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Tariq Aziz

TF 1.4a High Value Detainee

23 May 2008

Iraqi High Tribunal, International Zone, Baghdad

by (b)(3), (b)(6)
MNFI Historian

*I interviewed Aziz from about 1430 to 1547. This was after interviewing (b)(6)
(b)(6) My interpret with (b)(6) said Aziz spoke great English, better than (b)(6)
did, and (b)(6) wanted nothing to do with this interview. He hung around until Aziz
arrived. They exchanged greetings, and (b)(6) then left.*

I heard before Aziz came up to the interview that he seemed just a small old man. When I saw him, I agreed. I'd guess he was about 5'5", frail, and slow moving. He shuffled along carefully with a cane in his right hand. He had a mustache and his hair was white. He had on what looked like a hospital shirt. When we met, he indicated he was willing to talk to me, but it was time for his afternoon break with tea and a smoke, and unless he could have tea and smoke, he did not want to talk. I told the guards I would appreciate it if they would provide the tea up in the interview [interrogation] room, and they brought it up. A guard also handed me his Bic lighter for Aziz to use. Aziz had his own cigarettes. I forgot to notice what brand they were, but I think they were Marlboro. A couple of minutes after we sat down in the room, a guard walked in with a short styrofoam cup with hot water, a few Lipton tea bags, sweetener, and a plastic spoon. There were already a handful of plastic bottles on the table. Aziz also asked for a cup for his ashes. Before that cup arrived, Aziz had lit up and he used one of the near empty bottles to knock ashes off his cigarette. By the time the interview ended, the table between us was littered with tea bags, wrappers, and ashes. Before he got up, Aziz 'cleaned' up a bit by pushing the assorted litter and ashes into a pile in the middle of the table.

This interview is worth listening to the recording. My notes are very useful, but there is more detail to be gleaned.

Abstract

Aziz had a long career in the Ba'ath Party and many senior positions. Scott Ritter was a brilliant and ambivalent inspector. Aziz still believes in the Ba'ath Party as the best thing that ever happened to Iraq. The Ba'ath were nationalist, socialist, and progressive. Saddam ran things very well. The regime fell quickly in 2003 because of the effect of sanctions and because American air power was unstoppable. He turned himself in on 21 April 03. 1.4b, 1.4d

1.4b, 1.4d

1.4b, 1.4d The GoI going after JAM is nothing more than the Hakim and Sadr families struggling for dominance among the Shia, and through the Shia, all of Iraq, but

1.4b, 1.4d The only hope for the US is to turn on the GoI and join with the Ba'athists, the communists, and Allawi.

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Interview

Aziz was born in Mosul in 1936. In 1974 he was the editor of the Ba'ath Party newspaper and minister of culture and information. In 1979, he became the Deputy Prime Minister. From 1983 to 1991, he was also the Foreign Minister. In 1991, he became the Deputy Prime Minister without portfolio. He handled foreign affairs and relations, the United Nations and sanctions, and he dealt with the weapons inspectors.

What can you tell me about Scott Ritter?

He was brilliant and ambivalent. He was a tough inspector, the toughest, but he changed his attitude and realized that continuing the sanctions was wrong. He and I had a long conversation [before the invasion]. He thought the U.S. should change course.

His inspections were tough but smart. Many of the inspectors were doing non-sense. He was told to go do an inspection at the Ministry of Defense. I allowed him to go on the condition of taking many inspectors. He went, and spent all the time visiting in an office. He said he knew there would be nothing at the MoD. He thought Albright had her own agenda to keep the sanctions going by setting something up. The idea is that sending inspectors to the MoD would trigger a confrontation and the US could use the confrontation to strengthen sanctions.

I was a member of the Ba'ath Party since its inception. The Ba'ath Party stood for Arab unity, for Iraqi nationalism, and for socialism. I believe our regime and its 35 years was the best Iraq ever had. We served Iraq honestly.

The Ba'ath Party stood for nationalism and socialism. It was not rightist or conservative. It was a progressive party. It came out of the Araf era, a gloomy period of military rule in which the government had no real political agenda. All they wanted to do was rule. They had no socialist or political agenda. They had no idea of what to do.

The military did not believe in democracy. Nouri Said looked at all opposition as communist. In his mentality, he was an Ottoman. From 1920 to 1958, the world changed, but Iraq did not. It was the post-colonial period. His rule was out of date, but there were no domestic security problems. In June 1958, the monarchy collapsed. I had just finished my college education. I had a decent education. Things were not bad at the time, but we felt the government was full of old ideas and it was pro-British, which ran against the tide of the era.

In 1958, we went from royalty to a dictatorship and then to a republic. The country entered a period of military [clashes?] for five years.

