

SALAM PAX: THE CLANDESTINE DIARY  
OF AN ORDINARY IRAQI

Salam Pax  
NEW YORK: GROVE PRESS  
2003

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## > September 2002

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### Saturday, 7 September 2002

I'm preparing my emergency lists these days – any suggestions are welcome. At the moment I have:

Candles

Alcohol (maybe red wine?)

Good books

Crunchy munchies.

I think that will get me thru the bombing quite nicely.

:: salam pax 12:52 PM [+] ::

### Thursday, 19 September 2002

I hate birthdays.

But I'm not going to whine about why this year was the worst ever (I had the best days of my life for five or six months at the beginning of this year and it has been a constant downhill after that).

I give you five thoughts which gave me the warm fuzzies:

1. Linkylove from the Legendary Monkey:† she digs Portishead and has magnetic poetry. I have fallen in love with her fridge. Now I'm practising my low-frequency hums, to get those communication issues out of the way.

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† Host of the Sudden Nothing website: [vaspider.surreally.net/suddennothing](http://vaspider.surreally.net/suddennothing).

2. Raed calling me at midnight and telling me this is the last year I will be able to say 'I'm in my twenties.' Not funny. He thinks it is and laughed and laughed. Cruel bastard.

3. Friends and relatives finally realizing that I'm not good at these things and usually show my grumpy bitch side on these days. So instead of crashing my gates, I got e-mails and phone calls full of good wishes and love (but none wishing me what I really needed: seeing him and knowing that he is safe and well).

4. Watching *Dancer in the Dark* again. I ♥ Björk.

:: salam pax 12:05 PM [+] ::

I really wish Massive Attack would start worrying about the delay in their album release rather than this.\*\* But it is good to know that these people care about what is happening in Iraq and I was really very excited about the news that Massive Attack are planning a demonstration and a petition-signing with CND. The forum is great. The regulars there have a very quirky sense of humour.

Did you know that Massive Attack changed their name in 1991 to Massive only because the release of *Blue Lines* was too close to, ahem, the 'Mother of all Battles'. Now you know.

Today at work I was told that I am not getting paid this month. 'Cashflow trouble' da boss said. For some reason I thought that was funny. I couldn't control my giggles. He thought I am having a nervous breakdown or something. Short of telling you 'You're fired' this is the funniest thing evil-boss-creature could tell you on your birthday.

:: salam pax 1:01 PM [+] ::

## Saturday, 21 September 2002

All fools who spend their weekend working, although they have

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 \* Host of the Sudden Nothing website: [vaspider.surreally.net/suddennothing](http://vaspider.surreally.net/suddennothing).

\*\* 'No Massive Attack!', an article in the *New Musical Express*: [www.nme.com/news/102988.htm](http://www.nme.com/news/102988.htm). Damon Albarn (of the pop group Blur) and Robert '3-D' Del Naja (of Massive Attack) delivered an open letter outlining their opposition to an invasion of Iraq to Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, on 18 September 2002.

been told they are not getting paid, please stand on this side of the line.

I really had nothing better to do. Besides, I forgot how much I like working with the VIZ\* software. (I didn't get a chance to show you the work I did for the 100 Bed Hospital when I was in Jordan. I'll post the images here later.) I'm trying release four. It has a crazy right-click menu – I orgasm every time I click it. Do you see that red rectangular thingy in the image? *That* is the context menu for an editable mesh with a slice modifier. I love it.

Anyway, back to this world.

I checked my stats today and found out that I have been linked by Pandavox. That's the second link in two days. The goddess of linkylove has blessed me. Burning that modem and doing my sacred linkwhore dance around it worked. Go check Pandavox, you'll be surprised. I sit between Israeli and Iranian blogs – very geographically correct!

What really caught my eye was a post entitled 'A war to end wars'. I would really like to have some of that stuff you were on while writing this. Pandavox, honeybuns, you cannot be serious.

**Iraq: First we take Baghdad.\*\***

Yeah . . . and then we take Berlin (Leonard Cohen has always been one of my favourite lyricists).

**The Iraqi people will experience a prosperity unknown to them. The Iraqi people will see they have a friend with the American people. Most importantly, Iraq will no longer contribute money to terrorist groups.**

Sure. We will contribute cheap reliable oil to keep western economies going. Awww Pandavox, how I wish things were as clear-cut as you put them in your little fairytale.

**After their hostile governments collapse, many of the radical Islamists will lose a reason for fighting. Then we can enjoy peace again for a while.**

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 \* An architectural modelling software by Kinetix.  
 \*\* [pandavox.blogspot.com](http://pandavox.blogspot.com).

Meg Ryan should be in this movie. She does this bad-turns-to-good-and-happy thing quite well.

It's 3 a.m. and I should go to sleep. Tomorrow we're having a meeting at the Ministry of Health and I have three Lebanese engineers from the consultancy to entertain.

Raed, if I put a commenting link would you use it?

:: salam pax 3:45 AM [+] ::

After three months of clear skies and fierce morning sun we have a cloudy morning with temperatures around 29°C/85°F. Mmmmm, cool cloudy skies I love you.

Good article in *The Economist*: 'Whatever their quiet wish to be rid of Saddam Hussein, their experience of American arms has not been pleasant.'<sup>\*</sup> And a funny cover for this week's print edition.

OK. Have to run now.

:: salam pax 9:47 AM [+] ::

People who  
like Rem  
control of  
Hawkins

## Sunday, 22 September 2002

Got the OK for the comments link from Raed. I don't do nothing without Master Raed sayin' it's fine with him first. And here is another article in the *New York Times* about the war plans. I'm actually getting tired of these. Damn it, just do it and let us get over it!

**Officials said, however, that any attack would begin with a lengthy air campaign led by B-2 bombers armed with 2,000-pound satellite-guided bombs to knock out Iraqi command and control headquarters and air defenses. They said a principal goal of the aerial bombardment would be to sever most communications from Baghdad and isolate Saddam Hussein from his commanders in the rest of the country.<sup>\*\*</sup>**

:: salam pax 3:00 AM [+] ::

<sup>\*</sup> From 'Saddam plays his ace' (19 September 2002) in *The Economist* ([www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)).

<sup>\*\*</sup> 'Bush Has Received Pentagon Options on Attacking Iraq' (21 September 2002) by Eric Schmitt and David E. Sanger in the *New York Times* ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)).

## Monday, 23 September 2002

The last couple of days I have been working in a double shift: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and come back at 5.30 or 6 p.m. and stay till 12 or so. I can't do the 3-D model thingy during the day, so I have to come back in the evening. I don't really mind. I like working with VIZ. Besides, being here with no one in the office I can crank up the volume and jump around while my sluggish computer renders the scenes.

Music for VIZ Modelling:

Toufic Farroukh: *Drab:zeen* (really good arabic/jazz/dance fusion)

Röyksopp: *Melody A.M.*

Timo Maas: *Loud* (and take a break when 'that's how I've been dancing' comes up to jump around)

David Bowie: *Heathen*

Lamb: *What Sound*

And remember: never ever try to do work or drive while listening to Björk or Aphex Twin – they do strange things to brain cells.

:: salam pax 7:26 PM [+] ::

## Tuesday, 24 September 2002

Today I found out that WE HAVE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS on the 15th of October. Well, I did know, but didn't know the date. I can't decide if I should laugh or cry, but it is more funny than tragic.

:: salam pax 9:56 AM [+] ::

Just read this in the *Guardian*:

... like so many Iraqis after 20 years of war, [he is] a fatalist. He smokes heavily, loves high-cholesterol foods and is preparing his hospital for US attack.<sup>+</sup>

His love for 'high-cholesterol foods'??? What, is that another violation against UN sanctions? Let's make this clear, if people are

<sup>+</sup> 'After 20 years of war, Iraqi doctors await attack with mix of fatalism and dismay' (19 September 2002) by Ewan MacAskill in the *Guardian* ([www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)).

going to come here and demolish all high-cholesterol food production plants I will not sit by and watch. Fight for your right to have a heart attack! And just like me he also wants a bicycle:

**The general population has been getting ready too. 'Everyone has extra food, water, oil, candles, bicycles. You should have these things because of the threat,' he said . . .\***

Suddenly Iraqis are turning to environmentally friendly transportation.

Very funny people those British, they really are.

Raed, are you really going to stay in Jordan and miss all the action? Don't get married – come here and let's get bombed.

:: salam pax 10:22 AM [+] ::

### Wednesday, 25 September 2002

Sorry honeybunny, no images today as I have exceeded my bandwidth limit.

Raed, since you are my rich friend abroad, why don't you pay for my image-hosting account at villagephotos.com?

:: salam pax 12:04 PM [+] ::

### Saturday, 28 September 2002

So what do you think is the most used word in our vocabulary these days? It is 'ba3deen' (for you non-Arabish-speaking people, it means 'later/afterwards'). Anything that has anything to do with a decision that will affect the future will be answered with 'BA3DEEN'.

Example 1

[salam]: Listen . . . I haven't been paid the last two months and you make me work like a slave. How about buying me a better monitor than the one I have? It flickers.

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\* See note on previous page.

[evil\_boss\_unit]: We will think about it 'ba3deen'.

[salam]: What 'afterwards'? After I have lost my eyesight?

[evil\_boss\_unit]: No. Who cares about you these days? Wait until after *it* happens.

[salam]: Whaaa? I don't . . . ohhh, you mean *it*. Oh, I guess it's OK then, we'll see what happens afterwards.

Example 2

[salam]: Awww GOD! You still have those hideous curtains! You promised they will not stay!

[female\_parental\_unit]: Oh . . . I thought I'll keep them and change them afterwards.

[salam]: They are ugly and there is no excuse for not changing them . . . you know that!!

[female\_parental\_unit]: I said 'ba3deen' . . . and if it makes you feel any better they will probably be shredded by all the glass that will be flying thru them.

[salam]: Oh you mean *that* . . . OK, wait till 'ba3deen'.

Raed is in Baghdad for a couple of days and since we have very clear skies at the moment and a beautiful half-moon is rising, Raed and Salam are taking their drinks to the roof and thinking about what to do 'ba3deen', under the half-moon sky.

And in the warm fuzzies department: Raed did offer to pay the subscription fee for my account (it pays having rich, reckless friends and NO I don't know what a leech is . . .), but I said let's wait till 'ba3deen'.

