

## **Students Mirror National Mood Split**

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Mixed feelings at Baghdad university over Saddam arrest – partying students receive threats.

Arguments can heat up fast over the fate of former president Saddam Hussein, especially at the University of Baghdad. Students with varying political views come here to study from all over the country, so the range of reactions to the former president's arrest reflect the diversity of Iraq.

On a lawn outside their lecture hall, some literature students were playing festive music to celebrate Saddam's political demise when they were told to stop by another student, Salah al-Duleimi from the town of Ramadi, west of Baghdad.

"Saddam Hussein is free, and is in Ramadi!" he said, referring to a rumour that only the former president's body double had been captured, while the real Saddam had escaped to the predominantly Sunni town, a hotbed of opposition to the United States-led coalition.

A scuffle broke out, ending when Duleimi brandished a pistol. "If there's any more celebrating, I'll blow the place up," the Ramadi student said as he departed.

Departmental deans have caved in to this kind of pressure, and told their students that no more festivities would be allowed.

Meanwhile, at the nearby department of technology, one student waved a newspaper which ran a front page photo of Saddam behind bars – until another student ripped the paper out of his hand.

Elsewhere, two other students joked about the cocksure commentators on Arab satellite TV – both the Saddam apologists, who forecast an imminent upsurge in resistance, as well as opponents who are unanimous that it will fade away.

But the two students disagreed about whether Saddam merited the humiliation he had received at American hands. "No matter what Saddam did, he's still an Arab leader," said one, while the other replied that the former leader "deserved a lot worse than he got."

Other disputes centred on whether the man shown on TV might be a double, and whether the beard was real. Doubters argued that the real Saddam's hands were large and hairy, while those of the man on television were small and soft.

Some students even expressed contempt at Saddam for not committing suicide with an explosive belt. "There were 600 Americans there, so he could have taken at least 200 with him," suggested one disillusioned campus tactician.

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