

THE TORTURER FOR

HORRORS OF IRAQ'S PAST

The man pictured on the right worked for Uday Hussein. Last week he confided to Mark Franchetti how he had murdered and maimed any who dared criticise the Iraqi regime

As he stood on a street corner in Baghdad last week, the young man called Ali looked nothing like a torturer who cut out tongues and hacked off hands. His clothes were ordinary, his grin boyish. Standing by a burnt-out tank, he chatted amiably with a group of youngsters. Behind the fake Gucci sunglasses were the eyes of a killer: Ali is a former member of a fedayeen squad that carried out sadistic punishments for Uday, the deranged elder son of Saddam Hussein.



The knifeman: Ali, an Iraqi who was a member of a fedayeen militia unit that punished those who opposed Saddam's regime

But perhaps inside he wanted to extirpate his guilt by revealing it. He began to tell me in detail about how the fedayeen worked and his part in it. He showed me several safe houses they had used, including one the Americans had not discovered. It was still stacked up with the knife, tossing severed pieces into the street. "Those punished were too terrified to move, even though they knew I was about to chop off their tongue," said Ali in his matter-of-fact voice. "They would just stand there, often praying and calling out for Saddam and Allah to spare them. By then it was too late. "I would read them out the verdict and cut off their tongue without any form of anaesthetic. There was always a lot of blood. Some offenders passed out. Others screamed in pain. They would then be given basic medical assistance in an ambulance which would always come with us on such punishment runs. Then they would be thrown in jail." "When I had first met Ali after much searching, he had been reticent and secretive, but gradually he had opened up. True, he refused to reveal his surname and showed little emotion and scant remorse.



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terrible suffering he inflicted. He described how, clad in black garb that covered all but his eyes, he had often meted out sentences in the street, in front of a victim's family and horrified onlookers. Guarded by armed colleagues, he used to tie up and blindfold the accused. One of his men held the detainee's head in a firm grip. Another forced open the mouth. Ali would then draw out a pair of pliers and a sharp knife. Gripping the tongue with pliers, he would slice it up with the knife, tossing severed pieces into the street. "Those punished were too terrified to move, even though they knew I was about to chop off their tongue," said Ali in his matter-of-fact voice. "They would just stand there, often praying and calling out for Saddam and Allah to spare them. By then it was too late. "I would read them out the verdict and cut off their tongue without any form of anaesthetic. There was always a lot of blood. Some offenders passed out. Others screamed in pain. They would then be given basic medical assistance in an ambulance which would always come with us on such punishment runs. Then they would be thrown in jail." "When I had first met Ali after much searching, he had been reticent and secretive, but gradually he had opened up. True, he refused to reveal his surname and showed little emotion and scant remorse.

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...are still out there and we are still afraid." Beside him, his uncle lifted his shirt to reveal his legacy of prison torture — a back covered with the scars and boils of electrocution. A STOCKY man with a soft voice and thin moustache, Ali joined the fedayeen, a group set up under the command of Uday, in the mid-1990s when he was 18. He proved loyal and good at the work, and four years ago he was selected to join Safia, a special team that took orders directly from Uday. Members of the elite team had a special identity card signed by Uday in golden letters and a portrait of Saddam and the words "Allah, fatherland, leader". They worked closely with a group called Eion — meaning "Eyes" — which was in charge of gathering intelligence on opponents of Saddam. Their missions included kidnappings, assassinations and punishments. The pay was generous: some Safia members earned \$70 a month, including bonuses for special operations, a small fortune in a country where many workers earn a pittance. From this inner circle of the fedayeen Ali used to glimpse

After winning the war is

CHALLENGES OF BRITAIN'S FUTURE

Advisers are urging the prime minister to be as strong at home as he has been abroad. David Cracknell and Eben Black report

Next month the undisputed king of British politics will be sent a report by a Labour think tank on the future of Britain's monarchy. It will be another challenge for Tony Blair to show how bold he really is.

The Fabian Society has been examining, among other things, whether the female line of the royal family should have equal rights to succeed and whether a Catholic should be allowed to become sovereign. More importantly, it will discuss the case for downgrading the royal family to a "bicycling monarchy" on the Dutch model. Should, for example, the monarch still appoint prime ministers and pass legislation?

In Britain prime ministers traditionally tread softly around royal family affairs. But this weekend Blair, as he relaxes with his son Euan at Chequers, finds himself more than ever a president.

