

*Notes:* AD denotes the interviewer, Mr. Ali Al-Dabagh. TA denotes Mr. Tariq Aziz. Translator notes are italicized between two brackets such as [*example*].

**Summary:** The interview provides insights into important decisions made by Saddam Hussein regarding the invasion of Kuwait and meeting Ambassador Glaspie, the Iran-Iraq war, the Kurdish struggle, and Iraq's chemical weapons. The interview reportedly took place in summer 2010, but it was handed by Mr. Ali Al-Dabagh in spring 2013 to Al-Arabiya news channel. Aziz's voice is hard to understand at times because of his periodic mumbling. He was 75 years old at the time of the interview and sentenced to death by the Iraqi High Criminal Court. In May 2013, Aziz received a presidential pardon and was released from jail. He is reportedly living in Jordan now.

### **[Part I]**

**TA:** I have never harmed anyone in my life, and that's why I feel injustice. I was sentenced to death, but I am not guilty of the charges of killing and torture. I never ordered anyone killed or tortured or displaced. From 1979 to 2003, I held official positions like Minister of Foreign Affairs and more, but I never did any harm to anyone. I lived off my salary and never stole public money. I surrendered to the Americans because I had nothing to be afraid of. I am accused of killing Kurds and Shiites, but I don't know the victims, and I have never seen them or the cases that led to their deaths. It is making me sad. I am 75 years old now, ill, and close to death. I am ready to die just like any other human in this life, but it hurts me that I am accused of torture, killing, stealing, and more. I have never harmed anyone. I am accused of killing Talib Al-Suhail, and I have never met or heard of this person. I wanted to say this to you, Mr. Ali, because you are the spokesman of the prime minister, and you can do something. I am not asking much.

**AD:** You should rest assured that there was no political intervention against you in the court. Honestly, there wasn't even any pressure for a verdict against you in the media or among the public. For Saddam, you know he harmed a lot of people, so there may have been a revengeful attitude against him in the court because he harmed millions. But I absolutely know that the judges don't have any personal targeting for Tariq Aziz. You will be trialed fairly and honestly. I can't interfere with this court as a politician as this court is especially and completely independent from the government.

I am here to learn more about an important period in Iraq's history which is right before the American strike in 1991, and I would like to know more about it as an Iraqi citizen.

You met with James Baker in Geneva. He was rude to you, and you were rude in return. He talked about opening the doors of hell against Iraq and so forth. In this period of our Iraqi history, you represented the country's diplomacy. So when Baker talked like that, do you think this was an important indication showing the beginning of the strategy to destroy this country which led to the current invasion and all of that? What would you say about that period?

**TA:** I, as a Minister of Foreign Affairs, have a duty and obligation to publicly represent the state, not myself. Whether it's James Baker, Hoshiar Zebari, or myself; we all have to represent the state's position regardless of agreeing or disagreeing with it. But there are diplomatic ways through which you can signal a personal agreement or disagreement. Regarding the Kuwait situation, I did not support the invasion of Kuwait and I did not agree with it.

**AD:** Did you say your opinion to Saddam?

**TA:** Yes, I told Saddam in an RCC meeting on July 15<sup>th</sup> that invading Kuwait will lead to a war with the U.S. I knew as a politician that the U.S. would go to war and that Iraq cannot fight the U.S. But the RCC made the decision and to be honest I think it was a discretionary [*supportive*] decision because the president wanted to do it. This is all recorded on tapes, and I am saying in the recording that this decision will bring us to war with the U.S. That's all I said.

**AD:** Did this create any problems for you with Saddam?

**TA:** My opinion was not analogous with the U.S., but I did not want to invade Kuwait either. I told Saddam about this. Honestly, I only said it once during the meeting when the decision was made. It wasn't easy to say what I said, but I said it to be fair to Iraq because I didn't want a war for Iraq with the U.S.

**AD:** Do you think if anybody else said that to him, it would have changed his decision?

**TA:** No, I know Saddam very well. He was very keen on invading Kuwait in the days before he made his final decision.

**AD:** Didn't he know the consequences of his decision?

**TA:** I believe that Saddam was sick, physically, when he made the decision.

**AD:** [*Laughing*] Sick as in he had a stomach sickness or something else?

**TA:** No, sick psychologically . . . or physically; I don't know, I wasn't one of his doctors.

**AD:** Do you think Saddam wouldn't have made that decision if he was feeling better?

**TA:** Maybe he wouldn't have made the decision. His decision was not normal for a president and the way he made the decision was not normal. I know him very well, and I can say it wasn't normal. I did my duty and tried to change the decision, not out of fear for Kuwait because I actually hate Kuwait. I hate Kuwait as an Iraqi because it belongs to Iraq.

**AD:** Why? What's the problem with Kuwait?

**TA:** It has belonged to Iraq since the days of the Kingdom of Iraq.

**AD:** So you don't think America had a set up for Saddam to invade Kuwait? What was Glaspie's role?

**TA:** Ambassador Glaspie met Saddam and didn't say anything unusual. She didn't say anything that can be interpreted as encouraging the invasion, to be fair.

**AD:** Didn't she say "this is an Arab affair and we won't interfere?"

**TA:** No, it was regarding another topic.

**AD:** So she didn't say America will not object Saddam's invasion of Kuwait?

**TA:** No, I don't believe so. Saddam didn't make his intention to invade Kuwait until later. She spoke within the diplomatic norms and said nothing unusual. I could say she did encourage the invasion, but I wouldn't be fair and honest to history. She spoke within the diplomatic norms, and I believe that in this meeting the U.S. government had not yet made a firm decision regarding the situation. But did Bush make his own personal decision beforehand and not share it with her? That's a different question. When she left Iraq for the last time, she left normally as any ambassador would do, and I didn't feel there was any American setup or such thing.

