

Nov 04, 2016 by *Gordon Robison*

Remembering Liqa'a ^[1]

Amman, Jordan

When I arrived at Iraqi television a year ago this week Liqa'a Abdel Razzak was a familiar face. We had never met, but I knew her from Iraq's TV screens under the old regime. After taking over Iraqi radio and television the American defense contractor running the stations hired new reporters and producers but kept most of the technical staff and the news anchors. The latter decision prompted some criticism, but in time I came to see its wisdom. At a moment when everything else in their lives had changed the sight of familiar faces reading the evening news was worth a lot to average Iraqis. Since everyone understood that the people reading the news were "presenters", as opposed to "anchors" in the American sense, credibility did not seem to be much of an issue.

Of our half-dozen regular presenters Liqa'a was by far the best. A brown-haired woman in her mid-30s she read the prompter well, and was far superior to any of the other anchors at conducting interviews. As a colleague of mine noted, she did not like anchoring the evening news – it required her to return home after dark – but recognized it as an important job.

She proudly introduced me to her young son one evening and when I ran into her last spring she mentioned, with even more pride, that she was expecting another baby.

Three months ago Liqa'a's husband, a Tunisian who worked as a translator for the US defense contractor Titan, was killed. A month later their daughter was born. Still on maternity leave from her job at Iraqi TV, Liqa'a went to one of the American bases in Baghdad yesterday to finish the financial paperwork related to her husband's death. Near the base gunmen attacked Liqa'a's taxi killing her, a friend traveling with her and the taxi driver.

Yesterday's was not her first trip to the base to deal with her late husband's paperwork, and the friend in Baghdad who told me all of this speculated that the gunmen may have tagged her as a target during one of her previous visits. There's no indication right now that she was singled out because of her job at the TV station.

Tragedy touches everything in Iraq these days, and it seems to return with frightening regularity.

Back in May one of the station's reporters, and another friend of mine, Asad Kadhim, was killed by American soldiers. As is so often the case the details of the incident remain vague. The US military and a colleague of Asad's who was also in the car but survived give wildly different accounts of what happened.

The following week I saw Ghelan Ramiz Mahmoud, an articulate Princeton-educated former professor and diplomat, when he came to the Fox Baghdad bureau for an interview. We had met in the first days after the city fell when he sat in the garden at the Palestine Hotel giving

impromptu seminars on Iraqi history to CNN's Baghdad staff. When the interview ended we shook hands, agreeing to keep in closer contact. The Fox correspondent who conducted the interview recommended to his bosses in New York that the professor be put on retainer as a commentator for the upcoming handover of sovereignty. Two days later Dr. Ghelan died when US forces raided the house next door to his, the basement of which appears to have contained a bomb-making factory. The ensuing explosion left four Humvees burning out in the street and leveled Dr. Gehlan's house.

When he was in Washington a few weeks ago Iraq's Interim Prime Minister stood on the White House lawn and testily told reporters that most of Iraq's provinces are "completely safe." This week, however, speaking to Iraq's National Council, he said violence in the country is getting worse.

For the sake of the memories of Liqa'a, Asad and Dr. Ghelan let's all try, in the days and weeks ahead, to look at Iraq with the clear eyes Allawi uses when speaking to Iraqis, and not through the rose-colored glasses he wears when speaking in Washington and to Americans.

grr
