

Blind to their doings till the end

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Article

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Like Saddam Hussein, there are others who should be charged for war crimes in Iraq.

THE news that one-time strongman Saddam Hussein had been condemned to death by an Iraqi court hardly comes as a surprise.

Anyone proven guilty of committing crimes against humanity cannot be allowed to go unpunished.

Reportedly, in this case, witnesses testified how Saddam massacred their relatives and fellow villagers in northern Iraq during the 1988 Anfal campaign. Again, in 1982, he ordered another killing in Dujail.

The judgement that Saddam is to die by hanging was received with mixed reactions, given the dire state of affairs in Iraq.

Under the circumstances, there are those who long for the days of Saddam's rule because, ironically as it seems, they could enjoy some form of security then, as compared to today.

Of course, many more were jubilant knowing that the dictator will be put away for good. To them, at long last, justice was being served by a court managed by the country's own people.

This sentiment is shared by the US administration, though for different reasons. Not least because it lent credibility to the fact that the invasion to topple Saddam was justified to begin with.

The verdict was revealed, seemingly, to influence US mid-term voting and enforce the current administration's "tough" stance on Iraq.

It is as though through his death Saddam would be doing one last favour to save the US administration, like he used to when he was its trusted ally not too long ago.

Most unexpectedly, however, Saddam will not be the only one condemned to die by hanging.

Metaphorically speaking, the entire fate of the US administration was left hanging as the last votes trickled in for the mid-term elections.

Their candidates vying for the lower House of Representatives and House of Senate were given the "death sentence" as it were, as most of them lost their seats.

Presumably, this time, it is Saddam's turn to rejoice for another set of reasons.

For one, as a consequence of his own doing over the heightened violence in Iraq, the beleaguered US president is now a lamer duck, made worse without the support of what was described as his "lapdog Congress".

Based on an opinion poll, about six in 10 Americans believe that the Iraq invasion was a mistake. For that the president is now paying a heavy price.

Most analysts agree that the mid-term elections' ground-breaking results are proof enough that the US neocon-led war in Iraq has been soundly rejected — a point the president seemed to have missed when assessing the sentiments of the American people.

Indeed, according to some news reports, more than twice as many voters said they were angry at the president, rather than enthusiastic.

On top of this, exit polls suggested that corruption and scandal were even bigger problems, and those concerned by this — about four in 10 voters — wanted change.

In this drama, the immediate fall guy was the purported architect of the unpopular war in Iraq.

The obstinate know-all Secretary of Defence, famous for his "I don't do diplomacy" quip, was finally forced to step down.

That is, after managing to scoff at, mostly backed by the president, numerous calls for him to do so much earlier, including from those in the military and retired generals.

Even then, when he appeared before the Press, he only obliquely accepted to quit without so much as acknowledging the mishandling of the invasion of Iraq.

The defence secretary regarded as old thinking the request for more troops to secure Iraq, which is the bone of contention. Instead, he championed a lean-and-swift doctrine which is yet to be shown to be effective.

Perhaps, the outgoing defence secretary should personally field-test his "transformational" doctrine to prove his point.

As mid-term elections are often viewed as a referendum on the performance of the present US administration thus far, its implication is huge, considering the controversial decision to launch the so-called war on Iraq and the terrible situation that has developed in that country.

Similarly, it is arguable that it is also a referendum on the illusive "war on terror" declared by the US regime.

Moreover, both were initiated somewhat unilaterally, leading to what it is now.

Both, for now, have not only failed but the way out remains blurred, with no "winning strategy" in sight.

By this month, the US would have been in Iraq longer than it fought in the Second World War, causing patience at home to wear thin, especially when it was supposed to be "Mission Accomplished".

The notion that it takes a US election to knock some sense into the heads of the US government is indeed very damaging when all along the signal from the international community has been very loud and clear.

Even when the international community was dead against its proposed actions, the US administration chose to circumvent it unilaterally.

In other words, far from being a global leader, the US administration is more interested in advancing its standing at home rather than internationally.

Thus, it was not surprising to read what the newly elected House leader had to say about the "thumped" president: He is "not a leader".

This is supported by the latest survey of 19 world leaders by the North American magazine Maclean's where the US president was placed among the last four, ironically lumped together with the leaders who he stigmatised as "evil". (www.macleans.ca/worldpoll)

By insisting he would "stay the course" despite the increasingly murderous consequences that have befallen the Iraqi people, the US administration has demonstrated that it too is no less "evil".

Worse, because it is in sharp contradiction to the president's own statement at a news conference in late October insisting: "Don't do what you're doing if it's not working — change."

Add to this the May 2004 quote by the new House leader: "The shallowness he (the US president) has brought to the office has not changed since he got there." (WSJ, Nov 10).

In short, unless the level of "shallowness" is changed, how much change one can expect is being met with a growing sense of cynicism.

Shallow statements like "needless to say, the president is correct, whatever it was he said", as advocated by the outgoing defence secretary, can no longer be tolerated.

Otherwise, with two more years of damage to inflict, the Middle East will slip into a state of anarchy; and so too others parts of the world.

To be sure, like Saddam, it is time to charge those responsible for war crimes, to force the much needed change for the better.