

# Saddam Saddam

**FOR A SECOND** there, it looked like there'd be no Christmas this year, as televisions across the world broadcast images of US forces picking lice from a disheveled Santa's hair. It soon became apparent, however, that this was not your run-of-the-mill derelict Santa, shanghaied from his mission to the mall. No, not this guy. He looked more like a Satanic Santa morphing into a crazed Karl Marx right before our eyes. This wasn't jolly 'ol Saint Nick. This was "the evil one," or more specifically, I think, "the other evil one." I lose track sometimes. But hell, Michael Jackson move over – our holiday news hole has been filled. Saddam finally was down for the count – just in time for Christmas. I feel safe. Or is that fail safe?

As a nation, we've taken Saddam, a low life punk, and transformed him into a mythical figure. Then, seemingly for the sport of the hunt, we took him down "like a rat in a hole." I use the term "we" rather liberally here, like *The Syracuse Post Standard*, whose front page headline read, "We Got Him," as if *Post Standard* editors were there in the trenches capturing Mr. Hussein themselves.

For over a decade we've fixated on Saddam's living arrangements, from his palace toiletry (more college-aged Americans know Saddam had gold plated toilet seats, than can name their city council representative) to his seedy garden shack hideout. We know the dimensions of the grave-like hole where *Post Standard* editors ultimately caught him. We watched Army doctors probe his hairy face, in what the American media initially

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reported as a dental examination. Later, we learned that they were just swabbing for DNA, to make sure they had the right Saddam – there being six of them at last count. This was to the relief of working Americans outraged that our \$87 billion dollars were paying for Saddam's dental care, at a time when millions of working Americans are going without such "luxuries."

### **Saddam and Rumsfeld's 20th anniversary**

In the end we collectively celebrated the moment as it dangled historically disconnected from any context. Had Saddam eluded his captors for five more days, he could have been taken into custody on the twentieth anniversary of his first Baghdad meeting with Donald Rumsfeld, then a pharmaceutical industry executive and mysterious special envoy for President Ronald Reagan.

This would have been at the height of the Iran-Iraq war, when Saddam's troops were using weapons of mass destruction made from chemical and biological toxins supplied, according to declassified US Government documents cited in a 1994 Senate report, by the United States. (These would be *Brucella Melitrensis*, *Bacillus Anthracis*, *Clostridium Perfringens*, *Clostridium Tetani*, *Clostridium Botulinum* and *Histoplasma Capsulatum*, if you must know.)

Had Saddam stayed hidden for three more months, he not only would have completed the Santa to Marx visual transformation – he could have been captured on the anniversary of Donald Rumsfeld's subsequent visit to Baghdad. This trip, according to newly declassified US government documents, was to assure the Iraqis that US public criticism of Saddam's use of chemical and biological weapons was just for show. Then Secretary of State George Shultz instructed Rumsfeld to reassure the Iraqi regime that the Reagan administration's desire to continue improving the relationship between the US and Saddam's government remained "undiminished," despite the administration's rhetorical criticism of Iraqi war crimes.

With this undiminished relationship firmly in place, the Reagan administration supplied Saddam's government with satellite images pinpointing the location of Iranian troops – troops that were being armed by the Reagan administration in what we now know as the "Iran-Contra Scandal."

Before last week's release of these documents, Rumsfeld maintained that the sole purpose of his trip was to caution the Iraqis against the use of chemical weapons – an assertion that now appears to be the polar opposite of what the documents detail as the real purpose of his visit. To its credit, the *Washington Post* reported this story last Friday, December 19th. To its shame, they buried it on page A42.

### **Strange, how he was captured alive**

The oddest thing about Saddam's recent capture was the fact that he was captured alive. For Rumsfeld and the rest of the Bush administration, this poses a problem. If Saddam is put on trial by any court other than a US puppet court, the main focus of his trial would be his quasi-genocidal attacks against the Kurdish people, and his use of chemical and biological weapons during his war with Iran. Any probing of these crimes, however, would raise questions about accomplices. Yes, Saddam will go to the big house, but he'll certainly sing all the way up river. This digression from the "we got the evil doer" script presents embarrassing problems for the Bush administration. Any legitimate court that prosecutes Saddam would want to prosecute his accomplices as well. This won't be a welcome subtext to the 2004 election story.

So the obvious question is: Why is Saddam alive? The answer might very well be that he wasn't supposed to be. We certainly heard enough Wild West rhetoric from George W. There was lots of "Dead or Alive" talk, with the emphasis on "Dead" (have you ever wondered how come it's seldom "Alive or Dead?"). All of Bush's rants about Saddam always had an almost audible murmur of, "String 'im up high, he tried to kill my pappy."

The problem of late for the Bush clan is that many high level American military and intelligence people seem to have been turning against them lately. A few months ago, I described this ongoing process as a "soft coup." Most of the incriminating intelligence data that documents how Bush lied to mislead the nation into war, for example, came directly from the CIA and the military intelligence community. Stressed-out military personnel are now going AWOL by the score while their commanders are giving interviews about the White House's flawed war plan. The military community even has, with Wesley Clark, their own presidential candidate. Now, with the live capture of Saddam, they seem to have delivered a Christmas gift to the anti-Bush forces.

### **Bush vs. Saddam - who to blame for 9/11?**

Last week's pronouncement by the Republican head of the Senate's 9/11 Commission, that the attacks against America could have been prevented, has added to Bush's woes. Taking the statements of the Commission's Bush-appointed chair at face value, it now appears that Bush's government bore more responsibility for the 9/11 attacks than did Saddam. The feds, according to the report, could have stopped the attacks from happening – hence the Bush administration bears at least some responsibility for what ultimately happened on that day. The major remaining point of contention is exactly how much responsibility they bore. By comparison, reports issued by the CIA document that Saddam had no connection to the primarily Saudi terrorists. He didn't help orchestrate the attacks and he couldn't

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have prevented them. In other words, Saddam bore no responsibility for what happened on 9/11, but the Bush administration probably did.

So what was this war about again? If it wasn't about weapons of mass destruction, and it wasn't about 9/11, and it wasn't about al Qaida, and it wasn't about Saddam being a maniacal tyrant, because lord knows we certainly maintain friendly relations with enough of them, then what exactly was it about? We are now about 10,000 deaths and \$100 billion down the road of war and no one can answer this lingering question. Ultimately, perhaps the voters will address it in November. That is, unless they're distracted by an October surprise – say, the capture of Osama bin Laden. ●