



Iraq: St. Valentine's Day Massacres: Still Ongoing

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Nineteen years ago, on the night of 13th/14th February 1991, the Ameriya Shelter, on Baghdad's outskirts, was deliberately targeted by US missiles, in a war crime which near excelled the litany of criminal acts in the onslaught which then Secretary of State, James Baker, promised would: « reduce Baghdad to a pre-industrial age. »

My memories of Ameriya have been left in their immediacy, rather than again updated. (See below.)

On 13th/14th February this year, the US is still extinguishing Iraqis, detaining without trial (and almost certainly worse) in the name of « nation building » (read: nation erasing) after near seven years of murderous occupation. In the other country the US and UK are systematically destroying, Afghanistan, on precisely the anniversary of the Shelter bombing, they have launched another St Valentine's Eve and Day massacre. It is also another equally infamous anniversary: that of the fire bombing of Dresden.

« Operation Moshtarak », in Helmand Province, the biggest « surge » since the numerous other biggest surges since 2001, in this graveyard of Empires and Afghans, is set to create Ameriya's incendiary tragedy throughout the towns and villages of the region.

The US military is to « clear » (read kill) « suspected Taliban » (their trained and paid allies when the USSR invaded) from the region. Rule of law shredded, « suspects » are no longer tried, simply summarily executed. Over the years, a surprising number of « suspects » have still been in diapers. Quite a few have also been in wedding dresses.

The US military, of course, reverted to their old habit to « avoid civilian casualties. » They dropped leaflets telling the locals to leave to avoid casualties. According to UNICEF, just 28% of the population is literate, far less in rural areas. In the frozen wastes of a February Afghan winter, where are they to go? (In 1991, the US dropped several tonnes of leaflets with the same warning to the Marsh Arabs in Iraq. Illiterate but not stupid, they sold this bounty to the government, unable to import paper under the embargo.)

In 1750, Ahmad Shah's army, is said to have lost eighteen thousand men in Afghanistan from cold, in a single night in February, the most Siberian month, where the temperature falls to an average low of -8 C., and the eastern reaches of the Hari river can freeze so hard that people travel it as a road.

« This is not going to be a Falluja » said Major General Nick Carter, « that's not the model. » Oh good. « Moshtarak » means « together », in the Dari language. At least it's not the Wild West « Panther's Claw » mark two, title of the last absolutely « final surge. »

In more quaint army-speak, General Carter refers to « inserting » the fifteen thousand testosterone-driven troops, backed by bombs, bullets, possibly the odd bit of white phosphorous and other aids to « pacification » and « bringing the government in behind us. » One could almost think it was a raunchy Friday night on the town, rather than a killing spree.

The troops refer to this « insertion » as: « lawn mowing. » What is it about blood baths and gardening euphemisms? Remember those military human shredding machines, »daisy cutters »?

So as Ameriyah is commemorated in the hearts of Iraqis, a day which is as yesterday for all Baghdadis, keep the Afghan people also in your hearts, in their terror, this Dresden replicating Valentine's Day.

In her new book, to be launched on Wednesday 17th February, Iraqi writer and activist Haifa Zangana comments of Iraq:

“We wanted to put an end to this but we failed. The war and occupation in 2003, apart from shattering Iraq as a country and a people, has brought about many more imprisonments, many more deaths. Abu Ghraib is only one of many symbols. In occupied Iraq, torture became an instrument of humiliation and of a way to force a nation into submission. As we resist occupation now, our message is clear: We did not struggle for decades to replace one torturer with another.”(1)

An eloquent encapsulation for those in both occupied, invaded, terrorised, defiled lands.

A last word on the Ameriya Shelter comes from Dahr Jamail:

« I learned that the Amiriyah Bomb Shelter has been closed by the Americans, due to the fact that an Islamic Fundamentalist group was keeping it open. I am glad I went when I did a couple of weeks ago, for when monuments/schools/buildings are closed and/or occupied by the Americans here, they have a tendency not to reopen. » (2)

This uniquely poignant shrine, marking an unimaginable end, is now designated: an « Islamic Fundamentalist » site, by Iraq's liberators, the new Crusaders.

Notes

(1)Haifa Zangana: « Dreaming of Baghdad. »

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Dreaming-Baghdad-Women-Writing-Middle/dp/1558616055>

(2) <http://www.esterrepublic.com/Archives/djamail1.html>

<http://www.uruknet.info?p=30603> Ameriya 14th Feb 2007.

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