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### Saddam's execution brings satisfaction, unease

Web Posted: 12/29/2006 11:22 PM CST

**Sig Christenson and Scott Huddleston**  
Express-News

There was a time Iraqis trembled in the presence of Saddam Hussein, a tyrant so brutal he became known as "the butcher of Baghdad."

On the final Saturday of 2006, it was the butcher's turn to quake as Saddam ignominiously went to the gallows — a war criminal convicted on the very soil he once ruled with an iron fist.

The ironic and unexpected end for Saddam, a riches-to-rags-to-ruin story punctuated by serial violence, ritualistic torture, a lavish world of servants and grand palaces and, in the end, a musty underground hollow, elicited epitaphs devoid of tears.

"I'm glad," said Holly Morningstar, mother of Army Staff Sgt. Christopher R. Morningstar, a 27-year-old San Antonian killed Feb. 5 in Al Husayniyah, Iraq. "It won't bring back my son, but at least he helped the effort to get Saddam."

Saddam's death generally was cheered in San Antonio and elsewhere. Emma Bedoy-Pina, a member of the local chapter of Blue Star Mothers of America, a support group for military family members, said she wished Saddam had suffered as his people did.

"Execution for Saddam? I think I would rather he die a long and lonely death in squalor and in a run-down prison with no running water, no heat, no windows, where he would have to sleep on the dirt floor next to his own excrement and urine, no air other than just enough for him to breathe and live as long and miserable as possible," she said.

Others also wondered how the death of a once-powerful dictator would play in a volatile Middle East.

"He deserves to die no doubt about it, but I don't know what the political and war situation will be," Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff said, calling the fallout "one more complication" for Iraq and the U.S. coalition.


"It could go even beyond the Arab world," said Gen. Ronald Fogleman, a retired Air Force chief of staff who served on the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board until leaving the panel last year.

"The lack of any real strong counter-reaction internationally could be quite a message for countries where you have guys of this ilk operating," he added.

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Filmmaker Don North, 65, of Fairfax, Va., worried for seven Iraqi businessmen he profiled in a documentary, "Remembering Saddam." The men, convicted of trading in forbidden foreign currency, lost their right hands in Abu Ghraib prison's hospital.

The movie shows gruesome film footage of the surgery shot by the Mukhabarat, Saddam's secret police. The seven Iraqis later got prosthetic arms at a Houston hospital and met President Bush in the White House.

Today they carry laminated photos of that visit in their wallets, even though their association with the Americans has made them and their families targets of Saddam loyalists. One man in the group, TV producer Basim Al-Fadhly, lives in Dubai after the assassinations of his driver and two siblings.

"They are marked, really marked people," said North, a onetime ABC and NBC war correspondent in Vietnam who was embedded with the 101st Airborne Division during the 2003 invasion. "If there is an orgy of violence and revenge of Baathists and Saddam supporters in reaction to his death, my guys would be right at the top of the list of people to go after."

Most of those interviewed, Air Force Staff Sgt. James Hoke III among them, had strong feelings about Saddam's death. A survivor of a four-story fall in Iraq that left him with 22 facial fractures, two broken arms and other broken bones, he said Saddam got what he deserved.

"From the perspective of someone who's seen Saddam's torture chambers and what he's done to his people, if that's the Lord's will, that's the Lord's will," said Hoke, a 30-year-old Washington state resident treated at Wilford Hall and Warm Springs Rehabilitation Hospital in San Antonio. "I personally think he deserves it."

Not everyone was so sure.

#### **Mixed feelings**

The former Army captain who treated Saddam after his capture had no opinion on whether he should die, saying he'd leave the business of meting out justice to someone else.

Dr. Sudip Bose, an emergency room physician at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Chicago, said he was just a doctor who cared for Saddam on very short notice.

"He was surrounded by a bunch of guards and I took care of him like any other patient," recalled Bose, 32, of Chicago, noting that he addressed Saddam through an interpreter but would not elaborate about the encounter, citing doctor-patient confidentiality rules. "It was only afterwards that you realized the weight of the moment."

Muslims in the Alamo City offered a more muted view. San Antonio Muslim community leader Sarwat Husain said that while she and others feel Saddam should be punished, some feel he should have been tried in an international court of law.

"He killed innocent people and yes, that was wrong, but it should have been handled in the right manner," said Husain, president of the Council on American Islamic Relations-San Antonio.

Another local man born and raised in Iraq until moving to the United States in 1979 bitterly called Saddam's trial by Iraqis "a disrespect to the entire human race." Declining to be identified for fear of retaliation, he added, "It means we gave him to the Iranians" and predicted that Saddam's death "will only bring more pain, more chaos, more violence to the people of Iraq."

Amjed Baghdadi, a spokesman for the Islamic Center of San Antonio, said peace and stability in Iraq is more important to local Muslims than Saddam's fate. As Muslims today mark Eid ul-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice, their prayers and activities will be centered on help for impoverished and oppressed Muslims everywhere.

"A lot of our energy and prayer is focused on the people of Iraq, that they can put an end to their turmoil and get back to peace," he said. "We knew (Saddam) was a source of evil in that part of the world. We were as thrilled as anyone to see him removed from power."

At the Alamo, where tourists took snapshots on a chilly night, Andrew Pennington, 17, of Kansas City, Kan., smiled over news of Saddam's impending demise.

"I'm happy. I think he deserves it for all the things he has done," Pennington said.

"I feel there is justice on earth and I am quite relieved," Katie Carver, 23, of Colorado Springs, Colo., said, standing with him.

Just hours before Saddam was executed, Morningstar, 51, of San Antonio said she planned to celebrate Saddam's death quietly at home. But the party, she added, will be as much for her son's memory as for herself.

"I won't have a drink because I don't drink," she said. "I will find some way. I think that he would be celebrating, and I think he would like it if I would, too."

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*Staff Writer Lisa Marie Gómez contributed to this report.*

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