

At the same time, US forces were refusing to allow rebels to take weapons and ammunition from Iraqi military bases. (*MERIP*, May 1992, p.9, 12-13; Said Aburish, *Saddam Hussein*, London, 2000, p.308)

This is rather **more** than just 'turning a deaf ear'. It was **protecting the regime**. US policy, supported by Britain, was summarized by a US National Security Council official in Feb. 1991. Richard Haass scolded an official of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, for doing too much to help a Kurdish rebel leader named Jalal Talabani (now President of Iraq). Haass said: 'You don't understand. **Our policy is to get rid of Saddam, not his regime.**' (Cited, Andrew and Patrick Cockburn, *Out Of The Ashes*, London, 1999, p.37)

DEEDS UNACCOUNTED FOR

At the time of his hanging, Saddam was also on trial for massacring the Kurds. Kani Xulam, founder of the American Kurdish Information Network, tells Inter Press Service: 'As a Kurd, I don't think Saddam should have been executed right now', before the Kurdish catastrophe had been spelled out in court, and before Saddam had revealed which countries helped him to carry out the atrocities. (IPS, 31 Dec. <tinyurl.com/ydc4d9>)

In the one mainstream UK media article to deal properly with the issue of complicity, Robert Fisk comments: 'The whole truth died with Saddam Hussein in the Baghdad execution chamber yesterday. **Many in Washington and London must have sighed with relief that the old man had been silenced for ever.**' (31 Dec. <tinyurl.com/yfohay>)

They must also have sighed with relief that the British mainstream media once again silenced itself over the West's complicity with Saddam's crimes. Nuggets can be extracted here and there, but the overall pattern is one of self-censorship, of **service to power**. One marvels in particular at the suppression of any mention of Matrix Churchill and the damning Scott Report, which helped to undermine the Conservatives and paved the way for the squeaky clean Tony Blair.

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SADDAM'S CRIMES

AVOIDING THE WEST'S RESPONSIBILITY

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SADDAM'S CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

Two weeks after the execution, it is the **manner** of Saddam Hussein's death that continues to hold Western attention. Saddam's crimes fade into the background—and the complicity of the West in those crimes has been almost completely erased from public discussion.

Saddam committed many crimes against the Iraqi people, including his role in the 1968 Ba'athist coup and the institution of a brutal dictatorship. Beyond this, Saddam was also guilty of crimes of aggression against Iran (1980-88) and Kuwait (1990-91), and crimes against humanity in his massacre of Iraq's Kurds (especially the Anfal campaign in 1987-88) and the Shia Arab majority (especially in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War).

It is a matter of historical fact, as we shall see, that in all of these ventures (except the invasion of Kuwait), Saddam enjoyed the (often active) support of Britain and the United States. This barely features in the obituaries and profiles published in the aftermath of his hanging.

WEAK ADMISSIONS

Those who do not completely ignore the complicity of the West typically use of the vague word 'support' without specific details. David Aaronovitch gives us a classic example: '*For twenty years Saddam was tolerated or supported by various Western powers and by the Soviet Union, in the belief that he was better than the Iranians, better than chaos and, above all, in the mistaken belief that his depredations would be limited to the poor, bloody Iraqis.*' (*Times*, 1 Jan. 2007, p.13 <<http://tinyurl.com/yekjzc>>) Soft words, backed by immediate justifications.



THE OBITUARIES

It is possible to understand part of the story of Western sponsorship of Saddam's crimes from mainstream obituaries, if they are treated with care. (Obituaries: *Independent*, 1 Jan., p.28 <tinyurl.com/vw5b5>; *Guardian*, 30 Dec., p.24 <tinyurl.com/yx9uln>; *Telegraph*, 1 Jan., p.23 <tinyurl.com/y6nfhm>; *Times*, 1 Jan., p.38 <tinyurl.com/yyzsq>)

One way of de-emphasizing Western support for Saddam is to delay the first mention of it, indicating that it is unimportant. The *Independent* (first mention in para. 15) and the *Guardian* (para. 26) are worse on this than the right-wing *Telegraph* (para. 2) or *The Times* (para. 4).

