

# Victors Justice in Iraq. Tariq Aziz : “Ill, Isolated and Abandoned”

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“The expense of spirit in a waste of shame ... is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame, savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust.” William Shakespeare (1564-1616.)

In the UK, there has been much discussion in recent months, on the right of the ill or those with potentially disabling conditions to choose their time of death.

Imagine however, feeling so hopeless, abandoned and despairing that you request execution – in Iraq. That is the plea of Tariq Aziz, that country’s former Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

Aziz surrendered to the Americans two weeks after the invasion, in 2003. Well known in the West, he had some faith in the international community. Although woefully treated in diplomatic circles in the US., unable to travel away from the UN in New York (“The embargo even extends to dialogue, yet the West accuses us of being undemocratic”, he told me, in an interview, prior to the invasion. He had a point.) Broadly, though, he believed in the integrity of the international community. “I can talk at any level (with) the French, Russians, Chinese, Spanish, Italians, Belgians ...”

The former Foreign Minister was a sick man, with a serious heart ailment, even as he traveled from Baghdad to Rome, to ask the Pope to intervene, just prior to the invasion, in a brave and desperate move to avert more suffering and bloodshed. His passion for his country was unmistakable and in the complex and – after decades on a war footing – understandably paranoid clime of the country, he was prepared to take personal risks.

“Why don’t a cross party group of US congressmen come here, address our Parliament, engage in dialogue, meet people?” He asked me and other foreign visitors whom he met, extending the invitation to senior British parliamentarians. Some of us tried hard to convey his message. He – and we – were addressing a political brick wall. Lies, slaughter and invasion trump diplomacy every time, it seems, under the “New World Order.”

Aziz, of whom his son Ziad says, with validity, should be acknowledged, with his colleagues, as a prisoner of war, was held without trial until April 2008, then, says a lawyer who knows the case well: “They threw the book at him.” As all the regime, whatever the other arguments, his courage and pride could not be faulted, none fled, all vowed to stay in Iraq no matter what – and did. In a trial presided over by a Judge Raouf Abdul Rahman, from

Hallabja, a judicial mockery of impartiality, who had sentenced Saddam Hussein to death, the proud, dignified Aziz was hauled in to Court in his pyjamas.

Lawyers were unable to represent him, between death threats and refused visas. In a trial declared “fundamentally flawed” by Human Rights Watch, he was, predictably, sentenced to death. After all, next to Saddam, he knew probably most of volumes of the West’s alliances, dealings, arms selling and co-operations with Iraq over the decades. Volumes that reside in just two places, stolen from Baghdad’s Ministries and now (illegally) in Washington – and in the heads of the few surviving members of Iraq’s, arguably, still legitimate government, since the invasion was also illegal.

President Barack Obama made a pre-election commitment not to turn Tareq Aziz over to the Iraqi regime. Another in a litany of broken promises. He is now at the mercy of Prime Minister Maliki, whose Dawa Party tried to assassinate him, in Dujail, Iraq, on 1st., February 1982. Whilst the death penalty against him has been commuted to life imprisonment, due to his age, he has lost hope. His family have been unable to visit him for years and he feels that those across the globe, in whom he had thought he had friendships, have abandoned him.

There are those who have unceasingly pressured politicians, President Obama, (UK) Foreign Secretary Hague, the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichol, on behalf of this frail Iraqi Christian and his colleagues. (Their predecessors too were repeatedly approached.) They include former MP and Minister, Tony Benn, former UN Assistant Secretary Generals and Humanitarian Co-ordinators in Iraq, Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, Bishops, physicians, academics, journalists and many others. Letters have remained unanswered or a shameful fudged response.

Church leaders seem a world away from the humanity they preach. This week a former colleague of Rowan Williams, now Archbishop of Canterbury, talked of his involvement in the Jubilee Group, founded in the 1980’s, opposed to Margaret Thatcher and the Falklands war. Margaret Ronchetti told BBC Radio 4 (3rd July) that: “Rowan was concerned for those who did not have a voice.” Since reaching high office, it seems he has lost his.

The self styled “Vicar of Baghdad”, Canon Andrew White, went to Iraq originally at the invitation of Tareq Aziz, in his spirit of wishing people to see and understand. Since 2003, his silence has rung down the years.

Some months ago, his health declining, Aziz managed to send a letter via his lawyer, requesting that if he died, he be buried outside Iraq: “Until Iraq is liberated”, fearing his remains and grave would be vandalized, such has Iraq descended under occupation – and as he predicted in that interview, under the: “ ... pro-American government they wish to bring in and present as democracy and human-rights.”

His passionate love of Iraq remains an ingrained memory. I have written before, he suddenly broke off and said: “ Madam Felicity, when I was ten years old, I was handing out leaflets on the streets of Baghdad, putting them through peoples’ doors, to stop the British taking our oil. I am not about to give up on Iraq now.”

Last week, he made a statement through his lawyer, Gilles Devers, that he would rather be executed. He is, says Monsieur Devers: “ill, isolated and abandoned.” He never did give up on Iraq, but he has given up on life and a world of shame that has near erased his beloved

country, society and archeology's "Cradle of Civilisation."

The Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has now ruled that troops come under Human Rights Legislation and must protect life and liberty in occupied countries. With or without troops, Britain remains part of the invading coalition. Does U.K. Foreign Secretary, William Hague have the will to instruct lawyers to make representation to Iraq's government on behalf of an ill man, nearing eighty, and his colleagues and erase even a small part of the shame of what has been done in our name in Iraq?

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