdad, broke into Abu Ghraib prison and freed 500 inmates. This act caught al-Maliki's attention. Although the US had trained 200,000 men for the Iraqi Army, at a cost of \$25 billion, he wasn't sure that it could defend the capital. He came to Washington in October to request military support, but was told he could not have it until he made his government more inclusive of both Sunni and Shiite representatives. Benjamin Rhodes, deputy national security advisor to President Obama, says in the *Frontline* film: "We couldn't make him do it when we were there, and we couldn't make him do it when we were not there." Al-Maliki returned to Baghdad and continued his persecutions, but finally the two forces came face to face.

In the battle of Ramadi in January 2014, ISIS met the Iraqi Army, which jumped out of its vehicles, dropped its arms and ran, not wanting to defend the al-Maliki regime. ISIS picked them up, jumped in the Humvees and moved on. On the 6th of June, it sent suicide car bombers and truckloads of jihadists into the northern city of Mosul, paralyzing its populace with fear. By this method 800 militants took control of the airport and the city of 1.8 million people, then ISIS set up its own government, collected taxes, and conducted the traffic. Next it moved south, taking all the cities down to and including Tikrit. On June 29th, Ibrahim al-Badri, reborn as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, with long black beard and long black robe, slowly mounted the steps to the high pulpit of the Great Mosque in Mosul and delivered a sermon announcing the Caliphate of the Islamic State, designating himself as Caliph Ibrahim. The event was filmed and shown to a stunned and dumbfounded world.

It is believed that veterans of the Ba'athist Army provided the expertise for ISIS in planning tactical maneuvers and handling heavy weapons. ISIS overran the Peshmerga Kurdish forces and moved on Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. At this point the Western powers were alarmed, as Erbil is a center for major commercial concerns: Chevron, Exxon, Gasprom. The US began an air campaign, but told the Iraqi government that it would do more only if al-Maliki resigned. Three weeks later he did, but stayed on as vice president. Haider al-Abadi, an electrical engineer with a doctorate from the University of Manchester, also a member of al-Dawa, took over the top spot of prime minister. The Iraqi Army, plus the Kurds, with US and international air cover, engaged ISIS forcefully on the ground and began to take back territory. By the end of the year 2014 it had liberated twenty-five percent of the so-called caliphate, but not yet Tikrit.

ISIS responded to the assault with every atrocity imaginable: ritual beheadings of US and foreign captives, mass executions of Iraqi captives by shooting, burning, and beheading; crucifixions, child executioners and child suicide bombers, the use of chemical weapons, the use of human shields, mass kidnappings, sexual enslavement of kidnapped women, and destruction of ancient monuments. They circulated sophisticated videos and literature on the worldwide web and in social media, attracting hundreds of volunteers from Europe and America hungry for male camaraderie and the thrill of

killing. But still they took a pounding. The battle of Mosul lasted two and a half years, from January 2015 to July 2017, when the jihadists abandoned the city, leaving landmines and booby traps behind in the rubble. In the east, the Syrian Army, with air cover, battered the ISIS capital city of Raqqa and finally gained control at the end of October 2017. Syria's ally, Russia, also bombed ISIS and rebel strongholds in the country during this period. Fortunately for Baghdad, the steady bombardment and ground assaults confined ISIS to the north and cut it down into smaller pockets of forces.

ISIS was thus obliged to learn a hard lesson. The idea of a caliphate may attract recruits from around the world, but a caliphate requires the conquest and retention of territory, unlike the stateless asymmetrical warfare of the earlier version of Al Qaeda. The possession of territory comes with a great disadvantage: it can be bombed. Now it was bombarded almost daily from all sides, on the ground and from the sky, and its days did seem numbered. The people with whom it shielded itself could no longer protect it and became "collateral damage."

