

The Shameful Tragedy of Tariq Aziz. A Metaphor for the “New Iraq.”

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Global Research, June 24, 2015

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

As with everything to do with “The New Iraq”, the death, on 5th June, of the country’s former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, 79, was announced with a lie.

The Deputy Governor of Nasiriya, Adel Aldikhaly stated that he had died of a heart attack after “a long term incurable disease.”

Mr Aziz had been transferred from Baghdad’s Khadamiyah prison to Nasiriya’s jail three hundred kilometres south – notorious for appalling conditions at best and torture at worst – a year ago. The reason for his move is so far unknown. It might be surmised just another vicious act to isolate him – even in captivity – from Baghdad, his life’s residence, birthplace of his children, city of his home. What is known, however, is that he died from “long term” neglect, lack of medication and ill treatment.

He had long suffered from diabetes and blood pressure problems, well controlled on medication. In prison that control was sporadic or non-existent. His wife, Violet, visited him regularly travelling from her home in Jordan, helpless to alleviate his deteriorating condition. In April, now with speech and memory problems, he never the less took his wedding ring from his finger for the first time in fifty years and gave it to her for safe keeping. If anything happened to him, he told her, he was worried it would be stolen. She returned to her family devastated.

In spite of his frail, confused and ailing condition, he had been brought in to the visiting room in shackles.

In April 2003, after the illegal invasion, Tariq Aziz had agreed to give himself up to the (surely equally illegal) US “authorities” conditional on his wife and family being allowed to safely leave the country.

In context of illegality, lest it ever be forgotten, even the spineless former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, finally stated of the invasion, unequivocally, on the BBC after a disgraceful eighteen months silence on “coalition” marauding, mass murder, grand theft and mayhem: “I have indicated it was not in conformity with the UN Charter. From our point of view and from the Charter point of view it was illegal.”(1)

By December 2006 Annan stated that under Saddam Hussein’s government the country had been stable and safe – unlike the invasion’s reign of terror: “They could go out, their kids could go to school and come back home without a mother or father worrying ‘Am I going to see my child again?’ ”

At the time a UN Report stated: “3,000 civilians are dying every month (with an)

accelerating exodus of Iraqis, with some 100,000 leaving each month for the safety of Syria, Jordan, and the Gulf states.” (2)

As the invasion loomed, Tariq Aziz stated that it was not “regime change” that George W. Bush wished to bring about, but “region change.” If anyone could cut through the untruths it was he.



It was, however, the legitimate government of Iraq – whose “sovereignty and territorial integrity” was guaranteed by the UN – which was put on trial, in a US backed and created kangaroo court. When Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death he said of the Judge and Court: “You are servants of the colonisers.” Hard to dispute. (The “colonisers” are now back in force as “military advisers”, with more to follow – NB: “Operation Creep” alert.)

Saddam was executed on 30th December 2006. Tariq Aziz was sentenced to death in 2010. Charges included Saddam Hussein’s government’s retribution for an assassination attempt on Tariq Aziz’s life by members of the Dawa Party in 1980 and a subsequent assassination attempt on Saddam’s life in 1982. Dawa made another attempt on Saddam’s life in 1987 and were believed also responsible for an attempt on his son, Uday, in 1996 gravely injuring him.

After an alleged attempt on the life of President George Bush in Kuwait in 1993 the penalties were swifter, quite as brutal – and raised not a Washington eyebrow. When America was subject of a terrorist attack it declared the right to exact retribution on entire nations anywhere on earth, any time and: “You are either with us, or with the terrorists.” Hypocrisy and double standards rule, as ever.

