

Tongues Bloody Tongues: An American Man From Iraq

Words by Joseph Tepperman

[*We find **Saddam Hussein** alone, appearing to only just notice the audience.*]

Saddam Hussein: These are people here now? I have so wanted to speak to them, to speak with someone.

In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful. *Assalamu Alaykum*, O great nation. I address not only you, but all nations, all humanity. God is Great - *allahuakbar* - and great are the bearers of justice among His people. My name... My name is not important. It is sufficient to say I am the son of my people, the loyal and faithful son. I was also once the father to them.

[*he pulls down a map of Iraq*]

My nation is Iraq. My people, the Arabs of Iraq. This is the land from where all civilization has proceeded, these are the people who have stirred the world to heights of wisdom beyond all other. Though today, as at certain other points in time, our culture has fallen prey to outside envy, to the decadence of ones who wish us to abandon our message.

Today's aggressors join their destinies to the destinies of history's best-known colonialists, in Iraq and elsewhere. It is a very long list so I will not bother you with all of the names. But these include the English. The Persians. The Greeks. The Mongols. The Ottomans. The Romans. The-

[*noise of flocking parrots*]

You hear these? These, I think they are parrots? They are so loud. I have not yet heard such parrots here. But I know these birds. Two very bright yellow of them were once given me by... it is not important. I continue.

So, yes. The Romans. The Assyrians. The Akkadians. Now the Americans. The Chaldeans. The Sassanids. The Parthians. You understand what I am meaning to say.

For comparison, let us examine the history of one, of any one of these invaders. Maybe the English.

[pulls down a map of the U.K.]

Do you know, I was once a school teacher? Yes, it is true. Many do not know this, but I was.

So: the English. Yes. In their many years, the English native lands have been challenged by outside aggressors only four times: by the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings, and by a French people, the Normans. The English nation, we must remember, they were at the stage of receiving knowledge when Iraq's light shone the brightest. But history is not a contest, and today we find ourselves at a critical moment in the struggle for our renaiss-

[noise of parrots]

Again we have the parrots. I did not know there would be such parrots here today. Their sound is... very sad, their sound.

Please forgive me. I awoke here eleven days past. It has been very dark here. And without company.

Our renaissance, the struggle for renaissance. Yes. There was a man, he was an American man, but born in Iraq in the North, near Mosul. I learned later how his family emigrated when he was very young, before the Revolution of July 1958 - first to Azerbaijan, then America. As a man in America he became very wealthy from, I think, he owned more than sixteen landscaping businesses - this business of deciding where grow trees and bushes and then planting them and caring for them, this kind of a business.

This man, I have not thought on this man in a very long time. He came of himself to visit me in 1987, at the height of our struggle against Iran, seeming very innocent. "It is my wish to make the acquaintance of distinguished Mr. President" - something like this is the message that was sent to me through the ambassador office. I did not then decline. You see, he was a very wealthy man, and from Iraq originally. And relations with the Americans had not yet worsened. Besides, it is not my nature to refuse an invitation of this type.

And so this man, this American man from Iraq who had so praised the esteemed President, his intentions were left unclear. I and two of my cabinet ministers were waiting already ten minutes when he arrived late, with a European man, I

believe from the Netherlands, dressed well but sweating very much, introduced as a business associate. A third, a younger assistant man, I could tell Egyptian, carried with shuffled feet behind him two large of what looked like baskets, like baskets covered both by cloths of red flower printing.

The American man from Iraq, who was no longer a young man, he took slowly from the assistant one of these maybe baskets, maybe cages, took it by a ring from the top and, smiling, lifted to his head.

"A gift," he said. "For respected Mr. President."

From under the cloths was a sound, a wind sound, but hard, like many hanging curtains hitting to themselves, and then falling still.

By this gift, I might have a reason to suspect... I do not say what, but I knew to not suspect it - not from these men. Already they had passed my own security. But there was a thing in their manner, some thing that spoke - almost embarrassing - to me.

"Please," I said, and told for him to leave his basket gift. I felt very strong the need to conclude this visit. It was then that we went to sit and that in an instant I saw, I saw in his way of sitting down, of taking his chair and of holding to the arms of the chair and of leaning his body as if in a dance, like to be holding another person's hands in dance... Or I did not see in these but I knew in that time, that instant, I knew.

Very simple was the offer, obvious seeming now. The Netherlands man, he revealed to be representative of an organization for aid to refugees. This organization was known to take the refugees, and to gain for them visa status - in Europe, in America, in Australia. They now had interest in the North Iraq tribes who collaborated with Iran against us, of sending them to safety in airplanes. And the very wealthy American man who was from Iraq, he would give the money for this thing.

"And will you send also for you yourself?" I said.

"For me?" he said. "I do not understand."

"For you yourself," I said, "you are a Kurd yourself."

Late next day, one guard took to my desk the two strange baskets or cages that were covered with cloths. These I had forgotten - maybe with purpose. It was very late at that time - all others were away and sleeping, or meaning to sleep. The guard's shoes became more quiet as he returned to his post beyond the hall. And the sound, the very quiet sound from in the baskets, I could now hear this. No longer the before wind sound of hitting curtains but a small voices sound, like many quiet voices together talking but saying nothing.

In opening small the cover cloths - a pair of bars, thin, painted white. From in the under dark, four black eyes, very tiny, shined back to me.

But all this, this is very far in the past. A nation passes through these many life stages in the same as a human being: through birth, then childhood, adolescence, adulthood, to middle age, then old age, and the end of life, to death. It is natural to wonder on this, and to see in the past only lost wisdom, lost glory and understanding. I still believe in the capability of my nation to make rebirth, as we have made in the many past times. The struggle now is one the Arab world must make a solemn pledge to consolidate, if we will to see our-

[noise of flocking parrots]

You! Parrots! I will... I will keep with telling. If you will want to listen.