

Said K. Aburish

A journalist and author of numerous books, including the latest, **Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge**, he also was a consultant for this FRONTLINE report. For several years he worked closely with Saddam's government in posts which gave him the chance for unusually close access to Saddam Hussein himself. Beginning in the mid-seventies, he was a go-between for Western arms manufacturers doing business with Iraq, and he was part of Saddam's secret plan to acquire chemical weapons and an atomic bomb.

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saddam/interviews/aburish.html>)

I don't think there was any Arab in the '70s who did not want Saddam Hussein to have an atomic weapon. They wanted him to have military parity. Israel had atomic weapons. The Arabs wanted an Arab country to have atomic weapons. Iraq was the head of the pack and therefore all Arabs supported Saddam Hussein. I have news for you: I don't think there are many Arabs at this moment in time -- you can exclude me out of this statement at this moment in time -- who do not want Saddam Hussein to have an atomic weapon now. They don't look at it as weapons of mass destruction. They look at it as transfer of technology. That the Arabs have done it, the Arabs have joined the modern world. That's the way they see it. And that pleases them. The fact that Saddam Hussein eliminates people, kills innocent men, uses a chemical weapon against his own people, is actually in a way secondary to this image. The Iraqi people are concerned with the latter. They suffer because of the latter. But the Arab people outside of Iraq do not suffer because Saddam Hussein eliminates people, because he doesn't eliminate them. He eliminates Iraqis.

I think Saddam and the United States very often have a commonality which bonds them together and that is simply this: That without Saddam Hussein, Iraq would disintegrate into several countries and make more trouble for the rest of the Middle East. I know no Iraqi who believes that -- whether Sunni, Shia or Kurd. The American administration believes that however, and Saddam Hussein believes that. When the rebellion started against Saddam in 1991, that danger loomed. The United States helped Saddam crush that rebellion.

I think where we go from here is to make a deal directly with the Iraqi people. The only salvation for Iraq and for Western policy towards Iraq is to make a direct deal with the Iraqi people, openly. To tell the people who guarantee Saddam's continuance that they would not suffer if there is a change in the regime. To tell the Iraqi people that they would have more to eat and more medicine. To tell the Sunnis that they would not suffer under the Shias. To ask the neighbors not to interfere in Iraq. To give them an incentive to get rid of the man.

Saddam Hussein is now the only Arab leader who has a following outside his own country. . . . Saddam Hussein is standing up to the West. He has survived for nine years. He is a hero. He is not winning. But the mere fact that he survives, that he continues, is enough to make him a hero. And people like it. They don't live under Saddam Hussein, so they don't suffer from his actions the way the Iraqi people suffer. All they see is the fact that he is standing up to the West, and they like that.

He lives by virtue of the Iraqi people's fear. Once that fear is removed, the Iraqi people will move against him, as they have in the past moved against other dictators successfully, even ones who were very, very closely protected by their followers.