:: salam pax 11:43 AM [+] ::

### Sunday, 29 September 2002

The Legendary Monkey needs your suggestions for what she should read next. Show her what you are reading now!

:: salam pax 2:36 AM [+] ::

Well . . . as I said, Raed is in Baghdad after a trip to Basra (south of Iraq). He is at the moment crashing on my couch. He wears that T-

shirt 24/7. It says **MY LIFE IS HAPPY**. Yeah, right. And I have a body like Schwarzenegger's.

:: salam pax 2:51 AM [+] ::

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## > October 2002

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### Thursday, 3 October 2002

Spiralling down fast. I have been listening to Coldplay's 'Politik' non-stop since 9 a.m. Either the world is not worth commenting on or I am just plain lazy.

:: salam pax 11:39 AM [+] ::

### Saturday, 5 October 2002

Really had a good weekend. You should have been here. G. called late on Thursday and said he is conducting an experiment with Laurent. It involves three glasses and a bottle of cheap, cheap vodka. I think: 'What the hell? It'll either make me feel worse or it'll make me want to kill myself.' Having prepared razor blades for my wrist-slashing activities at three in the morning, I changed and took a taxi (the driver made me wish I had those blades with me to draw a mark on my wrist every time he bitched about life – 'Stop it, fucker! My blood will be on *your* hands!')

Aaaannnnnyway. I get to G.'s place with major psychological damage. G. reads books in the correct atmospheric conditions. You know, he once read a book about the tribes of the Arabian desert without having the air-conditioning on (that's, like, 46°C at night!). Now he's reading Rushdie's *Shame* while burning incense and drinking vodka-and-OJ in a coffee mug and wearing his bed sheets like a sarong, which is very much like shame. I love his sense for the theatrical.

Over at Laurent's it is more candlelight and incense (dammit, oriental philanthropists think it's cool . . . Give me L'eau D'Issey air-fresh-

ener NOW!) and lots of vodka in glasses which don't stand straight. That was very unsettling. Never do that to someone in a place with too much incense, especially when they're in a suicidal mood. The glasses have a sloping bottom and I'm thinking 'Why won't my drink settle in my glass??' Is that what you see when you are ready to die?? After the third drink it doesn't matter anymore and we are in the middle of the most insane discussions. Around 2 a.m. Laurent demonstrates how ARAK burns with a beautiful blue flame and downs a small glass of the stuff, just like that. I'm thinking 'Eeewww! I can't even smell arak.' After that he demands that we all go to ZarZur's and have kebabs (Note: ZarZurs was closed twice for not abiding to basic health regulations – I worry that dying of food poisoning is not as dramatic as slashing your wrists, but the thought evaporates). Next we have a drunk – really drunk – French dude driving us thru Baghdad, while we discuss cultural imperialism. He almost drives us thru the gates of one of the presidential palaces and the two Iraqi passengers scream in panic, while the two non-Iraqis think we are hilarious and laugh. The discussion goes on at ZarZur's. The waiters like us so much we get all the extra salad we ask for.

Back at Laurent's there's still some alcohol to go thru and it is at that point things start getting interesting: G. knows a guy who is selling these Sumerian cylindrical clay objects (they're tiny – 5cm max – but they look like the real thing) and coins from the Abbasid era (various caliphs). Nothing costs more than 20 bucks and he has jars full of these things. He says it is from a place near his village. They have used brick from the site to build furnaces – hehehe. Bread baked in ancient Sumerian ovens – go baby go!

A couple of months ago I saw one of these Sumerian thingies sold at eBay for around \$400 and it was not authenticated – it only had an expert opinion stating that it looked genuine. After a quick drunken calculation I am filthy rich – beautiful hunks queuing up to give me foot massages . . . Now, if only the Evil\_Boss\_Creature gives me my paycheck . . .

Home at 6 a.m. and sleep till 2 p.m., dreaming of riches.

You should have been here.

And more good news: I moved from 'Politik' to 'A Smile Upon Your

Face' on Coldplay's album. Three tracks in as many days now – that's what I call progress!

:: salam pax 9:45 PM [+] ::

### Sunday, 6 October 2002

Googlefight! Googlefight! Googlefight!\*

Raed vs Salam.

Salam wins with a whopping 268,000 hits, compared to Raed's weak 17,700. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen and goodnight.

and I had to try this\*\* . . . ouch! they beat the shit out of us . . . how prophetic . . .

:: salam pax 2:13 PM [+] ::

### Wednesday, 9 October 2002

Real-Life™ by GOD Inc. is not the greatest software available. The system crashes whenever I run the damn program . . . The SIMS are much more fun. Just felt like sharing that.

:: salam pax 11:57 AM [+] ::

Thank you for the excellent Counterpunch link. I mean, where else can you read articles with headlines like: "After all, he tried to kill my dad!": Iraq as an American projection.'\*\*\*

No, that's not the link to the article, it's a link to L. Monkey's . . . umm . . . remix. I do think he's right, but the whole thing probably sounds too biased for many people, and try publishing something like that in most of Europe and you get ANTI-SEMITISM stamped on your forehead. But boy, is it fun to read.

\* www.googlefight.com.

\*\* Salam entered the keywords 'Iraq' and 'USA' into the search engine. 'Iraq' scored 14,300,000, but 'USA' scored 69,900,000.

\*\*\* vaspider.surreally.net.

Now this next article is grrrrreat. I bet you haven't read something like it during all this media-on-war block party:

. . . but there is one other little-known scenario, based on the American leadership's theological belief system. Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney and Attorney-General John Ashcroft are all self-professed Evangelical or Born-Again Christians, and like their co-religionists could well believe in the Bible's end-time prophecies to the letter. *Such Messianic prophecies include the stipulation that before the Messiah can return to earth, there will be a major East-West war and the Jews must rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.*\*

You see, they are preparing for the return of the Messiah. It's the end of days scenario, stupid!

I wonder if anyone has bought the film rights yet?

:: salam pax 12:35 PM [+] ::

Hey. I have exceeded my bandwidth limit again.

Raed, see what you have done by not paying for my image-hosting account. I can't live on 5MB a day . . .

:: salam pax 1:30 PM [+] ::

### Thursday, 10 October 2002

For how much would you sell your kidney?

Salah sold his for \$250. His fiancée sold hers as well, for the same price. They've been engaged for a while and they needed the \$500 (that's equivalent to a million Iraqi dinars) to build two extra rooms in his parents' house for them to live in. I know this because a relative of mine was the buyer.

Breathe in. Change the subject.

Just in case you didn't know, next Sunday is Zacharia's Day; just so

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\* 'Might Sharon Nuke Iraq? How Things Could Go Bad, Very Bad' (2 October 2002) by Linda S. Heard at [www.counterpunch.org](http://www.counterpunch.org).

that you can all get yourselves ready. You know . . . John the Baptist's father. The same story as in the Bible is in the Koran. No-kids-old-guy gets a surprise package via the heavenly express and what does he find? A boy! So, if a woman wishes for a boy on Zacharia's Day and gets one she gives thanks by fasting on that day and giving candles to boys and Arabic drums (*tablas*) to girls. Not exactly subtle symbolism, eh?

And do you know how the wishes are made? You get a boy's candle and stick a needle in it. Ouch. How fast can you say 'penis-envy'? And since my mother has been 'blessed' twice, she has this big do every year. I personally think she's been cheated. I can't see her pricking that candle really hard and thinking 'A heretic idiot, pleeeeee.' Does Mr Z. give refunds?

So boys and girls, get those candles and needles ready. I tell you, I'm hiding my candle where no one but me will be sticking any needles in it – get your own candle you evil witch, this one is mine. I wonder, if I start sticking the needles in it now will the boys be delivered by Sunday? Well, it doesn't hurt to try.

My weekend starts here – and my religious beliefs don't allow me to blog on a Friday.

Raed, you'd better have a comment on each and every single entry you've missed the last couple of days – or a good explanation e-mailed NOW! If Tota is there and has you tied to the bed, you're already forgiven.

Tell her Salam says Hi.

:: salam pax 5:00 PM [+] ::

### Saturday, 12 October 2002

**The White House is developing a detailed plan to install an American-led military government in Iraq if the United States topples Saddam Hussein. The plan also calls for a transition to an elected civilian government that could take months or years.**\*

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\* 'US Has a Plan to Occupy Iraq, Officials Report' (11 October 2002) by David E. Sanger and Eric Schmitt, in the *New York Times* ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)).

Excuse me. But don't expect me to buy little American flags to welcome the new colonists. This is really just a bad remake of an even worse movie. And how does it differ from Iraq and Britain circa 1920? The civilized world comes to give us, the barbaric nomadic Arabs, a lesson in better living and rid us of all evil (better still, get rid of us Arabs since we're all evil).

Yeah, go ahead. Just flush all the efforts of people who were sincere in their fight for an independent Iraq down the drain. People fought, demonstrated and died so that my generation gets to see all their dreams turned upside down – twice. First by You-Know-Who and the second time by becoming a colony all over again.

God, I feel sorry for anyone who has ever had an ideal and fought for it. I feel sorry for every revolutionary Iraqi who ever wrote a book or a poem and got executed because of it. If they'd only known that this was going to happen – that it would all just end up being another colony – they wouldn't have bothered. It's much better to spend your time on sex, drugs and belly dancers. Uncle Sam is going to come and tell you how to run a country properly and how to spend your money on weapons from him – 'Don't go buying useless Chinese technology, habibi.'

**It would put an American officer in charge of Iraq for a year or more while the United States and its allies searched for weapons and maintained Iraq's oil fields. For as long as the coalition partners administered Iraq, they would essentially control the second largest proven reserves of oil in the world, nearly 11 per cent of the total. A senior administration official said the United Nations oil-for-food program would be expanded to help finance stabilization and reconstruction.\***

[uncle\_sam\_unit]: I told you not to worry about the cost, baby, you'll pay for it.

[salam]: Do I have a choice, Sam? Say, what if I don't like what you're doing?

[uncle\_sam\_unit]: No, you don't have a choice and I'm telling you you'll love it!

What is truly ironic is that the Bush administration is using the same

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\* See note on previous page.

argument that Saddam used to invade Kuwait for their invasion of Iraq. 'National security concerns' and 'helping the poor bastards over there to get rid of that evil government'. At least try to be original. I tell you it is about greed and power – it always is. Me and you are only a future statistic. The question is, in which column will we be listed: DEAD or INJURED?