The Iceman Returneth

Amid the bombed cities, mass graves, and corpse-clogged rivers, another player was still afoot in the blood-soaked desert sands. At the end of 2006, on the eve of Saddam Hussein's execution, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, High Value Target #6, still at large, declared publicly that he had been leading the opposition to the US occupation. On the day after the hanging, a group within the Ba'ath Party endorsed his name for president of Iraq, and a week later it was confirmed. The insurgency continued unabated, and together with Shiite militias, Al Qaeda terrorists and inner-city wars produced such a pitch of fury that the US was compelled to send in 30,000 more men—the famous last-ditch surge.

At this point, al-Douri unleashed an unsuspected force of his own: The Men of the Naqshbandi, an Iraqi chapter of an ancient Sufi order that has spread throughout the world. The Naqshbandi Order observes a succession of Sufi adepts who trace their line back to Abu Bakr (573-634), the father-in-law of Mohammed, regarded by the Sunnis as the true successor to the prophet. Al-Douri, initiated as the "hidden sheik" of the order, and confirmed as president of the post-Hussein Ba'ath Party, thus combined seemingly incompatible elements, peace-loving whirling dervishes and war-hungry military officers, into a shifting fighting force that attracted thousands opposed to the foreign occupation, the emergent Shiite government, and, after 2012, the emergent Islamic State. And yet al-Douri himself shifted ground and found common cause with al-Baghdadi, head of ISIS, and reportedly served as one of his generals in the 2014 occupation of Mosul.

In mid-June al-Douri posted on his Facebook page that ISIS had captured and executed Judge Rauf Abdul Rahman, who had sentenced "the martyr Saddam Hussein" to death. This notice was immediately denied by people in a position to know, including Michael Newton, co-author of *Enemy of State*. The upshot of this debate has not been resolved, as Rahman, if he was alive, was loathe to show himself. Subsequently, al-Douri had a

falling out with ISIS. Further word on Rahman ceased, and al-Douri became even harder to track. Reports on his whereabouts from 2006-2015 ranged over the map of northern Iraq: Ramadi, Mosul, Tikrit, Diyala, Hamrin. But possibly he wasn't in Iraq at all and coordinated military affairs from afar. His videos were believed to have been filmed in Damascus.

The Iceman, as he was called, was an expert killer, a commander in the Iran-Iraq war, the invasion of Kuwait, the persecution of the Marsh Arabs, and the suppression of the 1991 uprisings. Yet he was the man chosen to head the Return to Faith Campaign in 1993. In the insurgency he excelled in all areas of warfare: recruitment, fund-raising, public outreach, propaganda, and battlefield strategy and tactics, yet was known to be suffering from leukemia, for which he had sought treatment in Vienna in 1999. Again and again he was reported to have been eliminated, yet each time he popped up afterwards to give the report the lie. In April 2015 he was emphatically declared to be dead, the DNA from his blasted body allegedly having been tested, and a blood-clotted cadaver with a dark red moustache, gaping horse teeth, and a fiery orange beard was presented to the cameras. But thereafter the real al-Douri appeared in a video and mentioned events that had occurred after his unfortunate look-alike was slain.

The real al-Douri, then 72 years old, seemed to be alive and impossible to catch, but in the next three years he failed to give even a glimpse or a whisper of his existence. The last news of him came in an item dated 21 June 2018, reporting that Raghad Hussein, daughter of Saddam, had sent her condolences to the family of Izzat al-Douri upon the mournful event of his passing, which had occurred in a hospital in Tunisia. The stated cause of death was "a hematological illness." From that month forth he has not, as in the past, miraculously reappeared, and one may safely list him among the deceased. The hope for a Ba'athist restoration in Iraq evidently died with him, and the Ba'ath Party of Iraq, having partly merged with ISIS and partly ceased to function, dissolved like a mirage over the dunes.

