

## Further destruction of Iraq's Higher Education: Blazing fires, forged degrees and silencer guns

Dirk Adriaensens, member of the *BRussells* Tribunal executive Committee (01 December 2011)

*"Fire and gunpowder do not sleep together".... except in Iraq.*



Ali Al Adeeb

### The road to hell is paved with good intentions

On 6 October Ali Al-Adeeb, the current Iraqi Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, announced a new three-year higher education reform plan covering the years 2011-14 to rebuild Iraq's destroyed higher education system, by giving financial and administrative independence to universities, according to its website<sup>1</sup>. Tapping Iraqi talent abroad and encouraging international cooperation will be the drivers of the development of higher education. It focuses on developing the quality of education, accelerating scientific development and producing a skilled workforce. In a statement made at a Karbala University's graduation ceremony on 10 October, Al-Adeeb described Iraq's education as "staggering" beneath the impact of years of "occupation and useless things" while the rest of the world moved forward.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Adeeb's views echoed comments made from 9-11 March 2011 by Hans-Christoph von Sponeck, former UN humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, who told a Ghent University conference on the country's disastrous education situation, organized by the *BRussells* Tribunal and MENARG<sup>3</sup>, that "Iraq's former pride, its education system, has collapsed".<sup>4</sup>

On 30 November Ali al-Adeeb, discussed with the Canadian ambassador to Baghdad procedures to accept Iraqi students in Canadian universities. The Minister intends to send 10,000 students to study abroad to meet the needs of the country to different specializations. The ambassador expressed the readiness of Canada to facilitate the acceptance of Iraqi students.<sup>5</sup>

On 29 November it was reported that Representatives of Oregon State University and Iraq's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research had signed a memorandum of

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.moheer.gov.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=988>

<sup>2</sup> Wagdy Sawahel: <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20111013231806586&mode=print>

<sup>3</sup> Middle East North Africa Research Group at Ghent University: <http://www.menarg.ugent.be/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.brussellstribunal.org/Seminar/texts/en/2.pdf> and <http://www.newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2011/04/20/iraq-educide/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://en.aswataliraq.info/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=145849&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=145849&l=1)

understanding that will bring hundreds of faculty and students to OSU from Iraq for training and research opportunities.

On 23 October Ali al-Adeeb received a Russian delegation. He then called on Russia to increase its scientific and cultural cooperation with Iraq. Adeeb called for increasing the number of Iraqi students to be accepted in the Russian universities, particularly in the engineering studies.<sup>6</sup>

Shiny plans and beautiful words. But the situation on the ground shows a completely different reality.

### **The Minister of Higher Education: a fox in the hen house ?**

Who is Ali Al Adeeb? Ali al-Adeeb is a senior member of the Islamic Dawa Party. He returned from exile in Iran to Iraq in 2003 on the back of American tanks. In April 2006 he was tipped as a candidate for the post of Prime Minister. Al-Adeeb was also appointed to the committee that drafted the illegal Constitution of Iraq under occupation in 2005. Ali Al Adeeb (real name Ali Akbar Zandi?) is believed to have a brother in the Iranian Shura Council, according to Iraqi sources.

Ali Al Adeeb is obliged to send his students abroad because soon there will be no qualified University lecturers left in Iraq to teach the students.

Here's the story.

### **Blazing Fires, Forged Degrees**

A rash of small fires inside the offices of various ministries and government buildings in Baghdad would normally have security forces on the lookout for an arsonist. Or checking into the possibility of faulty electric wiring. However, in this case, the fires appear to have more to do with the work of the Iraqi parliament's Commission on Integrity (CoI), an independent body responsible for uncovering corruption at all levels of Iraqi government. On July 4 2011, a blaze started in the certificates office of the Ministry of Higher Education. In March 2011, the CoI announced that as many as 20,000 people currently employed by the state may have acquired their jobs on the basis of forged educational qualifications. Additionally, the CoI reported, the forgeries do not appear confined to junior staff, but have also been used by high-ranking government members.<sup>7</sup> Iraqi Newspaper Azzaman reported on 8 October 2011: "More than 30,000 Iraqi civil servants, among them high-level officials, have obtained their jobs on fake certificates and degrees, according to the parliamentary commission on integrity and transparency."<sup>8</sup> A variety of sources indicate that fake diplomas and educational certificates have been trading at anywhere from \$1,500 and \$7,000. Officials at Iraq's ministry of higher education have been singled out for blame, the ministry having also licensed a string of shadowy universities in recent years.<sup>9</sup> There are around

