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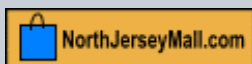
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An opportunity in the fight against terror

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Friday, December 26, 2003

By **CHRISTOPHER J. DODD** and **JON S. CORZINE**

EARLIER THIS MONTH, we returned from a trip to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Israel. When we visited these areas, no one could have known that just days later, the man who terrorized Iraq and cast a pall over the region for over two decades would become the world's most famous prisoner.

The capture of Saddam Hussein is a resounding success for the American armed forces, the Iraqi people, and the entire world. But it is crucial that we view this milestone not as an endpoint, but as a new beginning. We have a tremendous opportunity to use this moment as an engine for real progress - not only in Iraq, but in the entire region.

There are many Iraqis who have no great love for Hussein but who nonetheless view the United States as an occupying force. We can make a powerful statement by ensuring that the Iraqi people are the ones who try, and eventually punish, their former dictator.

While international involvement will likely be necessary to ensure international as well as local legitimacy, those who suffered under Hussein's oppressive rule deserve the opportunity to determine his ultimate fate.

Furthermore, the more Iraqis believe in and support the trial, the more such a trial can serve as a springboard for the long process of national reconciliation and building the rule of law.

Just as Iraqis must be allowed to try Hussein, they must also be allowed to determine their own political future. We support transferring administrative authority and political sovereignty to the Iraqis as quickly as possible. But it is crucial that the new Iraqi government be legitimate

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in the eyes of the Iraqi people. While speaking to Iraqis during our trip, for example, we found serious disagreement about whether a transitional government should be chosen by popular elections or organizing caucuses. This debate, while healthy, suggests that we still have much to do before Iraqis are fully invested in the process by which their own leaders will be chosen.

Imposing a government that lacks legitimacy can have disastrous consequences, as shown by many Iraqis' hostility to the new U.S.-backed Iraqi police force.

The task of securing and rebuilding Iraq is no less imposing now that Hussein is in custody. We must acknowledge that by doing everything we can to ease the burden on our troops. Many of the servicemen and women we encountered in Iraq are shouldering new and unfamiliar tasks such as peacekeeping and training Iraqi soldiers - and they may soon be asked to administer elections or oversee caucuses.

How can we best support our own troops? By seeking the involvement of the international community, including the United Nations, in Iraqi reconstruction. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the capture of Hussein was the virtually universal support and praise from world leaders - even those who staunchly opposed the war in Iraq. The capture of Saddam has presented us with a second chance to create a broad and inclusive international coalition.

It remains to be seen whether the Bush administration will seize this second chance.

Regrettably, to this point, the administration has continued to alienate many of our allies with its deeds and its words. As the world's only military and economic superpower, the United States bears the weighty responsibility of leadership in international affairs - but we must also display a willingness to work with our allies.

Finally, our success in capturing Hussein will mean little unless we use it as a catalyst for other positive developments worldwide. The most salient lesson we learned on our trip was that virtually all of the major foreign policy challenges America faces today are interconnected. Success in achieving peace and stability in one part of the world plays a crucial role in assuring others of our intentions and of our commitment.



In Iraq, we showed we were willing to persevere in the hunt for Hussein. We must now show that same resolve elsewhere. In Afghanistan, for example, the basic building blocks for a new society are in place - but that country needs a powerful and lasting commitment of resources to pave the way for a peaceful and stable future. In Israel, a political vacuum continues to permit the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to fester, crying out for leadership on both sides and for immediate American involvement.

There are no quick fixes in the war on terror. But every so often, we are

presented with an extraordinary opportunity to make great strides. Recent events represent such an opportunity. It is now up to us to seize it.

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