**AD:** She didn't warn you against the invasion?

**TA:** No. I met her in July, and she said she would be leaving for vacation like any other ambassador.

**AD:** You didn't feel like the U.S. wanted to push Saddam towards the invasion?

**TA:** No. The U.S. has had the same position towards Iraq since January 1990. An American magazine, U.S. and World News, said Saddam is the most dangerous man on earth in 1990. The editor was Jewish and he wanted the U.S. to strike Iraq and kill Saddam. So America did have a hostile position towards Iraq. Our relation with the U.S. before the invasion of Kuwait was okay; it was turbulent, but it was okay. [*Inaudible, Aziz mumbles confusingly about HW Bush and GW Bush*].

**AD:** There's a question that comes to my mind when thinking about this period. Before declaring the war in September 1980 against Iran, Kissinger was in the region, and he disappeared for a day. No one knows where he went. The U.S. National Security Advisor at the time said Kissinger met Saddam secretly on the Kuwaiti-Saudi border.

**TA:** I don't have any information about that, but I wouldn't believe it. I don't think so. I wouldn't believe that the U.S. and Reagan pushed for the war with Iran. The war with Iran was an internal issue.

**AD:** Did Saudi push Iraq towards war?

**TA:** Saudi hates Iran for sure. We both hated Iran just like everyone except Syria and Libya of course, but Saudi didn't encourage the war. The war... if you understand history, in 1989 Kuwait harmed Iraq. Iraq is an oil producing country. I met with the Minister of Oil who said the price of oil should be \$35, so why was it lower? You're a politician just like me. How can an oil state double its production and still earn the same revenue? It means there was a Kuwaiti plot against Iraq. Because when the price of oil hit \$7, it was too low, and we had debts to pay. So when Kuwait made a decision to increase oil production and lower prices to \$7 then it meant there's an economic war. Saddam wasn't patient. I will say this not to defend myself, but to be fair and honest to history; Saddam should have waited and should've been patient until the situation could've gone back to normal because Iraq wasn't the only country harmed by lower prices. Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Saudi, Kuwait, and Libya were all harmed when the prices of oil went down to

\$7, so why would Iraq alone do what it did and fight a war with the U.S. because of the invasion of Kuwait? We could have waited and worked harder politically and diplomatically with the Arab countries to pressure Kuwait. But Saddam made the decision to invade, and the decision, like I said, was made when he was sick. It is also very unfortunate that a number of the members of the RCC supported the decision because they were sadly opportunistic. The only one who didn't support the decision or encourage it was Izzat. He didn't encourage the invasion, honestly.

**AD:** What about when he went to Jeddah for the (Arab) summit? Did you go with him?

**TA:** No, I didn't go.

**AD:** In the Jeddah summit there was an intense conversation between him and (interrupted)

**TA:** I told you just like I was a minister of foreign affairs, Izzat was the Vice President.

**AD:** So he had to represent the state?

**TA:** Yes, he has to represent the state's decision. But he didn't encourage the invasion. He remained silent. I was the only one who mentioned the war with America to be the outcome.

**AD:** Saddam didn't make any comment about the war with America?

**TA:** No, he didn't comment. Saddam generally respects me and my opinion, but he didn't like what I said. I wished that the others would do the same. But I didn't support the invasion and I considered it a political mistake, as a politician. "It's wrong, and it will lead to an American invasion." That is all I said. It was my personal opinion and I kept it throughout the war. I made every effort I could to minimize the damage I expected for Iraq.

**AD:** What about Jordan's position? How was King Hussein's position?

**TA:** King Hussein's position was confused. I know King Hussein as a friend, and I can say he was confused. He thought he could get something out of Iraq since Kuwait is rich, and invading it would have returned a lot of money, so he supported Saddam. But did he encourage the war? I can't say no, but I can say maybe. I can say yes, maybe, but I can't say no. He didn't encourage the war, but he wanted to see Saddam successful in his invasion. However, I never felt he had

any games or setups made to encourage the invasion. He didn't encourage the invasion, but he supported Iraq.

**AD:** Going back to my first question about meeting Baker in Geneva. Did you feel after meeting Baker that Iraq would face hell like he said?

**TA:** Yes. It was clear that Baker supported the war.

**AD:** And he wanted to give you a message that they would not standby?

**TA:** He gave me a letter and I read it.

**AD:** What was the letter?

**TA:** The letter was from Bush to Saddam. It was full of threats of attacking Iraq. I refused to accept the letter out of respect for my country, and he said "how can you not accept it?" I told him, "I read it and know what it is, so I will not carry an official threatening letter from a president to another president."

**AD:** How was Egypt's position? Did they give Iraq any good advice?

**TA:** Neither yes or no. Mubarak tried but failed to make any pressure to stop the invasion. He didn't encourage the invasion, honestly. He felt the danger of the situation and its ripple effects, but he didn't say anything for or against the invasion.

**AD:** What about the European Union's position?

**TA:** The European Union didn't have a solid decision either. They didn't support the American position strongly or encourage the Iraqi invasion.

**AD:** Do you feel like the Arab population was supporting Iraq?

**TA:** The Arab masses supported the invasion.

**AD:** Why? Out of love for Saddam?

**TA:** No, because Arabs don't like Kuwait. The Arab nation was against Kuwait.

**AD:** Going back a little in history to the Iraq-Iran war. You said early in the war that the war would take a long time, and the Iranians responded saying they're ready for it as long as it would take. Did your command expect the war to last this long?

