

The Diary of Amal Salman - Living in Post-War Iraq, June- August 2005
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Amal Salman is an Iraqi girl living in Baghdad who turned 14 during the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Washington Post staff writer Anthony Shadid first visited the Salman family in March 2003. During the war and the ensuing conflict, Amal recorded her family's experiences in her diary. She shared copies of her journal with Shadid. These are translated excerpts of Amal's diary.

Thursday, June 23, 2005

This morning did not begin with the cries of the rooster as usual but with the sound of bombs and explosions in our Karrada neighborhood. At around 7 in the morning, a huge explosion shook the area, targeting the Abdel-Rasul Ali Husseiniya (a Shiite place of worship), which is opposite the apartment building in which I live. I woke up terrorized by the powerful explosion, with my heart beating fast, fearing that someone might have died or been wounded. I, my brothers, mother and our neighbor, Um Haider, went out to the balcony to see how the explosion took place. There were many people in the street who came out to see and look for their friends or relatives. The police had arrived and were doing their job. But the most frightening thing was that after people had assembled, which was some five or seven minutes after the first explosion, a suicide bomber in a car blew himself up and the car in front of the juice shop of Jabbar, which is exactly opposite our apartment building on the opposite side of the street. It was a frightening explosion, which scared me breathless because I was in the balcony. For a moment, I thought I had died. Then I realized I was not dead, but I was so scared. In a moment the police car was burned and those inside it were dead, burned. A young man who had only recently announced his engagement died, along with a good old man who lives in the neighborhood, named Abu Karrar, and Khalil the Kurd, who owns a shop in one of the small shopping centers here. There were many corpses, and wounded on the street, and an apartment building was burning.

This was the first time in my life I had seen with my own eyes a real scene like this, not through the news. It was a true disaster, which I will never forget as long as I live. Total destruction, not only in the Karrada district, but inside me, my family and among our neighbors. I was really in pain over this scene, which I hope no one would ever have to see. Glass was shattered, and scattered all over the bodies, and the debris and parts of human flesh strewn all over the street asphalt. Then police came, took the dead and the wounded to hospitals, then the American forces came. But this disaster which befell Karrada did not end because the dead and the wounded have relatives who came looking for them. Families, brothers, mothers and so on, all came searching and crying out aloud, "My son, my brother, father, where are you?" Then they would start asking anyone, like someone who lost something that left no trace. Iraqi forces on the scene would not let anyone take pictures, but in spite of that, the scenes were photographed.

I don't know what to write because I am scared, and wounded inside my heart for seeing those sights. How long will Iraqis suffer? Glass debris of all the shops and the apartment buildings, so much of it, littered the street. My sister Hibba was wounded in her arm by the explosion when she stood on the balcony. Deep, strong sadness prevailed over the other Husseiniya and another

mosque, indeed in all Karrada. Its streets which used to be full of people now became empty, with only wreckage from the explosion and what remained of dead people's flesh parts and pieces. Oh God, save us from all this! After police cleaned up the street, I thought to myself, will they be able to clean up people's hearts of fear and grief?

Afterwards the people marched in the funeral procession for those who died in the explosion. Women were crying, and many people with grief on their face seemed bewildered and unable to understand why so many people have to die. After the funeral, the street was empty, but there was still a lot of wreckage and debris. Many started to clean up, especially the shop owners, but the big problem is we don't have water for drinking. There is no life! This is one of the big problems for the Iraqis.

Following the explosion by about eight hours, an American military truck loaded with water bottles came over. An American woman soldier was distributing the water bottles in the same place where the explosion took place. People then lined up in a long line in front of the American truck, and received the water. It was a scene that was hard to describe, as if the Iraqis were beggars standing in line in a humiliating way! During the dispensing of the water bottles, the American woman soldier gave a camera to the translator to take a few pictures. Afterwards everyone was gone and the streets were once again quiet, but fear filled every corner in all directions. When night came, silence reigned over the Karrada streets, frightened by the terrorists' threats and those of Abu Mussab Zarqawi, who launched a campaign of fear on the Karrada residents, forcing them to go home earlier than normal out of fear and anxiety.

Friday June 24, 2005

Today is Friday when families usually go to the Friday prayer at the Abdel-Rasul Ali Husseiniya, but yesterday's explosion shattered the Husseiniya completely, so the worshippers prayed in the street as a sign of protest against the criminal act committed by the terrorists. The police were forced to close the road. And when the worshippers ended the prayers, they started to implore God to help us get rid of the terrorists and the Baathists of Iraq. Later on, the day seemed to pass in peace, but it was like dark clouds that covered Karrada, clouds of fear and worry of tomorrow and the threats of the terrorists.

Saturday June 25, 2005

The morning was quiet, but at around 2:30, forces of the Lightning (Brigade) came around and arrested two persons suspected of involvement in the Karrada explosion. Some of the people here said those two were just simple, poor laborers at a soap factory, but no one knows the truth. I was downstairs filling up water for drinking because we had no water for cooking, drinking or washing. This is always the problem in our building. Some in the building have water, but they never share with others.

Wednesday June 29, 2005

Today was quiet and the people spoke of nothing but the explosion, which was a grave disaster for us, and this quiet neighborhood. . . . Its people are good people who cause no trouble for anyone. The terrorists have struck against this area and its people. It was a great shock to my family because we always spoke of it as a quiet area, that Karrada is secure, but they struck it.

The great surprise came at 11:30 when the Iraqi police came to search the building. I was so scared because this was the first time I had seen the policemen up close and talked to them. God, mother was not here. She was at the hotel where she works. She is sacrificing for our sake so that we may live. We were alone, me, Fatima, Duaa and Hibba. We were scared, but the police said they were searching for weapons, said there was a tip that some in this building have weapons and are terrorists. But who knows? After the explosion anything can happen. One of our neighbors is called Um Ahmad. They came and asked many questions about her, maybe because she has some relatives in Falluja. . . . The day ended with talk about the police, the searches, and everybody was saying this and that, and so on.

