

HOW THE PAKISTANI PRESS FRAMED THE EXECUTION OF SADDAM HUSSEIN?

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ABSTRACT

This study has examined the contents published on the editorial pages of the three widely-published newspapers that how the execution of Saddam was perceived by the Pakistani press. The study found that majority of the editorials and columns have criticized Saddam regime as well as condemned his execution. The study has categorized the criticism made by the press. The press suggests that Saddam ruthlessly crushed his political opponents and brutally massacred Shiite and Kurd population in Iraq; the trial was not fair and conducted under the influence of US; insult of Saddam by the executioners and its video recording was the gross violation of law and morality; the execution will fuel the ongoing Shiite-Sunni violence; and selection of the day of Eidul Azha for hanging Saddam is a collective insult of the Muslims by the Iraqi and the US administrations.

INTRODUCTION

More than five years after the US-led attack and Bush's 1st May, 2003 speech announcing 'the end of major combat operations,' and 'mission accomplished' dozens of deaths remain the daily norm in Iraq (Ali, Dawn, 2007; Hammond, 2005). Hanging of Saddam is also an old story but the number of attacks on coalition forces is continuously increasing. The deaths of US troops crossed the number of 4000 in 2008 since the Iraq war started in March 2003. On the other hand, Iraq's religiously and ethnically based political parties show little sign of consensus and the Sunnis charged US forces in Baghdad for victimizing them. The US forces confessed that 60 percent of Baghdad is out of its control (Associated Press, 2007). The media reports show that the situation is worsening more and more for both the Iraqi population and the US forces in Iraq. The U.S. administration is in a very difficult position because the war is getting quite unpopular among the American public and is strongly opposed by the Democrats who are in control of the U.S. Senate. According to Associated Press (2007), "the public's patience for the war has long eroded." Blair, a strong U.S. ally against 'war on terror' is no more prime minister (Lane, 2007).

Immediately after the event of 9/11, the congress unanimously authorized President Bush to use all necessary force against those nations, or organizations, which planned, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks (Ahmad, 2003, p. 21). And on the name of 'war on terror' and 'doctrine of preemptive strikes' the U.S. initiated a global conflict that can be directed against any country (Thussu & Freedman, 2003). This situation has adversely affected the overall international security environment (Thussu, 2006). More than seven years have been marked by continuous conflicts and violence that can be traced directly to the post 9/11 period. The war on terror will continue to shape contemporary history. According to an editorial appeared in the daily Dawn (2007), the U.S. forces are facing tough resistance from the insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, bringing public pressure on the Bush administration to plan an exit strategy.

The U.S. administration considered Saddam regime “to be an imminent threat and in possession of weapons of mass destruction” (p. 19) but the war was opposed by many countries particularly veto powers, and failed to secure U.N. approval for attack (Maslog et al., 2006). Before the invasion, the U.S. had advanced three reasons for securing U.N. approval for attack on Iraq: threat posed by Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction; the links between Saddam regime and Al Qaeda; and the crimes of the Saddam regime against the Shiites and the Kurds in Iraq. Pirzada (Dawn, 2007) argues that after facing failure on the first two counts, the whole thrust of the Bush administration had been to get rid of Saddam. However, many Muslims believe this war as an assault on innocent Iraqis, and Islam, and many see it as being fought for control of oil resources (Maslog et al., 2006; Thussu & Freedman, 2003).

Saddam occupied the power in 1979 and became an exclusive ruler and absolute dictator till March, 2003. After fall of Baghdad, he disappeared from the scene and was captured on Dec. 13, 2003 from an underground hideout near Tikrit. A suit was lodged in war crimes and ethnic cleansing against him and 11 other leaders of the Baath Party. He was convicted by a panel of judges working under Iraqi constitution. Death penalty was ordered on Nov. 5, 2006 for the killing of 148 persons in Dujail in 1982. His petition was rejected on Dec. 26, 2006 and was executed on Dec. 30, 2006. He was hanged after a trial which legal status was questioned from several aspects.

This study is designed to examine that how the execution of Saddam was perceived by the Pakistani press. It has focused the main issues like the ruling of Saddam—mass killing of his political opponents. The establishment of tribunal, the legal procedure followed by the tribunal, and the time of the execution are the focal points of this inquiry. The study also includes the manners --- video recording of the execution and insult of Saddam during the event and its effects on the Shiite-Sunni relationship in Iraq.

REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT OPINION PAGES OF THE PAKISTANI PRESS

Press criticized Saddam’s regime

In its editorial, the daily Nation (2007) criticized Saddam that he had been one of the U.S. most trusted agents in the Middle East and attacked Iran to please the U.S. and to stop Iran as an emerging power on the scene. The daily blamed him for invading Kuwait; crushing all his political opposition and even killed his two sons-in-law for speaking against him. Niazi (Nation, 2007) believes that Saddam was responsible for bloodshed and sufferings of his own people. He massacred Kurds, Shiites and political opponents. On commenting Saddam regime, Lone (Nation, 2007) expressed that he was a brutal tyrant and killed thousands of Iraqis just for political reasons.

Gauhar (Nation, 2007) severely criticized Saddam for dropping nerve gas on Kurd population, killing thousands of people. Mirza (Dawn, 2007) also made Saddam’s regime responsible for the killing of Kurd and Shiite population. He believes that Iraq’s Arab neighbors as well as the Reagan and Thatcher administrations supported his war efforts. Fatemi (Dawn, 2007) believes that Iraq’s history is brutal and bloody beyond belief because Saddam himself never believed in the sanctity of law. He maintains that some Arab rulers and Western sources extended financial support to Saddam in the war against Iran. Shaikh (Dawn, 2007) condemns him for bad ambitions that reduced the most prosperous country into a living hell. Baig (Jang, 2007)

expressed that Saddam used poison gas against Kurds that killed innocent people including children and women. Laghari (Jang, 2007) lamented his role as a U.S. agent and invaded Kuwait that provided justification for establishing U.S. military basis in the region. Hussein (Jang, 2007) as well as Razi (Jang, 2007) criticized his unwise and irresponsible ruling that enabled Israel to attack atomic reactor of Iraq.

Pakistani press criticizing execution

Pakistani press criticized the execution of Saddam on several counts: the U.S. influence on trial; video recording and insult of Saddam during the execution; its effects on Shiite-Sunni tension; and the hanging of Saddam on the day of Eidul Azha.

The status of the tribunal

Saddam was sentenced to death by an Iraqi elite court constituted and working under the Iraqi constitution. But Qureshi (Jang, 2007) as well as Sajid (Jang, 2007) believe that hanging of Saddam was an integral part of the U.S. conspiracy and the trial did not fulfill the least requirements for justice. The guardian (2007) cited in the Dawn, reports that Saddam was tried by a special tribunal shaped and directed by Western forces. Patel (Jang, 2007) holds that occupation of Iraq was an illegitimate act and courts functioning there were illegal and their verdicts had no legal status. Haq (Jang, 2007) and Qureshi, (Jang, 2007) observe that his hanging is an extrajudicial killing because the trial could not meet the international standards in the judicial process and the main task of the U.S. constituted tribunal was to eliminate him. Bhaie (Jang, 2007) pointed out that impartial judges were terminated and Saddam's lawyers assassinated.

Umar (Jang, 2007) expressed that Saddam's execution was a matter of concern for the Human Rights Organizations because the legal procedure was full of flaws. Editorial appeared in the daily Nation (2006) strongly criticized the execution as saying that it was an act of revenge, not a delivery of justice. Human rights groups and former U.S. Attorney-General Ramsey Clark made it clear that the trial was not fair and justice was not delivered properly. According to Ayazuddin (Nation, 2007), the Americans imposed a judgment on the Iraqi tribunal. Gauhar (Nation, 2007) suggests that the procedure of the execution was like a man convicted of murder being handed over to the victim's family to kill him as they please. Lone (Nation, 2007) asserted that Saddam's hanging was a crime for he was not allowed to defend himself. He maintained, "Saddam was in fact hanged without having been legally convicted of an offense," and that the U.S. refused to allow a trial in an international tribunal that has tried Milosevic and other war criminals. Ali (Dawn, 2007) comments that the trial fell well short of acceptable legal norms and the style of execution reinforced the impression of a pure revenge. Mirza (Dawn, 2007) described the trial as bogus and totally prejudiced. He maintains that many Western legal experts, human rights and civil organizations including the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch condemned the legal aspects of the trial. Harassing and persecution of the defense lawyers and removal of the independent judges were also criticized by the press. The press also reveals that Iraqi administration is run by Shiites and Kurds, who are Saddam's political enemies. The press comments that several observers, including the American commentators, claim that the execution was carried out swiftly and several judicial aspects were ignored (Fatemi, Dawn, 2007).

Shaikh (Dawn, 2007) cited an Arab observer in his article, "Important evidence were not disclosed to them during the trial, and Saddam was prevented from questioning witnesses testifying against him. Several of his lawyers were threatened or assassinated, and the trial was

subjected to continuous political interference.” Shaikh argues that Iraqi law requires signatures of the president and vice-president for the death penalty but the Prime Minister did not secure their signatures for the execution.

