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Who will be next?

A hundred beats
By Fatima Bhutto

Saddam Hussein, former dictator and continual megalomaniac, has been sentenced to death by hanging for the atrocities he presided over while president of Iraq. He will have an appeal, which he will invariably lose, and then he will be sent to the gallows --a move heralded by President George W. Bush as "a major achievement for Iraq's young democracy and its constitutional government". As I heard the verdict come in on television last Sunday night there was one question running through my mind: as we condemn Hussein to death for his crimes against humanity, when will we ask for Donald Rumsfeld to be indicted for his war crimes? When will George W. Bush be taken to the dock and made to answer for his spearheading the unjust and brutal occupation of Iraq?

Quite soon, actually.

On November 14 a group of German lawyers will come before federal prosecutors and move to charge Rumsfeld, US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, and other members of the Bush administration with war crimes. The doctrine of universal jurisdiction allows for domestic courts to try international crimes, regardless of the nationality of the accused or the location of the crime. Wolfgang Kalek, the human rights lawyer at the forefront of the German trial, presented the American Military Commissions Act of 2006 as his impetus for taking these men to task. Let's call it exhibit "A". The act, which Bush enthusiastically endorsed, allows retroactive immunity for any civilians who violate the War Crimes Act and makes it impossible for members of the Bush administration to be tried for their actions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Further building the case against his administration, last month Bush signed into law a bill that in essence repeals the Bill of Rights and nullifies the writ of habeas corpus.

The October 17 bill legalises torture and kidnapping as necessary means to combat terrorism and effectively invalidates the concept of innocence before the law. Now the goons at the CIA can arbitrarily pick up suspected "militants" (or "miscreants", take your pick) and extract confessions under extreme duress that will hold up in a court of law. It seems perfectly obvious that America is in dire need of a regime change. To use the popular parlance of the administration, the American people need to be liberated, and fast. Kalek, who will be raising the human rights abuses in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib during the trial, said that while Rumsfeld may not immediately be confined to a dark dingy cell for his crimes, "we will make it possible that he will be arrested someday".

They got General Pinochet twenty years after he lorded over thousands of extra judicial killings and disappearances in Chile and they eventually got Slobodan Milosevic. What makes Bush and Rumsfeld certain that they will forever be protected by their self-ordered immunity?

Sub-standard IQ levels, most likely.

So far, approximately 3,000 American soldiers have been killed fighting in Iraq, yet 3,000 Iraqis die every month under the occupation. The total number of Iraqi fatalities, mainly made up of civilian deaths, is upwards of 600,000. Hussein has nothing on America's body count. In three short years the American occupation forces have killed more Iraqis than Saddam Hussein could have ever dreamed of. Even the aptly named "Prince of Darkness" Richard Perle, lifelong Neocon and former chairman of the Pentagon's Defence Policy Board Advisory Committee, is having second thoughts about America's genocidal role in Iraq, admitting in a recent interview that "The levels of brutality that we've seen are truly horrifying...I have to say, I underestimated the depravity".

To fund a war based on the false premise that Iraq was in possession of weapons of mass destruction --it was not, nor was there any truth to the documents that claimed Iraq had a hand in 9/11. Ahmed Chalabi, the head of the renegade Iraqi National Congress in exile who disastrously misled the American government with his bogus intelligence should also be tried for war crimes. Having been accused of fraud and large-scale corruption, Chalabi is currently hiding out in London, which seems to be the place for disgraced politicians to take refuge in these days - America has already shelled out \$337 billion dollars. America spends approximately \$250 million dollars a day on its bloodbath in Iraq, and every second longer that American troops stay in Iraq costs each American taxpayer an additional \$6,300 dollars according to Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times.

While we're trying Hussein for his massacre of Shias in Dujail and his assault on Iraqi Kurds in the Anfal attacks, when will we start talking about the US Marine Kilo Company's massacre of innocent women and children in Haditha last November, which is being compared to America's My Lai massacre in Vietnam? What about Fallujah? What about Abu Ghraib? What about the burning of the Baghdad Library? What about the mass graves that the occupation forces promised would be a relic of Hussein's political legacy --why are they still being dug?

I hate to sound redundant, but since we're on the topic of American dollars put to use in Iraq, will Hussein's judges remind the ladies and gentlemen of the court that it would not have been possible for the Halabja massacre to have taken place without the stockpile of chemical weapons kindly donated by the Americans during the Iran-Iraq Gulf War? The nerve agents used to kill 5,000 residents of the Kurdish town of Halabja in 1988, such as Tabun, Sarin, VX, and Mustard Gas were not made in Iraq, they were gifts. Who gave Hussein those gifts, you ask? In 1988, the same year, while hoping to snag a Republican nomination, Donald Rumsfeld bragged that restoring full relations with Iraq was one of his greatest achievements as a politician. He had been in Iraq five years earlier, at the height of the Iran-Iraq war, shaking hands with Hussein and ensuring the Iraqi people of America's complete support. Rumsfeld, working in the Reagan administration at the time, was America's main conduit to Hussein. Military intelligence, money, arms, and even nerve gas came to Hussein through Rumsfeld. If Hussein must be condemned for the massacre at Halabja, then so must Rumsfeld. His resignation is simply not enough. Officials say Hussein will be executed by 2007 --is it too much to ask that the death penalty, which is completely abhorrent, be commuted to a life sentence and that he has a new cellmate or two by then?