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<sup>6</sup> [http://en.aswataliraq.info/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=145378&l=1](http://en.aswataliraq.info/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=145378&l=1)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.iraq-businessnews.com/tag/corruption/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.azzaman.com/english/index.asp?fname=news%5C2011-10-08%5Ckurd.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1039/re8.htm>

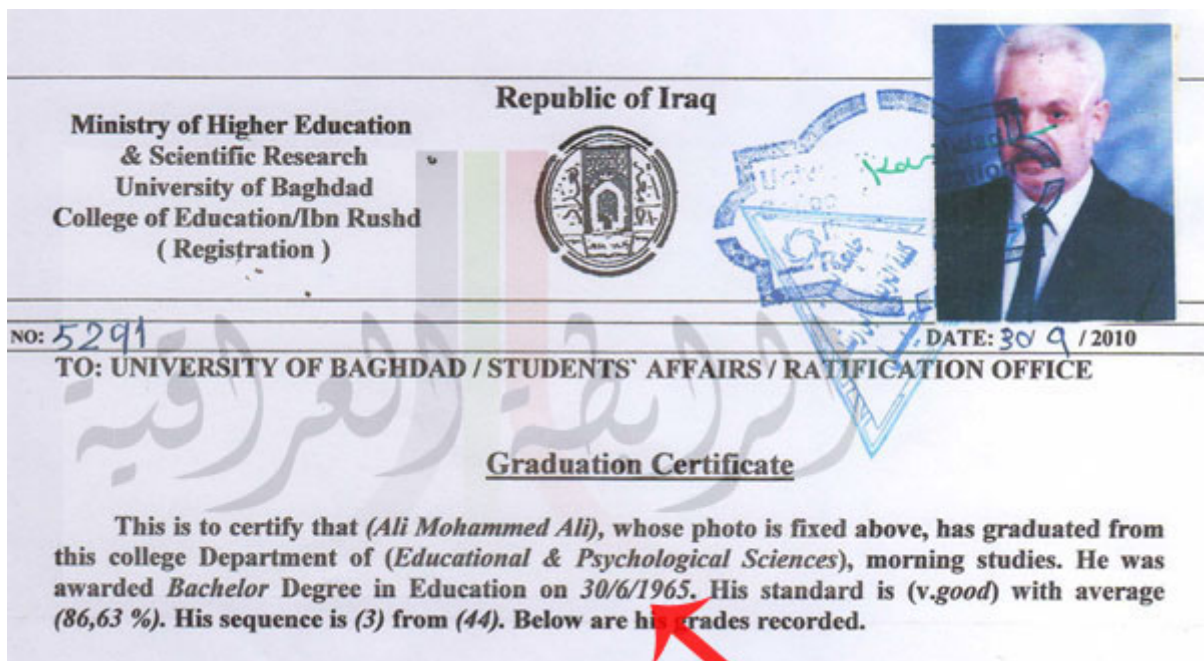
nineteen thousand fake functional degrees, at the ministries of interior and defense alone, the Chairman of Security and Defense Committee of House, Hassan Sinead revealed on 21 June 2011.<sup>10</sup> Corruption, grade buying and fraudulent degrees are rampant in Iraq today, posing a serious threat to the country's development.<sup>11</sup>

## Silencer Guns

On the early morning of 31 July 2011, a group of unknown armed men assassinated the Director-General of Administration in Iraq's Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research—Dawood Salman Rahim and his son, Hassanein—as they drove in their car in west Baghdad's Ghazaliya district.<sup>12</sup> Dr Rahim told his friends that he might get killed because he refused a request of Ali Al-Adeeb to equate the Shia Hawza religion certificates with the Scientific PhD certificates. Dr Rahim asked the minister to give him a written authorisation to do so. The minister threatened him to force his collaboration in this issue. Security officers of the Ministry raided his house two days before his assassination, and took his car registration certificate, and his rationing ticket. He was assassinated by silencer gun two days after the raid.

