

Hussein Confessed to Massacre Order, Iraqi President Says

By [RICHARD A. OPPEL Jr.](#)
The New York Times
September 7, 2005

BAGHDAD, [Iraq](#), Sept. 6 - The deposed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein has confessed to crimes in meetings with investigators for the special tribunal that will try him later this year, President Jalal Talabani said in a televised interview Tuesday night. But a lawyer for Mr. Hussein's family dismissed the statement as a "fabrication."

Speaking on the state-run Iraqiya network, Mr. Talabani, a Kurd, said investigators have told him the "good news" that Mr. Hussein had confessed to ordering the Anfal massacre against the Kurds in northern Iraq in 1988 and to ordering other executions.

"He confessed about the Anfal executions, and the orders issued by his name," Mr. Talabani said. "Saddam should be executed 20 times."

It was not clear from the interview whether Mr. Talabani was saying that Mr. Hussein had acknowledged that his actions were criminal or that the former leader had merely admitted he had ordered killings he believed were proper. In the past he has not denied that he ordered people killed.

After the broadcast, a lawyer for Mr. Hussein's family criticized Mr. Talabani's remarks and suggested in an interview with The Associated Press that his statements had been false. Claims of a confession "comes to me as a surprise, a big surprise," said the lawyer, Abdel Haq Alani. He said Mr. Hussein had made no mention of a confession during a meeting with his Iraqi lawyer on Monday.

Mr. Alani added, "Is this the fabrication of Talabani or what?"

Fighting against Sunni Arab insurgents continued in western and northern Iraq. Some residents fled the northern insurgent stronghold of Tal Afar as fighting continued between American and Iraqi forces and insurgents who have controlled much of the city for almost a year. Residents complained of severe food shortages, and news services reported that the fighting had killed and wounded civilians and that residents had been bracing for a new round of combat.

Insurgents used a large roadside bomb to kill one American soldier in Tal Afar on Monday, the military said. American troops have been fighting since May to wrest control of the city from insurgents who moved in after the military largely abandoned Tal Afar last year.

In western Iraq, military jets launched two airstrikes against insurgents near the Syrian border on Tuesday, the latest assault against militants who control much of the desolate badlands of western Anbar Province that are home turf to the most hardened elements of the Sunni Arab insurgency.

Shortly after midnight on Tuesday, jets bombed two bridges near the town of Karabila that insurgents had used to transport foreign fighters and weapons into central Iraq, a statement by the [United States](#) Marines said. Hours later, jets flattened a "foreign fighter safe house" near the bridges after a gun battle with marines there that killed two insurgents, another statement said.

In contrast to the military's normally more upbeat assertions about progress curbing the insurgency, the first statement noted that western Anbar residents have "experienced an increased level of violence at the hands of Al Qaeda in Iraq terrorists."

In central Baghdad, two American soldiers were killed Tuesday morning and two more were wounded when insurgents attacked their vehicle with a large roadside bomb. Another American soldier died Monday in Ramadi, the provincial capital of Anbar, when his vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb.

In other violence, the Iraqi police found four bodies in a sewage duct in southern Baghdad on Tuesday afternoon, according to an official at the Iraqi Interior Ministry. The official also said that shortly after 9 p.m., attackers shooting from a car window opened fire on people gathered at a Sunni mosque in northern Baghdad, killing three and wounding two. There were also unconfirmed reports that the son of Anbar Province's governor had been kidnapped from his college.

Iraqi officials say Mr. Hussein's first trial is expected to begin Oct. 19, when he faces charges that he ordered the killing of nearly 150 men and boys from the Shiite village of Dujail, 35 miles north of Baghdad, after a failed assassination attempt against him there in 1982.

If convicted, Mr. Hussein could be hanged soon afterward, eliminating the need for other prosecutions of charges of crimes against humanity, Iraqi officials have said. Those charges include ordering the Anfal massacre, where tens of thousands of Kurds were gassed or otherwise killed and dumped into mass graves, and the suppression of the Shiite uprising in southern Iraq in 1991, when 150,000 people were killed and bulldozed into graves.

Across many parts of Iraq with heavy Sunni Arab populations - especially in western Anbar - Iraqi security forces are far from being able to battle the insurgency on their own. But in the Shiite-dominated south, a battalion of 1,500 Iraqi troops formally assumed control of the holy city of Najaf, where Shiite insurgents fought fierce battles with American troops just last year.

The American 155th Brigade Combat Team handed over control of the main military encampment in Najaf, Forward Operating Base Hotel, to Iraqi troops during a ceremony on Tuesday.

The American commander, Brig. Gen. Augustus L. Collins, said the "Iraqi Army in Najaf can control the area," according to a pool report of the ceremony. But the general also emphasized that a contingent of American troops would remain based nearby in case the Iraqi forces needed help.

"Although we are transferring authority at this F.O.B., we will still be here to help the people of Najaf," he said.