

A country now run by foreigners, including Israelis...

Nearly visiting Iraq

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In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

A London-based Iraqi businessman who visited Iraq bi-yearly all through the thirteen grinding years of UN sanctions, undertaking the 1,200 kilometre road journey to and from Baghdad, nearly visited Iraq again last month – but not quite. The road has become so dangerous and the threats from the US backed interim ‘democratic government’ so great to those who opposed war and sanctions, that he had to meet friends in Amman, in neighbouring Jordan.

Riad El Taher, who Chairs Friendship Across Fronters, formerly an anti-embargo organisation and now anti occupation – Patron of which is Father of the House of Commons, Tam Dalyell – told Globalresearch.ca first hand stories, from trusted long time friends, of the frightening reality of conditions prevailing in occupied Iraq.

‘I met a wide spectrum of people, including Kurds, who inspite of their differing backgrounds and politics were united in condemnation of the occupation, mistrust of the US appointed government and the horror of continuous loss of Iraqi lives.’

‘The US soldiers’ says El Taher. ‘are largely adopting their motto: “No Worse Enemy”, consequently creating a cycle of resentment and hatred. Their search methods are intrusive and brutal. One UK educated Christian friend said his home was raided at five a.m. ‘ The situation was largely defused due to his fluent english – and his offering them beer. El Taher joked that he had become a collaborator, but another friend immediately responded that had he not behaved as he did, his home would have been trashed and almost certainly belongings and valuables stolen as is virtually an unaccountable norm in US searches. Claims for their return or for compensation are almost always unsuccessful Iraqis and pressure groups say.

‘Another UK graduate’ told of an incident at a check point. ‘His hands, he said, were visibly on the wheel, when his mobile phone rang, he instinctively tried to reach it and was almost shot, his shouted explanation in English, almost certainly saving him.’ The solder responded, he related to El Taher: ‘ “I could have killed you and it would have taken me five minutes to justify my action.” ‘ Iraqis have become unpeople, whose lives count for nothing. One of hundreds of letters to a US website comes to mind, whinging about the stress he was under, a soldier wrote: ‘I don’t like shooting women and children, it’s not my thing.’

‘Iraq lives are excessively expendible’ El Taher commented: ‘unlike (those of foreigners.)’ Staying in the same hotel was the Iraq womens tennis team: between the low flying, trigger happy US helicopters and the ongoing explosions, practising tennis in Iraq had become a life

threatening activity – they had to travel to another country to hone their skills.

‘A state of fear, uncertainty and corruption prevails in occupied Iraq...’ (further) ‘.. a senior official in the Interim Government stated that no Minister can make a decision without the approval of the US allocated Minister’s Advisor – particularly on contractual issues and areas of finance. So much for sovereignty’, commented El Taher. Infact there are allegedly twenty seven different criminal enquiries ongoing in the US as to the whereabouts of nearly eighteen point six billion dollars allocated to Iraq under US stewardship, which is reportedly untraceable.

Of fear and concern, is a country now run by foreigners, including Israelis, whose actions in Palestine seem to be being mirrored, with house demolitions and random killings the norm. The National Guard, asserts El Taher, is largely comprised of the Kurdish militia and though most he spoke to abhor the armed resistance and the suicide bombings, nearly eighteen months of attempts at peaceful actions and demonstrations have been met with US troops and now the National Guard firing at random into the crowd.

‘The troops are the problem, not the solution’, says El Taher, pointing out that Foreign Secretary Straw has repeatedly said (with US counterparts) that if the ‘sovereign’ Iraqi government asks them to leave, they will go. The survival of the Iraqi ‘government’ however, he points out is reliant on the troops. (Grafitti throughout Baghdad warns: ‘We’ll have your head Allawi’, who is now dubbed ‘Iyad Hussein’ – inspite of which, many Iraqis say that if Saddam ran for election tomorrow, he would win by a landslide.) El Taher is further scathing about Chahnaz Rasheed, a non-delegate allowed to address the Labour Party Conference begging the troops not to leave, and expressing her gratitude for the invasion. She is, he says: ‘Wife of a Member of the Iraq Governing Council who is now Minister for Irrigation.’ She, however, whilst lauding a free Iraq, lives safely in Surrey, asserts El Taher, claiming many of those appointed too live largely in London and Amman, the chaos of Baghdad, the slaughter of Falluja and Iraq’s other ancient cities are for those who have no such options.

El Taher has harsh words for prominent people who have done nothing to highlight the plight of a man who may not have been perfect, but had the plight of Iraq’s people under sanctions very much at heart, imprisoned former Christian Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz. His ‘.. family are living modestly in Jordan, the cannot afford the cost of schooling. Communication via the Red Cross is sporadic and in the unhelpful, the last letter they received is three months old.’ Tareq Aziz’s son asked about: ‘conditions and his health’ but the Red Cross representative: ‘refused to elaborate’. ‘This is not the conduct of a humane or impartial organisation ... especially when they remain silent on the conduct of the troops and the new National Guard who took a female member of a household hostage when they failed to find the male family member they were seeking’. Taking women in the family when the men cannot be found is commons practice. Many are believed to have been transferred by the Americans to British Jails in the south, though since access is not allowed by the usual Agencies, this is unconfirmed.

Ironically the only slaughter ordered investigated in the bloodbath Iraq has become, the only investigation into deaths is that of forty nine National Guards killed in an ambush this week. Not, as Brian Cloughley writes so aptly writes in a current ‘Counterpuch’ intro:

‘The butchery ... of the war on terror. The terrorist brides and grooms, the terrorist kids

rushing round in party clothes; all the terrorist musicians and terrorist wedding guests'. One could add and all those terrorist mourners at funerals, or terrorist toddlers and Mums, shot in cars at US road blocks.

As for Tareq Aziz, I have a personal memory of an interview with him for a Middle East magazine. He has a heart ailment and was clearly unwell. A doctor was waiting outside, should he be taken ill. Aziz suddenly broke off and said: 'Madam Felicity, when I was ten years old, I was leafletting in Baghdad; putting fliers through doors, to stop Britain getting her hands on Iraq's oil. I am not about to give up on Iraq now.' He didn't, but ill and like the rest of a sovereign government, illegally overthrown and imprisoned in an act which will surely render generations of historians aghast, most of his foreign friends have moved on and lifted not a finger to help

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