Videotaping and taunts by the executioners

Video recording of the event of execution was a strange phenomenon and condemned by many article writers. They believe that making video of the event was violation of the law. They also condemned the taunting of Saddam by his executioners during hanging (Nation, 2007; Khayal, 2007). According to Mirza (Dawn, 2007), shocking scenes were brought to the world and released on the internet. He cited the British Vice President, John Prescott who told the BBC that the manner of Saddam’s death was “quite deplorable, and to get this kind of recorded messages coming out is totally unacceptable.”

The Daily Dawn (2007) writes that it was justice delivered in its crudest form and “the video tapes are shocking and terrible.” Shaikh (Dawn, 2007) suggests that the execution was a “sectarian killing rather than the dispensation of justice.” The Daily Jang (2007) terms the video taping as an illegal, immoral act. Muhayyuddin (Jang, 2007) condemned the video recording in which indecent language had been used by the executioners. Ali (Dawn, 2007) argues that video showed that Saddam was subjected to taunts from the guards and the assembled audiences.

Eidul Azha factor

The hanging of Saddam on the day of Eidul Azha was another aspect of the event criticized by the Pakistani press. It is commonly believed in the Muslims that the Bush administration planned the event on the occasion of Eid to insult the Muslims collectively. The press pointed out that execution on the day of Eid indicates their insensitivity towards Muslim beliefs and practices.

Qayyum (Nation, 2007) also criticized the U.S. by choosing the sacred day of Eid for the execution. He maintained that they do not care about Muslim religion. Similarly, the press believes that execution on Eid was a collective insult of all Muslims, and has violated the Iraqi law. The press cited a senior Iraqi judge who remarked that the local law forbids execution during Eid (Ayazuddin, Nation, 2007; Lone, Nation, 2007). Mirza (Dawn, 2007) warns that the hanging of Saddam on Eid day is the beginning of a new war in the region.

Baig (Jang, 2007) accused the Iraqi and the U.S. administrations and added that hanging on Eid day was a collective insult of more than one billion Muslims across the world. Muhammad (Jang, 2007) remarked that such act indicated the moral degradation and tension of the Iraqi and the U.S. administrations. Some articles predict that hanging of Saddam on Eid bring many negative consequences to the region because it is a matter of concern and anger for the Muslims. Such events will make the situation more difficult for the Iraqi and U.S. administrations (Haq, Jang, 2007; Butt, Jang, 2007).

Sectarian tension

Sunni-Shiite tension in Iraq is already very high and hundred of Iraqis are being tortured and killed on daily basis. Since, Saddam was a Sunni leader, hanged by Shiite led administration, therefore, Sunni population blames Shiites for his execution. The press predicts that hanging of Sunni’s leader will further intensify the ongoing war between the two sects and the situation would be worst in the coming days.

The hanging of Saddam will intensify the ongoing bloodshed, deepen sectarian and ethnic divide and push the country towards disintegration. Shiite-Sunni divide has got worst and Saddam’s

hanging has driven a dagger into the heart of Shiite-Sunni relations (Gauhar, Nation, 2007; Qayyum, Nation, 2007)). The press predicts that Saddam's execution will turn the Shiite-Sunni violence into a civil war because Iraqi Sunnis are likely to evaluate Saddam's execution as an evidence of their further marginalization (Fatemi, Dawn, 2007). The press alarms that Saddam's hanging will further accentuate the sectarian divide and perhaps destabilize the entire gulf region (Jang Editorial, 2007; Laghari, Jang, 2007; Haq, Jang, 2007).

Justice by the criminals

The press also criticized the social and ethical aspects of the Saddam's execution and questions the integrity of the U.S. administration for involvement in the crime against humanity. The press claims that the U.S. administration is responsible for the killing of thousands of civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, South-East Asia and Latin America (Ali, Dawn, 2007; Mirza, Dawn, 2007). Mirza (Dawn, 2007) cited two writers with the following statements:

The shameless, outrageous, covert military support which the US and Britain gave to Saddam....And now Saddam, who knew the full extent of that Western support given to him while he was perpetrating some of the worst atrocities since the Second World War — is dead" (Robert Fisk). "Saddam was a tyrant is beyond dispute, but what is conveniently forgotten is that most of his crimes were committed when he was a staunch ally of all those who now occupy the country (Tariq Ali).

