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Speaking of Saddam...

On the capture of the Iraqi dictator and what should be done with him.

One indisputable bit of good news—or so one might have thought—was the capture of Saddam Hussein on December 13. Actually, news of Saddam’s capture was met by considerable wailing and gnashing of teeth among many disaffected Democrats, including Howard Dean who just managed to mumble that he supposed it was “a good thing.” Within an hour or two of Saddam’s being dragged out of his spider hole, there were cries that the U.S. had “humiliated” the poor man. Cardinal Renato Martino, a “top Vatican official,” criticized the U.S. military for airing footage of Saddam being examined by doctors. “I felt pity to see this man destroyed,” the Cardinal said, “[the military] looking at his teeth as if he were a cow. They could have spared us these pictures.” Maybe. For our part, we think those images sent a salutary message to the Arab world: dictators who rape, torture, and murder hundreds of thousands of people, who enrich themselves on the backs of a starving populace, are likely to wind up scurrying from dirt hole to dirt hole before being deloused and publicly examined by an army doctor. What, we wonder, does His Eminence object to in that message?

In the weeks and months that come, one of the chief questions will be what to do with Saddam. Who should try him? Naturally, *The New York Times*, the BBC, and almost the entire Democrat establishment shout with one voice and one heart: “an international tribunal.” After all, the U.N. has already failed Iraq for more than a decade, why shouldn’t it go on doing so? For our part, we believe Saddam’s fate should be ultimately decided by the people he tyrannized for more than three decades, the Iraqis. Many people seem to have become suddenly tender-hearted on the subject of Saddam. What about his rights? Must be sure the poor chap isn’t brutalized. We thought William F. Buckley, Jr. had the last word on this subject. In a recent column, Mr. Buckley wrote that

the very idea that Saddam Hussein needs the niceties of Blackstone’s laws prescribing judicial procedure and the

means of protecting the innocent is a surrender to epistemological pessimism: the notion that you can't ever really prove anything. Built into that nihilist surrender is doubt about first principles. If there is anybody in town who believes that Saddam Hussein is not guilty of crimes however described, what we need to worry about is him, not Saddam... .

It isn't to ask for lynch law or even for victor's justice to say simply: This is a man, finally apprehended, who killed by the thousands and tortured his country, committing genocide north and south. His "trial" should be of the order we'd have given to Adolf Hitler if he had been taken alive. Exhibit him, make him dwell on what he has done, satisfy the Iraqi people that we share their concern, and that having dispatched an army to their country to contain and disarm him, we will back the Iraqi court that sends him to the gallows.

To which we say, Amen.

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