

2-1-2003

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Recommended Citation

Terrill, W. Andrew Dr., "Why Saddam will not Choose Exile" (2003). *Articles & Editorials*. 297.
https://press.armywarcollege.edu/articles_editorials/297

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WHY SADDAM WILL NOT CHOOSE EXILE

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During his rise to power, Saddam Hussein is reported to have taken his two young sons to Iraqi torture chambers to view acts of torment committed against the luckless individuals imprisoned there. One of these sons, Uday, grew up to be a psychopath, while the other, Qusay, became a cold disciplined killer like his father. Both learned from Saddam's torturers to avoid the most horrible of all fates—helplessness before your enemies. It is a fate that Saddam himself will never accept.

In recent statements, some members of the U.S. administration have been asked if there is a way out the current standoff without war. Options are few, and one of the only acknowledged possibilities is that Saddam may voluntarily leave office and go into exile along with key henchmen and family members. Some Arab states, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are reported to be exploring this option. Nevertheless, despite our best hopes, there is no chance that Saddam and his family will voluntarily chose flight. While a comfortable exile may seem preferable to being killed or captured by invading U.S. forces, Saddam views his survival and his tenure in power as inseparable.

To Saddam, the suggestion that he go into exile is tantamount to asking him to commit suicide on the basis of what the United States might or might not do. Through years of brutal rule, Saddam has made countless enemies in the United States, Israel, Kuwait, and among the Iraqi opposition. The Iraqi ex-dictator would always face the danger that his security would be penetrated or his protectors bought out. Who in the Mossad would not be thrilled to bring Saddam to justice in the same way that Adolph Eichmann was snatched from Argentina? What wealthy Kuwaiti would resist writing a check to Saddam's protectors so that they might reverse promises of sanctuary? Moreover, Saddam himself has ordered the murder of many of his own enemies in exile such as former Minister of Defense General Harden al-Tikriti, who was assassinated in Kuwait in May 1971. To Saddam, murdering the helpless is just good business.

Additionally, Saddam is hardly likely to trust international guarantees of his safety upon leaving Iraq. He himself has made similar guarantees in the past, promising two sons-in-law amnesty if they returned to Iraq after having defected to Jordan in 1995. Working through his daughters, Saddam convinced the two younger men that they were family with legitimate grievances that should have been taken into account. No punishment would be directed at them if they returned to Iraq to resume their former relationships with Saddam. In an act of supreme naivety, the bait was taken. Once in Iraq, Saddam ordered the two men killed. In Saddam's world, this is the price for being too trusting when the other party is offering guarantees.

Apart from the ironclad certainty that Saddam would not voluntarily go into exile, one wonders who would be willing to take him. Most of Saddam's natural allies (and there are not many) fear that they may be the next target in the U.S. war on terrorism. Accepting the world's number one tyrant doesn't seem likely to reduce that risk, even with sly nods from the administration that such an action may be forgiven in the name of a wider peace. Additionally, Saddam would hardly arrive to his new home alone, but rather bring his large and unruly family with him. How they could be managed by a reluctant host is anybody's guess.

During the last days of the exiled Shah of Iran, Saddam had a chance to watch his old enemy travel from country to country being treated as an unwanted leper, a degrading, humiliating last few years for a proud man. Saddam himself could never expect treatment anywhere near as sympathetic as that provided to the shah. No friends exist in foreign capitals to pressure sheltering countries. Furthermore, a shakedown of Saddam for every dollar he has in foreign bank accounts would have to be expected by whatever host he found. While the shah's exile was humiliating, Saddam's would be a living hell, probably a very short living hell that, however appropriate, will never be agreed to voluntarily.