



Ahmad Al-Rubei, 1949-2008

In Memoriam

By: Raouf Ebeid, Editor - PI Online

Published: March 10, 2008



The Harvard educated Kuwaiti philosopher, *Ahmad Al-Rubei*, died this past week at the age of 59 from brain cancer. He was never one to shy away from confrontation, although he always managed to keep the debate civilized. The politician / journalist / academician was eulogized by many in the media as well as by members of the political establishment throughout the Middle East. [PI Online](#) examines the interesting life of this liberal thinker through the writings of those who remembered him.

Abdel Rahman Al-Rashed remembers *Al-Rubei* as someone who maintained an unobstructed clear vision of matters without being carried away by barbaric slogans or confined by inaccurate taboos. A man with multiple talents, *Al-Rubei* never ceased to amaze those around him with his attractive personality and ability to revisit the same subject with the same enthusiastic spirit he was known for.

His early leftist tendencies in the sixties were a reflection of the Pan-Arabism of Nasser and the Marxist anti-colonialist movement of the time. As a teenager in 1965, he participated in the failed uprising in the sultanate of Oman known then as "The Zafar revolution," which landed him in jail. His early involvement with the Palestinian *Fath* movement ended with him once again in prison. *Al-Rubei*, disappointed with what he described later as false slogans used by different nationalistic movements and regimes, decided to change course and embarked on an educational voyage, which culminated in receiving his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1984 in Islamic Philosophy. *Al-Rashed* recalls this exchange with *Al-Rubei* when discussing his incarcerations early in his career: "You went to prison as *Che Guevara* and came out as *Mandela*," to which *Al-Rubei* laughingly replied, "True, I came out of jail but the apartheid problem remains in the Arab world."

After returning home from the U.S., *Al-Rubei* started his political career. He was a member of parliament in the eighties and nineties and was appointed Minister of Higher Education in 1992 and 1996. *Al-Rubei* was centrist by most standards, although the religious establishment considered his views too liberal and the political establishment considered him too confrontational. Disappointed with government after losing his bid for reelection in 2000, in the final years of his life he concentrated on journalistic writing, mostly in the *Al-Watan*, *Al-Qabas* and *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* newspapers.

Al-Rubei's quest for Arab unity was dealt a deadly blow with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and by the many Palestinians who sided with Saddam Hussein. Although the Palestinian problem continued to trouble him, his discussion of the issues became more realistic and focused. *Al-Rubei* also recognized the disaster unfolding in Darfur and became one of the few Arab writers to condemn the Sudanese government's actions as what he often described as a crime against humanity. He was also notorious at chastising the defenders of the status quo. *Hussein Shobokshi* remembered *Al-Rubei* as an eternal optimist, but one who maintained that the Arab World will only be able to progress if Arabs stop ignoring the tendencies toward extremism, discrimination and ignorance prevalent in the society.

In his eulogy of *Al-Rubei*, the Chairman of MBC network, Sheikh *Waleed Al-Ibrahim*, credited him for choosing the name "*Al-Arabiya*" for the Dubai-based satellite TV news channel. *Al-Rubei* may have wanted to perpetuate the "Arab dream" that betrayed and escaped him during his lifetime.

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