Exit Al-Baghdadi

On 19 December 2018, the new American president declared: "We have won against ISIS. We've beaten them, and we've beaten them badly. We've taken back the land." The statement was a bit premature. The following month Dan Coats, US Director of National Intelligence, told a January 29 hearing of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence:

The conflicts in Iraq and Syria have generated a large pool of skilled, battle-hardened fighters who remain dispersed throughout the region. While ISIS is nearing territorial defeat in Iraq and Syria, the group has returned to its guerilla-warfare roots while continuing to plot attacks and direct its supporters worldwide. ISIS is intent on resurging and still commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria.

The bombardment of ISIS strongholds in northern Syria continued unabated through the year. In October President Trump unaccountably ordered US troops to withdraw from the region, allowing Turkish forces to enter and drive America's ally, the Kurds, from their towns and homes. Tens of thousands of Kurds, yesterday members of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, fled across the desert sands and sought exile in northern Iraq.

At that very time, the US Joint Special Operations Command, relying on intelligence from the Kurds, was planning an attack on an ISIS compound in the Idlib province of Syria, where the leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was believed to be hiding. Under the circumstances, having no advance notice of the US pullout, it launched the attack.

On 26 October F-15 fighter jets and MQ-9 Reaper Drones blew away ISIS soldiers on the ground. Al-Baghdadi was observed by an overhead drone seeking cover in a dugout. As the commandos closed in, he detonated an explosive vest, killing himself and two of his children. DNA samples of the kill matched those that had been taken from the prisoner Ibrahim Awad al-Badry at Camp Bucca, and thus confirmed his identity. His body was swiftly removed and buried at sea with Islamic rites, according to General Frank McKenzie, commander of US Central Command. The US team collected documents and electronics at the site, after which air strikes obliterated the place to prevent it from becoming a terrorist shrine. ISIS promptly confirmed the death of its leader and announced his replacement, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, promising that things would get far worse for the Americans under the new leadership.

Iran in Control

Meanwhile the transformation of Iraq into a satellite of Iran hardened into a fait accompli. In November 2019, the online journal *The Intercept* revealed that it had received 700 pages of secret intelligence reports from Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security in Iraq. The first packet of articles and documents appears in the journal under the title: "The Iran Cables: Leaked Iranian Intelligence Reports Expose Teheran's Vast Web of Influence in Iraq." The leaker, who did not disclose his identity, explained that his purpose was to expose what Iran was doing in his native country, Iraq. *The Intercept* first determined that the documents were genuine, then had them translated from Farsi, after which they teamed up with *The New York Times* for their release. Veteran reporter James Risen and others on the staff of *The Intercept* collaborated in the production of articles published online. Basically the reports, which cover the period of late 2013 through early 2015, reveal that, just as Ali Khedery reported in his 2014 *Washington Post* article and *Frontline* appearance, Iran moved to take control of Iraqi affairs after the US withdrawal in 2011. It broadened and strengthened that control with each year.

The introductory article, "A Spy Complex Revealed," states matter of factly: "No Iraqi politician can become prime minister without Iran's blessing, and [the new PM] Adil Abdul-Mahdi, when he secured the premiership in 2018, was seen as a compromise

candidate acceptable to both Iran and the United States.” The article details Iran’s involvement in nearly every office and policy of the Iraqi state. Major General Qassim Suleimani, head of Iran’s Quds Force, is the point man who comes to Iraq to manage affairs. His main concerns are: “to keep Iraq from falling apart; from breeding Sunni militants on the Iranian border; from descending into sectarian warfare that might make Shia Muslims the targets of violence; and from spinning off an independent Kurdistan that would threaten regional stability and Iranian territorial integrity.”

He also coordinates with the Revolutionary Guards, the Kurds, the Syrians, and the Americans to fight the Islamic State, always wary of his military allies’ motives and making sure to keep Iraq a “client state.” One of the devious methods of Iranian intelligence is to recruit Iraqis who had worked for the CIA and been left behind. They were paid to spill all they knew about their former employer, to point out places and name names.

