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For the 23 people in the United States who have not been wholly consumed by the *All Michael*, *All The Time* media onslaught, it's been an interesting week.

For instance, California, the world's 8<sup>th</sup> largest economy, went officially, publicly broke and started issuing IOUs for debts. Those few California residents who paid attention for the last ten years have known the state has been broke for years and simply been covering it up with shell game budgeting, but now the kimono is open and the entire world knows the story. Well, at least those who are paying attention know the story.

The governor of South Carolina, Mark Sanford, owes a huge personal debt to Mr. Jackson for the timing of his demise. It shifted media attention away from Mr. Sanford's personal and political self-immolation in the flames of yet another unseemly sexual tryst by the politically powerful. While otherwise humorous, I view this incident as the dark side of the reality of a system that self-selects only the most extreme narcissists, since only those who qualify as full-on or clinically borderline personality disorders, reeking of megalomania, vanity, conceit, egotism, selfishness and lust for power would even consider, much less survive, the electoral process. Sanford, as a politician, isn't an outlier in this regard, he is simply emblematic.

North Korea kept itself and its leader, Kim Jong-il, in the news, the resulting spotlight of international diplomacy and media brightly illuminating the walls of the closed society. And since that's the entire point of the North Korean regime's posturing, baiting and deceit, I'll not augment it here, except to point out that the reason there will never be any accommodation and reconciliation between North Korea and the rest of the world is that if there was, the sole reason and rationale for the current regime to exist would disappear, along with the regime. Don't hold your breath waiting for a well-behaved, engaged North Korea.

The Middle East, as always, also provided headline fodder for those news organizations that left a tiny portion of resources available for something other than the color of the socks on the corpse. Most neglected among these stories was the Iranian elections, using the term loosely, and the simultaneous detention of staff from the U.K. embassy in Tehran. The most reliable mark of leadership without credibility is reliance on the creation and cultivation of an external enemy to unite the masses. While North Korea's Kim Jong-il certainly wins the global award for lack of imagination in this regard, Iran's theocracy is not far behind. The U.K.? Again? There are 74 foreign embassies in Iran. Can't the mullahs nominate somebody else for Satan-of-the-week, just for varieties sake, if nothing else? How about Greenland or Mali or Argentina? Or could it be that it's not just about creating and cultivating an external enemy to unite the masses, it's a lot about what the quantity, tone and source of media coverage that demonization will yield? Those crafty theocrats, they're always a step ahead of the lumbering, slumbering, decadent West.

Another major event in the Middle East that went largely unnoticed was U.S. troops moving out of large urban areas in Iraq, turning over day-to-day security to Iraqi police and military personnel, and thus giving a major PR victory to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. A PR plum which was subsequently augmented by U.S. Vice President Joe Biden offering to help the Iraqis overcome internal divisions and achieve reconciliation between the three major ethnic and political groups: Shia, Sunni and Kurd; an offer that was quickly and loudly refused by the Prime Minister, further augmenting Maliki's newly hatched and fledgling credentials as a strong, independent leader, free of undue U.S. influence and control; and entirely capable of leading and uniting the Iraqi people under a common vision of unity and shared purpose. Right.

And lastly, there was by far the most interesting news of the week—the almost entirely unnoticed release of the redacted FBI interviews with the post-capture, former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Hussein, or “High Value Detainee #1” as he is referred to, was America's version of “unite the masses with an external enemy” of his era, so it is interesting to learn a little bit about how he spins history and represents himself and his regime.

## Lessons From Saddam

I compiled all the interviews and supporting documents into one PDF file here:  
<http://www.hackneys.com/docs/saddam-hussein-FBI-interviews.pdf>

I also OCR'ed the file to add select, copy & paste capability for those interested in excerpting portions.