## Ali Al-Adeeb: Forged Diploma?

Iraqi sources claim that even Ali Al-Adeeb's diploma has been forged. His diploma certificate was issued on 30-09-2010, after his appointment as minister, and it shows that he had graduated from the College of Education/Baghdad University on 30/06/1965, meaning he was 19 years old, as he was born in 1946, and this is impossible in Iraq.



<sup>10</sup> <http://iraqdailytimes.com/19000-fake-functional-degrees-in-security-ministries/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pri.org/stories/business/global-development/iraq-s-corrupt-school-system2396.html>

<sup>12</sup> [http://en.aswatiraq.info/Default1.aspx?page=article\\_page&id=144042&l=1](http://en.aswatiraq.info/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=144042&l=1)

## Ali Al Adeeb's virulent sectarianism and selective deBa'athification

Hundreds of people have recently been arrested all around Iraq in an operation launched by the security forces against members of the banned Ba'ath party. The crackdown started in October 2011 when the Ministry of Higher Education went after members of Tikrit University in Salahaddin. That was quickly followed by a wave of detentions across six of Iraq's eighteen provinces. By early November, the government announced that 655 former Baathists had been picked up.<sup>13</sup> Within his department, Ali al-Adeeb, the second man in Maliki's Dawa party, started applying a virulent anti-Ba'athist agenda since he came into office.<sup>14</sup>

Iraq commentator Reidar Visser refers to the "*selective de-Ba'athification*" process being pursued in Iraq.

" It is a historical fact that Shiites and Sunnis alike cooperated with the old regime in their millions, and it was for example Shiite tribes that cracked down on the "Shiite" rebellion in the south in 1991. Nonetheless, the exiles who returned to Iraq after 2003 have tried to impose an artificial narrative in which the legacy of pragmatic cooperation with the Baathist regime is not dealt with in a systematic and neutral fashion as such; instead one singles out political opponents (often Sunnis) as "Baathists" and silently co-opt political friends (especially if they happen to be Shiites) without mentioning their Baathist ties at all. The result is a hypocritical and sectarian approach to the whole question of de-Ba'athification that will create a new Iraq on shaky foundations. (For example, the Sadrists have been in the lead in the aggressive de-Ba'athification campaign, yet it is well known that many Sadrists in fact had Baathist ties in the past.)"<sup>15</sup>

## Uprooting the remnants of Iraq's intellectual class

The President of Tikrit University resigned on 14 October 2011 after the sacking of 300 university lecturers by Ali Al-Adeeb, 140 employees and professors at the University of Tikrit alone<sup>16</sup>. The President of the University stated that they were all very good lecturers. Iraqi sources claim that the Minister of Higher Education has discharged some 1.200 lecturers since he became a Minister. Ali Al-Adeeb also wanted to impose Islamic law in Iraqi universities through the imposition of sectarianism and the veil and the separation of the sexes, leading to discontent in university circles.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/8/274009/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2804620/posts>

<sup>15</sup> Reidar Visser in <http://gulfanalysis.wordpress.com/2010/01/08/why-ad-hoc-de-baathification-will-derail-the-process-of-democratisation-in-iraq/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.aknews.com/en/aknews/8/274009/>