The press argues if Saddam have killed Kurds and Shiites, the U.S. resorted to carpet bombing and killed thousands of civilians indiscriminately in Afghanistan and Iraq. Bush and his allies are more criminal for occupying Iraq for its natural resources, widening sectarian tension and killing thousands of Iraqis (Qureshi, Jang, 2007; Sajid, Jang, 2007). The press asks that Saddam was hanged for the killing of 148 people but the U.S. is responsible for the killing of 450000 and injuring two million civilians in Iraq for the sake of occupation of Iraq's natural resources (Umar, Jang, 2007; Patel, Jang, 2007).

International reaction to the execution

Saddam's execution evoked mixed reactions worldwide. President Bush called it "an important milestone on course to Iraq's becoming a democracy" The OIC, the Muslim world's representative body termed it a tragic event that could intensify the ongoing Shiite-Sunni tension. Pakistan also termed the execution as a tragic incident and dangerous for the Iraq stability. Iran and Kuwait hailed the act while European countries criticized the hanging mainly because of opposition to the death sentence on principle, not for any other reason. Russians regretted that it would further intensify the already tragic situation in the region The Vatican City condemned the hanging and warned that it would intensify the ongoing violence in the region. Human Rights Watch denounced the event as an inhuman, immoral, and illegal.

US political analysts Riddle and Nolan note that execution of Saddam proved that Bush

administration has declined the option of solving the problems through peaceful dialogue and political negotiation (Muhayyuddin, Jang, 2007). Libya denounced the execution (Mir, Jang, 2007) and an Egyptian newspaper, Al Ahram warned that the event would adversely affect the entire region. UK voice president, Prescott and the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown denounced the event as an illegal act. A prominent Iraqi novelist expressed that hanging of Saddam was a crime and situation in Iraq would be worst under the US occupation (Bhaie, Jang, 2007).

RESEARCH QUESTION

News events are explained and evaluated within the society's normative structure and brought to the media within the framework of journalistic norms (Daniel, 1995). Time Magazine's poll shows that majority of the Asian opposed the war on Iraq but their governments supported this US-led adventure for some military and economic reasons (Beech, 2003). Masloge et al. (2006) believe that coverage given to Iraq war by Asian media may have serious implications in the future. The execution of Saddam is one of the major events happened in the Iraq war scenario. It may also bring some adverse consequences to the regions, particularly to Iraq geographical integrity due to the ongoing intensive Shiite-Sunni violence. A British think-tank said, "Iraq is on the verge of becoming a failed state, leading to a process of fragmentation" (Dawn, 2007). However, the present study examines the opinion pages of the Pakistani press-- the three national dailies-- regarding the execution of Saddam.

The main question this study has posed is that "How Saddam Hussein's execution was perceived by the Pakistani press?" The question was answered after reviewing and analyzing the opinion pages of the three selected national dailies.

METHODOLOGY

News events are framed to influence audience members' perceptions of the social reality (Khan & Farish, 2005). But how much the media is successful in influencing the perceptions of the audiences is a matter of proper investigation. Many studies have been conducted on the extent and nature of coverage given by the press to various national and international issues. Some have examined the flow of foreign-news stories into United States (Mujahid, 1970). Some have compared foreign news in the dailies of the United States and South America (Markham, 1959). Some have studied the flow of news between countries (Hart, 1963; Merrill, 1962) and some have examined the coverage of the news stories by the US magazines (Khan & Farish, 2005). Most of these studies have used the methods of content analysis as space occupied, length and width of columns, length and size of headlines, page location, and number of words in the text. Some studies have adopted this approach by coding the adjectival or other verbal and adverbial terms (Hashem, 1995). But coding such terms without attention to a complete sentence and paragraph of the text could be misleading because the term makes a complete sense only within a complete sentence and paragraph (Khan & Farish, 2005). The contents published in the opinion page needs to expand the area for analysis to the whole text.

So, for this study, content analysis approach was utilized to examine and evaluate the perception of the Pakistani press about the event of Saddam's execution. Opinion page-- editorials and

columns-- of the three widely circulated national dailies were selected for this study. Two dailies were selected from English and one from Urdu newspapers (national language). They were selected from well-established groups of newspaper published in Pakistan: The daily Dawn was selected from the Dawn group of newspapers; The daily Nation from Nawaiwaqt group of newspapers; and The daily Jang from the Jang group of newspapers.

The study also included those articles published on the editorial pages of these dailies that had been taken from the foreign press because principally, it can be counted as an integral part of the Pakistani press on the issue. The contents in editorials and columns on or about Saddam and his execution in these three dailies formed the unit of observation. The units of observation were determined according to the formula introduced by Twohey (Twohey, 1941). According to this formula, these contents were first classified as 'relevant or irrelevant.' Relevancy was decided on basis of discussing Saddam's regime and/or his execution with special reference to the particular event of execution. The relevant contents were then classified in the following fashion:

1. editorials and columns criticized Saddam's regime only;
2. criticized execution only;
3. slightly criticized Saddam regime and fully criticized execution;
4. fully criticized Saddam regime and slightly criticized execution; and
5. criticized both Saddam regime and execution equally.