:: salam pax 8:06 PM [+] ::

## Tuesday, 15 October 2002

Raed sent a long e-mail (i.e. more than five words) saying that this is turning into a war-blog and he doesn't like it. So, I am toning things down; because if he doesn't like me anymore, I'll actually have to pay for accommodation when I'm next in Jordan and I would like to go there for a week before getting blasted out of the solar system.

First, I want to tell you that I am a happy YES voter. I didn't really read what was written on the piece of paper, but I know the answer is YES. And the whole voting centre I went to also knows I have ticked the YES box, because, you see, I had forgotten my glasses and I needed someone to show me which box to mark for the affirmative. This was asked loud enough for everyone to hear – no need for booths or secrecy.

Outside they were already celebrating, although the voting centres had only just opened. They had sweets and dates and cinnamon-flavoured tea. Personally, I prefer my *chai* flavoured with mint leaves and they had *no* coffee! (I need coffee – at home my family is always hiding the coffee from me. I need caffeine.) So, I stood there for a while watching kids with plastic flowers jump around. We have the day off and I didn't want to go back home, because since last Saturday the house feels like a dorm.

At first it was OK. They were just here to help my mother with this Zacharia's Day thing. Now I have a tiny cousin playing video games downstairs; another watching WWF smackdown videos upstairs; another studying in my bedroom; and still another at my computer browsing thru Saudi discussion boards with subjects like 'What does the man of your dreams look like?'



Last night, while wondering whether to watch semi-naked musclemen wrestle or tell 'whisper of the night' what the man of my dreams looks like, I realized that I really needed to get loaded.

A quick call to cousin No. 246 (yes I have far too many – my mother has eight sisters and brothers) and he's OK with it, but we have to hurry because all off-licence stores close by 10 p.m. and there are no bars/clubs/restaurants where drinks are served (in addition to that, no alcohol on Fridays, religious holidays and, most distressingly, the whole month of Ramadan).

We get to our friendly Satan's Beverages Dealer just as he is turning his lights off. He sees the desperation in my eyes, smiles, and tells us that he has no local beer left, only imported stuff. Man, I haven't been paid in two months. I don't want to buy imported, give me cheap local poison. Satan's Beverages Dealer just smiles. I buy whatever he has and look at his son. He's not more than seven years old and is drinking Laziza, a non-alcoholic beer. Now what is that kid doing with Laziza? His father looks at him with amusement as the tiny Satan smashes the bottle on the pavement. I can't deal with this any longer. I go hide in the car while my cousin is giving Satan's Beverages Dealer his money. Tiny Satan waves goodbye.

Blast fills the screen.

Fade to black.

Credits.

:: salam pax 2:37 PM [+] ::

### Wednesday, 16 October 2002

I am very impressed! Jim Henley's website Unqualified Offerings: War, Peace, Freedom, Fish, More\* has a very well-informed source. Now, let's see if his source can tell him what happened to the phonelines since Monday. Back to you, Mr Henley.

:: salam pax 12:53 PM [+] ::

\* Unqualified Offerings ('Peace Now! Socialism never!'): [www.highclearing.com](http://www.highclearing.com).

### Thursday, 17 October 2002

By some unthinkable means, Diana\* manages to make me tell her things I shouldn't. I just can't help myself. And look where it got me. Today she sends me this link from the *Los Angeles Times* and asks if the tribal leader they talk about is my grandad:

**Shwerid serves as a mediator in disputes, both civil and criminal. Although he is careful not to place himself above national law, his followers often turn to him, rather than the Iraqi courts, to resolve disputes.\*\***

Before you read the rest of the paragraph, please bear this in mind: national law is a farce because of the corruptibility of the system. People don't bother to call the police when there's trouble, because they'll just write the report in favour of whoever pays the most. Now you can gasp at what comes next:

**For example, if one person kills another on purpose, Shwerid will order the aggressor to pay the victim's family \$7,000 in blood money.**

Now *that* is a lie. Shame on you, Shwerid – and you call yourself a tribal leader . . .

Well, if *you* pay \$7,000 in blood money, that's just because you're a foreigner and they always get inflated prices. Get someone local to bargain for you and you'll get away with paying only \$1,000 – \$2,000 max. Really. Unless you were really bad and shot someone very important in the tribe – the leader's son for example. Then you'll have to pay four times as much as the amount you would have to pay for killing a regular Joe.

Now before you start your rants and flames and angry disgusted e-mails, please remember what I wrote above. The law has very little influence deep in rural areas and this is meant to be a deterrent, not a pay-per-kill scheme.

\* Diana at Letter from Gotham: [letterfromgotham.blogspot.com](http://letterfromgotham.blogspot.com).  
\*\* From an article in the *LA Times* ([www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)).

Back to sheikh Shwerid:

**'Yes, we will resist anyone who comes here, using our own weapons,' Shwerid said, while seated inside a guest house he uses to greet tribal members who travel from around the country seeking his help and advice. 'The tribe is fully co-operating with the Government.'**

Of course, by 'here' Shwerid means his and the tribe members' land. It has nothing to do with the Government. These people live off the land and it is the most prized possession you can get in Iraq: fertile land. So what do you do when you see a mob of armed people coming towards you? You defend your land, crops and families. And if you are a strong tribe in the area, you keep all the other tribes in check: 'Don't hurt my land and I won't hurt you.' It just happened as a side-effect that the Government benefited from the control these strong tribes exercised in certain areas. But the government quickly realized the potential and 'nurtured them, winning their good favor with money and supplies' – and gave them fancy cars imported as part of the food for oil programme.

By Allah, she made me do it again! OK, I have *not* told you this.

Diana, in answer to your question: no, this is not my grandad. But sheikh Shwerid sure makes me feel like a 'bargain-basement' person. I hope no one hears we come that cheap per shot. My tribal leader has to get his pricing policy up to date and fast.

:: salam pax 3:42 AM [+] ::

A German scientist thinks that he can tell which of the Saddams are the fake ones and which is the real. This was reported on German television around the 26th of September. Check it on msnbc.com, news24.com or (where they really got into the spirit of the report and started looking for *doppelgänger*s everywhere) at FM4 discussion boards – it's in German.

To demonstrate this amazing ability to analyse facial features, the *New York Times* has put up this interactive thingy.\* Go check it. It's

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\* 'Will the Real Saddam Hussein Please Step Down?' (6 October 2002) by Tom Zeller (www.nytimes.com).

a joke. Go to the link which says 'Can you spot Saddam?' and check the answer.

It tells me nothing. Of course the guy looks different than the other pictures, because the one Dr Dieter thinks is the real deal was shot sometime in the early 1970s, while the other three are very recent photos (as in this-year/last-year recent). Can't they allow a guy to grow and wrinkle a bit? Yes he might have doubles, but Dr Dieter proved nothing.

:: salam pax 1:42 PM [+] ::

## Sunday, 20 October 2002

**'We'll happily watch the American bullets fly over our heads at first,' said one disgruntled intellectual. 'But after a two-year honeymoon we'll be shooting at them. Iraqis will never, ever be ruled by foreigners.'**\*

I'm afraid most Iraqis fail to understand what will be brought about by an American 'invasion'. It should be seen as a catalyst for change. We have to do the hard work ourselves. Change has to come from within. It's no use just sitting back and waiting for others to solve our problems. And Iraq will be ruled by foreigners if Iraqis don't take an active part in whatever happens. The problem is that years of being told what to do has turned us into a bunch of fatalists who see whatever happens to us as *maktub* – written by the hand of God – and submit to it, like all good faithful people should.

FunFact of the day: when was the last time the Iraqi 'man-in-the-street' had the right to express an honest and free opinion about the Government's policies?

Answer: 1962. That's forty years ago.

I can only hope that our American friends don't forget to bring extra copies of *Democracy for Dummies* and *Make a Decision: It's Not as Hard as it Sounds* with them.

The quote above is taken from an article in *The Economist*. You

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\* 'Waiting, with bravado and anxiety' (17 October 2002) in *The Economist* (economist.com).

should go and read it. What I really like about the article is that it reads like a How Iraqis Feel Today guide. It's all here . . .

The bitterness brought on by years of sanctions and poverty:

**'Assuming I were to say I don't like our president, I still believe many of his positions are just,' said a Baghdad accountant-turned-taxi-driver. 'Do Americans think forcing me to look for fares, just so I can send my children to school wearing shoes, is just?'**

The effect of years and years of propaganda (and believe me, it works – you won't discuss something that became a 'fact' after having it hammered into your head time after time. You don't think. You have learned all the answers by heart without even knowing it):

**The hostility to America, echoed by a range of Iraqis, from a successful Baghdad sculptor to a village share-cropper, is understandable. Relentlessly repeated footage of Israeli brutality, often juxtaposed with images of 'collateral damage' from American bombing in Afghanistan and in Iraq's 'no-fly zones', fill the state-controlled airwaves.**

The fear of seeing old grudges resurface if the country falls into chaos:

**The small Christian minority, fairly prosperous but decimated by emigration, worries that without the protection of the secular Baathists, the Muslim religious revival which has swept the country could turn against them. Sunni Muslims, who are over-represented in government but vastly outnumbered by the Shia, fear losing their traditional dominance. Loyalists in the Baath Party and in dozens of Arab tribes – including Shia as well as Sunni clans – fear retribution.**

Actually, I don't get the 'secular Baathists' part. The Muslim religious revival is heavily sponsored by the Party.\* Whatever.

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\* The word 'Baath' means 'Renaissance' in Arabic. The original Arab Socialist Baath Party was founded in Syria in the 1940s. The Iraqi Baath Party was founded in 1951. Saddam Hussein joined it in 1956 and the Party came to power on 8 February 1963 in a coup backed by the army, overthrowing Brigadier Abdel Karim Qasim (who had previously overthrown the British-installed Iraqi monarchy in 1958). Saddam Hussein was elected Assistant General Secretary of the Party in 1966 and staged a successful coup in 1968. From 1979 to 2003 he was the President, Head of the Revolutionary Command Council and Secretary General of the Baath Party.

And finally, a general discontent at how bad things have become:

**Baghdad, once a city of broad avenues, villas and European-standard public housing, now looks more like Kinshasa, Congo's sad capital, complete with lakes of sewage, piles of trash, beggars and straggling flea markets.**

I usually have more fun when I can disagree with western journalists. Maybe if I read it again I can find something.

