

# Many Iraqis Say a Bush Defeat Would Be

11/3/92

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Special to The Washington Post

BAGHDAD, Iraq, Nov. 2—Conversations on the streets of this war-battered city leave a strong impression that Iraqis are almost as eager as Gov. Bill Clinton to see President Bush go down to defeat in Tuesday's presidential election.

The expression of strong feeling against Bush seems to run from the highest echelons of power to the man in the street, reflecting official opinion-making by the au-

thoritarian government as well as Bush's close personal identification with the 1991 Persian Gulf War, in which Baghdad was bombed.

Many Iraqis, whose daily life has been made miserable by a U.N. economic embargo championed by Washington, say they hope Bush's departure would lead to at least a partial lifting of sanctions. Others cling to an almost obsessive belief that their situation would automatically improve with his departure.

The animus is fueled by editorials and

debates in the government-controlled press critical of the U.S. administration and its hostility toward President Saddam Hussein.

"You can tell Bush I'm against him," said a man in his thirties standing in a market where shelves are often partly empty and prices continue to soar. "Things can't go on like this."

People here also voiced a feeling that the sanctions issue has been personalized by Bush because of his statements warning that the embargo will not be lifted as long as Saddam remains in power.

## Good News for Their Country

"If he loses, there will be a change for the better," said a low-level government employee who complained his salary is not enough to keep up with inflation that has seen the price of basic goods such as rice increase almost a hundred-fold since Iraq invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990.

Until recently, the government has been at pains to keep a low profile during the U.S. political campaign and to prevent creating an incident or impression that could be exploited by the Bush administration.

But following Bush's recent warning to

Saddam that his electoral defeat should not be taken for granted and that street demonstrations would be premature, the Iraqi Information Ministry issued a statement quoting a "well-informed Iraqi source" denying any plans were afoot to organize official celebrations.

But an Iraqi official told the Reuter news agency today that Iraqis will be dancing in the streets if Bush loses, even without official demonstrations.

"As the speaker of parliament and a cit-

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izen, I expect the Iraqis to stage street celebrations if Bush is ousted," said Saadi Mehdi Saleh. "God willing, he will be toppled in the elections."

Despite the government statement, there was speculation that should Bush lose, ordinary Iraqis will be allowed to show their feelings in some kind of public display depicted as spontaneous. The move would serve as a means of venting frustration over the suffering and hardship caused by the war and sanctions and could help deflect blame from the government.

In any case, the U.S. election has been the subject of speculation and debate in the government-controlled press. Babil, the newspaper controlled by Saddam son Uday, recently devoted three pages to a discussion on what the election meant for Iraqis.

Uday himself, a participant in the debate, was skeptical that a victory by Clinton would bring much change in U.S. policy toward Iraq.

"The way the candidates are unanimous on the sub-

ject of leader Saddam Hussein . . . means all the concerned parties have realized and are convinced that the existence of leader Saddam Hussein is unwanted from their viewpoint," Uday stated.

But the overall tone of the discussion appeared to be against Bush. "The downfall of Bush means release from suffering," one participant said. "The topic across the interest of our people, the question of who is to win, is being discussed even in the [Baath] party organization," another said, adding that "the defeat of Bush will be psychologically beneficial for our people."

Some skepticism about a Clinton administration is also to be found in the streets. "We have no choice with Clinton or Bush," said a man in his twenties whose dream of a university education was interrupted by military service.

"We would like to see a change in American policy toward Iraq," said the man, who said he now earns a meager living selling small batches of infant formula at a local market to support his wife and four children.