

# The Saddam Hussein Trials

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**EDITORIAL**

The crimes committed against the Iraqi people by Saddam Hussein's dictatorship are so numerous that there is no realistic possibility of trying Mr. Hussein for all of them. But if there is one particular case for which he must be made to answer, it is the gruesome military campaign he waged against Iraqi Kurdish civilians 18 years ago. At least 50,000 civilians were killed and 2,000 villages destroyed.

Those genocidal attacks, which included the use of deadly poison gas against thousands of unarmed women and children, stand as a crime against humanity. The emotional and political scars they left behind continue to distort Iraqi politics even today and they must be accounted for, fully and publicly, in a court of law.

The trauma of those attacks — and the long postponement of justice — greatly intensified the conviction of many Kurds that they could never live safely under Iraqi Arab rule. Since 1991, the Kurdish northeast has had an autonomous Kurdish government and not much concerned itself with trends in the Arab areas of Iraq, including the recent drift toward civil war. Had it been otherwise, the Kurds, who are largely Sunni by faith and relatively secular in their habits, could have applied a powerful brake to the divisive sectarian policies of the Shiite fundamentalist parties.

Mr. Hussein's first trial, in which he has now admitted ordering the execution of 148 men and boys from the Shiite village of Dujail to punish an assassination attempt, is now moving toward its final stage. If he is convicted and draws the expected death sentence, the genocide trial may never take place. That would be perverse.

The Dujail trial has been far too flawed to stand as Mr. Hussein's ultimate reckoning with the law. And the Kurds have had to wait far too long for the full measure of justice to which they are entitled, including a full detailing of all the relevant facts.

The attacks drew protests, but, shamefully, no effective international response at the time they occurred. That was in part because the Reagan administration and the first Bush administration were torn between revulsion and their misconceived strategy of building up Iraq as a bulwark against revolutionary Iran.

This long-delayed genocide trial cannot fully right history's wrongs or bridge Iraq's dangerous ethnic and religious divisions. But it can help. It needs to proceed, with Saddam Hussein alive and in the dock.

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