Totally off the subject: I am compiling a Top Five list of my favourite Iraqi anti-Bush slogans in English. At the moment I have two competing for the top spot: 'Bush Go Hell!' and 'Down Down Bush and his Tail Blair!'

:: salam pax 1:56 AM [+]

**Last March, Arraf published a piece in London's *Daily Telegraph* [in which] she wrote: 'People in the streets are not allowed to talk to television journalists; or rather, the journalists are not allowed to talk to them. "Why do you want to ask them political questions? They are not qualified to answer," an official said . . .'**\*

Well . . . if this is true, why are British journalists interviewing people up and down the country? It looks like you're going to bump into a British journalist just by standing in the street. *The Economist* has an article with interviews and here are two more from the *Guardian* website: "But why do they hate us?" Iraqis face up to the threat of a US attack' and 'X marks the despot: Bombing Iraq into democracy could well prove counterproductive'.\*\*

I demand to be interviewed. I'm going to stand all day in Arasat Street, because Mr Rory McCarthy seems to be spending a lot of time there, he knows so much about it:

**The shops in Baghdad's Arasat Street reek of the opulence of corrupt Third World élites. Wide-screen televisions sell for hundreds of pounds alongside shops that specialise in original chrome parts for**

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\* From an article in *The New Republic* (ssl.com).

\*\* "But why do they hate us?" Iraqis face up to the threat of a US attack' (20 October 2002) by Rory McCarthy. 'X marks the despot: Bombing Iraq into democracy could well prove counterproductive' (16 October 2002) by Brian Whitaker (www.guardian.co.uk).

Toyota Land Cruisers. Supermarkets sell foreign cigarettes and under-the-counter Cuban cigars at £100 a box. Every other car on the road is a new BMW or Mercedes-Benz. All this in a country in which UN sanctions have supposedly strictly limited imports to humanitarian goods alone.

Yeah. And there's a single yellow new VW Beetle that cruises that street as well. Actually it's probably just as well that Mr McCarthy stays in Arasat Street, foreigners seem to develop strange ailments if they eat anywhere else.

:: salam pax 11:35 AM [+] ::

**Tuesday, 22 October 2002**

I should write something about this, but I can't.\* So the amnesty states that all political prisoners can go. So where is H.? They said that this amnesty should leave no one in prison within 48 hours, so where is he? I want him to be at home, safe. I can't keep calling his brother only to hear that there is still no news.

:: salam pax 4:00 AM [+] ::

**Wednesday, 23 October 2002**

Raed, I'm sorry but David Bowie's song 'I'm Afraid of Americans' is stuck in my head and I can't think of anything else to write.

Actually . . . there is a lot to write about, but it doesn't matter. H. is not home yet. From what I have heard today I should brace myself for bad news. Political prisoners have been dealt with. Light a candle for me will you, Raed? Keeping myself together takes effort the last two days.

And forget about the trip to Amman. You asked about what is happening at the Jordanian border a couple of days ago. Well, Jordanians are not letting thru any Iraqi under the age of fifty. Guess why? Because the American and the Israeli army are play-

\* 'Saddam sets free political prisoners' (21 October 2002) by Rory McCarthy (www.guardian.co.uk).

ing war games in the western (well, eastern for Jordan) desert. And the Jordanians are bending over to make sure that the Amis are getting as deep as they want to. Yeah, me-love-you-long-time – no need for lube either. The war hasn't started and we are already imprisoned in Iraq. Jordan isn't letting anyone thru its borders and neither is Iran (look for it yourself. I can't be bothered. I read it in the *New York Times* a couple of days ago) and do you know what else I read in the *New York Times*? The American troops they are studying how the Israeli army fought in Jenin.

Jenin. Remember how Jenin looked like after the siege? How comforting is that?

Excuse me, but I need to listen to some angry-boy-music and bang my head against a wall and bleed; it will make me feel better, I'm sure. Have I told you already that I hate the world?

P.S. Raed, don't even think about coming to Baghdad the next couple of days/weeks. You might not be able to go back to Jordan. Besides, I don't want you here the next couple of days. I am planning on spending them in a drunken haze. I do not want you near me.

Love,  
Salam

:: salam pax 4:13 AM [+] ::

Draft of the US-British Resolution on Iraq: ' . . . in order to restore international peace and security.'

Peace and Security. Ha.

Bomb us, already. Stop pussyfooting.

:: salam pax 11:56 AM [+] ::

**Thursday, 24 October 2002**

Today I am not going to read any news and I'm only going to watch So 80's on VH1 – and tell you about things that made me smile.

Learn of knowledge  
was the  
served  
by  
foreign  
media

1. Reading the e-mails I got from the Legendary Monkey, Kashei\* and Diana. Thank you. Warm fuzzies have never felt better.
2. Having one of my posts chosen as 'Slogan of the Day' on Samizdata.net and receiving the 'dubious honour of a permanent link'. Expect a lot of blog-related terminology in the future. Fear my blog-cabulary.\*\*
3. E-mail from Joe Schmo of [www.boredshitless.com](http://www.boredshitless.com) asking Who-the-hell-are-you?-type questions. You'll get your answers but, believe me, Diana will still know more – she has ways. Is 'tele-hypnosis' a word? Joe has added me to the links on his blog. I am one of the new links and so is Letter from Gotham [letterfrom-gotham.blogspot.com] (that does make me feel kinda special).
4. My younger brother deciding to start his own groupblog with a couple of friends around the world. I have finally corrupted him. Now I can pretend that I am not reading his weblog, just like he pretends he doesn't read mine. A BLOG FOR EVERY IRAQ!! – that will be my campaign slogan.
5. The secretary at the office finally stopped hiding the solitaire game she is playing on her computer after I showed her my favourite online silly games. Next step is to stage a demonstration against the oppressive rule of Evil\_Boss\_Unit.

:: salam pax 1:30 PM [+] ::

### Sunday, 27 October 2002

Looking thru the *New York Times* e-mail alerts I see this: '12 Americans Stage Protest Hussein Is Happy to Allow'.\*\*\* I read thru it wondering if Mr JOHN F. BURNS is reporting news from the same Baghdad I live in. Nothing in the news about it and no one at work making any look-at-those-poor-deluded-souls-going-at-it-again comments (which is one of two responses to this sort of thing – the other being 'I wonder how much money are they getting as a

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\* [www.alarminingnews.com](http://www.alarminingnews.com), hosted by Kashei and Peter.

\*\* [www.samizdata.net/blog/glossary.html](http://www.samizdata.net/blog/glossary.html).

\*\*\* An article by John F. Burns, 27 October 2002 ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)).

"thank-you" gift from Saddam?). Half-way thru the article Mr Burns does say that there was virtually no Iraqi media present at the 'protest'. Right on. Ms Kelly might as well have staged that protest in her bathroom.

Dear American friends, please stop sending her over here. She is not helping. Some people might think that this is the sort of thing I like to see happening. It is NOT. Kelly, baby, you have been used. They have put you on show for the westerners. For me, personally, I lost interest when you were quoted saying things like: 'I wish people in our country would be willing to show the same *spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation* to the two million people in our prisons.'

I think you'd better take your 'thank-you' gift and leave. Fast. It feels like you're stepping on my toes. And I pray for 'your' prisoners that they are not shown the exact same 'spirit of (no-trial-just-shoot-them-I-don't-want-to-worry-about-them) forgiveness'.

I would have loved to shake you by the hand and give you a 'thank-you' hug, but that statement . . . tsk tsk tsk.

Is she really that naive or just trying to stay on the right side of the red line? I would forgive her for the latter. Everybody has to make a living, somehow.

:: salam pax 7:10 PM [+] ::

### Tuesday, 29 October 2002

Which is sexier? To be a CIA put-up or a propaganda ploy?

A week ago Kathy K. of On the Third Hand [[site-essential.com](http://site-essential.com)] linked to a post on my site and at the end of her comments about the post she wrote 'I've been watching him for a while, and I think he's real.'

I linked back to her, saying 'I'm for real. Really.'

Actually, almost everyone who has linked to me either wrote in their weblog that they wonder if it is for real or e-mailed me asking – with the exception of the Legendary Monkey. That's because she is Legendary. She just *knows*.

But Al from Culpepper Log\* thought the whole issue of my 'realness' was worth writing about. So over to you Al:

... [the blog] fascinates me on a couple of general grounds. First, I'm damned curious what people in Iraq (and the whole Middle East, for that matter) really think of the US. [...] Do they mostly even kind of half believe the Baath Party American Satan thing? [Well, we did have another Satan. During the 1980s Ayatollah Khomeini was the Shaitan before America, but now we are friends with Iran so America gets to be the new Shaitan. Very Orwellian, eh?]

Do they anxiously await us to come 'liberate' them, as our government generally insists they will? [Oh-oh ... did he say 'liberate'?] Raed seems to welcome our prospective liberation [whaaa? Which part of my rant wasn't clear enough and please don't use that word again it hurts] – if perhaps with some trepidation. 'Ha. Bomb us already. Stop pussyfooting.' [That post was meant to be sarcastic, or do you really believe that resolution will restore international peace and security? And there is more ...] The site looks believable. Also, however, I WANT to believe. [Here he links to the X-Files site – he also thinks I'm from planet K-Pax, apparently.] This alone makes me a little suspicious. They have a somewhat cynical and fatalistic tone that I'd find likely. There are cryptic personal notes. [These notes are not cryptic. This is Arablish. Because most of the world thinks that communication revolves around the English language we have to adapt our language to these non-Arabic enabled systems. Ya3ni lo a77'i inglizi lo 2aba6il.]\*\* The use of the English language is convincingly rough. [Oh maaan, I have been told numerous times that my Arabic is rough. I know my German is rough and now my English is rough. I blame my parents for moving me around every five years. I need a mother tongue. Should I try Esperanto??] But does that really mean that it's real? If someone at the CIA were trying to construct a convincing fake Iraqi website for our domestic consumption, it would probably look somewhat like this. [Excuse my rough English, but what 'consumption'?? I average 20 hits a day on a good week, unless Instapundit links to me or – ohmigod – Instapundit is the CIA too!] If 'Raed' is a fake, it's a fairly convincing one. [Raed, baby, I always knew you were a fake. Salam rules. Yeah!]

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\* Al Barger, host of Culpepper Log: [www.morethings.com/log/](http://www.morethings.com/log/).