A college professor found dead in Diyala – June,2011

The number of prominent Iraqi academics and professionals who fled the country surpass 20,000. Of the 6700 Iraqi professors who have fled since 2003, the Los Angeles Times reported in October 2008 that only 150 of them had returned<sup>17</sup>. But it's not safe to return. The *BRussells* Tribunal warned already on 26 April 2009, that "*those academics who return are finding jobs few and the welcome far from warm*"<sup>18</sup>. The statement further alarmed the academics who are invited or forced to return, to be aware of criminal acts like kidnappings or assassinations.<sup>19</sup> Since the US-led invasion in 2003, Iraq's intellectual and technical class has been subject to a systematic and on-going campaign of intimidation, abduction, extortion, random killings and targeted assassinations. To this date there has been no systematic investigation into the assassination of hundreds of University professors. And now Ali Al Adeeb is eliminating what's left of Iraq's intellectual capital. This equals ***Educide***<sup>20</sup>: **the annihilation of education.**

The current Iraqi government has a policy of excluding experienced professors, and replace them with people with party affiliations, or some other ignorant people with fake university qualifications. But discharging capable professors seems not enough for Mr Al-Adeeb. Many Iraqi academics are obliged to retire against their will because the government orders them to do so, while they are at the height of their capacities. The situation of the Iraqi academics abroad is also dire, because the ones who live in Europe, the US and Asia lost their retirement rights in Iraq, thus hundreds of them have no income because they are deprived from their retirement rights in their country.

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<sup>17</sup> James Petras in <http://forum.prisonplanet.com/index.php?topic=128725.0>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/Al-Tikriti.htm>

<sup>19</sup> See the list of assassinated academics: <http://www.brusselstribunal.org/academicsList.htm>

<sup>20</sup> *Educide* is a concept introduced by Hans-Christoph von Sponeck, former UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq, in his keynote speech at Ghent University Conference, which examined the ongoing catastrophe of the Iraqi academia and the country's disastrous education situation, in March 2011.

## Death Squads inside the Ministry of Higher Education?

[www.iraqirabita.org](http://www.iraqirabita.org) reported on 17 November that Ali Al Adeeb is running a sectarian shia death squad, whose main duty is to exterminate Sunni Iraqi academics and Sunni officers and policemen from the former government. The death squad is called Asaaib Ahl Al Haq, active in Baghdad – Al Thawra area, and run by Ali Al Adeeb himself, directly supervised by his Office Manager, Majid Al Gharrawi, who has a leading role in the recent arrests. The death squad receives information from the Office Manager of Al Adeeb about students and professors from Bab Al Muadam Universities Compound and Al Mustansiriyah University, who allegedly have Baath links, or who are Sunni, in order to kidnap and assassinate them. Many employees in the Ministry of High Education have fake Iraqi names, cooperating directly with the Iranian intelligence, according to Iraqirabita.

The result is that even more professors flee the country. An Iraqi newspaper told the story about a college professor who got shot in the head and was brought to the hospital in a critical condition, but he survived. He was shouting: “please, if I die, do not let anyone leave my wife and daughters in the streets”. This is because Iraqi academics, or anyone of the educational or teaching staff, usually don’t possess a house of their own. They rent houses, or live with their families in miserable conditions. Whenever they ask the government for a piece of land to build a house, or loans to buy a house, they face an endless routine of governmental procedures that might take years. So they are lost in a way or another, and their families are lost too, whether through the assassinations and the continuous fears they live in, or through the terrible treatment by the government.

An Iraqi professor in exile in Amman states: “we are all here in Amman. We cannot go back to Iraq and resume our profession, it seems that we are not only imprisoned in our country, but also in the country we are in now, because there are not enough places for us in colleges here.” An Iraqi student who also escaped Iraq testifies: “we cannot complete our studies in Jordanian colleges, because there is no one to help or support us. We feel disappointed because many Arab students, especially the Jordanians, studied in Iraq for free many years ago, and now we have no one to help us during these hard times.”

## **A book with the recommendations of the International Seminar on the Situation of Iraqi Academics in Ghent**

From 9-12 March 2011 the *BRussell*s Tribunal and the Middle East North Africa Research Group (MENARG) organized a 4-day seminar in Ghent University titled: “**Defending education in times of war and occupation**”.