Friday July 1, 2005

At 11.15, my sister Hibba and I went to visit our neighbor who lives in the side street near us. She was wounded in her feet in the explosion, and was badly hurt. We learned that she was wounded in the second explosion near the Jabbar juice shop. She was going to have an operation done on her foot next week, and we felt sad for her. Then we came home.

Monday July 4, 2005

Today was quiet, and no one spoke about anything except electricity, which comes only for short times. Water is not available because the terrorists are targeting water pumping plants everyday. We are all suffering from these problems, as they never end. The rich can live outside Iraq very comfortably but the poor who can't have to stay suffering. The major event was at around 7:23 today. Police came again to search the building saying there are some residents who are gathering terrorists in their homes, providing them with money, and information. God knows who is telling the truth or not these days. No one has trust in anybody else, whether the police, the National Guard or even our own folks. God help us all!

Tuesday July 5, 2005

This morning I was downstairs filling water for drinking. This is a big problem, because water supply to our building is very little. Life has become very difficult for us poor folks in these difficult circumstances. . . . While I was downstairs, my brother Mahmoud came and said the road was blocked. Everyone was asking why and some said they had arrested terrorists. The truth however was that police had found a bag, and at first thought there was a bomb inside it, but in fact they found a girl of 16 years -- dead, beheaded, and naked. She was thrown on the street, inside a bag, raped by someone unknown. I heard the news from my friend who contacted me because her home is near the place of the incident. Others also came and said they saw in the

police car someone whose identity was unknown. What an injustice! People no longer have any mercy in their hearts.

Wednesday July 13, 2005

I do not want to talk about this sad day today. It is the day of grief, the day of children's massacres. Thirty-two children were killed today, and it was a very sad day because of this grave catastrophe. What wrong have those children committed to be killed in New Baghdad? Small children, ages ranging between 7 and 12, were killed while Iraqi leaders were fighting over positions, leaving the Iraqi people to die in the terrorists' fires. Iraqi leaders are traveling from one state to another, but Iraq is without security, stability, and other necessities like water and electricity. What sin have the people of this country done to become victims of conspiracies, and elections which the people thought would be useful? Iraqis have lost faith in their leaders and even in themselves!

Thursday July 14, 2005

Today was the funeral services for those children who died in the explosion in New Baghdad. The terrorists are always threatening, so what should the people do? May God help them! The police are dying, and so are the National Guard. Death is all we hear in the news everyday. Death, slaughter, murder, kidnappings and robberies. Nobody knows why.

Friday July 22, 2005

Our of our neighbors is Um Mohammad who had traveled outside Iraq to the (United Arab) Emirates with her husband and settled there. After a week, I heard that the security officer for Kadhimiya was killed, but we did not recognize who he was. Later we found out that our neighbor, Raad, the husband of Um Mohammad, came back from the Emirates after the death of his brother Emad, the police officer of Kadhimiya. We had no idea that the victim was the brother of Raad. . . . Mother went with the sister-in-law of the victim to the funeral service along with our neighbor, Um Haider. Raad said his brother went to work and was a very simple man, never cared to have protection escorts, and did not even carry a hand gun. Three armed cars attacked him from behind.

Friday July 29, 2005

Today was a normal day, marred only by the lack of water and electricity. Our neighbor, Abu Habib, has bought a huge generator. My mother has given him 25,000 Iraqi dinars to become a shareholder and promised to give him 15,000 a month to supply us with electric power. The main problem is water. There is no water, and the little supplies that exist are found downstairs. We have to fill water from the ground floor, and expend a lot of effort to carry the water up to the apartment. Duaa, Hibba, Fatima, Amal, Mahmoud, and so on. We suffer a lot going up that long staircase! What has happened to everyone? There is no mercy in anybody's heart anymore. Some in our building have water but wouldn't give it to anybody else. There is so much selfishness! In this building, no one helps others. Great God, what has happened to the people, no mercy, no compassion, no help?

Monday August 8, 2005

Today was a terrible day. Since early morning, I found myself as if floating in the middle of a dust storm, spraying fine, reddish dust. I looked into the skies and found it almost red, as if crying over the situation in Iraq, and the continuing bloodshed. The country is falling apart, with so many people dying all over, and now the skies are bleeding with the blood of the Iraqis, and the victims. The home is full of dust, and the whole family cleaned it up. There is little water to do the cleaning with. We had to bring water from the building basement, carrying it in buckets. It was very tiring, and the day was long, depressing, and very hot. But we are in August, and August is known as murderously hot. Later in the day, the weather improved a little. But the day was really tiring, and sad. Not only that, it is also sickening because many people were taken to hospital suffering from pneumonia and other breathing problems. The streets, because of the dust, were empty, deserted. That's how Iraq is.

Thursday August 11, 2005

Today was a normal day, like other days. But I found something funny today. Some people stole a car and, as they tried to drive away, it broke down in front of the building. The thieves were scared that they might be caught, so they left it in the middle of the street and ran away. People watching the thieves running away thought the car was rigged with bombs, so everyone ran off, scared that it was a car bomb. Police came and they were scared too, fearing that it was a car bomb. Suddenly the car caught fire and then some brought water to extinguish the fire. The whole thing was so funny. The police sealed off the street, then left the burned car in the middle of the road. A few hours later, they came and took it away. We were so scared. People do not feel secure, afraid of each other. No one trusts anyone, even the police do not trust each other.