\*\* 'You mean I either speak English or nothing at all'.

At least he gets one thing right:

**He can't really be expected to prove himself. He's writing stuff that would get him shot in a second if Hussein's goons found him.**

What you really missed is that I am not Raed. Look again at who is posting. You didn't even bother to do that? Well, it happens when one is too concerned about conspiracy theories and the like.

One more correction, neither I nor Raed are 'regular Joes'. Actually most regular Joes would look at us suspiciously. I have spent half of my life out of this country and had to be taught how to re-grow my roots by someone who isn't even Iraqi by nationality, he just loves the place (thank you, Raed). We both have a mistrust of religion and have read the *Tao Te Ching* with more interest than the Koran. And we both have mouths which have gotten us into trouble. The regular Joe would be more inclined to beat the shit out of us infidels.

Go ask Diana. She knows.

UPDATE: [letterfromgotham.blogspot.com](http://letterfromgotham.blogspot.com) also comes to the rescue: 'bloggadavit about the authenticity of one Salam Pax of Baghdad.'

o salam pax 5:15 PM [+]

You would have thought that an almost-war-declaration would have more dramatic wording than:

**ACTING under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, DECIDES that Iraq has failed to take the final opportunity afforded it in Resolution 1441 (2002).**

They definitely need a better script writer for that show, but I guess that is what CNN and the rest are for.

The wise oracle of Gotham\* predicts that You-Know-Who will be history by the 18th of March, but she won't say how she got that date. C'mon, spill it! Whatwhywhere? And she also invited me to tea at the Palm Court if I ever came to NYC. Alrighty, who said you can't get a classy date thru the Internet?

:: salam 10:58 AM [+] ::

\* Diana, at [www.letterfromgotham.blogspot.com](http://www.letterfromgotham.blogspot.com).

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## > March 2003

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### Saturday, 1 March 2003

It is nice to see the Office of the Iraq Oil-for-Food program rise to the occasion and redo their site. With all the attention it is going to get if the program stays intact after an 'invasion', they really needed a better image. Their site looked hideous. Now they have this nifty map and even pictures. Go take a look.\*

:: salam 11:41 AM [+] ::

### Sunday, 2 March 2003

I wasn't going to write about this, but since the *Guardian* has mentioned it, I won't be giving away any state secrets.

Have you read this article on the *Guardian's* website: 'The big match unites a country of two halves: Luke Harding, in Irbil, sees a top Baghdad soccer team take on Kurdish.'

It's just a filler, nothing really interesting, and if you did read it you probably just skimmed over this paragraph:

**To reach Irbil, the Baghdad players had to travel across a reinforced Iraqi frontline, past freshly dug army trenches filled with oil, and up into the mountains of Kurdistan.**

Blink and you miss it. You still didn't see it? Listen: Freshly. Dug. Army. Trenches. *Filled with oil.*

\* [un.org/depts/oip](http://un.org/depts/oip).

Story time: A week ago on the way to work I saw a huge column of blackest-black smoke coming from the direction of the Dorah refinery, which is within Baghdad city limits – thought nothing of it really. A couple of weeks earlier to that, a fuel tank near the Rasheed army camp exploded and it looked the same – stuff like that happens. My father was driving thru the area later and he said it looked like they were burning excess or wasted oil. Well, they were never environmentalists to start with – if they didn't burn it, they would have dumped it in the river or something.

The smoke was there for three days and the column could be seen from all over Baghdad being dragged in a line across the sky by the winds. During the same time and on the same road I take to work, I see two HUGE trenches being dug. It looked like they were going to put some sort of machinery in it, wide enough for a truck to drive thru and would easily take three big trucks.

A couple of days after the smoke-show over Baghdad, I and my father are going past these trenches and we see oil being dumped into the trenches. You could hear my brain going into action. My father gave me the shut-up-u-nutty-paranoid-freak look, but I knew it was true. The last two days everybody talks about it. They are planning to make a smoke-screen of some sorts using black crude oil. Actually, rumour has it that they have been experimenting with various fuel mixtures to see what would produce the blackest, vilest smoke and the three days of smoke from Dorah was the final test.

Around Baghdad they would probably go roughly along the green belt, which was conceived to stop the sandstorms coming from the western deserts. I have no idea how a smoke-screen can be of any use, except make sure that the people in Baghdad die of asphyxiation and covered in soot. I think I will be getting those gas masks after all.

FunFact: After the oil wells in Kuwait were set on fire and the whole region covered in the blackest and ugliest cloud, it rained for days on Baghdad, washing everything with black water from the sky – the marks took a year to wash out. I think Salman Rushdie would have found this very amusing. Characters in his novels are always haunted by things past in the strangest ways, the shame of your actions following you and then washing you with its black water –

no ablutions for you, Mr H., watch your city covered with the shame of your actions. We have an expression – *skham wjijh* – which roughly translates to 'face covered with soot' and is used to describe someone who has done something utterly disgraceful. Getting your city covered with *skham* once has to haunt you for the rest of your life; but now we get *Skham from the Sky II: The Return of the Evil Cloud*. The world is just a re-run of bad movies, but Mr W. Bush already beat me to that expression.

:: salam 12:35 PM [+] ::

### Wednesday, 5 March 2003

Bigger, better, faster – so stop harassing me about the font size. And I promise I will have a proper post later today. I have been a bit lazy. My mind is full of fuzz and number 18s – that's your fault. It *is* a super cool idea really, and will fit with so many conspiracy theories type of stuff, but you'll have to make her tell you about it on the 19th.\*

Since last night Google.com and msn.com are blocked. All the usual news sites are still accessible – even Google news, only the search gets you the **YOUR ACCESS HAS BEEN DENIED** page.

:: salam 11:03 AM [+] ::

### Thursday, 6 March 2003

Article in the CSmonitor.com.\*\* You see that woman on the right of the pic? Her name is not Janon, as the article says, it is Jinan (it means 'heavens') and she is the evil witch of the Department of Architecture. You can see it in her smile. The woman on the left makes the whole engineering college march to her whistle. Really very strong and well-known women in the College of Engineering. One of them has a very eloquent daughter apparently:

'I hope they see us as people,' says the increasingly anxious Nihal,

\* This refers to Gotham's oracle: [www.letterfromgotham.blogspot.com](http://www.letterfromgotham.blogspot.com).  
 \*\* 'US-taught Iraqis feel war's weight' (5 March 2003) by Scott Peterson ([www.csmonitor.com/2003/0305/p01s04-woiq.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0305/p01s04-woiq.html)).



in a separate interview. 'It's a feeling you can't describe. You worry about yourself and your family and aunts and uncles in their houses – it's like your heart is in a million pieces all over the place and you don't know how to keep it together.'

And Jinan kicks ass too:

'It's funny,' she says of the cultural disconnect. 'Why should we be sitting here trying to convince you that we are OK? Why should I have to make you feel like we are people worth living?'

The dinar is miraculously keeping its cool and is still around the 2,360 for a dollar. The lowest it ever got during the last ten years was 2,500 for a dollar, but I think we will hit that bottom in the next couple of weeks. A relative of mine who works at a bank says that everybody who comes into the bank is complaining that *al suq waguf* ('the market is at a standstill'). They are a 'private bank' – there is no such thing as a private bank really, they are all partially owned by the state – and have been told to stock up on biscuits, dates and water. Can't imagine why – as if anyone is going to come to work when things start dropping on our heads. But to be fair, after Gulf War I the banks opened pretty fast. People who lived near their workplace and could walk to work did just that. The banks limited the amount you are allowed to take from your account to 100 dinars, which was around \$200 or so at the time. Today, 100 dinars buys me a pack of local chemical-flavour bubble gum.

Since we are talking about money, today was pay-day. It is amazing what the sentence 'We're sorry, but you know how things are at the moment blah blah blah' can do to your paycheck. In one single year I have gone down from \$200 to \$100 and hit rock bottom at \$50. In retrospect, deciding to go back to living with my parents was the wisest decision I have made for quite a while. My friend G. is getting half his salary in money and the rest in alcohol – really, no joke. But good imported stuff which we wouldn't buy anyway. His fatcat-filthy-rich boss turned seriously Muslim and is giving away his stash of the devil's beverages. Good for us, I say.

Human Shields Bashing #124

**'Basically, they said we are not going to feed you any longer,' said**

**John Ross, an American who has been active in radical causes since he tore up his draft card in 1964.\***

Excuse while I wipe the tears from my eyes. Out! Out! Out! He could have at least said something more in line with his 'radical cause'. This is a bit insulting, actually. For some reason I feel offended. FEED YOU? Why does the Iraqi government have to frigin' feed you? You have volunteered to 'help' in a country which can't feed its own population properly (well, it could if it spent a bit less on people like *you*).

There is another good bit:

**The activists accused the Iraqi authorities of trying to use them as pawns in the war with America.**

Oh, shockhorror! What a surprise! Back to where you came from. Don't wait for thank-you speeches – Out! Out! Out!

**The bitter flight from Iraq follows a showdown with the Iraqi authorities who demanded that they decamp from their hotels in central Baghdad and take up their self-assigned roles as civilian protectors.**

No no, just stay in your hotels, buy souvenirs and make fun of the backward ways of these Iraqis. Hope you sent all your friends post-cards telling them about the pitta and tahini you have been eating while strolling around Baghdad, you tourists. Did you take enough pictures of children begging in the streets to show your friends back home how much you care about the plight of the poor in the Third World? Bet they were all shaking hands and promising to see each other at the next 'worthy cause' party.

Today is *mumarasa* ('practice') day in Baghdad. (~~Maybe tomorrow~~ ~~nope~~, I checked, it was a one-day thing.) All the security forces – police, civil defence units and the like, excluding the army – are going thru the motions. Besides parading up and down all over the country, all units were supposed to go thru the events of an 'emergency situation'. The funniest were the policemen. They have been issued army helmets with green camouflage fluff on it. All the main

\* 'Human Shield cracks on Baghdad's cynicism' (3 March 2003) by Suzanne Goldenberg (www.guardian.co.uk).

squares and intersections had at least twelve people wearing their full gear, carrying Kalashnikovs and a couple of extra ammunition magazines. There were also fire-fighting guys with big red cars *and* Kalashnikovs – everybody gets to carry guns (I don't get where the myth that fire-fighters are sexy came from). And other assorted killing machines mounted on cars: some were going around the city, some were stationed. They all looked a bit self-conscious and hot because of the helmets. It was around 24°C at noon today – pretty warm to be wearing all the stuff they had on.

