

# Iraq's New Reign of Terror

By Laurie Mylroie

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As the narrator intones two Koranic verses — "The thieves, cut off their hands for their ill gains and as punishment from God who is great and wise," and "There is life for you in punishment, O you who can reason, that you may follow the right path" — the camera focuses on a severed hand placed on a torn green jacket.

On June 4, the Iraqi regime introduced the Islamic punishment for theft, amputation of the right hand, while decreeing that repeat offenders should lose a foot. Three months later, the hand of a thief, along with the man himself, were shown on Iraqi television.

Saddam Hussein has launched a new reign of terror intended to shore up his weakening grip on power. Although Islamic law does have provisions for cutting off the hand of a thief and the head of a murderer, many punishments being meted out have nothing to do with Islam. They are simply cruel and bizarre.

The regime has decreed that dealing illegally in foreign currency and forging official documents are punishable by amputation of the hand. On Aug. 18, it announced that those whose hands are cut off should also have an X tattooed between their eyes, although Islam strictly forbids such mutilation. Mr. Hussein has personally signed all the amputation decrees.

But the decree that has had the broadest impact is the Aug. 25 announcement that army deserters, or

anyone sheltering them, will lose an ear and be branded. A second offense means losing the other ear; a third offense means death. (In a stunning bout of hypocrisy, the regime also began selling exemptions from military service for around \$1,000, a staggering sum to most Iraqis.)

Military officers who have defected to the opposition say that ear amputations are being performed at army checkpoints, where the ears are thrown into buckets, and that the punishment has been carried out on several thousand people.

There are tens of thousands of army deserters in Iraq, and the new punishments have precipitated open

## Cruel sentences are leading to mass desertion.

opposition. In the northern, predominantly Sunni city of Mosul there were street demonstrations in early September. In the southern Shiite city of Nasriya, the Arab tribe of a mutilated man took revenge by attacking the local headquarters of the ruling Baath Party and cutting off the ears of the officials present. They also cut off the ear on a picture of Mr. Hussein.

Iraq's economic situation is bad and getting worse. Last week, the Government drastically reduced the rations it provides at subsidized prices. By Tuesday, the market price of most staple foods had doubled. This

hardship, combined with the harsh new punishments, has produced Iraq's greatest political fissure since the 1991 post-Gulf War uprisings.

Many army deserters and other opponents of the regime have headed north, where Kurds control nearly 40,000 square miles of territory. This has become the staging area for an umbrella organization called the Iraqi National Congress, which is orchestrating most of the internal opposition to Mr. Hussein.

Since early September, the Iraqi National Congress has been receiving over 100 Iraqis a week fleeing his control. Until recently, most were men who came to join the fight against Mr. Hussein, leaving their wives and children with male relatives. Now army deserters predominate and those that have families try to bring them.

The regime is clearly teetering. The key is the United Nations sanctions, which are undermining its control. Yet several countries, especially France and Russia, are pressing the U.N. to lift the sanctions because they are eager to resume trade. Baghdad has resorted to threats: on Wednesday, the Information Minister, Hamid Hammadi, warned that if sanctions were not eased by November, Iraq "will find another way to deal with the Security Council."

Lifting the sanctions would be foolish. Given Mr. Hussein's determination to hold on to as much of Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons program as possible, it will be impossible to control him once Baghdad is allowed to sell oil. Even the chief of the U.N. weapons inspection team, Rolf Ekkehus, has publicly voiced his doubts about Iraq's intentions.

U.N. Resolution 687, which established the sanctions, was very much an American document, and reflects the flaws of our policy at the end of the Gulf War. It links the ban on exports solely to the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Thus Iraq could invade Kuwait again, but according to Resolution 687, that would not affect its ability to export oil.

The resolution also reflects the Bush Administration's indifference to what governments did to their own people. The sanctions are in no way connected to Mr. Hussein's persecution of his own people, whether army deserters or civilians.

Now that the Security Council is moving to establish tribunals to investigate human rights violations in Bosnia and Rwanda, why not investigate Iraq as well? In April 1991, as Baghdad crushed the postwar uprisings, the Security Council passed a resolution demanding that Iraq stop repressing its population. The European Community called for war crimes trials. But the Bush Administration, hoping that those around Mr. Hussein would overthrow him, foolishly opposed the measure.

Rather than debating whether to lift sanctions, the Security Council should be addressing Baghdad's human rights violations, including the campaign to chop off body parts. Failure to do so will only give the appearance that the U.N. has different rules for countries without oil and those with lots of it.

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