ATTACKING IRAN, ARMED BY THE WEST

The *Telegraph* is also straightforward about the Iraqi invasion of Iran: 'Both sides were covertly supported by America and Britain in the hope that they might provide a check to each other's ambitions... British and American firms vied with one another for Iraq's plump rearmament contracts.'

The *Independent* adds: 'It is worth recalling that Saddam, who was subsequently demonised by America, relied on financial and logistical support from the US (the US granted him \$6bn in loans and provided him with satellite pictures showing Iranian troop concentrations).'

The *Guardian* is almost alone in pointing out that not only did the West furnish conventional weapons, it also supplied '**the means to manufacture a whole array of unconventional ones: nuclear, chemical and biological.**'

For British newspapers, this should have been a headline item, given the **Matrix Churchill** affair and the massive **Scott Report** into the 'arms-to-Iraq' scandal. A crucial part of this concerned licences granted in 1989 to export high-precision machine tools to Iraq, despite the acknowledgement (by Minister William Waldegrave, in this case) that the British firm producing the machine tools, Matrix Churchill, had been 'taken over as part of a procurement network for the Iraqi **nuclear, CBW** [chemical or biological warfare] **and missile programmes**', and that previous orders had been 'shipped to **the major Iraqi munitions establishments**'. In another secret memo, Waldegrave defended the exports with the words, '**Screwdrivers are also required to make H-bombs**'. (David Leigh, *Betrayed*, 1993, p.184)

GASSING THE KURDS, REWARDED BY THE WEST

Saddam's outstanding crime, which defines his rule, is the chemical attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja, in March 1988, killing 5,000 civilians. *The Times* is the only newspaper to record the 'punishment' meted out by Britain in response to the atrocity: '**Britain doubled Iraq's export credit guarantees.**'

'Export credit guarantees' are loans offered to countries buying British exports. The year before Halabja, Britain lent Iraq £175 million. Then, in 1988, 'the British taxpayer advanced Saddam **£340 million** in medium term credits.' (John Sweeney, *Trading With The Enemy*, 1993, p.99)

The Department of Trade and Industry admitted in 1991 that in early 1988 it permitted the sale to Iraq of chemicals used to manufacture poison gas. The DTI then withdrew the admission—leaving open the possibility that British chemicals were used in the Halabja attack. (Sweeney, p.94)

Saddam was emboldened to use chemical weapons against his own people after the lack of Western reaction to his earlier chemical weapons attacks on Iranian troops (a fact noted in passing by *The Times*, *Guardian* and *Independent*). (See Juan Cole <tinyurl.com/l3tmx> for more.)

The Times remarks correctly that, 'By now Saddam was convinced that no atrocity of his risked serious punishment. He believed that Western powers would not oppose his acquisition of nuclear weapons, since they had allowed him to buy chemical weapons technology and had apparently turned a blind eye to his agents buying nuclear triggers and fissile material, often with money borrowed from themselves under such guises as credit for agricultural products.'

MASSACRING THE SHIAS, AIDED BY THE WEST

In 1990, Saddam miscalculated, invading Kuwait. In 1991, he was expelled, and US-British-French forces drove deep into southern Iraq. A massive national revolt followed. The *Guardian* remembers: 'President George Bush senior had urged the Iraqis to rise up. But when they did so, he turned a deaf ear to their pleas for help.' This is not quite accurate.

US forces were poised to crush the heart of the regime, the Republican Guard, in a 'battle of annihilation' (US commander Norman Schwarzkopf), but were stopped by President Bush Sr. (Cohen and Gatti, *In The Eye Of The Storm*, 1991, p.298) Then Schwarzkopf permitted Saddam's helicopter gunships to operate against the rebels. (Mentioned in *The Times* obituary.)