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When they talk of the Iraqi regime having been a dictatorship, they're wrong. Dictatorship comes after a democracy, or through a democracy, just as Hitler took power through the Reichstag. Iraq had no democracy [and hence could not have birthed a dictatorship]. The 'parliament' was not democratic; it was a bureaucracy. Seventy of its members were sheiks chosen without competition. The rest were put there by the government, by the rich, or others. Only a few members represented the progressive parties.

From 1958 to 1968, we had military rule, with only officers in charge. The Ba'ath Party was a progressive, revolutionary party. It brought hundreds of thousands into direct participation in the government.

It was anti-Israeli.

Saddam led the Ba'ath Party. Bakr was the president, and the party was a civilian party. Bakr was an officer. Saddam was intelligent, hard working, and charming. Saddam became the top man when Badr decided to retire. Saddam was very efficient. He was a very good listener. He was a very good listener.

Why did the regime fall so quickly in 2003?

First, because of the long period of sanctions: the people and the military had suffered, and the middle class was in dire straights and tired. The war with Iran was extremely difficult, but there had been no sanctions. People lived well. In the 1990s, the US policy of sanctions drained Iraqi power.

Second, because of American air power: missiles are unstoppable. There was no way to stop them, and there was no way to hide from them. They would destroy everything they targeted. The U.S. will win anything militarily. But the U.S. lost the war politically.

Before we go into that, when were you detained?

I gave myself up on 21 April 2003. I was on the deck of cards and I was an old man. It made no sense for me to run or hide. From that day until late 2005, I had no access to the news. I had no newspaper and no radio. I only saw my family in December 2003. They told me how they were living then. Now I get news from listening to Sahwa and al Hurra (US Propaganda), and sometimes the BBC. We do not have radios in our cells. I also read Time, Newsweek, and Foreign Affairs.

You said the U.S. is losing politically. Why and How?

Why and How? First, let's begin with 1984, when Iraq and the U.S. reestablished diplomatic relations. Iraq had severed diplomatic relations with the United States in 1967 after the Six Day War. In 1984, [during the Iran war, and because of it] I traveled to Washington and met with Reagan, Schultz, and Weinberger. Iraq was not the enemy of the U.S., but of Israel, and Israel created conflicts between the U.S. and Arabs. Israel saw Iraq as an enemy.

When Iraq emerged from the Iran-Iraq stronger than before, Israel decided to use the U.S. to strangle Iraq with sanctions.

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The first reason the U.S. has lost the war politically is because of Israel. President George [W] Bush followed the pro-Israeli neo-cons, Cheney and Wolfowitz, who all were either Jews or pro-Israel. One of the worst US mistakes was to do it [invade Iraq] to serve Israel.

1.4b, 1.4d

Can you explain the current conflict in Basra and Sadr City?

He said 'Sadr City' with a bit of a 'humph.' It had slipped my mind to think of Sadr City having been "Saddam City," which I suppose he would have responded quite positively to.

1.4b, 1.4d

Before 2003, we had a real government. Now, without the coalition here, there would be no Government of Iraq. It is still American air power that is winning, in all these conflicts [Basra, Sadr City, Mosul], it is American air power that is destroying resistance.

What would happen if the coalition left?

1.4b, 1.4d

During sanctions, the Government of Saddam provided the Iraqi people with 2,000 calories a day of food. It was very efficient, without looting. Now, millions are hungry and billions sit in a bank. Who is rich? The rulers, and when the coalition leaves Iraq, these 'rulers' also will flee, the government will collapse, and they'll take all the wealth with them.

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If you had a chance to advise the next President, what would you tell him or her?

You have to support the secular forces, the Ba'ath, the communists [though there aren't many left], and Allawi . . . and these represent the majority of the middle classes, the lawyers, teachers, . . . The Ba'ath Party created the middle class and they can run the country again. The GoI does not know how to run things.

Either do it, or leave it to chaos. You are shedding blood, and the Pentagon's numbers are fake. There are ten times more casualties than the Pentagon admits.

Are you [conflating] wounded with dead?

I'm talking about all the casualties who may as well be dead. The U.S. Army has lost a lot in this silly and stupid war.

Can you tell me what your trial is about?

I have been in detention for five years. They say, first, that I'm responsible for the 1992 killing of some merchants. That charge is ridiculous because [I think he said he was not in charge of whoever did it at that time]. Second, I'm charged with preventing Shi'ites from praying on Friday. That's ridiculous. I'm a Christian; Saddam had thousands of Muslims to give such an order, and he never did or wanted such a thing done. People are laughing at the tribunal [IHT] because they no it has no serious charges to make against me.

Everyone knows I hurt no one.

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