People in Basra are saying that for them it does feel like war already – lots of raids down there. A couple of days ago in the seven o'clock local news bulletin they showed a number of Baath Party members overseeing the burning of leaflets (the ones that look like \$100 bills). They only said it was in the southern parts of Iraq. I wish someone can bring me one of them. Imagine the eBay potential it would have in a couple of months' time.

There is an incredibly strong rumour that Uday is in Russia (Belorussia). What makes it even more suspicious is this: I wrote that Google was blocked from last night, well now it is open, but type a search for anything in Russia and you get the **ACCESS DENIED** page on the search results.

And have you seen the speech by Izat Ibrahim\* in the Islamic Summit today? Was that diplomacy in action or what? Calling the Kuwaiti foreign minister a monkey – he actually called him a monkey – and insulting his 'moustache' – a very serious offence in Bedouin code, like insulting his manly pride – we have a master in abuse-hurling in our government. Although Libya and Saudi Arabia did quite well a couple of days earlier. And they ask why the Arab nations are such a farce. It is because we have kings and presidents who behave like kids in a sandpit.

:: salam 1:22 AM [+] ::

\* The Iraqi Vice-President.

## Sunday, 9 March 2003

Tips on how to become super popular in the office:

Listen to what everybody is talking about, then surprise them with cool info from the web. It helps if Google is still blocked and no one has yet figured out that there is life after Google. Today, the million-dollar question was 'Who the hell is Barbara Bodine?'+ Well the ones who listen to the BBC World Service were asking, the rest were just going what-what-what?

**The plan calls for a northern and southern sector to be administered by two retired US Army generals, sources said. A central sector, including Baghdad, will be administered by Barbara Bodine, a former US ambassador to Yemen, the sources said.\*\***

We will for the moment try to ignore whether this means a divided Iraq or federalism thrust down our throats or a redraw of the Iraqi map, because this will be, after all, the decision of the ~~invaders~~ liberators. We have the right to remain silent otherwise we get smacked upside the head.

Anyway, www.dogpile.com came to the rescue and I was the Internet superhero when I showed them THIS\*\*\* – and more oohs and aaahs when I showed them THIS.\* I should have charged 250 dinars for each viewing. Actually the biggest surprise was finding out that Barbara Bodine was in Iraq in 1983 as Deputy Principal Officer in the US embassy here.

General reactions? You can imagine the fear of castration the Iraqi males are going thru at the moment. Don't expect this to be swallowed very easily. And to divert this unease they would just say something along the lines 'She doesn't look very pretty, does she?' One person who doesn't actually work here, but was dragged by a colleague to see the picture, said 'You know, it is their intention to

+ Barbara Bodine, the former US ambassador to Yemen who served in Baghdad in the 1980s, was appointed to look after the central region, including Baghdad, after Gulf War II. She was held hostage at the US embassy in Kuwait during Gulf War I.

\*\* 'Three US administrators will run post-war Iraq' by Barbara Starr, 7 March 2003 (www.cnn.com).

\*\*\* Biography of Barbara Bodine on www.state.gov.

\* Photograph of Barbara Bodine on cnni.co.uk.

destroy the pride of the Muslim man.' Tread carefully, is what I say. Change shouldn't be plunked on people's heads like this, especially when there is already an atmosphere of mistrust and unfriendliness. Someone said this will be like having another Gertrude Bell,\* I am not sure this is good. (Two interesting links: The Female Lawrence of Arabia and The Gertrude Bell Project\*\* with an amazing photo library. Thanks a million for the link A. – he is the only Iraqi reader I have, apparently.)

:: salam 11:49 AM [+] ::

A BBC reporter walking thru the Mutanabi Friday book market (again) ends his report with: 'It looks like Iraqis are putting on an air of normality.'

Look, what are you supposed to do? Run around in the streets wailing? War is at the door eeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Besides, this 'normality' doesn't go very deep. Almost everything is more expensive than it was a couple of months ago; people are digging wells in their gardens; on the radio yesterday, after playing a million songs from the time of the war with Iran (these are like cartoon theme songs for people my age, we know them all by heart), they read out instructions on how to make a trench and prepare for war – that is after President Saddam advised Iraqis to make these trenches in their gardens.

But in order not to disappoint the BBC, me, Raed and G. put on our 'normal' faces and went to buy CDs from Arasat Street in a demonstration of normality. After going first into Sandra's fruit juice shop and getting what people from Foreign would probably call a poor imitation of a banana and apple smoothie, we spent half an hour contemplating the CD racks at music shop. Raed, being the master of talk-and-slurp-at-the-same-time technique, was trying to steal away my 'normality' by reminding me that I will be wasting my

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 \* The archaeologist Gertrude Bell (1868–1926) learned Arabic and travelled deep into the desert to investigate ancient archaeological sites. Her knowledge of the country and its tribes made her a prime target for recruitment by British Intelligence during the First World War. Later, as a political officer and then as Oriental Secretary to the High Commissioner in Baghdad, she became a king-maker in the new state of Iraq, which she helped to create. As Honorary Director of Antiquities in Iraq, she established the Iraq Museum in Baghdad.

\*\* [www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/home](http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/home).

10,000 dinars because there will be no electricity for the CD player. I explained to him that I am planning on operating a pirate radio station and need to stock on music for the masses I plan to entertain – said in a matter of fact voice and Raed didn't even blink, which made Mr Music Shop Owner look at us very suspiciously at this point, so we moved to the next rack. But since I buy the stuff that would otherwise sit and collect dust, he didn't say much and was very happy to take away 12,500 dinars. I bought five instead of the planned four CDs – many thanks to Malaysian bootleggers for providing us with cheap CDs. The Deftones, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, Erykah Badu and the new Amr Diab (here\* for audio clips if you are interested) have joined the Pax Radio CD racks.

Other normal stuff we did this week:

- Finished taping all the windows in the house – actually a very relaxing exercise, if you forget why you are doing it in the first place.
- Installed a manual pump on the well we have dug, because up till now we had an electrical pump on it.
- Bought 60 litres of gasoline to run the small electricity generator we have. Bought two nifty kerosene cookers and stocked loads of kerosene and dug holes in the garden to bury the stuff so that the house doesn't turn into a bomb.
- Prepared one room for emergency nasty attacks and bought 'particle masks' – that's what it says on the box – for use if they light those oil trenches. The masks just might stop our lungs from becoming tar pits. They are very hot items since the word on the trenches spread. You can buy one for 250 dinars and they are selling faster than the hot cakes of Bab-al-agma.
- Got two rooms in our house ready to welcome our first IDPs (internally displaced persons): my youngest aunt, a single mom with three kids, because she lives farthest away from the rest of us and another aunt from Karbala in the south. Hotel Pax is officially open for the season. No need to make reservations, but you might need to bring a mattress if you come too late.

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 \* [www.erykahbadu.com](http://www.erykahbadu.com) and [www.amrdiab.net](http://www.amrdiab.net).

Other news/rumours:

Party members are going around the city telling people to stay in their homes if anything happens. 'Do not go out in the street.' 'Everything will be brought to you.' They have dug wells in many places with generators beside them to pump the water out and they will be distributing the water. If there is a need to move out of the house, wait until the Party car comes to take you.

They have gone around and asked which households own more than one car, taken down names and numbers – rumour has it that they are going to appropriate any extra car if the need arises. Anyway, you will not be able to drive your car around. People like doctors in state hospitals have been given badges to stick on their cars and so have Party members. You will have to have some sort of permission to move around when the curfew takes place the moment an attack starts. Because of that, we have issued our own curfew from last Friday. Headcount at 10.30 p.m. With so many people in the house a roll-call is the only way to make sure everybody is here. And we are counting on the Americans to attack at night. If they start the attack during the day, they would have mayhem on the streets.

:: salam 6:43 PM [+] ::

## Tuesday, 11 March 2003

Some time ago I promised to show you the new 10,000 dinar bill. It has been issued around four months ago and might become a part of this country's history soon.



Please excuse the quality. I don't have the scanner at home. What you see beside the picture of the Prez is the Unknown Soldier monument in Baghdad.

The dinar hit a new low tonight: \$1=2,700 dinars. The wholesale markets in Shorjah stopped buying and selling today, to see which way the dinar will move next.

:: salam 2:41 AM [+] ::

In one of my posts I wrote that I seem to have only one Iraqi reader. Well, I was wrong. I have two and a half (half-Iraqi, half-Chinese). What is really exciting is that the second reader is a girl here in Baghdad. She's twenty-three years old and is a computer geek (well, engineer) and she agreed to write something for the blog. She will go by the name 'riverbend'. Please give her a warm welcome. I hope she decides to join the weblog and write as often as she can in the next couple of weeks.

So, without further ado, I give you 'riverbend':

Salam, you've reminded me that we have to get to duct-taping the windows (did you use an 'X' pattern or the traditional '\*')? [*Salam: The \* star is good, but with particularly big windows I have been using a + and Xs in each quadrant.*] We've all been talking about the war, discussing the possibilities, implications, etc. but it really hit me yesterday when I got home and – 'lo and behold!' – there were no pictures or paintings on the walls! So I asked, stupidly, 'Where are all the pictures?' I was told that they've been 'put away', because who knew what might come tumbling down if a bomb fell particularly close? I then pointed to a funky black steel chandelier that no one seems to pay any attention to and reminded them that it should be a more immediate worry, not the pictures . . . It is beginning to look like a Gothic death trap. I have visions of it coming down on my head . . .

Otherwise, yes, we are living normally – going to work, cleaning house, eating, drinking. Life doesn't stand still every time America threatens war. It gets more difficult, true enough, but it goes on – which, by the way, is driving the foreign journalists crazy. They want some action here and seeing people go about their daily lives is just a waste of time and film, it seems.

*Danny WFA*

*of  
the  
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Be careful with the gasoline, Salam. A whole family burned to death the other day because their gasoline storing facilities weren't adequate (is that considered 'friendly fire?') – hope you've got it stored in a safe place. [*Salam: Yeah, we saw that on TV. Pretty nasty – my mother freaked, of course.*] We've stocked up on candles (dozens of 'em), but my mother is starting to eye my collection of scented candles anyway. So you can anticipate the scene – hundreds of bombs flying overhead, the deafening sound of planes, blended with murmured prayers, in a semi-dark room smelling faintly of . . . lavender. And that smell will forever be consecrated in my mind, along with the rest of the 'war memories': candles, duct tape, kerosene lamps and lavender . . .