This classification was decided on the basis of analysis of the theme, and the theme was judged from the editorials and columns as a whole. This approach is appropriate because the words or sentences (favorable/unfavorable) without analyzing the entire body of the text can be misleading.

Time frame

Contents published in fourteen days, from Dec. 31, 2006 to Jan. 15, 2007 were analyzed to address the research question. The dailies were not published on January 2nd and 3rd due to Eid holidays, therefore the period constitutes fourteen published days in total. Dec. 31, 2006 was chosen as the first day of the study because Saddam was executed on the daybreak of Dec. 30, 2006, and editorial and opinions had to be appeared on the next day. January 15, 2007 was chosen as the last day because no editorial or column was published after that date on the issue of execution. The fourteen days is an enough time to analyze the issue within the framework of the above developed classification.

RESULTS

Finding-1. The three national dailies published four editorials in the specified period on this issue and all of them criticized both Saddam regime and his execution equally.

Finding-2. Thirty-two columns were relevant to the issue of Saddam's execution and his regime published in 14 days in the three national dailies. The finding shows that 3.125 percent of the columns have criticized Saddam's regime only. Over 56 percent of the columns have criticized Saddam's execution only. 31.25 percent have slightly criticized Saddam's regime and fully criticized his execution. Over 9 percent of the columns have criticized Saddam's regime and his execution equally.

See details for number of relevant columns in table-1; for relevant lines in table- 2.

From Dec. 31, 2006 to Jan. 15, 2007 ----- Total published days: 14

Table-1. No. of relevant columns

Names of Dailies	The Dawn	The Nation	The Jang	Total	Percent
No. of total relevant columns	07	06	19	32	
No. of columns criticizing Saddam regime only	Nil	Nil	01	01	3.125
No. of columns criticizing execution only	Nil	04	14	18	56.25
No. of columns slightly criticizing Saddam regime and fully criticized execution	06	02	02	10	31.25
No. of columns fully criticizing Saddam regime and slightly criticized execution	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
No. of columns criticizing Saddam regime and execution equally	01	Nil	02	03	9.375

Table2- No. of relevant columns' lines

Names of Dailies	The Dawn	The Nation	The Jang	Total	Percent
Lines of total relevant columns	684	423	1423	2530	
Lines of columns criticizing Saddam regime only	Nil	Nil	81	81	3.20
Lines of columns criticizing execution only	Nil	244	1045	1289	50.95
Line of columns slightly criticizing Saddam regime and fully criticized execution	554	179	121	854	33.75

Lines of columns fully criticizing Saddam regime and slightly criticized execution	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Lines of columns criticizing Saddam and execution equally	130	Nil	176	306	12.10

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The press has evaluated the event of Saddam's execution with the relevant background. It has analyzed the present situation and established its relations with the past two decades. The press suggests that Saddam was a strong U.S. ally in the Gulf and worked for the U.S. interest in the region. He was responsible for the deadly war against Iran and Kuwait which killed some one million people and destroyed their economies. Support of the U.S., U.K. and some neighboring Arab countries for these wars was severely criticized by the Pakistani press on this occasion. Majority of the writers contributed in the press believe that Saddam was encouraged by the US ambassador to invade Kuwait. The press criticized the sanctions against Iraq that caused the death of half a million people particularly children in need of medicine.

The overall analysis of the relevant columns gives a strong impression that the present war against terrorism is actually a war against Muslims to establish American hegemony in the region. Saddam was hanged just to please the Shiite population in Iraq that could expedite the ongoing Shiite-Sunni tensions, and consequently will disintegrate Iraq into different ethnic and religious pieces. According to the contributors of the opinion pages of the three dailies, this Balkanization of the country would enable the U.S. administration to easily control the region for the interest of oil resources. Latest situation prevailing in Iraq has partially proved the accuracy of the analysis made and predictions given by various writers. Killing and kidnapping has become a daily norm. No security strategy is working in Iraq and the country has collapsed into an absolute civil war. Allied forces are also facing tough resistance. Head of the U.S. forces in Iraq said that U.S. casualties had mounted because Sunni extremists are starting to fight very hard. He said, "This is a skilled and determined enemy. He's ruthless. He's got a thirst for blood like I've never seen anywhere in my life. And he's determined to do whatever he can" (Associated Press, June, 30, 2007).

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