

Basra: Profiting from their Destruction, the British are Back

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"When will there be justice in Athens? There will be justice in Athens when those who are not injured are as outraged as those who are." Thucydides (460 BC - 395 BC.)

In December 2007, Major General Graham Binns, Commander of British Forces in Basra, handed illegally occupied Basra Province back to the Iraqis, with Basra city centre "festooned with flags, lights and banners to mark the occasion."

In fact, the whole nonsense was window dressing. British soldiers had been under siege in their bases between February and September that year and had withdrawn to Basra Airport, on the city's outskirts, leaving just seven hundred soldiers in Basra, squatting in one of Saddam Hussein's palaces. They too slunk out to the airport, under cover of darkness on 3rd September.

At the hand over, Major General Binns said that Basra had been successfully wrested from its enemies and was now being handed back to its friends. However, at the time, a poll of 1,000 Basra residents for BBC's Newsnight programme showed 85% saying British troops had been a negative effect on the Province for their five year occupation.

Given the litany of claims of murder, torture, abuse, theft, against the British army being handled by lawyers in the UK, for Basra region residents, "negative" seems a bit of an understatement.

However, Major General Binns, who commanded the 7th Armoured Brigade when it led the siege of Basra in 2003, is back in Basra with a new hat on. In the revolving door between the US and UK armies and mercenary companies, Binns, who left the army in 2010, joined one such, Aegis Defence Services, who have been employed by the New Governor of Basra, Majid al-Nasrawi.

Amongst other things, states the Major General: "Aegis will be asked to provide help with setting up specialised CCTV detection and checkpoint systems across the city, establishing a "ring of steel" security system to thwart suicide bombers." Sounds just like old times, more work for more lawyers surely inevitable.

Aegis is to also: "set up an academy to help security forces improve coordination and intelligence-gathering techniques." Exactly what British forces said they were also doing during their uninvited stay. Indeed a contingency remained, even after the 2007 flight, to "train" Iraqis, leaving finally, in April 2009. Further, the locals who forced the majority British troops' "hurried departure" are still a considerable force to be reckoned with. More trouble ahead, and what a great excuse to call back the UK's "boys" if it all goes pear shaped for

Aegis, in the vital oil port hub, the engine of the entire country, which is Basra port and the region's oil.

"The contract is politically sensitive as it will put British military experts in an influential position in Basra, advising the Governor's ... security committee." Britain has again its feet firmly under Iraq's table.

"We have signed a contract with the Basra Governor", states Binns: "and will initially be supporting them in procuring specialised equipment for search and detection purposes and CCTV, but that may expand." You bet. (1)

For a man who commanded UK forces in Basra, Binns seems woefully ignorant of the infrastructure. Last summer, for the third year in a row, the people of Basra demonstrated in the sweltering heat because the electricity supply operated just two hours a day. In 1991, the subsequent ten-plus years of bombing and in 2003, Iraq's electricity system was systematically destroyed.

In context, in the first major assault: "On January 17, 1991 ... the U.S. dropped metallic filaments onto the power network that short circuited the system, and caused blackouts. The Coalition then targeted twenty eight power plants, flying 215 sorties against them, along with nine transformers and switching yards. Within a few days, the entire power grid was knocked out of action." (2) The attacks went on year after year. Each time one ruined facility had been cannibalized for equipment to revive another one to staggering along status, the repaired one would be re-bombed. The 2003 targeting was the final death knell to Iraq's electricity infrastructure.

Through it all, until the invasion, the extraordinary ingenuity of Iraq's engineers and other experts somehow kept the electricity imperfectly on, in spite of the siege conditions of the embargo, for far longer, daily, than those with the \$billions in the budget of the "New Iraq."

Perhaps The Major General and his burly elves will pitch up with pockets full of batteries for his CCTV, "specialised equipment" and "ring of steel." Alice Binns in Wonderland.

As the BBC explained: Aegis is one of the UK's biggest mercenary companies, having: "made millions from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan since it was founded just eight years ago.

"It is even fair to say that Aegis, like much of the private security industry, owes its very existence to the last Iraq war.