Further, the US and UK are seemingly “with the terrorists.” The Dawa Party also bombed the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut in December 1981 and was thought to have been behind the bombing of the US and French Embassies, the airport and the main oil refinery in Kuwait in 1983. Both Iraq’s current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and his predecessor Nouri al-Maliki have key positions in Dawa. Al-Maliki leads it, whilst al-Abadi become head of it whilst in London in the 1970s. They both only returned to Iraq with the 2003 invasion. Terrorist connections, incidentally, were no bar to al-Abadi receiving a grant from the UK Department of Trade and Industry in 1998. (3)

The all demonstrates that this is hardly a regime to adhere to human rights standards, yet alone for prisoners, especially political ones who could still be regarded, in law, as the legitimate government. Tariq Aziz never stood a chance. Appeals to leading Western politicians, Bishops, human rights organizations, the UN High Commissioner for Human

Rights, the Pope – current and previous – over twelve years, were met with no words or weasel ones. Integrity, courage and compassion are qualities in very short supply in high places, hypocrisy and inhumanity, however, in abundance.

On April 24th, the twelfth anniversary of Tariq Aziz's detention, his eldest son Ziad wrote a despairing, prophetic letter: "Time is not on our side, I can't stress enough the urgency of the situation and the need to for an immediate intervention. It has been 12 years today since the Americans took him and since I last saw my father, I don't know if there is another year to wait." (4)

More letters were written, approaches made, more silence or gutlessness the response, including from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. But then, he is a former oilman and his son works for Tony Blair. Surely a meeting of God and Mammon as ever there was.

Aziz was, of course, a Chaldean Christian who was welcomed in the Vatican as an honoured guest in 2003, when he appealed for intervention to halt Iraq's destruction, guardian of so many of the Bible's integral epiphanies. He was extended welcome and respect by Kofi Annan when UN Secretary General – google the photographs – the list of current and former world names who welcomed him, in spite of the crippling US-UK driven UN embargo, is long. All have been silent in the face of another historic shame and injustice. "History will slaughter those responsible", as former UN Secretary General Denis Halliday said of the embargo.

Even from prison he courageously fought for Iraq charging the invaders:

"We are all victims of Britain and America. They killed our country." (5)



What penalty was exacted for that comment, which went around the world?

His statement was endorsed by then US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta. As the US troops slunk out under cover of darkness on 15th December 2011 – following the example of the British who fled in the night in 2009. At a ceremony marking US retreat at Baghdad Airport Panetta boasted that: "We spilled a lot of blood here ... to achieve ... making the country sovereign and independent and able to secure itself." Admissions of both criminality and delusion?

The "sovereignty" and "independence" to which Iraq had been reduced, had driven Aziz, a year earlier, to instruct his lawyer that in the event of his death he would be buried in Jordan for fear his grave would be desecrated or his body exhumed by the US proxy government. He requested his body be returned to the country he loved to be buried: "after Iraq is liberated." (6)

The day before Tariq Aziz's death, his wife managed to visit him again. His son Ziad wrote of

her “horror” at his condition. He was wheelchair -bound, unable to walk, with a pulmonary infection, his entire system clearly collapsing:

“I cannot describe to you how horrified she was at his sight and how miserable he looked. I’m afraid that the worst would happen soon. We need urgent help to deliver this message ... we need to secure his release immediately. At this point keeping him in prison is just torture, plain and simple. There is no reasonable justification to keep him in prison, except to watch him die slowly, which I suspect is what they want.”

Ziad was right. Before further useless appeals were made, he was dead, the family learning of their loss from news bulletins, not a courtesy call from the Iraqi authorities. His ordeal, however, and that of his family, was far from over. Torment follows even the dead in the nightmare of the “New Iraq.”

The Jordanian government responded speedily in granting the families’ request that he be buried there. Ziad Aziz expressed his gratitude, saying: “Jordan is a safe haven for the body of my father.” Having completed some bureaucratic paperwork, his remains should have been on a ‘plane in hours or no later than the following day. Instead it was subject to further assault.

With no permission requested from his family an autopsy was performed. The body was subsequently returned to Baghdad from where relatives were informed that the formalities for transfer to Jordan would take ten days. According to reliable information various government Ministers, each with their own “fiefdom”, were placing their own conditions on Tariq Aziz’s freedom, even after death.

