

NOTE

## THE SHOE DRAMA

**Ramzy Baroud writes :**

The plot, so unexpectedly, thickened in Iraq on a Sunday like no other. The two main actors—US President George W Bush, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki—took to the stage to perform another well-rehearsed press conference. The scripts were ever so predictable: Bush to tout the 'progress' achieved in Iraq, while al-Maliki to express gratitude for the freedom bestowed on his country. Both men were to caution from overstated optimism, and to forewarn of the great challenges that are yet to come. The two partners were to shake hands, smile and walk away. Things, however, didn't go according to plan on Sunday, December 14.

A surprise appearance by till then little-known Iraqi journalist Muntadhar al-Zaidi provided a most unpredictable conclusion to the public performance regularly held in Baghdad's Green Zone theatre. Every joint press conference of US and Iraqi officials has, for years, concluded, more or less according to plan. Since the toppling of President Saddam Hussein's statue in 2003, in a well orchestrated—Shakespearean even - series of events, until that fateful Sunday, few have dared to violate the carefully prepared, monotonous media appearances, which often end with a handshake, unconvincing smiles, and the mutter of disgruntled journalists for failing to land a last minute question.

But al-Zaidi changed all of that when he hurled his shoes at President Bush at the exact moment the two main actors were scheduled to exit the stage—compelling the US president to duck twice, astoundingly escaping the makeshift, but largely symbolic weapon. Truth be told, Bush's timely dodges, were as impressive, as al-Zaidi's seemingly impeccable pitches.

Much has been said of al-Zaidi's daring act, which will indeed secure a permanent footnote in history books for an Iraqi man's footwear. Stories are told of poems, computer games and artwork idealizing al-Zaidi's shoes; and a rich Arab has reportedly offered millions of dollars for the pair of shoes that were meant as a "farewell kiss" to Bush. While most Americans are likely to remember Bush's legacy as that of a man who has guided a nation into unprecedented economic mayhem, Iraqis, and others, will remember him as a brutal, self-righteous zealot, who invited untold bloodshed, humiliation and the destruction of a once a magnificent and leading civilization. □□□