He has fought a war against the wishes of his party and the opposition of the public. He has confronted rebels and brushed aside critics. He has emerged victorious from military action, although the longer-term consequences of invading Iraq remain uncertain.

What does not destroy me makes me stronger, argued

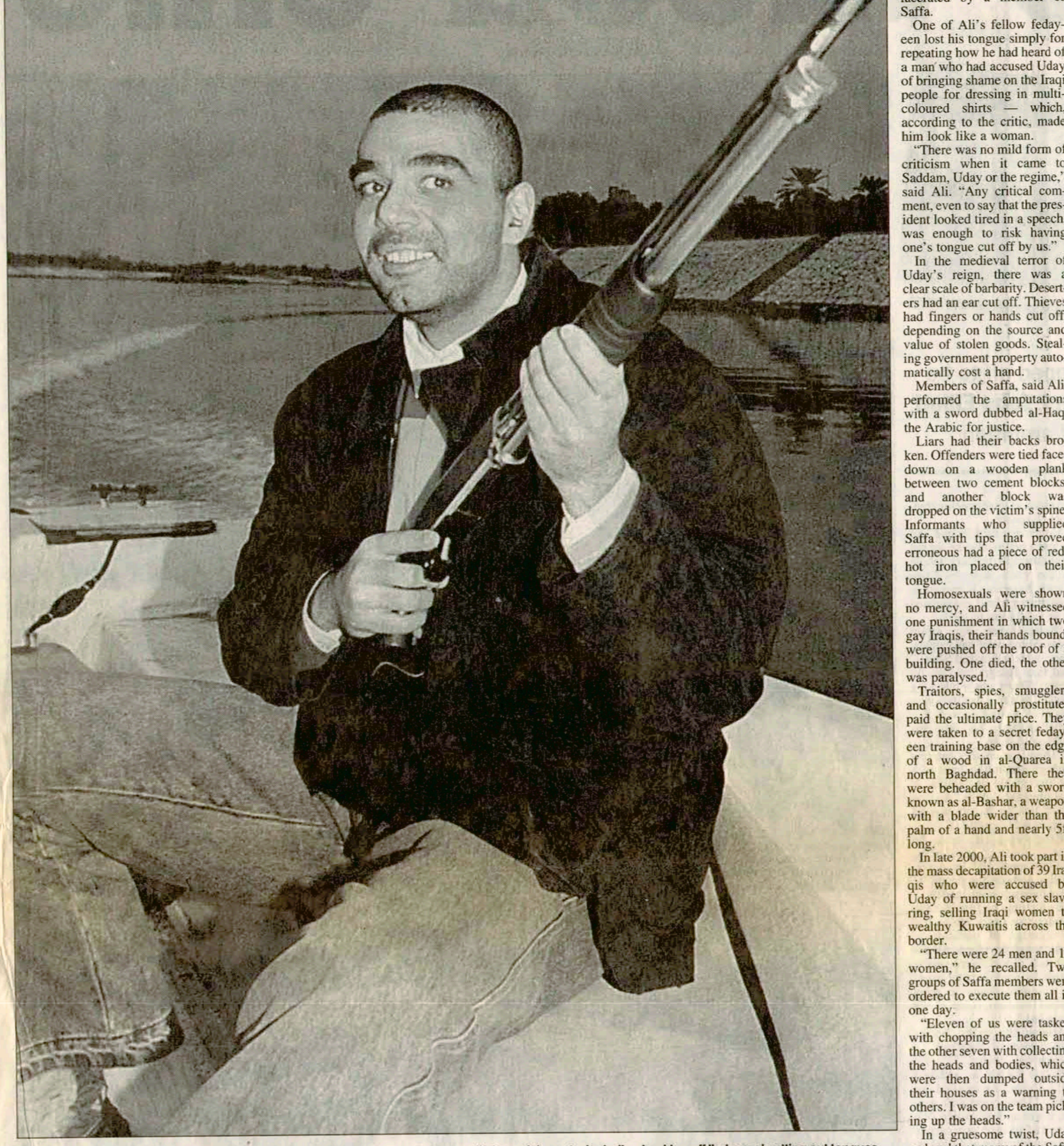
In other areas he does seem intent on forging ahead with significant changes, despite opposition. Last Thursday, while MPs were away from the Commons and most of the country was winding down for the Easter break, the government quietly announced a direct challenge to the powers at the heart of the National Health Service.