**TA:** No. We expected a sooner solution.

**AD:** What was Saddam's purpose for the war with Iran? Was it changing the regime or pressuring the regime?

**TA:** Iraq was forced to enter the war. Iran attacked Iraq in the media and politically humiliated us.

**AD:** You mean the Islamic regime of Iran or the Shah?

**TA:** No the Shah was fine with Iraq since signing the 1975 agreement. Khomeini wanted to occupy Iraq but didn't want to do it militarily directly because he didn't have a strong military. You are an Iraqi Shiite, and I am an Iraqi who knows the Iraqi Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds. Khomeini declared himself as the Imam of all Muslims. No one can be the head of Shiites without controlling Najaf, Karbala, and Samara. Anyone who is to be called an Imam must control these cities which are Iraqi cities, so he had to invade Iraq.

**AD:** So Khomeini wanted to occupy Iraq, and Saddam went to war in self-defense?

**TA:** Saddam didn't have any benefit in going to war with Iran. If you had asked "should Iraq go to war with Iran?" a month before the war, in private or public meetings, then the answer would have been no.

**AD:** As a diplomat, do you think the reasons were enough for Iraq to get into war with Iran? There are many reasons for conflicts between nations, such as borders and more, but did Iraq have enough reasons to enter a military conflict with Iran?

**TA:** Relatively speaking, if I go back in time, I would support having a military strike against Iran to discipline them; a strike, not a war. But going inside Iran was not right because they have conflicted areas and some dangerous areas too, so it would've been better to do just a short military strike.

**DA:** This is your opinion after the war, not before the war?

**TA:** Before the war as well; I didn't support the war.

**DA:** But you had this opinion after eight years of a war that took a toll on Iraq?

**TA:** Yes, I wanted to see it solved politically.

**DA:** Did Saddam want a political solution?

**TA:** Yes, Saddam would have agreed to a realistic solution that would have solved all the problems between Iraq and Iran.

**AD:** Saddam, after invading Kuwait, declared he had agreed to the 1975 agreement which he tore apart in 1980.

**TA:** The 1975 agreement was signed when Iraq was weak.

**AD:** Yes, he tore it apart then he agreed to it in 1990. Did anyone encourage him to do so or was it his own idea?

**TA:** I honestly don't know. I can't say yes or no. I would have rather seen a stop to the war but Iran didn't agree. Iran had a set goal of making Iraq under the control of Khomeini, whether it is some parts of Iraq or all of Iraq. Khomeini wanted to control these areas since he declared himself an Imam for the Shiites. He only wanted Najaf, Karbala, and Samara. He didn't want Mosul for example, so he would have only agreed to a solution that keeps Mosul for Iraq.

**AD:** You said earlier that the Iranian military was weak after the Shah, so did they really intend to occupy Iraq?

**TA:** No, it was their desire.

**AD:** You didn't answer me about Saddam agreeing to the 1975 agreement after invading Kuwait. Did you have any role in that?

**TA:** No, Saddam had to agree to it.

**AD:** During the war with Iran, did the Arab and Gulf countries like Kuwait and Saudi support the war?

**TA:** Of course. They were afraid of Iran and wanted to shut down the Islamic regime.

**AD:** Did they think Saddam would get rid of Iran for them?

**TA:** Yes, they tried to get rid of Khomeini.

**AD:** Are you tired or anything?

**TA:** No, I'm fine.

**AD:** Saddam's chemical weapons and equipment, were they officially bought from some government like Spain and Germany or were they bought from private companies?

**TA:** I don't know. Saddam needed to be strong and had a lot of money. Europe didn't like Iran so they didn't care much, and the companies wanted money too.

**AD:** Do you think the decision to use chemical weapons against civilians was right?

**TA:** No. I believe that Saddam wanted to weaken Iran tactically, but if he had any other choice to weaken them without chemical weapons, then he would've done it.

**AD:** There was a joke I remember. Tariq Aziz said we have a weapon that can kill many people at once, so people said it was Pif Paf [*a household insecticide*]. Saddam used chemical weapons against the Kurds when they welcomed the Iranians, so he wanted to take revenge. Was it solely Saddam's decision to do that?

**TA:** Honestly, I don't have much information about this because it's a tactical [*military*] issue not political. But I believe the Iranians attacked Halabja with chemical weapons before Iraq did. I was never involved in this issue because my position was the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

**AD:** So the Iranians attacked with chemical weapons, then the Iraqis used them as well?

**TA:** I believe so. I don't have solid information about this because it is a military related issue but let's think about it. Why was Halabja attacked and who did it? Halabja is an Iraqi city inhabited by Kurds, so what benefits would Saddam gain from attacking it?

**AD:** Because when the Iranians took the city, the Kurds welcomed them.

**TA:** So there were good relations between the Kurdish leadership and the Iranian leadership.

**AD:** Of course.

**TA:** Saddam wanted to weaken both of them, but Iran attacked Halabja with chemical weapons first before Iraq did. This is my understanding of it, but I have nothing official about it.

[*Tariq Aziz's court judge*]: I would like to comment on this please. If Halabja residents were actually welcoming the Iranians, why would the Iranians attack the civilians there?

**TA:** Because the Iranians wanted to occupy it but it's an Iraqi town. It's true that the Kurds were helping the Iranians, but the town had Iraqis in it.

[*Tariq Aziz's court judge*]: For example, why would you attack me if I was cooperating with you against the same enemy?

**TA:** So that they can blame it on Iraq. The Iraqi casualties in Halabja were the result of Iranian strikes.

**AD:** The eight years of war with Iran were very tough in regards to the number of martyrs, wounded, and casualties. During all these years Saddam promoted the public slogan, "no voice can be louder than the call for war." Did anyone dare tell Saddam that the war was exhausting and the country was tired?

