¡s¿ ¡ p ¿ On Sunday , Iraq announced that it would try Saddam Hussein and three others for the deaths of 140 Iraqis in Du j ail , the site of an attempt on his life in 1982 . National Public Radio & # 82 17 ; s story about the announcement was a masterpiece of understatement .¡/ p ¿ ¡ p ¿ NPR reporter Tom Bull ock allowed as how it might seem strange that Saddam was being tried for a relatively minor crime compared to gas attacks on Iraqi Kurds or the brutal repression of Iraq & # 82 17 ; s Shiite majority after the first Gulf War , actions that killed thousands of Iraqis . But he explained that Iraqi investigators & # 82 20 ; are clear & # 8 221 ; that they have chosen this particular incident as the cause for prosecution because it is a & # 82 20 ; straight forward case involving strong enough evidence to convict Saddam Hussein and the others charged . & # 8 221 ; So , according to Tom , that explains it . It & # 82 17 ; s just a technical thing , a matter of good jur is pr udence , you see ? ¡/ p ¿ ¡ p ¿ On the other hand , any number of observers have pointed out that a trial of Saddam Hussein would likely be a mine field for the Bush Administration . In a trial , Saddam would have the opportunity to take the stand and explain in excruciating detail where he got his weapons of mass destruction , and how when he used them against Kurds in Hal ab ja , the U . S . didn & # 82 17 ; t seem upset at all , and when he used chemical weapons against Iran the U . S . didn & # 82 17 ; t withdraw their support & # 173 ; indeed , they continued to provide assistance in the form of intelligence and weapons . He could talk about Donald R ums feld & # 82 17 ; s friendly visit to Baghdad as all of this was trans piring . He could point out that the U . S . had nothing but good things to say about him until he moved into Kuwait . And speaking from the podium of the witness stand , he could not be censored , and his voice would reach to every corner of the world .¡/ p ¿ ¡ p ¿ In that light , is it surprising that the basis of the trial will be a relatively contained incident that did not involve chemical weapons ? A trial in which , if Saddam or his lawyers try to raise issues of U . S . and western complicity in his dirty deeds in the past , the judge can simply rule such testimony irrelevant ? And is it surprising that this is a death - pen alty case ? All they have to do is convict him on this one , then execute him , and he disappears as a potential embarrassment .¡/ p ¿ ¡ p ¿ And would it have been too much to expect Tom Bull ock and NPR to point any of this out ? ¡/ p ¿ ¡ p ¿ GRE G WE I HER is a political scientist and freelance writer living in Houston , Texas . He can be reached at ¡ a href =" mail to : g wei her @ uh . edu " type =" external "¿ g wei her @ uh . edu ¡/ a ¿ .¡/ p ¿ ¡ p ¿ & amp ; # 160 ;