

Middle Eastern Reactions to Saddam's Capture

Dec 15, 2003



Brief Analysis

The December 13 capture of Saddam Husayn elicited a variety of reactions from government officials and other prominent figures throughout the Middle East. Following is a sampling of these reactions, quoted and paraphrased from various regional and international media sources.

Arab League. Secretary-General Amr Mussa stated that the Iraqi people should "decide the fate of the old regime and its old leaders" with regard to issues such as the discovery of mass graves in the wake of the U.S. invasion. (Agence France Presse [AFP], December 14)

Egypt. Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher asserted that Saddam's capture would facilitate the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq: "What happened will accelerate the process allowing the Iraqi people to recover their sovereignty and take in hand the country's affairs as soon as possible." Maher stated that he made this point clear in a phone call with U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell, who had informed him of Saddam's arrest. (www.albawaba.com, December 14)

Iraq. Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zibari stated, "The arrest of Saddam Husayn will leave a large impression on the security in Iraq. This is the happiest and most wonderful news -- we have long waited for it -- and it will [have a] formidable effect on the morale of his supporters who may be under the delusion that he will rise again. The people will be more desirous of working together to rebuild a democratic Iraq."

Adnan Pachachi, a member of the Iraqi Governing Council, stated that Saddam "is a tyrannical ruler and is responsible for the killing of thousands of Iraqis, and we found him tired and exhausted, except that he was unremorseful; rather, [he was] recalcitrant."

Deputy Oil Minister Abd al-Sahib Qatbi stated, "The seizure of Saddam will yield an upturn in Iraqi oil production because [it will] bring a halt to sabotage operations that faced the oil companies and Iraqi oil pipes."

Qassem al-Hashmi, vice president of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, stated, "It is necessary Saddam Husayn not be concealed, that the Iraqi people witness his trial, and that this trial be inside Iraq and in the presence of every one of the Iraqi people, [including the] intelligentsia and lawyer [classes]." (all Iraqi quotes from www.aljazeera.net, December 15)

Iran. Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid-Reza Asefi expressed his satisfaction with the arrest and declared that Iranians shared their happiness with the Iraqi people. "Certainly, the arrest of Saddam will heal the profound wounds of the Iranian people, particularly of relatives of the war martyrs and disabled. . . . The history of Saddam's crimes, in particular those regarding its people and the regional nations, including making use of chemical weapons, are unforgettable." He added that an open trial for Saddam and his collaborators would help restore some of the violated rights of the Iraqi people. (www.albawaba.com, December 14)

Israel. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated, "The entire world can breath a sigh of relief, because the dictator who ruined Iraq cannot interfere with its reconstruction and rehabilitation." (Ha'aretz, December 15)

Jordan. King Abdullah responded to the capture by stating that the Iraqi people should gain independence and

manage Iraq's affairs by themselves. "Our efforts are directed toward this," he said while meeting with visiting Japanese deputy foreign minister Itshiro Aezawa. (Petra News Agency, December 14)

In contrast, Azzam Hinaidi, an Islamist member of the Jordanian parliament, stated, "Of course [Saddam's arrest is] bad news. To us, Saddam was a symbol of defiance to the U.S. plans in the region. And we support any person who stands in the face of the American dominance." (<http://english.aljazeera.net>, December 15)

Kuwait. Crown Prince Shaykh Saad al-Abdullah al-Salem al-Sabah told Kuwaitis that "heavenly justice was finally done," stating that he hoped Saddam's capture would bring stability and prosperity to the Iraqi people. He added that he shared Kuwaiti citizens' "joy and relief" over the arrest of a man "who committed the most hideous, brutal crimes against our peaceful people, and caused pains and suffering whose traces can still be seen in every home in Kuwait." (Kuwait News Agency, December 15)

West Bank/Gaza. Palestinian Authority prime minister Ahmed Qurie refused to comment, stating that "it is an Iraqi issue, and the Iraqi people should make their choices. . . . This is the choice of the Iraqi people and we will respect their decision." (al-Hayat, December 15)

Palestinian Legislative Council minister Mouhamed Hourani stated, "Saddam is a dictator and the Iraqi people suffered during his rule, but the [American] occupation stopped it." (an-Nahar, December 15)

Nafez Azzam, a prominent Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader in the Gaza Strip, stated that the Saddam's capture was a "small symbolic and moral victory for the U.S., but would certainly not stop Iraqi resistance," which will continue "carrying out painful strikes against the American occupation on their lands" (www.albawaba.com, December 15). He also stated, "The Americans fabricated the notion to the whole world that Saddam was behind the entire Iraqi resistance. But the coming days will prove the Iraqi people are fighting for freedom and there is not just one person behind this resistance." (<http://english.aljazeera.net>, December 15)

Adnan Asfour, a West Bank Hamas leader, urged the Iraqi people to follow the path of the Palestinian people: "The Palestinian people have also seen their leaders arrested and assassinated, but this has not stopped their resistance of the occupation," he said, adding that the Iraqis should continue "attacking occupation forces." Abdel-Aziz al-Rantissi, another Hamas leader, asserted that the United States would "pay a very high price for the mistake" of arresting Saddam. "What the United States did is ugly and despicable. It is an insult to all Arabs and an insult to Muslims," he added. (www.albawaba.com, December 15)

Qatar. Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jasim bin Jaber al-Thani stated, "The arrest of Saddam will contribute to supporting [the] security and stability of Iraq. . . . I hope that the Iraqis will turn toward a phase of openness and democracy, and the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq will not be easy before the stabilization of security there." (www.aljazeera.net, December 15)

Saudi Arabia. "Many people here will feel relieved," said Abdulaziz al-Fayez, a member of Saudi Arabia's consultative Shura Council. "There may be celebration in Washington, maybe in Iraq. But here it is a feeling of relief." (Reuters, December 15)

Syria. In an official statement, Syrian information minister Ahmad al-Hasan stated, "We wish for Iraq to preserve its territorial and public integrity. . . . We hope the elected government which represents all kinds of Iraqi groups can ensure the stability and security on the Iraqi land and that Iraq will restore its active role in the region liberated from any occupying authority that hinders its free will." (www.albawaba.com, December 14)

President Bashar al-Asad refused to comment on Saddam's capture, stating that it is "an issue that concerns Iraq and not Syria." (Associated Press, December 15)

This report was compiled by Jeff Cary and Joyce Karam.

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