**TA:** No. When the war had already started, it could only end with a victory for Iraq because had we given up, then the whole country would have collapsed.

**AD:** So until the war was over, no one ever told Saddam that this war is worthless?

**TA:** Personally, I never asked to stop the war because it was good for the country to fight Iran.

**AD:** What about the military leaders? From what you have heard or seen since you were a high ranking official, no one told Saddam out of loyalty and honor for him as a leader that the war needs to stop?

**TA:** To stop the war unilaterally?

**AD:** More like accepting peace mediations such as the ones by Arab leaders like Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia?

**TA:** No, there wasn't any serious mediation. There weren't any serious ones that would have kept Iraq's honor and sovereignty.

**AD:** What about other political powers? Did they try to convince Saddam to stop the war?

**TA:** No, never. Not the French or the Americans or the Europeans because they all knew Iran was insisting on continuing the war. The Iranian media was daily waging the war more and more through Khomeini's speeches.

**AD:** What about Communist Russia? They had good relations with Iraq.

**TA:** The Soviet Union was benefitting from the war by selling weapons to both countries.

**AD:** So they didn't intend to stop the war?

**TA:** No, not seriously.

**AD:** You had a good relationship with Yevgeny Primakov and he played an important role during the sanctions on Iraq in the 90s. Was he serious about his role or was he benefitting from it?

**TA:** Primakov was representing the official Soviet Union policy. He didn't have his own agenda. He wasn't a policy maker, but rather a public servant.

**AD:** Between the end of the Iraq war in 1988 and the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the people felt like Saddam was giving more freedoms and making some political reforms. Did you feel like Saddam was serious about this liberalization?

**TA:** He wanted to fix the Iraqi interior affairs, fix the Kurdish issue, and do justice to some of the Iraqi Shiites who were harmed during the war; all within the limits that wouldn't harm the regime of course.

**AD:** How would he have done justice to the Kurds and Shiites?

**TA:** So that we have a clear picture, there was no true political representative of the Shiites in Iraq. The Kurds had representatives who wanted special rights and privileges for self-governing which has always been on the table for discussion until 1990 when they wanted federalism. We had negotiations with Masoud and Jalal but Masoud's party demanded federalism.

**AD:** Did Saddam agree on federalism?

**TA:** No.

**AD:** Do you think federalism would solve the Kurdish issue?

**TA:** No. Mr. Ali, currently Masoud Barzani is demanding the right of self-determination. I wouldn't believe any Kurdish politician who says he will not demand Kurdistan to be independent. Neither Jalal nor Masoud would do that. This is a fact. If the current political system in Iraq would weaken to a point where it would be feasible for Kurdistan to declare independence then it would. Right now let's say Kurds control 80% of the Kurdistan nation they want, and there's only 20% left. So the Kurds will stay in Iraq as a quasi-state until they can achieve the nation they want.

**AD:** But it was the Baath Party that gave self-governance for Kurds out of all the countries in the region in 1971. Turkey, Iran, and Syria didn't give them that right.

**TA:** That's because the Party believes in that solution.

**AD:** Didn't that encourage the independence of Kurdistan?

**TA:** No. Honestly, Saddam wanted to make a real solution for the Kurdish issue. He wanted the Kurdish self-governance area to be an Iraqi area inhabited by the Kurds. He truly wanted to do that, but the Kurds wanted more.

**AD:** But don't forget that after Saddam's March declaration of Kurdistan, he sent Mullah Mustafa a bomb in a bag with a sheikh.

**TA:** This may have been done by Nazim Kazar.

**AD:** Without Saddam's knowledge?

**TA:** Honestly, I don't know. Nazim always acted personally and independently, and he even conspired against Saddam.

**AD:** What about the Shiites? You said Saddam wanted to do justice for the Shiites, how would he have done that?

**TA:** As an Iraqi, I would like to say that Saddam loved Shiites and Sunnis alike and loved Iraq. He didn't hate Shiites, and he never acted in a sectarian way. He is an Iraqi Arab Muslim who loves Shiites and Sunnis. But he promoted his family to be around him [*Interrupted*]

**AD:** So why would he want to do Shiites justice if he didn't harm them?

**TA:** Shiite civilians were not harmed. The religious political parties were targeted by Saddam because they had worked against the regime and have their own agendas.

**AD:** But he killed Mr. Baqir al-Hakim and Mr. Baqir al-Sadir and his sister [*Interrupted*]

**TA:** Al-Sadr sent a letter to Khomeini asking for assistance to lead an Islamic revolution in Iraq.

**AD:** Don't you think that the Iraqi intelligence may have fabricated that letter to justify their actions?

**TA:** I honestly don't know.

**AD:** Do you think Saddam was right in killing someone who had such a prestigious religious position and authority for Shiites?

**TA:** Saddam was protecting himself.

**AD:** Is it right to kill a woman like they killed al-Sadr's sister?

**TA:** No that was an extreme measure.

**AD:** When the Baath Party came to power they were against the religious authority in Najaf. You remember that because you were the Minister of Media. Religious figures were prosecuted like Mr. Mahdi al-Hakim who was assassinated in Khartoum and was actually a friend of mine. He was falsely accused of spying for Israel. So there was a conflict with the Shiite religious figures since the beginning. Didn't this start the conflict between Shiites and the Baath regime?

**TA:** Yes, this was too much. I'll admit it. I was an official in the government but I didn't get into this game of weakening the Shiites against the Sunnis.