On a not-quite-completely-different subject: I had a flash of déjà vu this morning while reading the news. \*sigh\* Aren't the Americans ever going to get tired of war?

riverbend

The next time, if 'riverbend' decides to join, she will be part of this group blog (yes, it was supposed to be a group blog, but Raed is such a lazy bastard). I'll be happy to forward any mail to her until she makes up her mind whether to put her addy here or not.

:: salam 1:30 PM [+] ::

### Wednesday, 12 March 2003

Here is something fun to read – unlike the comments down below where we engage in index-finger wagging at each other. This I got from Douglas, who has always been thoughtful and sends me articles from French magazines or newspapers translated. Thanks Douglas. This one is exceptionally good. It is about events before the first Gulf War.

If *vous parlez français*, then go to this link: *Un après-midi avec Saddam*.\*

If you are no-French-please, then go to this link. I hope I have not

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\* An article by Alcibiades Hidalgo in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, 11 March 2003 (www.lemonde.fr).

done a *faux pas* by posting your translation, Douglas: 'An Afternoon with Saddam'.\* It is on an abandoned blog.

My favourite bits:

. . . blah blah blah . . . 'You can tell comrade Fidel Castro,' he (Saddam Hussein) said, getting up, 'that I thank him for his solicitude. If the troops of the United States invade Iraq, we shall crush them like that!' he concluded resoundingly, stamping the carpet several times with his shining military boots . . . The audience had ended . . . blah blah blah . . . Without asking us to repeat what happened again, he (Fidel Castro) only asked the Gallego to imitate with his own feet the gesture with which Saddam had shown how he would crush the Americans.

It's like watching two kids talking about a fight in the playground: me crush you like a cock-a-roach, youyou!

We'd rather not talk about who crushed who. As for the next 'Mother of All Battles' . . . one word: shock'n'awe. Learn it in Arabic: *al-ithara wa al-faza*. That's like putting stones in the middle of mud-cakes and throwing them at me, cheater.

:: salam 12:49 PM [+] ::

### Thursday, 13 March 2003

Today is a public holiday. In the Muslim calendar it is the 10th of Muharam – or Ashura (3ashura2) for Shia Muslims. A pivotal date in the history of Shia. Today is the day Imam Hussein was killed in Karbala/Iraq. Which, in the words of Shiapundit\*\* 'is a time for grief, reflection, and *ibadat* (prayers). Nothing else.'

My mother is Shia from Karbala, so each year we wake up in the morning (it is 1 a.m. as I write this) to the sound of the 3azah al 7ussain ('The Lament of Hussein') from the radio – not very pleasant. And after that we hear the stories of the public laments that used to take place in Karbala (now they are banned). The last three days of the Imam's life are acted out throughout the whole city of

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\* A link to The Pointless Linkage Project: [pointlesslinkage.blogspot.com/2003\\_03\\_09\\_pointlesslinkage\\_archive.html#90576946](http://pointlesslinkage.blogspot.com/2003_03_09_pointlesslinkage_archive.html#90576946).  
\*\* [www.shiapundit.blogspot.com](http://www.shiapundit.blogspot.com).



The entities that call themselves 'the international community' should have assumed their responsibilities a long time ago; should have thought about what the sanctions they have imposed really meant; should have looked at reports about weapons and human rights abuses a long time before having them thrown in their faces as excuses for war five minutes before midnight.

What is bringing on this rant is the question that has been bugging me for days now: how could 'support democracy in Iraq' come to mean 'bomb the hell out of Iraq'? Why did it end up that democracy won't happen unless we go thru war? Nobody minded an un-democratic Iraq for a very long time. Now people have decided to bomb us to democracy? Well, thank you! How thoughtful.

The situation in Iraq could have been solved in other ways than what the world will be going thru the next couple of weeks. It can't have been that impossible. Look at the northern parts of Iraq – that is a model that has worked quite well. Why wasn't anybody interested in doing that in the south? Just like the ~~US/UK~~ UN created a protected area there, why couldn't the model be tried in the south? It would have cut off the regime's arms and legs. And once the people see what they have been deprived of they will not be willing to go back. Just ask any Iraqi from the Kurdish areas.

Instead the world watched while after the war the Shias were crushed by Saddam's army in a manner that really didn't happen before the Gulf War. Does anyone else see the words 'Iran/not in the US interest' floating or is it me hallucinating?

And there is the matter of sanctions. Now that Iraq has been thru a decade of these sanctions, I can only hope that their effects are clear enough for them not to be tried upon another nation. Sanctions, which allegedly should have kept a potentially dangerous situation in Iraq in check, brought a whole nation to its knees instead. And who ultimately benefited from the sanctions? Neither the international community nor the Iraqi people, but *he* who was in power and control still is. These sanctions made the Iraqi people hostages in the hands of this regime; tightened an already tight noose around our necks. A whole nation, a proud and learned nation, was devastated not by the war, but by sanctions. Our brightest and most creative minds fled the country not because of oppression alone, but because no one inside Iraq could make a liv-

ing or survive. And can anyone tell me what the sanctions really did about weapons? Get real. There are always willing nations who will help; there are always organizations which will find his money sweet. Oil-for-Food? Smart Sanctions? Get a clue. Who do you think is getting all those contracts to supply the people with 'food'? Who do you think is heaping money in bank accounts abroad? It is *his* people, *his* family and the people who play *his* game – abroad and in Iraq; Iraqis and non-Iraqis.

What I mean to say is that things could have been different. I can't help look at the northern parts of Iraq with envy and wonder why.

Do support democracy in Iraq, but don't equate it with war. What will happen is something that could/should have been avoided. Don't expect me to wear a 'I ♥ Bush' T-shirt. Support democracy in Iraq, not by bombing us to hell and then trying to build it up again (well, that is going to happen anyway), not by sending human shields (let's be real, the war is going to happen and Saddam will use you as hostages), but by keeping an eye on what will happen after the war.



To end this rant, a word about Islamic fundis/wahabisim/qaeda and all that.

Do you know when the sight of women veiled from top to bottom became common in cities in Iraq? Do you know when the question of segregation between boys and girls became red hot? When tribal law replaced THE LAW? When 'Wahabi'\* became part of our vocabulary?

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 \* A Wahabi is a member of a sect of Muslim puritans following strictly the original words of the Koran. They are named after Muhammad ibn Abd-el-Wahhab, who founded the sect in the eighteenth century.

It only happened *after* the Gulf War. I think it was Cheney or Albright who said they will bomb Iraq back to the Stone Age . . . Well, you did. Iraqis have never accepted religious extremism in their lives. They still don't. Wahabis in their short *dishdasha* are still looked upon as sheep who have strayed from the herd. But they are spreading. The combination of poverty/no work/low self-esteem and the bitterness of seeing people who rose to riches and power without any real merit (but having the right family name or connection) shook the whole social fabric. Situations which would have been unacceptable in the past are being tolerated today.

They call it *al hamla al imania* ('the religious campaign'). Of course, it was supported by the Government: pumping them with words like 'poor in this life, rich in heaven' kept the people quiet. Or the other side of the coin is getting paid by Wahabi organizations. Come pray and get paid – no joke, dead serious. If the Government can't give you a job, run to the nearest mosque and they will pay and support you. This never happened before. It's outrageous. But what are people supposed to do? Their government is denied funds to pay proper wages and what they get is funnelled into their pockets. So please stop telling me about the fundis – never knew what they are never would have seen them in my streets.

#### **RANT ENDS**

:: salam 1:37 AM [+] ::

### **Monday, 17 March 2003**

Impossibly long lines in front of gas stations last night – some even had two police cars in front of them to make sure no 'incidents' occur.

The price of bottled water jumped up threefold.

On Shabab TV (Youth TV) there were announcements that the NUIS\* is selling water pumps and tanks, hard helmets, small electrical generators and, most surreally, chemical-biological attack protection chambers – in the picture they showed it looked like an octagonal barrel laid on its side, with two bunks in it and

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\* National Union of Iraqi Students.

some strange equipment on the outside. No prices, just a phone number.

Rumours of defaced pictures of Saddam in Dorah and Thawra districts (maybe, maybe not). And the cities of Rawa and Anna are so full of people now you wouldn't find a hut to rent. It was pretty safe to be there during Gulf War I and people who have the money are renting places there, hoping that it will be safe this time.

The dinar is hovering around the 2,700 per dollar and the hottest items after the 'particle-masks', are earplugs – they can't be found in shops and you have to pre-order.

:: salam 8:48 AM [+] ::

### **Wednesday, 19 March 2003**

I would have posted something earlier today, but there was a lot to do and my brother reminded me that we have to go refill the car, and that was two hours of wasted time waiting. It is not as bad as two days ago, but the gas stations are still crowded. A couple of hours after I wrote that two police cars were standing near gas stations to keep things in order, we went out again and there were more Party members wearing their olive-green uniforms with Kalashnikovs in gas stations, but today it is back to the police cars. There is a rumour that they will open the 'special' gas stations for the public too. There are four of these in Baghdad, used only by *them* or whoever has the right ID.

Before I go into what was going on today, I really want to thank all the people who have been sending e-mails and letting me know that they care and worry about what will happen in Iraq. Thank you so much. I hope you understand that it takes a bit of time to answer your questions, so please don't be angry if I don't reply promptly. I print them out for Raed to read and he is totally baffled. Some of them I wish I could publish or print and paste on lamp-posts. Thank you very much.

A couple of weeks ago, journalists were exasperated by that fact that Iraqis just went on with their lives and did not panic. Well, today there is a very different picture. It is actually a bit scary and very disturbing. To start with, the dinar hit another low: 3,100 dinars per



dollar. There was no exchange place open. If you went and asked, they just looked at you as if you were crazy. Wherever you go you see closed shops and it is not just doors-locked closed, but sheet-metal-welded-on-the-front closed; windows-removed-and-built-with-bricks closed; doors were being welded shut. There were trucks loaded with all sorts of stuff being taken from the shops to wherever their owner had a secure place. Houses which are still being built are having huge walls erected in front of them with no doors, to make sure they don't get used as barracks I guess. Driving thru Mansour, Harthiya or Arasat is pretty depressing. Still, me, Raed and G. went out to have our last lunch together.