James Risen, speaking of the project during a 18 November 2019 interview on *Democracy Now!*, remarked:

It’s such a huge thing to admit to yourself as a country that everything we’ve done in Iraq for the last fifteen years was a mistake. All these lives lost were in vain, all the money poured into there has gone for a misbegotten, tragic mistake. We have benefited what we now consider one of our biggest enemies It’s such a huge thing to admit that no one wants to admit it.

Ongoing Turmoil

For all of its successful machinations, the Iranian authority has failed to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people, who largely resent its interference, as well as the corruption and perennial inefficiency of their own government. Iraq is falling apart. At the time of writing, the end of November 2019, two months of mass protests and demonstrations in Baghdad, Basra and Nasiriyah have disrupted the already chaotic society, and many hundreds of people have been killed, injured, and arrested. At the same time, in Teheran, mass protests and demonstrations against increased gas prices have broken out, incurring brutal retaliation from government security forces. More than a hundred people have been killed and thousands have been injured and arrested. Both countries are in turmoil with no easy prediction of the outcome.

(Update: On Friday, 3 January 2020, Qassim Suleimani, head of Iran’s Quds Force, was killed by an American drone attack at the Baghdad airport. Iraq’s Shia leader, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, condemned the attack and the breach of Iraq’s sovereignty. Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, vowed “harsh retaliation” for the assassination. Mass anti-government protests in both Iraq and Iran turned against the United States. The Trump administration prepared to deploy more troops to Iraq, though

Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, backed by the Iraqi parliament, called on the United States to withdraw all troops from the country. Iran's parliament designated the US military a state terrorist organization. President Trump threatened both Iran and Iraq with reprisals in the event of any hostile action. A world crisis emerged amid fears of a new war in the Middle East).

At just this time the [Costs of War Project](#) conducted by the Watson Institute at Brown University in Rhode Island has come out with its report for the totals of the US Global War on Terror up to the end of fiscal year 2019. It found that more than 800,000 people had lost their lives, a “very conservative estimate,” including 335,000 civilians. The number of war refugees and displaced persons is reckoned at 21,000,000. The cost totals \$5,900,000,000 (5.9 trillion dollars) for the period 2001-2019 and will likely total \$6.4 trillion by the end of 2020. A total of 1.2 metric tons of greenhouses gases have been released into the atmosphere by military operations. The project also determined that the United States has no clear strategy for ending the wars, so that the costs in blood and treasure will continue on through the decades, not necessarily as a result of new military operations as by the attrition and maintenance of forces and victims in place. It concludes: “Total deaths during the post-2001 US wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen is likely to reach 3,100,000 or more.”

The Price

“The world is better off without Saddam!”—so say three of the politicians most responsible for the 2003-2011 war in Iraq and everything that followed: former President George W. Bush, former Vice-President Dick Cheney, and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Each repeats the same phrase as though its truth were self-evident, yet it can only mean that the world is better off not only without Saddam, but without the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed during the occupation; the millions of Iraqis driven into exile; the millions more maimed, traumatized, and impoverished, and all those additional millions debilitated by the loss of family members, property, and peace of mind.

Better off also without the 4,424 American soldiers killed and the 22 veterans who commit suicide every day, but with the 31,952 wounded and maimed, and the estimated 32,000 veterans handicapped by post-traumatic stress syndrome, which is 20% of the 160,000 soldiers who served in the war between 2003 and 2011. And better off without the trillion one hundred billion dollars spent on the war in Iraq, money that might have been spent on infrastructure, education, science, and culture at home, and on environmental protections and improvements throughout the world. And finally it is a better world without Saddam, but with an unstable Iraq in his place serving as a satellite state to Iran, subject to terrorist bombings every day and unsafe for tourism and the normal activities of a civilized state.

Was there a chance that Saddam could have become an American ally, as his CIA debriefer John Nixon believes? Could he, with American help, have been remade into

Washington Decoded

something like a democrat? Or could he have just been left alone, without weapons of mass destruction, under a no-fly zone, monster that he was?

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