

The Capture of Saddam

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The capture of Saddam Hussein by the U.S. occupation forces in Iraq is, of course, good news.

While he posed no threat to the United States and little threat to his neighbors, Saddam was a tyrant who brutalized his own people for decades. As long as he remained on the run, there were some Iraqis who feared his eventual return to power.

With Saddam in custody, a shadow has been removed and the progress toward self-government may be hastened a bit.

But, realistically, Saddam was nothing more than a shadow. With the U.S. invasion in March, Saddam was forced to flee Baghdad. By April, no one thought of him as being in control of the country. By May, even President Bush was posing in front of a sign that declared, "Mission Accomplished."

Now that Saddam has been captured, advocates for the Bush administration's misguided policy of pre-emptive war will attempt to find justification for the invasion that has cost thousands of Iraqi lives and hundreds of American lives. But wiser counsel comes from **U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky**, the savvy Illinois Democrat who was one of the wisest critics of the president's rush to war.

"I take exception with those who see this as a major vindication of this war and the policy of pre-emptive war," **Schakowsky** said Sunday. "I disagree with those who say this proves that it was all worth it - the loss of American lives, the isolation of the U.S., the enormous expense born by Americans alone."

Schakowsky is right. Before the war, the serious justifications that were offered for attacking Iraq had little to do with Saddam or the suffering of the Iraqi people.

The United States needed to invade the country, Americans were told, to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, to stop terrorism and to create a model of democracy for the Arab world. Only when the weapons of mass destruction were not found, when connections to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida were not established, and when progress toward democracy was thwarted did the administration start to peddle the notion that Saddam was directing the guerrilla war that continued to destabilize Iraq.

While Saddam loyalists have, undoubtedly, been behind some of the attacks on U.S. troops and on Iraqi civilians who have cooperated with the occupation forces, serious analysts suggest that the continued violence in Iraq is the product of many resentments, many motivations and many groups. To suggest that the capture of one man will resolve all of those resentments is absurd.

This does not mean, however, that the Bush administration's approach to Saddam's incarceration and prosecution is irrelevant. It is essential that all of the legalities be handled by his fellow Iraqis and not by occupying forces. If the Iraqi people believe Saddam's prosecution and punishment is being managed by the United States, they will lose confidence in the process.

Beyond the question of how to handle Saddam lies the broader question of how the United States will extricate itself from the Iraqi imbroglio.

The administration can speed up the process of bringing our troops home by treating the capture of Saddam as a turning point. It is time for President Bush to reach out to allies such as Canada, Germany, France and Russia.

These countries, as well as the United Nations, need to be brought into the process of stabilizing Iraq and then quickly putting power into the hands of the Iraqi people.

It is, indeed, good that Saddam has been captured. But the question of *how good* remains to be settled.

Ultimately, the best result of the capture of Saddam can, and should, be a hastening of the end to the occupation.

And the best way to achieve that result is by inviting other countries - even those that had the wisdom to oppose the invasion - to share responsibility for the reconstruction of a country that has been devastated not just by Saddam Hussein but by too many years of sanctions and wars.