The Department of Health is to introduce new contracts for those hospital consultants ever though, over doctors last year voted decisively to reject them. John Hutton, the junior health minister, said that in individual NHS trusts where consultants were in favour they could start using the new system. The British Medical Association, which represents doctors, has muttered darkly about consultants withdrawing from the NHS if such a move were imposed.

Nor will Labour backers be afraid to rebel against the NHS. As Stephen Pound, a rebel over Iraq, said: "Everyone knows that losing your virginity is the first part, but when you've done it once it's much easier."

Even so, Blair and Alan Milburn, the health secretary, seem set on shaking up the service. The prime minister has made it clear that he intends to press ahead with the creation of foundation hospitals. They will be semi-

SADDAM'S MAD SON



Uday, Saddam's deranged elder son, controlled a special unit that carried out sadistic punishments, including hacking off limbs and cutting out tongues

There was nothing that anyone could do. He would either pay the women money or try to rape them. "Other times he would force them to dance and strip. To oppose him would mean to risk getting killed. "One of his steady mistresses was a Jordanian restaurant owner called Wafaa. She used to bring him girls. Then she began sleeping with him herself and the sexual favours paid off. Suddenly she had power. She was one of the first people in Iraq to have a mobile phone, and she could have anyone killed if she wanted to. By day Uday often slept, according to Ali, in his exclusive nightclub on the Euphrates. In private he had a liking for cowboy hats and garish clothes — but only those with a death wish would dare to comment on his style. Anybody, including fedayeen soldiers, caught making even innocuous remarks against Saddam, Uday or the regime would have his or her tongue lacerated by a member of Safia.

AS war dawned, the fedayeen in Baghdad were ordered to keep a close watch on the districts of Saddam City, Shaula and al-Husseina. All three are predominantly Shi'ite and poor working-class areas. The regime, said Ali, feared that once the war began they could become hotbeds of rebellion. Small units of fedayeen patrolled the districts in pick-up trucks with a heavy machinegun mounted on the roof. They were ordered to break up any group of more than five Iraqis by firing into the air and to search for spies trying to help the Americans. They arrested anybody who walked past their positions more than three times. As the US Marines advanced, the fedayeen retreated back into the city centre to try and fight. "We were shocked when we realised that they were at the city doors. The army betrayed us. Without tanks and artillery there was little we could do against US tanks." "But I saw even as the marines closed on the city centre, Uday was still in Baghdad. On the day when US marines were on the southern bank of the Euphrates but had not yet managed to take the bridges, Uday pulled up near Ali's group at the wheel of a Land Cruiser. He was armed and protected by three bodyguards. He asked about US positions, praised his fedayeen fighters and ordered them not to let the Americans take a nearby highway bridge which led into the city centre. According to Ali he was calm and very much alive. Ali and his fellow Safia members fought on sporadically for several days. When they realised all was lost they abandoned their uniforms and melted into the ordinary population. Ali buried his weapons and burnt his Safia ID card. Now he lives discreetly in the city but in fear, and would be photographed only with his face masked.

Any critical comment, even to say that the president looked tired in a speech, was enough to risk having one's tongue cut off?

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Blair ready to pick fights on the domestic front?

After the war there is a view emerging," he said, "that as we are going to be in power for another six or seven years, we can afford to do a bit more long-term planning for change — rather than just snatching at eye-catching gimmicks for the manifesto."

One area which is seen as ripe for action is the fundamental relationship between the individual and the state. Among ideas that new Labour thinkers are circulating is to give more power back to the voters and let "the market" do the work.

Blair and some aides have been studying the idea of what they call "co-payments" in public services, making individuals contribute more directly to the cost of public services. For example, hospital patients might chip in for certain services; parents might have some financial link to their children's schooling. Other policy wags are studying the American system which you cannot be tried for the same crime twice; making feckless mothers and fathers on residential parenting courses; extending on-the-spot fines to 16-year-olds; and making begging a recordable offence.

Such measures may seem alien to Labour, but what was once anathema is now being floated among Blairite supporters. The key obstacle may be Labour's old bedrock, the unions.

During the second Gulf war it was Blair's family that sustained him. Even Euan, his 19-year-old son, who normally confides little in his parents about life at Bristol University, encouraged his father, saying, "They were really support-

Next in line: having weathered the storm over Iraq, many Labour figures believe Blair will be more decisive in tackling opponents such as the firefighters