The body was finally taken to Baghdad airport for the flight to Jordan, accompanied by his wife, on 11th June. It is believed that the process was speeded with the help of the Jordanian government.

However:

... armed men reportedly broke into the airport cargo section in SUVs to seize the mortal remains of the man who was once Iraq’s top diplomat, minutes before the corpse was due to be loaded onto a Royal Jordanian plane for burial in Amman.

An Iraqi MP who asked not to be named said the SUVs had registration plates issued by the Iraqi Interior Ministry. The MP claimed the militants wore black uniforms similar to those of the Counter-Terrorism Agency set up by former Prime Minister Maliki years ago, whose members are thought to still be loyal to him.

Al-Araby has obtained information that indicated the four SUVs passed through no fewer than four checkpoints on the airport road without being intercepted.(7)

For some hours the whereabouts of the body was unknown, inflicting further trauma on the family. The Iraqi government eventually made an unconvincing comment about a paperwork problem, also airing a fabrication that he had requested to be buried near his birthplace outside Mosul. There were real fears that, as with countless “liberated” others, he would be

disappeared for all time.

Seemingly again with help from the Jordanian government, his casket was finally flown on Royal Jordanian Airways first flight out of Baghdad to Amman early on Saturday 13th June, with his wife, greeted by family and crowds of Iraqis and Jordanians determined, as one said: "To give him special send off."

"I last saw my father twelve years ago, now I welcome him in a box", said Ziad Aziz, grief consuming his face. His birthday had been three days after his father's death.

Moving services were held the same day at St Mary of Nazareth Church in Jordan's capitol, Amman and then at the Church of the Virgin in the ancient, historic, biblical city of Madaba (8) where he was laid to rest. The services, the streets, were packed with those determined to show their respect.

However for anyone who might harbor questions regarding Tariq Aziz,

Ibrahim al-Marashi Assistant Professor at the Department of History, California State University, San Marcos and author of "Iraq's Armed Forces: An Analytical History" writes:

Having avoided execution, the question most likely to be asked after his death is the scope of his guilt in crimes perpetuated under the Baathists. Having read thousands of captured Iraqi state documents for my doctoral thesis, his signature never appeared on any execution orders or military orders against the Kurds, the Kuwaitis, Iranians, or fellow Iraqis ...(9)

Of course, as the rest of the former government, courage was unfaultable. Whatever their failings, they vowed not to abandon their country, never did, paying the ultimate price.

I have written many times before of his comment in an interview with me: "When I was ten years old, I was handing out leaflets, putting them through doors in Baghdad to stop the British stealing our oil, I am not about to give up on Iraq now." A man of his word, he died for the country he loved.

He said in the same interview regarding the embargo: "If the United States want to impose military sanctions on Iraq, let them do it, but don't deprive our children of milk, health, medicine."

The small, towering, resolute figure also died deprived of "milk, health, medicine", sharing Iraq's plight as he vowed.

May his soul fly in the golden dawns and dusks in the country he loved and died for, with the birds who soar in their great flocks as the sun rises and falls against the shimmering, translucent, glowing brilliance of the far horizon, a human metaphor for Iraq's ongoing nightmare.

Notes:

1) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/16/iraq.iraq>

- 2) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/dec/04/iraq.unitednations>
- 3) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haider_al-Abadi
- 4) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/anglo-american-revenge-in-iraq-tariq-aziz-twelfth-anniversary-of-a-us-t-ravesty-of-justice/5445393>
- 5) <http://www.globalresearch.ca/iraq-tariq-aziz-they-killed-our-country-we-are-all-victims-of-britain-and-america/28619>
- 6) <http://en.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleNO=10456#.VYQxsEtw1h>
- 7) <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2015/6/12/tariq-azizs-body-returned-after-being-snatched-by-militants>
- 8) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madaba>
- 9) <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/06/divisive-legacy-tariq-aziz-iraq-saddam-150606062928971.html>

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