Some highlights and comments from the interviews with Saddam Hussein:

- *“Hussein stated it is not only important what people say or think about him now but what they think in the future, 500 or 1000 years from now.”*

This is a very telling comment and is an attribute about Middle Eastern culture that many people in the West, particularly among the political left, do not comprehend and/or fully appreciate. This is most apparent as it relates to attitudes and approaches to people such as Osama Bin Laden. Very few people in the West understand that it is the long view, the very long view, of history that is what matters. It is inconceivable to most of those in the West that what is happening now is not really about their countries or about, most importantly in these self-absorbed cultures, *them*; but is about Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden and their ilk becoming a martyr—immortalized in poem, song and electrons. The immediacy of life, the short-term values that dominate decision making and the absence of cultures spanning thousands of years make understanding this reality particularly challenging for Westerners.

- *“Despite all the hardships and issues endured by Iraq, one hundred percent of the people voted for Hussein in the last elections. In Hussein's opinion, they still supported their leader.”*

There is no better statement to reflect the thinking of nearly every political leader on earth than this. You can think of Saddam and this mindset as what almost every elected official in the U.S. would become if left to fester long enough.

- *“When [Ayatollah] Khomeini came to power in 1979, he had two things which “interfered” with his mind. One, he was a religious fanatic...”*

This excerpt is important for two reasons. First, it illustrates that Hussein was secular. Many Westerners, especially among the American political right, consider all Muslims religious fanatics, despite the fact most are as much “regular folks” about their religion as the everyday American. This blindness to where religion fits into typical Middle Eastern life is the same mentally occluded view that prevents Westerners from perceiving Turkey as an Islamic democracy—the very model the West dreams of creating as an example for the people of the Middle East to follow. In both cases, the on-the-ground reality does not fit into the narrative favored by the highly polarized political left and right, so it is ignored.

The second reason this excerpt is important is that it is the foundation upon which the U.S.'s support for Iraq in its war with Iran was based. The support was built, brick by brick, using the realpolitik cement of “The enemy of my enemy is my brother.” Many Westerners, especially Europeans and the American political left, have an extremely naïve view of geopolitics as it is manifested in the trench warfare of hand-to-hand diplomacy and international relations. U.S. support for Iraq during the Iran/Iraq war was pragmatic and followed the fundamental principle of nation-state relations: Any and all actions of a nation state are first, foremost and always in the self-interest of the nation state.

## Lessons From Saddam

- *"The soldier of today is not the same as the soldier of 100 years ago. They are part of a 'universal group' hearing and seeing things on the television and radio. The soldier is 'part of the world' and is 'affected' by this."*

Even dictators have limits, and one of those limits is the effectiveness of fighting forces and a civilian population that are exposed to sources of information other than the official party line. There is one thing feared above all others by totalitarian regimes and that is the free flow of information. In the immortal words attributed to the first great Persian emperor, the ruler of the world, Darius, "Control information and you control the world."

- *Hussein stated that while looking at the ways in which others live, we "don't forget we are Arabs and Iraqis and that Iraqis have their own way of coexisting and relating with other Arabs."*

This is an illustration of the differences between Arab nations that is lost on many westerners, who tend to view Arabs, and Arab nations as a monolith, marching in lock step. In reality, thought, belief and political reality varies widely in the Arab world from nation to nation, national region to national region, city to city and village to village.

- *According to Hussein, the psychology of the Ba'ath Party was to recruit young individuals at the beginning of their schooling such as when they were in elementary and secondary school. The Party seldom recruited members from colleges. Their philosophy was that they wanted a person they could mold to "grow" into the Party. In the 1950's and 1960's, the Party accepted primarily young people and only a few older individuals.*

This is the difference between a political party and a cult. A political party sets forth its ideas and people are drawn to those ideas. A cult seeks to obtain malleable minds and form them to its own ends.

- *Hussein stated leading people is the most difficult thing in life. Whoever can lead people in the Party, and the masses, will be effective in their jobs. Hussein continued saying Party members "gave it a try with some succeeding and some failing." Party members continued in their positions until the responsibilities of their work overcame their individual abilities. At this point, they were replaced.*

*The 1968 revolution in Iraq included seventy "revolutionaries." Very few of them continued in government and/or Party service after the revolution. Some were appointed to positions and performed well, some did not. All of them did not have the ability to lead and be professional. Some continued in service while others dropped out over time.*

*Like others, they were appointed to government positions. Some "made it" while some did not.*

Some things are universal, even among "revolutionaries," including the Peter Principle: People in organizations rise to their level of incompetence.

