
Following the Bombs: *Eyewitness in Baghdad*

By Doug Johnson, reporting from Baghdad with the Voices in the Wilderness' Iraq Peace Team, a group of international peace-workers who remained in Iraq through the war, in order to act as eyewitnesses and to be voices for the Iraqi people in the West.

I'm overwhelmed and tired. For three days now I've concentrated on visiting injured civilians in hospitals and seeing bombed sites. This morning I accompanied April to the Al Kindi Hospital where we interviewed an extended family of 25 that had been living in six houses together on one farm just outside of Baghdad. At 6 pm yesterday, B-52s dropped cluster bombs on their farm, destroying all six houses, killing four and severely injuring many others. Even the farm animals were killed. We were told that yellow cylinders landed in their yard, and when they and the animals crept closer to investigate, the bombs detonated. The father of one of these families, Saaed Shalish, age 36 – a farmer, lost two sons but he has not yet been told. Doctors tell me that he's in critical condition.

I also met Ali Jasem, age 8, whose farm house was destroyed by a missile and whose father was killed from decapitation. Ali received surgery to remove shrapnel from his head. Later, April and I met Ishmel Shakir Kareem, age 60, who is a low income day worker who was a passenger in a car that was knocked over while driving through the Shallal Market area of the Al Sha'ab District of Baghdad. The bombing occurred at 1:30 pm yesterday, and I have just returned from the site. This is an impoverished area of houses and small shops far removed from any military targets. The bomb struck the median between the parkway, breaking nearly every window on the street, demolishing and burning a ramshackle autorepair shop, gutting a small diner and destroying the apartments above it. Sitting next to the bomb's crater in the median are a number of car remains. Crunched, mangled, and scorched car frames give testimony to the bomb's indiscriminate destruction. At the hospital, we were told that five died in that attack. On the street, however, people insist 15 or 16 had died.

I also met Hasem Hamid Shakir, age 26, who was injured in another bombing in the same district of Al Sha'ab. He sustained injuries to his left leg from quarter-size shrapnel that penetrated his car as he was driving. He claimed to have witnessed a whole family burn to death inside their car, and said a school was damaged by bombs. Today, I witnessed that site as well, and I can verify his story. A bomb was apparently detonated above a residential home next to a school, tearing apart the home's top floor with

shrapnel and breaking most of the school's windows.

I'm told that the U.S. media is claiming that Iraq is bombing their own people to frame the U.S., but I don't buy it. Bombs are dropping on Baghdad as I write this, and I'm willing to wager they're not Iraqi bombs. Let's get this straight. The U.S. is waging war on Iraq and has been for the last 12 and a half years. U.S. bombs are dropping everywhere. They have even broken windows in my hotel. These bombs are not that "smart."

Earlier today I also met a number of Syrians who claimed to have been bombed by Apache helicopters while riding in a caravan of three busses from Syria to Baghdad. The attack, they say, occurred at the "160 K Station" next to a bridge. Allegedly a helicopter bombed the bridge, causing the vehicles to stop suddenly and collide with one another.

As they scrambled to exit the vehicles, the buses were bombed. As they waited to be rescued, their buses were bombed again. According to Abdul Malik Tutangi, age 45, 16 civilians were killed and 19 injured in the attack.

Yesterday, I visited another home destroyed by a U.S. bomb in a residential area. The home was a half block from a school and about three blocks from the hospital. Because of the weather, visiting this site was like walking on another planet. After the intense sand storm the day before, white powder seemed to linger in the air and settle in places almost like snow. Breathing became difficult. Visibility became null. My clothes stained from white specks. Windshields became blurry and smeared. The sky took on colors I've never seen before in my 43 years. Every Iraqi I've talked to says they've never seen anything like it. The sky was yellow on one horizon and orange on the other. Street lights radiated a fuzzy, phosphorescent green. I kept looking around, thinking "What is this? What's going on?" April and I speculated that the U.S. may be experimenting with a new weapon or messing with the atmosphere, and although this may sound outlandish, after enduring U.S. bombing for a weekend then seeing surreal colors in the sky, it's easy to imagine the two are connected.

Now that the sky is clear, bombing has intensified. Several large explosions have just shaken the building. It's funny, but you actually get used to it. The only affect it has on the Iraqis is that it pisses them off and they can't wait for the U.S. soldiers to arrive on the ground so that they can put up the fight of their lives.

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Iraq Peace Team: <www.nonviolence.org/vitw>

