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Why Is Bush Gentle With 'the Butcher Of Baghdad'?

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Saddam Hussein, widely feared as "the Butcher of Baghdad," declared a school holiday last Saturday to swell the crowds ordered to demonstrate in front of the British Embassy.

The dictator took offense because Margaret Thatcher's government dared to protest - as "an act of barbarism deeply repugnant to all civilized people" - his hanging of a reporter for *The London Observer*.

"Mrs. Thatcher wanted him alive; we gave her the body," crowed the Iraqi propaganda minister, after the remains were turned over to the British Embassy in Baghdad.

The accredited journalist, Farzad Bazoft, had heard reports of an explosion at a plant to the southwest of Iraq's capital.

Reporters were denied permission to investigate; suspecting trouble at one of Iraq's poison-gas or missile plants in that area, the reporter disguised himself and went anyway.

He was caught, tried as a spy, and promptly hanged.

Not all the people of the civilized world found the lynching repugnant: "Moderate" King Hussein of Jordan, no relation to **Saddam**, deplored "a concerted attack on Iraq for a long period of time without any reason to justify it."

Arab apologists are busily trying to besmear the victim: Bazoft had a prison record in his early 20s, was stateless, confessed to spying under the always-gentle Iraqi interrogation, etc.

The PLO's Salah Khalef broadcast support of Iraq's gleeful leader.

Saddam sent no demonstrators to the U.S. Embassy for good reason: The Bush administration's reaction was of such studied indifference as to border on condoning the assassination.

President Bush refused to join in the worldwide appeals for clemency.

After the hanging, the president's spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater, said only that "we regret those (appeals) went unheeded. But we don't have a lot of details on the case itself."

At the State Department, our rip-'n'-read spokeswoman, Margaret Tutwiler, read "We deplore Iraq's decision . . ." but when asked what our government intended to do about it, went into her usual flustered state: "I did not think to ask . . ."

A couple of questions we should all ask:

What terrible secret was the journalist trying to uncover? Bush knows, from the same satellite observation that showed poison-gas production at Libya's Rabta plant, that **Saddam** is producing poison gas at 10 different locations. Some of that gas was used in the Iranian war, some in killing thousands of Iraqi Kurds. Three months ago, Iraq launched a three-stage, 48-ton rocket, demonstrating its missile capability. Was the damaged plant producing gas, rockets or nuclear weapons?

Why is Bush so eager to help the dictator of what has become the world's most dangerous nation? When the Congress identified Iraq as a **terrorist** nation to be denied U.S. favor, Bush invoked an exception enabling him to ignore this ruling "in the national interest."

That's why Iraq still gets loan guarantees from us on grain purchases.

The Atlanta branch of Italy's Bank of Lavoro scandalously slipped \$3 billion in financing to Iraq, in a deal being laconically prosecuted by our Justice Department.

Even after the scandal broke, and our agriculture secretary promised a Senate committee no new loan guarantees would be issued without notification, Secretary Clayton Yeutter supplied an additional \$500 million guarantee.

When these fishy dealings were outlined in this column, with wonderment at Bush's needless exposure of U.S. taxpayers, the Iraqi press counselor in Washington, Abdul Rahman Jamil, wrote to my editor to insist our aid was used for grain, not missiles, explaining:

"It is not uncommon to expect delays of payments in financial arrangements."

That tipped off future repayment problems.

"Mr. Safire ought to be reminded," Jamil added, "that a little knowledge is dangerous, and he is using this knowledge dangerously."

A colleague cheerily passed this along with "Hope you weren't planning a holiday in Baghdad."

(I did not take Jamil's reminder to be intimidation, noting it only as a misquotation of Alexander Pope's "A little learning is a dangerous thing.")

So now they're hanging foreign journalists in Iraq and nobody in the Bush administration gives a damn.

Bush ignores this state murder, allows the U.S. to become dependent on Arab oil while **Saddam** urges OPEC to raise prices, and keeps guaranteeing loans to the country that spends billions on mustard gas and missiles.

In what national interest?

What hold does the Butcher of Baghdad have on the president of the United States?

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