"'In Iraq in 2003 and 2004 money was basically free', explained Andy Bearpark, Director-General of the British Association of Private Security Companies"(3) unless you were an Iraqi.

Aegis was founded by former British Army officer Tim Spicer, in 2002. He was replaced as Chief Executive in 2010 by Major General Binns. To describe Spicer's career as "colorful" would not do him justice. Controversy has followed him from his army posting in Northern Ireland, when two of his soldiers were convicted of murder, then to Papua and New Guinea and on to Sierra Leone with his previously founded mercenary company, Sandline.

In August 2004 the just two year old Aegis, under Spicer, reportedly won a \$293 million,

three year contract in Iraq, outsourcing, including intelligence, for the US Army. In May 2006, writing in the Guardian, Stephen Armstrong commented: "Colonel Tim Spicer is effectively in charge of the second largest military force in Iraq - some 20,000 private soldiers. Just don't call him a mercenary."

At the time: "Aegis had a contract with the Pentagon ...to oversee the sixteen private security companies providing personnel, security, military training and reconstruction." Training again, eh? And now they are back.

Following the awarding of the Pentagon contract: "... five US Senators, Charles Schumer, Hillary Clinton, Ted Kennedy, Chris Dodd and John Kerry, wrote a joint letter" to then Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, calling on him to investigate the granting of the Aegis contract, describing Spicer as "an individual with a history of supporting excessive use of force against a civilian population" and stating that he "vigorously defends (human rights abuses.)"

Moreover: "In a December 2005 letter to his constituents, then U.S. Senator Barack Obama called on the Department of Defense to withdraw its contract with Aegis. Obama wrote that: "The CEO of Aegis Defense Services Tim Spicer has been implicated in a variety of human rights abuses around the globe ... given his history, I agree that the United States should consider rescinding its contract with his company."(4) Quite. Never-the-less, pots, kettles and black come to mind. Aegis was, after all, in competition with the US's also seemingly human-rights-free marauders, Blackwater.

However, Tim Spicer was awarded a Knighthood and Aegis ploughs up the \$millions. It is Chaired, by Sir Winston Churchill's grandson The Honourable Nicholas Soames, former UK Minister of State for the Armed Services, former Shadow Secretary of State for Defence and mega enthusiast for the Iraq invasion. The Board includes Colonel Giles Harrison, the highlights of whose: "...military career included managing a multi-stakeholder, multi-billion pound programme at the UK Ministry of Defence", Brigadier James Ellery, and of course, Major General Binns (and his batteries) amongst others.(5)

For anyone who thought the British finally gave up Iraq in 1932, 2007, 2009, they are back with a vengeance. Same car, new paint.

Of course, if the appalling US appointed "Viceroy" Paul Bremer had not created his De-Ba'athification policy (enforced on 16th May 2003) which effectively sacked and denied employment to almost anyone who had been employed in the public sector during Saddam Hussein's rule, all from electricity to security could have been fixed at a fraction of the price.

But perhaps that was the plan, to tear the financial heart out of Iraq to the mega gain of the UK and US whose companies are rolling in the mega dollars. The countries who destroyed Iraq are reaping untold riches from their destruction.

Ironically, it is the De-Ba'athification policy itself which has been blamed as a major factor in the collapse of economy, society and security throughout Iraq. The concept came from Iraqi exile and convicted embezzler, Ahmed Chalabi, whose Iraqi National Congress was nurtured by the CIA's \$millions.(6)

As Hussein al-Alak, founder of the Iraq Solidarity Campaign puts succinctly: "It is a bitter irony, that those who introduced the policy of De-Ba'athification, thus creating an

unimaginable level of paranoia and discrimination, were those who also brought to the British and American Governments, the now infamous claims of Saddam's 45 minute WMDs." (7)

Notes

1 .

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10550202/Basra-invites-British-back-for-security-role.html>

2. <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.co.uk/2010/06/basra-protest-over-lack-of-electricity.html>

3. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11521579>

4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Spicer

5. <http://www.aegisworld.com/who-we-are/key-personalities/>

6. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/14/iraq.davidleigh>

7. <http://totallyhusein.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/a-chance-for-iraqi-political-growth.html>

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