

Harsh stance

Bush's move to prevent tortured soldiers from receiving compensation wrong

Air Force pilot Lt. Col. Dale Storr's A-10 fighter jet was shot down by Iraqi fire during the Persian Gulf War in 1991. The Iraqis held the Air Force pilot captive for 33 days — a period in which they beat him with clubs, broke his nose, urinated on him and threatened to cut off his fingers unless he revealed military secrets.



MIDHAT FAROOQI

What's worse, the Bush administration is seeking to block Storr and 16 other former prisoners of war from collecting any of the hundreds of millions of dollars they won last summer in a lawsuit against the government of Saddam Hussein. The Bush administration should support the troops with actions, not just words.

The case dates from April 2002, when the former POWs filed suit against Saddam's government in the Federal District Court in Washington, D.C. The soldiers wanted Saddam to pay damages for the physical and emotional injuries they had suffered as a result of torture while in captivity.

When the Iraqi government did not respond to the lawsuit by July 2003, U.S. District Court Judge Richard W. Roberts ordered it to pay damages totaling almost \$1 billion: \$653 million in compensatory damages and \$306 million in punitive damages.

However, by July, Saddam's regime

because the former Iraqi government due to the American invasion of Iraq. The Bush administration moved within days of the decision to block the troops from collecting any of the money, stating that it was needed for Iraq's reconstruction. On July 30, according to court documents, Roberts reluctantly sided with the government, stating that President George W. Bush had signed an executive order in March that confiscated Iraqi assets and made them the property of the U.S. government. With the money no longer in Iraq's possession, there could be no payment to the former POWs.

John Moore, one of the lawyers in the case, was stunned. "It never occurred to me in my wildest dreams that I would see (our) government coming in on the side of Saddam Hussein and his regime to absolve them of responsibility for the brutal torture of Americans."

Now, the former prisoners are appealing the decision through the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, according

to The New

York Times. Officials are arguing that the money is no longer the property of Iraq, and that it is required for rebuilding Iraq — a matter of "national security." In a sworn court filing, L. Paul Bremer III, the American administrator in Iraq, said the money won by the former prisoners had already been "completely obligated or expended" in reconstruction efforts. "These funds are critical to maintaining peace and stability in Iraq," Bremer said.

David Eberly, a retired Air Force colonel whose F-15 fighter was shot down over northwest Iraq, does not buy the argument. "The administration wants \$87 billion for Iraq," he said. "The money in our case is just a drop in the bucket."

Even if the Bush administration feels the money is needed in Iraq, it should at least grant a portion of the sum to the troops. Denying the soldiers any compensation, despite their supreme sacrifice in the service of their country, is an extremely harsh stance.

The Bush administration also rejected a proposal that would have allowed the United States to delay the payments to the troops for months or years, according to The Times. Stephen A. Fennell, another lawyer representing the former prisoners, believes that such a proposal would have allowed the Bush administration to provide the money after the reconstruction of Iraq was

well underway.

"My guys are obviously real patriots, and they authorized us to tell the government that we were willing to wait," he said. "But that was turned down."

These actions by the Bush administration not only hurt the soldiers in question, but future American troops as well. The lawyers who had initially brought the case on behalf of the former prisoners said such a huge penalty against Iraq would discourage other governments from torturing American troops. Now, with the damages left unpaid, there is no such deterrent for other terrorist states in the future.

Cynthia Acree, whose husband Clifford is a Marine colonel held by the Iraqis for 47 days, said "The money is not the issue and it never has been. I remember it so well, the look on my husband's face when he heard the decision, because finally there was a public record."

"But now, our government wants to act like none of this happened, to throw out the entire case," Acree said. "My husband is an active-duty Marine colonel, and President Bush is his commander in chief. But I'm not. And I can say that I feel betrayed."

If the Bush administration is truly serious about supporting American troops, Acree would not feel that way.

Midhat Farooqi is a senior genetics major.



MAHESH NEELAKANTAN • THE BATTALION



Dirty politics

Arrest of Russian oil tycoon suspicious

On Oct. 25, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, CEO of the Russian oil company Yukos, was arrested at gunpoint on his private jet in Siberia. The Russian government charged him with fraud, embezzlement and tax evasion. On Nov. 4, Khodorkovsky resigned his position as head of the oil giant from his jail cell. The \$8 billion man is the richest of the so-called oligarchs in Russia.



DAVID EGE

The Russian government's actions are suspicious because the arrest came less than two months before Duma — the Russian Senate — elections in December, and five months before the March 2004 presidential election. While the arrest appears to be politically motivated — Khodorkovsky was getting too powerful — because of the history of secrecy within the region, the real story behind Khodorkovsky's arrest is not likely to emerge.

Khodorkovsky and the other tycoon oligarchs became rich overnight as they snatched up enormous fortunes when the industry privatized in the mid-1990s under Boris Yeltsin. During this time, old Soviet state assets were sold at extraordinarily cheap prices. In Khodorkovsky's case, he purchased 78 percent of Yukos shares at an auction held in 1995 by Menatep Bank, also conveniently owned by Khodorkovsky. Khodorkovsky made Yukos more efficient by drastically downsizing its workforce, consolidating operations and creating a work environment that pitted employees against one another.