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- *Additionally, people in Iraq generally "know each other" and there are many tribal influences. Even if the law permits such conduct, tribes will seek revenge.*

*Hussein explained that the selection or dismissal of individuals for particular military or governmental positions often involves consideration of the perception of one's family or tribe.*

These are two variations on the reality of tribe, a fundamental unit of human existence everywhere on the planet except America. Because it does not exist here as it does culturally elsewhere, Americans are fundamentally incapable of understanding what tribes are, how they work and how other societies are constructed on the building block of tribe.

- *According to Hussein. Khomeini and Iran would have occupied all of the Arab world if it had not been for Iraq.*

A fact of history that is lost on most Westerners is that although they share the same religion, there is very little love lost between Arabs and Iran. The Persian Empire, centered in Iran, ruled the Arabs for centuries. The Arabs have not forgotten this period of history, or the indignities they suffered. For most Arabs, the worst possible scenario is a militarily dominant Iran, poised to re-create the glory of the Persian Empire in the modern day Middle East.

- *According to Hussein, the Kuwaiti leaders were not "from the people." On the contrary, they were originally brought in by the British.*

*Hussein reiterated information provided in a previous interview stating, "Kuwait is Iraqi." According to Hussein, Kuwait was "stolen" from Iraq by a British resolution.*

*According to Hussein, national rule was a relatively new concept during this time period. Even though most Iraqis were Arab, they were not accustomed to being ruled by an Arab, King Faisal at that time. He was "installed" into power by the British.*

Another brutal fact of history lost on almost all Westerners is that the Middle East we all learned about in school and see on the news every night is almost entirely artificial, created by England and France. The two European colonial powers arbitrarily drew lines on maps to divide up the former Ottoman Empire after WWI. As part of this post-war dividing of the spoils, co-operative rulers were installed by the Europeans in the newly created artificial nations. All of this was done despite wartime promises by the Allies to create an independent Arab homeland in exchange for the Arabs' assistance in defeating Germany, Austria-Hungary and their ill-fated ally, the Ottoman Empire. The Arab view of history since 1918 begins with artificial borders drawn through the middle of traditional tribal areas, European betrayal and colonial installed foreign kings and goes downhill from there. Most of the intractable Middle East mess we deal with daily can be laid at the feet of the Europeans.

## Lessons From Saddam

- *"How would someone know the Shia would act this way about something that happened 1,300 years ago?"*

This is yet another reality of the Middle East lost on most westerners, particularly the political left. In the Middle East, events of more than 1,000 years ago are passionately debated as if they happened last week. Enmity based on these long ago events is carefully implanted and nurtured in new generations. Contemporary retribution is rationalized and justified based on real or perceived injustices from centuries or millennia in the past. The time scale and level of passion related to long-ago events in the Middle East is inconceivable and incomprehensible to the typical modern westerner.

- *"The sins of a government are not few."*

This is probably the closest thing to an admission of responsibility and guilt ever uttered by Hussein. It is also a very accurate observation of the realities of geopolitics. Unfortunately, those on the political right consider this pragmatic maxim a license to execute "the ends justify the means" as foreign policy.

- *Hussein stated that the Iraqi senior leaders received information regarding their Party much in the same manner as Democrats and Republicans in America. When a directive was issued by the leadership, instructions were sent to all Party members. When a Party member desired a certain action, a request was submitted through the appropriate channels to the Iraqi leadership.*

This is a very revealing insight into just how far Hussein's perception of how America is governed was from the reality. He assumed that since his totalitarian party controlled all aspects of life in Iraq, the same must be true in America. In reality, however, it is not the political parties that control America; it is those who purchase the politicians of the parties that control all aspects of life in America. Here, it is indeed pay to play.