The conference started from the premise that the educational crisis can only be addressed with an awareness of the general situation. Nevertheless, the urgent task of the seminar was not so much to give reasons for the destruction of Iraqi academia, but rather to propose ways of rebuilding its rich traditions, and restoring its potential for future contributions. The conference also highlighted the duty of international organisations to respond, and the responsibility of non-Iraqi educators to stand in solidarity with their Iraqi counterparts. The international academic community should be more aware of the on-going nature of the crimes against Iraqi academics, and encouraged to participate in the proposing and exploring



of practical remedies. We thus set out to articulate a set of well-formulated recommendations that can strengthen both academic understanding and activists' engagement.

A book with some keynote speeches and recommendations of this seminar, titled: **"BEYOND EDUCIDE - Sanctions, Occupation and the Struggle for Higher Education in Iraq"**, will be published in December 2011 by Academia Press.

This book hopes to do more than simply provide the international academic community, the wider public and the relevant institutions with access to knowledge about the destruction of Iraq, and the plight of Iraqi academia and academics in particular. It also seeks to provide a starting point for those who stand in solidarity with Iraqi academics, and who seek to promote education in general, to propose and discuss practical means of helping Iraqis recover their rights to education, and of defending Iraqi academics. In particular, this book and other outcomes of the Ghent Seminar enable educational leaders —deans, professors, department heads as well as administrators — to establish a practical network of opportunity for displaced Iraqi academics, thus helping to sustain and rebuild what remains of Iraqi academia outside Iraq. Finally, alongside the practical initiatives discussed or adopted, we hope to reaffirm the responsibility of politicians, governments, civil servants and associated institutions—at both national and international levels—to uphold international law, to defend the rights of education embraced by the United Nations, and to stop the ruthless repression and killing of Iraqi academics.

As such the organizers of this initiative seek to take a solid step towards relieving the suffering of the Iraqi people and participate in the efforts to propose, map, plan and outline the steps necessary for rehabilitating Iraq's educational system.

Iraq is in ruins and so is its higher education system. Beyond the desperate lack of resources, problems include politicization of the educational system, uneven emigration and internal displacement of teachers and students, security threats, and corruption. Illiteracy is widespread in comparison with previous decades, standing at 39% for the rural population. Almost 22% of the adult population in Iraq has never attended school, and a mere 9% have secondary school as highest level completed. As far as gender equity, 47% of women in Iraq are either fully or partly illiterate, as women's education suffers from differences across regions, and especially between the North and South. The facts on the ground in Iraq show that there is no "revolution" whatsoever in Iraq's education system, no major reconstruction worthy of the name. What we appear to be witnessing is murder, destruction, corruption and decline.

Without an accurate analysis of the state of Higher Education in Iraq and the fragile security situation in general, no accurate recommendations can be drafted and presented to International and Regional official bodies and human rights organizations. This article is yet again proof of the doublespeak by the Iraqi puppet government and of the dangers the current situation presents for the Iraqi academic community. The *BRussells* Tribunal has been monitoring the situation in Iraq under occupation very closely. It started the campaign to highlight the plight of Iraqi academics subject to harassment, threats, assassinations, and forced exile. Denis Halliday, former Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq: "Uncomfortable although it is, (we have) to face the unthinkable, that is, the existence of US policy to end -

to terminate - established United Nations card-carrying sovereign states. In the case of Iraq, this policy required US military terrorism, infrastructural destruction and human massacre to create malleability. Malleability, that is, of an intelligentsia focused on sustaining a complex society, and a timeless and intricate culture both essential for the various peoples of Iraq to recognize their unique identity and hard won sense of nation. The (case of) Iraq shows that removal, or enabling the killing of such academic, scientific and established citizens was deemed necessary for state-ending."<sup>21</sup>

The book can be ordered by sending a message to [ghentseminar@brussellstribunal.org](mailto:ghentseminar@brussellstribunal.org)  
The price is 9€. + shipping costs.

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<sup>21</sup> Denis Halliday in his review of the book *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq* <http://www.brussellstribunal.org/Book1.htm#halliday>  
(Pluto Press 2010 – <http://www.plutobooks.com/display.asp?K=9780745328126>)