**AD:** I am not saying weakening but rather targeting the Shiites through killing their religious figures. Mr. Mohsen al-Hakim for example didn't demand political power like Mr. Baqir al-Hakim.

**TA:** I don't know him personally.

**AD:** Yes, but you're an Iraqi intellectual, and you know that the religious authority of Najaf never demands political power.

[*Tariq Aziz's court judge*]: They only wanted to practice their religious beliefs, which don't affect the state, so why were they attacked?

**AD:** I'll tell you an example. In 1977 the Shiites, like usual, were walking from other Iraqi cities to visit Najaf, but the Iraqi intelligence and security services surrounded them and prevented them from practicing their religion and then arrested Mr. Baqir al-Hakim. This created a crisis and they executed a number of young men. I think Izzat was the head of the court at the time.

**TA:** No, it wasn't him.

**AD:** Yes, it was Izzat Mustafa. But you see how the Baath Party created the conflict with the Shiites by targeting their religious practices.

**TA:** I agree it would have better to let them practice their religion, but Ahmed Hassan al-Bakir was the man in charge back then.

**AD:** Saddam had nothing to do with all of this?

**TA:** He did have a role, but it was al-Bakir's decision because he was the president in 1977.

**AD:** Saddam was running everything in 1977!

**TA:** No not everything.

**AD:** Were there big differences between Saddam and al-Bakir?

**TA:** No, to be honest, al-Bakir couldn't have continued his presidency without Saddam.

**AD:** Do you think Saddam stabilized the state when he created the Hunain militia in 1968?

**TA:** I don't know much about Hunain. It was an organization during Abdul Salam Arif's presidency and played a role in the revolution of 1968.

**AD:** No, I am talking about after the revolution when people like Abdul Wahab Karim started an assassination campaign against the Baath National leadership and orchestrated assassinations by car accidents and things like that.

**TA:** I don't know about that.

**AD:** The Baath Party used the communists politically for some time then flipped around and prosecuted them. Was it necessary to get rid of them?

**TA:** The communists changed into a military organization. They wanted to take control of the country.

**[End of Part I]**

**AD:** You had a sudden political promotion from editor of Al-Thawrah (the revolution) newspaper to member of the RCC where you were given multiple cabinet positions. You are considered one of Saddam's most trusted men because he gave you many critical positions and tasks. Do you think it's because you are close to Saddam or another specific reason?

**TA:** I wouldn't say critical positions. I had the positions of Minister of Higher Education, Minister of Education, Minister of Youth, Minister of Culture and Media, and Minister of Tourism. These are not critical leadership positions.

**AD:** But these are ministries heavily related to the people.

**TA:** I would say cultural-related.

**AD:** When did you first meet Saddam?

**TA:** It was in Syria when I was there in the 60s when he was at the Party's Pan-Arab Conference after the Revolution of 1963.

**AD:** What was his level at the Party?

**TA:** He was at the cadre level.

**AD:** Did you feel like he was special at that time?

**TA:** He was a smart young man with a good intellect, and he had worked on improving himself intellectually.

**AD:** Where did his intellect come from?

**TA:** Reading. He read a lot. He was living in Syria after trying to assassinate Abdul Karim Kassim and then went to live in Egypt where he was reading a lot of books.

**AD:** Was your first meeting a coincidence or it was arranged?

**TA:** Yes it was arranged. We had similar ideologies and views.

**AD:** When did Saddam's political rise start?

**TA:** Saddam was first the Deputy Secretary General of the Party.

**AD:** When was that?

**TA:** Since the early days of the revolution. He was a member of the country's party command, then he became the Deputy Secretary, meaning the second in command. He was very efficient and worked hard with a good intellect.

**AD:** You like Saddam, right?

**TA:** Yes, I do. To be fair, I do like him a lot. He is a leader and very intellectual, but violent and strict too.

**AD:** I have heard your court recordings. You seem very loyal to Saddam while others like Watban, his step brother, and others were not loyal to him. Why is that?

**TA:** Watban, if I may say honestly and fairly, is a trivial person. He is illiterate. He was a deputy police officer who was promoted to become the Minister of Interior Affairs, etc. He is different than Saddam.

**AD:** You are so loyal to Saddam that you never talked bad about him. Though you just said he is violent. Do you think that when we discuss his political life, starting in 1968 then ruling the country in 1979— was he a dictator?

**TA:** No.

**AD:** You told me yesterday that when Saddam decided to invade Kuwait, no one could protest or object to the decision.

**TA:** No, when he went into Kuwait, the command was weak.

**AD:** Isn't the command weak because Saddam was a dictator? You are going to say no again?

**TA:** No. Honestly, I would always tell him my honest opinion.

**AD:** Weren't you afraid of him at any time when you would say your own opinion?

**TA:** No, I was never afraid of him. I would always tell him my honest opinion, and he would always listen to it.

**AD:** Would he only listen to you or to the others as well?

**TA:** No, most of the others would just agree like Taha, Izzat, and others. But since I am more knowledgeable and intellectual, I read and wrote more than the others, and I would always voice my opinion.

**AD:** Was Saddam's ruling right or do you think it could have been better?

**TA:** It could have been better if we continued a more nationally inclusive governing style, but Saddam had an exclusive leadership style.

**AD:** Wouldn't that make him a dictator to some extent?

**TA:** To some extent, yes. But honestly, Saddam would come to the meetings then talk and let the others voice their opinions. The command was weak intellectually, like Taha Yassin Ramadan and Izzat who weren't well educated.

**AD:** So what you're describing to me is that everyone around Saddam was either trivial or uneducated except for Tariq Aziz who was an intellectual and voiced his opinion to Saddam all the time. Don't you think that every leader should have a smart and capable advisory group around him to lead a country like Iraq?