- *Hussein indicated he was interested in understanding the American culture, and did so by watching American movies. According to Hussein, he watched numerous American films, from these he developed his opinion of the American culture.*

It wasn't just Saddam and his cronies sitting around the tube forming their opinions about American life, American people and American culture based on American movies, it was and remains the entire rest of the planet Earth. If you ever wonder what people think of America, watch some Hollywood movies. Is it any wonder that the other six billion people in the world think every American male carries a well used machine gun and every American woman is ready to jump into bed at all times? Why does everyone else think we're violent, shallow, materialistic and incredibly uninformed? Because that's how we're depicted in popular television and movies.

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- *Hussein further stated that Iran's weapons capabilities have increased dramatically, while Iraq's have been eliminated by the UN sanctions. The effects of this will be seen and felt in the future, as Iran's weapons capabilities will be a greater threat to Iraq and the region in the future.*

While this might be viewed as prescient today, from the perspective of the region, nothing is different today than it was then: Iran was and is viewed as the biggest strategic threat.

- *Iran had continued to advance its weapons capabilities. SSA Piro commented that under those circumstances, it would appear that Iraq would have needed to reconstitute its own weapons program in response. Hussein replied that Iraq would have done what was necessary and agreed that Iraq's technical and scientific abilities exceeded others in the region.*

This is the tacit admission that anyone who thinks Hussein and Iraq was not retaining WMD and WMD production capability was and is beyond naïve. All it takes in one visit to the trackless deserts of the region to drive home the point that a totalitarian regime could hide whatever it wanted, for as long as it wanted, from whomever it wanted.

- *[Ali Hasan] Al-Majid had limited experience outside of his tribe and his decisions were based on that limited experience.*

This is a life-lesson from an unlikely source. If you limit your experiences to your own tribe, you will have a very limited ability to comprehend, understand and integrate the full range of potential options for challenges and opportunities. This is why limiting your human interaction to only people who think and believe exactly as you do and only reading, watching and listening to news sources in perfect alignment with your views is inherently self-limiting and eliminates any and all possibilities of learning and growth.

- *Hussein stated that he was a believer in God but was not a zealot. Hussein believed that religion and government should not mix. Additionally, the Ba'ath Party ideology was not religiously based, as its founder was a Christian.*

A promising mix, by any measure, in the region he played in. If he'd been less delusional, drunk with power and megalomaniacal and the contemporary U.S. more adept at nuanced foreign policy, he would not have outlived his usefulness in the post cold war world.

- *If he wanted to cooperate with the enemies of the United States, Hussein would have with North Korea, which he claimed to have a relationship with, or China.*

At least Hussein perceived the China realities. I lost an old friend because he couldn't accept this strategic, geopolitical reality. It's striking that a semi-educated, tank commander turned dictator had more common sense about geopolitics than my college educated, self-proclaimed world-expert friend.

## Lessons From Saddam

- *Hussein denied that Iraqi forces withdrew from Kuwait following their defeat. He insisted Iraqi forces withdrew as the result of an official proclamation. This cease fire, including the Iraqi withdrawal, was negotiated by the Russians and accepted by Iraq. Coalition air attacks against Iraqi ground forces occurred while troops were retreating under official orders from the Iraqi leadership. Hussein denied that Iraqi forces would have been eliminated if they had not withdrawn.*

*Hussein further characterized a "bad" person as someone who behaves in a manner contrary to the trust existing between him and the person.*

*Hussein continued his story saying he surprised the policeman by pushing his machine gun aside and pulling a pistol which he (Hussein) had concealed under his shirt.*

These are perfect illustrations of the end-state, delusional nature of extended exposure to absolute power; the god-level discernment of right and wrong that are assumed attributes of absolute power; and the universal rule that everyone is the star of their own movie, in this case a hilariously improbable action B movie.

In the end, Hussein was a garden variety despot, one of far too many the world has seen and will, unfortunately, continue to witness as nations continue down the start and stop, one step forward—two steps back, herky jerky path of development.

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