



Written by on October 28, 2010

Reactions to the Sentence of Tariq Aziz

On October 27, AFP news service quoted from a statement issued by Russia's foreign ministry calling for "clemency" for former Iraqi Deputy Premier Tariq Aziz, who had been sentenced to death by hanging by Iraq's top criminal court a day earlier.

The statement read: "It is obvious that considerations of elementary humanity demand that [Aziz] is shown clemency. We would like to be able to count on Iraq's presidential council not allowing this sentence to be enforced."

However, the ministry acknowledged that the sentence was Iraq's "internal affair."



Iraq's supreme criminal court imposed the death sentence on Aziz on October 26 after finding him guilty of "deliberate murder and crimes against humanity."

AFP also quoted Mikhail Margelov, the head of the foreign affairs committee in Russia's upper house, the Federation Council: "What has happened in Iraq is the elimination of a witness and a settling of accounts between different religions, not a victory for justice. Nothing can justify this sentence."

In a surprising statement from a political entity not associated with compassion, Gennady Zyuganov, the head of Russia's Communist Party, said in an Interfax statement: "We will ... call on the international community and parliamentarians in Europe and the United States to prevent this assassination." Zyuganov described Aziz as "a very sick old man."

Though there has been a consensus of opinion expressed that Aziz's legal representatives would take advantage of his right to appeal under Iraqi law, in an [interview with CNN](#), the former official's daughter, Zainab Aziz, was pessimistic about the success of an appeal preventing her father's execution, stating: "I don't think he has any hope of coming out" of prison.

In an interview with CNN from her home in Amman, Jordan, Zainab Aziz said that her family had no idea her father was going to be sentenced this week. "Until last week, they were hearing new witnesses in this case," she said. "My father served his country for more than 22 years. He delivered himself to the U.S. Army [following the collapse of the Hussein government] because he wasn't afraid. He didn't do anything wrong. He served his country. He has been wronged."

Badi Arif, an attorney who formerly represented Aziz, attributed the decision to execute the ex-Deputy Prime Minister as political, telling CNN: "Mr. Aziz used to always tell me, 'They'll find a way to kill me, and there is no way for me to escape this. But from a legal perspective, this sentence is wrong; this is illegal and this is unexpected.'"

CNN also quoted from a statement issued on October 26 from Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, which said:

The position of the Catholic Church on the death penalty is known. It is truly hoped therefore that



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the sentencing against Tariq Aziz not be carried out, precisely to favour the reconciliation and reconstruction of the peace and justice in Iraq after the great suffering it has gone through.

While the Russian government ceded that the decision to execute Aziz was Iraq's "internal affair," as noted earlier, its statement released through its foreign ministry asked Iraq's government to exercise clemency and not carry out the execution.

A similar statement issued by U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Crowley on October 27, as reported by [Xinhua](#), the official Chinese government news service, took a strictly hands-off approach: "Our position is that Aziz was convicted through a legal process. That is consistent with the Iraqi constitution. The final disposition of this case is up to Iraq,"

One wonders why a spokesman for the United States government, long regarded as the prime defender of Western Christian civilization, did not include even a *request* for clemency. (With Iraq's government still in power only because it is propped up by U.S. troops, the Iraqis are hardly in a position to refuse such a request.) Even the statement issued by Russia's Communist Party expressed some sympathy for Aziz, feigned though it might be, by attempting to elicit pity for him by referring to him as "a very sick old man."

The U.S. government's position (or lack thereof) with regard to Aziz raises further questions about its decision to invade Iraq in the first place. Was it all a mistake? Did U.S. intelligence sources err in determining that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction? Or was that assertion merely a pretext to carry out the real objective — removing Hussein at any cost? And why Saddam Hussein? Was he the most brutal and threatening figure in the Islamic world? (He was not even a very good practitioner of Islam, being a largely secularized Muslim.)

Why was Iraq chosen? Why not Iran, or Libya, or Somalia, or Syria? So far, the only significant result of the invasion of Iraq has been to vastly reduce its Christian population. In our previous article, "[Former Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz Sentenced to Hang](#)," we quoted an article from *USA Today* of June 2, 2010 headlined "For Christians in Iraq, the threats persist":

Before the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 there were about 1.4 million Christians in Iraq, a Muslim-dominated nation of nearly 30 million. Since then, about 50% of Iraq's Christians have fled the country, taking refuge in neighboring Jordan, Syria, Europe and the USA, according to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

Another report published on About.com entitled "[Christians of the Middle East: Country-By-Country Facts/ A Presence Dating Back Two Millennia](#)," notes:

Christians have been in Iraq since the 2nd century — mostly Chaldeans, whose Catholicism remains deeply influenced by ancient, eastern rites, and Assyrians, who are not Catholic. The war in Iraq since 2003 has ravaged all communities, Christians included. A rise in Islamism diminished Christians' security, but attacks on Christians appear to be receding. Nevertheless, the irony, for Iraq's Christians, is that on balance *they were far better off under Saddam Hussein than since his downfall*. As Andrew Lee Butters writes in *Time*, "About 5 or 6 percent of Iraq's population in the 1970's were Christian, and some of Saddam Hussein's most prominent officials, including Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz were Christians. But since the American invasion of Iraq, Christians have fled in droves, and constitute less than one percent of the population." [Emphasis added.]

Americans frequently debate about whether or not the United States is a Christian nation. Regardless of whether the country's national institutions retain any remnants of Christianity domestically, during the



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past 65 years the State Department has rarely, if ever, maintained a Christian-friendly foreign policy.

Consider the case of the Nationalist Chinese ruler, Chiang Kai-shek, a Methodist Christian who was locked in a deadly struggle for control of China in a war against the communist forces of Mao Zedong, which had been supplied by the Soviet Union with arms from a stash of Japanese weapons left in Manchuria after World War II.

Chiang's forces, in contrast, had been denied weapons through an embargo declared by General George Marshall of the United States. Marshall boasted of having disarmed 39 of Chiang's divisions "with a stroke of his pen."

Scores of similar examples could be made, if space permitted.

Photo: In this Dec. 2, 1998 file photo, former Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz stands at attention as the Iraqi national anthem is played at a conference in Baghdad, Iraq: AP Images



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