**TA:** Honestly, Saddam did lead Iraq well and built many infrastructure projects.

**AD:** Like what?

**TA:** There are many of these projects. Since he was a Vice President, he started major projects like dams, electricity, etc.

**AD:** But wouldn't it be natural for a rich country like Iraq to do all these?

**TA:** Yes, but Saddam worked hard as leader to build the country he loved. He built dams, roads, factories, and many intellectual institutes. Iraq was in great shape and well developed before invading Kuwait and the sanctions.

**AD:** But from the time the country went to war with Iran until 2003, Iraq spun into internal crisis and conflicts in the region and throughout the whole world. Saddam had conflicts with the whole world which caused wars and crises that depleted the country. Do you think all of this could have been avoided?

**TA:** Iran was hard to avoid because Iran wanted to control Iraq.

**AD:** But I am talking about the big picture. Let's look at Jordan for example, a country developing with no natural resources, or Egypt which realized it was ridiculous to keep fighting Israel so they stopped it and focused on nation building instead, or the Gulf countries that developed much faster. Why was Iraq different?

**TA:** Iraq, before the 1980s up until the war, had engaged in major nation building. The roads and the industries and the infrastructure were great.

**AD:** Yes but it was through socialism. We didn't have an openly competitive economy because the government protected its factories. The Iraqi products were all of poor quality, consumed locally, and the customer was forced to buy them through the government regulated markets.

**TA:** No, they were high quality. Iraq before the 1980s was producing great quality products.

**AD:** But don't you think that Iraq, after the 1980s, descended into militarizing society, and all the money went into weapons while all other civilian sectors were ignored? Everything became produced for the war effort.

**TA:** No, the civilian sector kept getting developed, it wasn't ignored. There was nation building, and Iraq was a relatively developed country.

**AD:** Do you think that you have achieved your ambitions from when you were a young man?

**TA:** My ambitions were all related to the party. I had modest ambitions, and I don't like ruling the country or dictatorship.

**AD:** Did you ever wish to replace Saddam?

**TA:** No. I never competed with Saddam, but I always had my own opinions.

**AD:** Now, when we talk about the crises since the Iran war, which according to you was because of Iran, then invading Kuwait followed by international sanctions [*Interrupted*]

**TA:** The Kuwait war is different than the Iran war. Iran wanted to occupy Iraq so we had to defend ourselves. But Kuwait was a mistake. It's true that there was foul play with lowering the oil prices, and it harmed Iraq, but Saddam shouldn't have invaded Kuwait and should have been patient at least six more months, then things would have changed.

**AD:** Now that's what you think about Kuwait. You have some disagreement with the way Saddam made the decision. Do you think Saddam made the right decision, or do you think it was right but needed a few adjustments?

**TA:** It needed adjustment but was not wrong. Saddam made a big mistake regarding Kuwait, but I still think he strengthened Iraq and built it culturally, militarily, and more.

**AD:** What about the sanctions era? Was Saddam's diplomacy right when dealing with Ekeus? Was it right to follow a crisis-laden and confrontational policy by refusing to deal with them many times until the last minute under threats and pressures?

**TA:** No. My opinion is that he should have accepted the defeat and the new conditions. Then, slowly, he could have rebuilt Iraq. I lived through the crises with the UN Special Commission. There was a new crisis every day.

**AD:** Couldn't you fix that? You couldn't convince Saddam to be better?

**TA:** I tried, but it didn't work.

**AD:** Do you believe there were others who were pushing for this confrontational policy?

**TA:** Honestly Mr. Ali, the Command was weak.

**AD:** You mean Saddam was weak or the members of the Command?

**TA:** No, I mean the others. Saddam wasn't weak. Saddam and Iraq were both plagued by Hussein Kamal. He was a big problem like a cancer inside the regime until 1995 when he left the country. He was very powerful and interfered in everything, imposing his opinion a lot.

**AD:** No one could stop Hussein Kamal?

**TA:** Only Saddam would've stopped him, but he was close to him. He was his cousin.

**AD:** How come he left Saddam and tried to overthrow him?

**TA:** [*Laughs*] That is life!

**AD:** Do you think he was told to leave Saddam or was he just ignorant?

**TA:** He was ignorant and greedy.

**AD:** Did he think he could become the Saddam of Iraq?

**TA:** Yes.

**AD:** Wasn't he Saudon Hummadi's driver?

**TA:** No. I don't think so.

**AD:** Oh it was Chemical Ali.

**TA:** Yes, that's right. It was Ali.

**AD:** When Hussein Kamil left Iraq, the Jordanians and Americans were very interested and took good care of him, then his bubble burst, and he went back to Iraq. What's the secret of his return?

**TA:** There's a family secret, but I wouldn't know it. Saddam liked him. He gave him a lot of power as the Minister of Military Industries during the sanctions era. I believe we should have taken the sanctions more seriously and responsibly brought the country back together.

**AD:** Did anyone else share that opinion with you or was it just yours?

**TA:** Yes, there were some people who had similar opinions to mine. But the decision was ultimately left to Saddam.

**AD:** So the whole Command couldn't affect Saddam's decisions when dealing with the UN inspectors?

**TA:** No.

**AD:** So it is clear now that Iraq didn't have WMDs. But after the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam tried to make some weapons and had trucks loaded with chemical weapons going around Iraq so that the inspectors wouldn't discover them.

**TA:** No there weren't any chemical weapons. There weren't any biological weapons. We had some but Saddam destroyed all of them.