The private industry in Russia, however, is still at the mercy of the Kremlin. In the oil industry, for example, private investors may own the companies, but the government controls the oil pipeline system. Even if the oil giants fund new pipeline projects, the state will still claim control. Although the state and the oli-

garchs have been at odds since the privatization era, it is said that President Vladimir Putin has made an agreement with the oligarchs that allows them to keep their money, but they must stay out of politics.

Khodorkovsky crossed this line too often recently, which led to his arrest. He has funded two opposition parties, the Union of Right Forces and Yabloko. During arguments on recent oil legislation, he has allegedly outspent even the Kremlin to influence Duma members. Russian news agency Rosbalt reported Oct. 28 that Khodorkovsky was being considered as the communist party's candidate for the 2004 presidential election. And The New York Times has reported that Khodorkovsky might be considering a bid for the presidency against Putin in the election next March from jail.

It is for actions such as these that many people, including international financier George Soros, believe Putin arrested Khodorkovsky for political reasons. Putin sent a message to all of the oligarchs that he is still in control. Russia is formally a democracy, but some have accused Putin of wanting to revert to Soviet times, where one man controls all as he pleases. Putin even pushed to reinstate the old Soviet anthem as the national song in December 2000.

It has long been known that rules in Russia are broken and rights are frequently violated through government corruption and favors being given to friends of the powerful. Police frequently stop

pedestrians for little reason, which commonly results in an "unofficial fine." The Times reported that one can evade the draft for \$5,000. Additionally, Russia's government still allows torture to be used on its criminals, which is why England recently rejected a Russian request to extradite a Chechen rebel leader. Russia's three main television stations are all controlled by the state. Putin himself is a former KGB spy. If that doesn't raise eyebrows of alarm, then nothing will.

With all of the underhandedness that occurs in Russia and the behind-the-scenes dealing between organizations and companies, the whole truth behind the actions that led to the arrest of Khodorkovsky might never be known.

Business is conducted under the table, government gives and takes as it pleases and facts are covered up. Did Khodorkovsky bend some rules on his path to wealth? Probably, but this is no surprise when the topic of conversation is Russia. Furthermore, why did Putin wait to arrest

him until now if the charges involve \$1 billion in tax evasion? Surely the Kremlin knew of this earlier. It's just that they let it slide until someone attempted to turn economic power into political power that rivaled them. Even after the verdict has been decided, how will Americans ever know if it was correct when the standards in Russia are so different? Look for books to be written 20 years from now concerning the "real" truth of Khodorkovsky v. Putin.

David Ege is a junior computer engineering major.

MAIL CALL

Aggie Spirit goes beyond Bonfire

Texas A&M did not create Aggie Spirit or Aggie traditions. They exist or do not exist because of the students. I get extremely concerned when I hear students say that the Aggie Spirit is declining because we no longer have Bonfire. I simply do not believe that. If true, the Aggie Spirit is much more fragile than we all believe.

If I were to look into a "crystal ball" for you and tell you that Bonfire will never return to Texas A&M, will you and other students simply write off Aggie Spirit as dead — as a thing of the past? If you do, I would tell you that you are letting down the many generations of Aggies who built and sustained that spirit that you claim to cherish so much.

Aggie Spirit was real before Bonfire ever existed. Aggie Spirit was real while Bonfire was simply something that a few Aggies threw together a couple of days before the t.u. game. Bonfire grew to become a popular and significant Aggie tradition only in the latter part of its existence.

If you truly believe that Aggie Spirit is on the decline then I believe you are asking the wrong question. Instead of asking the University what it is going to do to bring back Bonfire so Aggie Spirit can survive — you and your fellow students should be asking yourselves what you are going to do to assure that Aggie Spirit remains alive and well

for future Aggies. The responsibility for sustaining Aggie Spirit rests squarely on the shoulders of Aggies, past, present and future.

Bill Kibler
Interim Vice President for Student Affairs

Moore abused his power as judge

In response to a Nov. 19 mail call:

When you hold public office or any position of authority, the line between personal and public opinion is often inseparable. For example, if University President Robert M. Gates were to say that the Corp of Cadets sucked and should be disbanded, there would be a lot of people calling for his dismissal even though he is expressing a personal opinion. By virtue of his position, President Gates represents the administration of this fine University. In the same way, Judge Moore represents, or rather represented, the judiciary of Alabama.

He had used, or rather abused, his position as chief justice to defiantly install a Judea-Christian monument in the power-center of Alabama's judiciary; something that I am sure no ordinary Alabama resident would be able to accomplish by himself.

Judge Moore's position as chief justice and the location of this monument clearly say to the people of Alabama that

Christianity prevails in the judiciary of the state. Establishment of religion doesn't always have to be in the form of official proclamation. Here's an acid test for those who still disagree: Would you still feel the same way if Judge Moore had instead installed a statue of Buddha or Koran inscribed with the teachings or laws of those religions?

Kenny Kwong
Graduate Student

Demonstration by YCT disgusting

I was just writing to express my disgust at the anti-diversity protest staged by the Young Conservatives of Texas in the Academic Plaza on Wednesday. YCT continues to embarrass the University and perpetuate the belief that all Aggies are ignorant and hateful. Considering their activities this year, it is no wonder that minorities are under-represented at Texas A&M, and we were listed by the Princeton Review as the 12th most gay unfriendly campus in the nation. The only group with an information table countering the YCT rally was the Society of Mexican-American Engineers. While their effort was admirable, it is time for all Aggies to stand up to the Young Conservatives, regardless of major, race or political affiliation.

Casey Foster
Class of 2005