**AD:** It was leftover from the war with Iran?

**TA:** Iraq in the 80s had a very advanced military industry making missiles and long range weapons.

**AD:** How advanced were these weapons?

**TA:** Very advanced.

**AD:** Let's focus on chemical weapons. After destroying most of the WMDs, he left some chemical weapons in underground bunkers.

**TA:** No, that's not true.

**AD:** No? Then what was the story of the trucks that went around the country?

**TA:** It was just a game! It was a false accusation. Not true at all.

**AD:** How do you see Saddam's position toward Israel? Do you think it was right?

**TA:** Yes, he was against Israel. He wanted Iraq and the Arab nation to be strong and fight Israel.

**AD:** Do you believe in that?

**TA:** Yes. As an Arab citizen, I hate Israel.

**AD:** You think Israel can be destroyed?

**TA:** Technically no, we can't destroy Israel. Israel is powerful. But as an Arab and Iraqi nationalist, I am against Israel.

**AD:** So should we live peacefully with them?

**TA:** No, we shouldn't be in peace with them.

**AD:** So, if we can neither destroy them nor live peacefully with them, then what should we do?

**TA:** We fight them.

**AD:** Militarily?

**TA:** If needed, yes.

**AD:** When Saddam struck Israel with 13 missiles, do you think it was a right decision?

**TA:** It was part of the war.

**AD:** Why did he strike Israel while there were masses of foreign forces on the Iraqi borders?

**TA:** He wanted to reach as far as possible.

**AD:** Was it like a media show to gain popularity among the Arabs?

**TA:** No, it was just the most we could do. He couldn't fight Israel but he could inflict pain on them just like they did to Iraq.

**AD:** Do you think it was a right decision?

**TA:** It's not wrong. It was a war, so it's fine.

**AD:** After 2003, they found out there were no WMDs in Iraq. The decision to invade Iraq was made at the UN. You are a diplomat and respect the United Nations' laws. What was your position?

**TA:** My opinion was that we should have submitted to the UN laws to keep Iraq safe. Iraq is rich without the need for WMDs, so we didn't need them anyway. We are a country with good industry, agriculture, and education. We could have survived.

**AD:** But this was obviously not going to happen, so did you think about something else? You and your command group saw how Saddam would make decisions himself and didn't care about the others. The whole country belonged solely to Saddam. Didn't you think of anything else to do to save Iraq?

**TA:** Hussein Kamil was very powerful until 1995. Then he was weakened and fled the country.

**AD:** How many Hussein Kamil's were there around Saddam?

**TA:** Only one.

**AD:** Not even Uday?

**TA:** Uday was just a kid.

**AD:** He was a kid, then when he grew up, don't you think he became just like Kamil? Uday killed someone close to you, Kamil Hena.

**TA:** I don't know him. He was just an employee.

**AD:** Don't you think Uday was one of Saddam's own crises?

**TA:** Uday went beyond what is acceptable.

**AD:** Couldn't Saddam stop him?

**TA:** No, he couldn't. I never interfered in this subject.

**AD:** Would you say Saddam's tense relations with his wife, Uday, and the rest of the family affected Saddam as a president?

**TA:** I tried to keep myself away from this, so I don't know.

**AD:** During the Iran war, Saddam was very cautious. He would make sure everyone was inspected, including Tariq Aziz, and no one knew where Saddam lived.

**TA:** No, we were never inspected. But yes we didn't know where he lived.

**AD:** Where did you usually meet?

**TA:** At the Buhaira [*lake*] area. But again, Saddam never inspected the members of the command because that would be an insult and it never happened.

**AD:** Did you ever think of leaving Iraq and all of its crises to go live somewhere peacefully?

**TA:** No. I am an Iraqi, and my fate is tied to Iraq.

**AD:** Did you ever feel a self-conflict with all these crises?

**TA:** Yes, I did of course. But I wasn't able to fix much.

**AD:** Did your family feel that conflict?

**TA:** No, I never told them much about that.

**AD:** Were you afraid for other reasons?

**TA:** No, I was just secretive and liked to keep work away.

**AD:** If we look back at this era, can you say you would have done something differently? How would you describe Tariq Aziz?

**TA:** I always wished good for Iraq and to avoid what happened. I wish we were able to make ourselves better because we started having a lot of hate around us.

**AD:** How did you feel about Saddam's execution?

**TA:** I was sad. He was a human that I lived with a long time after all.

**AD:** Do you think he deserved it?

**TA:** It depends. Mr. Ali, Saddam ruled in an era full of risks with lots of sacrifices and losses. There are people who hate him and decided to kill him. He is over now. But I wish Iraq didn't have to go down to the way it is now. It was possible for Iraq to have stayed developed.

**AD:** We surely can keep saying if this happened then this wouldn't have happened, but Saddam ruled individually and had many conflicts with his own people and the rest of the world. There was so much blood between him and the people. Saddam's rule for example was different than King Hussein's. King Hussein was nice to his people and so were the rest of the Arab rulers like Mubarak. Saddam was violent with his people, and so, naturally, there was a lot of anti-Saddam sentiment among the people. When he was sentenced to death, it was a result of his own doing. Do you think he had a fair trial?

**TA:** I don't know. The Kurdish judge, Abdul Rahman, who also sentenced me in court, hated Saddam. The judge before him tried to defend or be fair to Saddam, but he was removed. He was also a Kurd, but the Kurd after him was revengeful.

**AD:** Saddam accepted the execution sentencing based on what he did. When people do something, they expect a consequence, and life goes around. Saddam, just like you said, had a violent era. Don't you think we need to do an extensive review or trial of the whole era?

**TA:** Saddam issued as many executions as presidential pardons for prisoners. He issued many pardons and executions at the same time.

**AD:** You were inside the regime and know that the courts were not as independent as they are now. It was only Awad Al-Bendar who would issue the sentencing, and there was no appeals process or anything like that.

**TA:** True. It was violent.

**AD:** So didn't you think this would cause a violent response from the people as well?

**TA:** I never interfered with these issues.

**AD:** I know it wasn't your area of jurisdiction, but what do you think about the issue?

**TA:** Yes, I do wish it could've been done in a better way.

**AD:** Do you think we could have avoided the big "earthquake" of 2003 if things were done differently?

**TA:** Yes, it could've been possibly different if it wasn't for Hussein Kamil and other corrupt people. We could have avoided the war with Bush despite the fact that Bush had his mind set on attacking Iraq. We can't forget about the Jewish-Zionist role in everything that happened to Iraq.

**AD:** Don't you think one of the reasons is that Saddam didn't rule the country wisely?

**TA:** Yes, a little.

**AD:** I have some personal questions for you. You are a Christian. Do you practice your religion?

**TA:** No. I am closer to Islam than Christianity.

**AD:** I know that you read a lot about Islam and like it.

**TA:** Yes, I am closer to Islam, but I remained a Christian. One day we had a ministerial crisis. Ahmed Hussein was about to be chosen to become the new Prime Minister preceded by Saudon Hummadi. Before them there was Mohammed Al-Zubaidi who was a trivial person and intellectually weak. So Saddam said if only Tariq Aziz was a Muslim then he could have been the new Prime Minister. Since then, I decided not to officially convert to Islam because I would never do it for an official position.

**AD:** Now the Christians are being targeted and killed by groups like Al-Qaeda according to the government, such as what happened in the Saydat Al-Najat Church in Baghdad. What do you think about that?

**TA:** It is bad. The situation is bad all over Iraq with people dying everywhere. I am completely against Al-Qaeda ideologically and religiously.

**AD:** Did Saddam's intelligence contact Bin Laden in the 1990s out of hate for the U.S.?

**TA:** No, that never happened. There's actually a statement from Bin Laden where he says Saddam is an apostate.

**AD:** It was rumored that Al-Zawahiri visited Baghdad some time.

**TA:** No, there was no such thing. Saddam hated Al-Qaeda before and after 2003.

**AD:** There are many international organizations currently defending Tariq Aziz. Why do you think?

**TA:** *[Laughs]* They appreciate me.

**AD:** Why wouldn't they appreciate the other prisoners?

**TA:** I never treated anyone badly.

**AD:** How do you feel about your life in prison?

**TA:** The prison hurts me. My health is bad, and my family is displaced.

**AD:** When you surrendered to the Americans, did they take secret information from you?

**TA:** They did when I was at the airport prison. They asked me questions and I tried to keep my answers unspecific. They tried a lot, but I am an Iraqi patriot, and I tried to avoid anything that harms Iraq. But I wasn't violent with them or anything like that, because life is not worth giving up my principles and dignity. I will defend my country even if it means death.

**AD:** What do you think about the current Iraqi politicians? Like Jalal Talabani?

**TA:** Jalal is actually a friend of mine. I have a friendship with Jalal and Masoud, both of them.

**AD:** You know that Talabani said he won't sign an execution order for Tariq Aziz. Is that because you're his friend or something else?

**TA:** I don't know. He is against execution as a president.

**AD:** He signed an international treaty against executions. But as the Iraqi President, he must adhere to the Iraqi constitution, and one of his obligations is signing off court orders for

execution. However, he said he will not sign any execution order for Tariq Aziz. Do you think it's a favor?

**TA:** Yes, I appreciate it of course.

**AD:** What do you think about Masoud?

**TA:** Barazani is my friend. We always had dinners and trips together.

**AD:** Now Masoud is the President of the KRG, do you think he is a good leader?

**TA:** Masoud is Kurdish. I don't like his recent statements about the KRG independence.

**AD:** What do you think about Nouri Al-Maliki?

**TA:** I honestly don't know much about him. But he looks like a good, moderate person trying to unite Iraq.

**AD:** What do you think about Aziz Abdul Hakim? He is now living in your house! [*Both laughing*]

**TA:** I don't know him.

**AD:** [*Laughing*] I am asking you your opinion for history's sake, not related to your court or anything like that.

**TA:** Yes, I know. I don't know much about the Hakim family. I don't hate them or anything.

**AD:** As you know, nations always go through historic changes. Now the situation is completely changed in Iraq, and the new governments after 2003 all said they want to build a democratic Iraq. Do you think this will be hard to do?

**TA:** Democracy is hard in Iraq. There are many minorities and mixtures in Iraq. You have different types of Kurds. You have Arab Sunnis, Shiites, and Al-Qaeda. You also have Christians and other minorities. It's a whole mix!

**AD:** Don't you think it's good that Iraq is diversified?

**TA:** It's too much.

**AD:** As a Christian who is an Arab nationalist and a Baathist, wouldn't you say the new Iraqi inclusive governing is bringing all the mixtures together? Is that better or was Saddam's way better?

**TA:** When you compare Saddam's regime to the current one, there are a lot of differences. But the current system is exhausting.

**AD:** Do you think it's fit for Iraq or not?

**TA:** It's hard for it to fit Iraq. Iraq as a whole is now weaker than it was under Saddam.

**AD:** Do you think giving freedom to the media and press is a good thing or a weakness?

**TA:** No, it's not a weakness, but it's currently more than what it should be. Freedom is good, but it's too much now. The country's political system is currently excessively mixed, and that's actually weakening the nation. Iraq is now very weak.

**[End of Part II]**