The radio plays war songs from the 1980s non-stop. We know them all by heart. Driving thru Baghdad now, singing along to songs saying things like 'we will be with you till the day we die, Saddam' was suddenly a bit too heavy. No one gave that line too much thought, but somehow these days it sounds sinister, since last night one of the most played old 'patriotic' songs was the song of the youth *al-fituuwa*: it is the code that all Fedayeen\* should join their assigned units. And it is still being played.

A couple of hours earlier we were at a shop and a woman said as she was leaving (and this is a very common sentence): *itha allah khalana taibeen* ('We'll see you tomorrow, if God keeps us alive') – and the whole place just freezes. She laughed nervously and said she didn't mean *that*, and we all laughed, but these things start having a meaning beyond being figures of speech.

There still is no military presence in the streets, but we expect that to happen after the ultimatum. Here and there you see cars with machine-guns going around the streets, but not too many. Enough to make you nervous.

The prices of things are going higher and higher, not only because of the drop of the dinar, but because there is no more supply. Businesses are shutting down and packing up. Only the small stores are open.

Pharmacies are very helpful in getting you the supplies you need, but they also have only a limited amount of medication and first-aid

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\* Fighters loyal to Saddam Hussein.

stuff. So if you have not bought what you need you might have to pay inflated prices.

And if you want to run off to Syria, the trip will cost you \$600. It used to be \$50. It's cheaper to stay now. Anyway, we went past the travel-permit issuing offices and they were shut with lock and chain.

Some rumours:

It is being said that Barazan (Saddam's brother) has suggested to him that he should do the decent thing and surrender. He got himself under house arrest in one of the presidential palaces which is probably going to be one of the first to be hit.

Families of bigwigs and *his* own family are being armed to the teeth. More from fear of Iraqis seeking retribution than Americans.

And by the smell of it we are going to have a sandstorm today, which means that the people on the borders are already covered in sand. Crazy weather. Yesterday it rains and today sand.

:: salam 3:13 AM [+ ] ::

### Thursday, 20 March 2003

It is even too late for last-minute things to buy – there are too few shops open. We went again for a drive thru Baghdad's main streets. Too depressing. I have never seen Baghdad like this. Today the Baath Party people started taking their places in the trenches and main squares and intersections, fully armed and freshly shaven. They looked too clean and well groomed to defend anything. And the most shocking thing was the number of kids. They couldn't be older than twenty, sitting in trenches sipping Miranda fizzy drinks and eating chocolate (that was at the end of our street); other places you would see them sitting bored in the sun. More cars with guns and loads of Kalashnikovs everywhere.

The worst is seeing and feeling the city come to a halt. Nothing. No buying, no selling, no people running after buses. We drove home quickly. At least inside it did not feel so sad.

The ultimatum ends at four in the morning here in Baghdad – and the big question is will the attack be the same night or not? Stories about the first Gulf War are being told for the 100th time.

The Syrian border is now closed to Iraqis. They are being turned back. What is worse is that people wanting to go to Deyala, which is *in Iraq*, are being told to drive back to Baghdad. There was a rumour going around that Baghdad will be 'closed': no one goes in or out. People are being turned back at the borders of Baghdad city. There is a check-point and they will not let you pass it. There are rumours that many people have taken the path thru Deyala to go to the Iranian border. Maybe, maybe not.

If you remember, I told you a while ago that you can get fourteen satellite channels sanctioned by the state, retransmitted and decoded by receivers you have to buy from a state company. This service has been suspended. Internet will follow, I am sure.

Things on Iraqi TV today:

- An interview with the minister of interior affairs. Turned the volume down, didn't want to hear anything.
- Demonstrations in Iraqi cities.
- Yesterday the last 500 prisoners from the Iraq-Iran War were being exchanged. I can't believe they are still doing this. For fuck's sake, that war ended in 1989! Every Iraqi family can tell you a hundred heart-breaking stories about things that happen when you have thought your brother/father/son is dead and he suddenly appears after ten years.

:: salam 12:21 AM [+] ::

Air-raid sirens in Baghdad, but the only sounds you can here are the anti-aircraft machine-guns. Will go now.

:: salam 5:46 AM [+] ::

There is still nothing happening in Baghdad. We can only hear distant explosions and there still is no all-clear siren. Someone in the BBC said that the state radio has been overtaken by US broadcast. That didn't happen. The three state broadcasters still operate.

:: salam 6:40 AM [+] ::

Now that was really unexpected. When the sirens went on we thought we will get bombs by the ton-load dropped on us, but noth-

ing happened, at least in the part of the city where I live. Aircraft guns could be heard for a while, but they stopped too after a while and then the all-clear siren came.

Today, in the morning, I went with my father for a ride around Baghdad and there was nothing different from yesterday. There is no curfew and cars can be seen speeding to places here and there. Shops are closed. Only some bakeries are open and of course the Baath Party Centres. There are more Baath people in the streets and they have more weapons. No army in the streets. We obviously still have electricity, phones are still working and we got phone calls from abroad, so the international lines are still working. Water is still running.

The English-speaking radio station on FM is now replaced by the Arabic language state radio programme broadcasting on the same wave length. I just say that, because last night just as the BBC was broadcasting from Baghdad (yes, we have put up the sat dish again) their news ticker (or whatever you call that red band down there) said that the Iraqi state radio has been taken over by US broadcast. We watched Saddam's speech this morning: he's got verse in it!!

:: salam 1:23 PM [+] ::

I watched al-Sahaf on al-Jazeera. He said that the US has bombed the Iraqi Satellite Channel, but while he was saying that the ISC was broadcasting and if it really did hit the ISC headquarters it would have been right in the middle of Baghdad. What was probably hit were transmitters or something. All TV stations are still working.

:: salam 4:28 PM [+] ::

The all-clear siren just went on.

The bombing would come and go in waves, nothing too heavy and not yet comparable to what was going on in 1991. All radio and TV stations are still on and while the air raid began, the Iraqi TV was showing patriotic songs and didn't even bother to inform viewers that we are under attack. At the moment they are re-airing yesterday's interview with the Minister of Interior Affairs. The sounds of

the anti-aircraft artillery is still louder than the booms and bangs, which means that they are still far from where we live, but the images we saw on al-Arabiya news channel showed a building burning near my aunt's house – Hotel Pax was a good idea.

We have two safe rooms, one with 'international media' and the other with the Iraqi TV on. Everybody is waitingwaitingwaiting. Phones are still OK. We called around the city a moment ago to check on friends. Information is what they need. Iraqi TV says nothing, shows nothing. What good are patriotic songs when bombs are dropping?

Around 6.30 p.m. my uncle went out to get bread. He said that all the streets going to the main arterial roads are controlled by Baath people. Not curfew, but you have to have a reason to leave your neighbourhood – and the bakeries are, by instruction of the Party, selling only a limited amount of bread to each customer. He also says that near the main roads all the yet-unfinished houses have been taken by Party or army people.

:: salam 10:33 PM [+] ::

### Friday, 21 March 2003

The most disturbing news today has come from al-Jazeera. They said that nine B52 bombers have left the airfield in Britain and are flying 'presumably' towards Iraq. As if they would be doing a spin around the block! Anyway, they have six hours to get here.

Last night was very quiet in Baghdad. Today, in the morning, I went out to get bread and groceries. There were no Baath Party people stopping us from leaving the area where we live – this apparently happens after the evening prayers. But they are still everywhere. The streets are empty. Only bakeries are open and some grocery shops charging four times the normal prices.

While I was buying bread a police car stopped in front of the bakery and asked the baker if they had enough flour and asked when they opened. The baker told me that they have been informed that they must open their shops and they get flour delivered to them daily. Groceries, meat and dairy products are a different story. One dairy product company (not state-owned) seems to be still operating and

their cars were going around the city distributing butter, cheese and yoghurt to any open markets. Meat is not safe to buy, because you wouldn't know from where and how it got to the shops.

Anyway, we bought fresh tomatoes and zucchini for 1,000 dinar a kilo, which would normally be 250. And most amazingly the garbage car came around.

The Iraqi Satellite Channel is not broadcasting any more. The second youth TV channel (it shows Egyptian soaps in the morning and sports afterwards) also stopped transmitting. This leaves two channels: Iraq TV and Shabab (Youth) TV. They are still full of patriotic songs and useless 'news' – they love the French here. We also saw the latest Sahaf show on al-Jazeera and Iraq TV, and the most distressing Minister of Interior Affairs with his guns. Freaks. Hurling abuse at the world is the only thing left for them to do.

On BBC we are watching scenes of Iraqis surrendering. My youngest cousin was muttering 'What a shame' to himself. Yes, it is better for them to do that, but still, seeing them carrying that white flag makes something deep inside you cringe.

We sit in front of the TV with the map of Iraq on our laps, trying to figure out what is going on in the south.

:: salam 3:13 PM [+] ::

As usual, Diana comes to the rescue:

IS SALAM PAX REAL?

Please stop sending e-mails asking if I am for real. Don't believe it? Then don't read it. I am not anybody's propaganda ploy – well, except my own.

Two more hours until the B52s get to Iraq.

:: salam 6:05 PM [+] ::

### Saturday, 22 March 2003

4.30 p.m. (Day 3)

Half an hour ago the oil-filled trenches were put on fire. First,

watching al-Jazeera they said that these were the places that got hit by bombs from an air raid a few minutes earlier, but when I went up to the roof to take a look I saw that there were too many of them – we heard only three explosions. I took pictures of the nearest. My cousin came and told me he saw police cars standing by one and setting it on fire. Now you can see the columns of smoke all over the city.

Today we had quite a number of attacks during daytime – some without air-raid sirens. They probably just gave up on being able to be on time to sound the sirens. Last night, after wave after wave of attacks, they would sound the all-clear siren only to start another air-raid siren thirty minutes later.

The images we saw on TV last night (not Iraqi, but Jazeera/BBC/Arabiya) were terrible. The whole city looked as if it were on fire. The only thing I could think of was 'Why does this have to happen to Baghdad?' As one of the buildings I really love went up in a huge explosion I was close to tears.

Today my father and brother went out to see what is happening in the city. They say that it does look that the hits were very precise, but when the missiles and bombs explode they wreck havoc in the neighbourhood where they fall. Houses near al-Salam Palace (where the minister Sahaf took journalists) have had all their windows broke and doors blown in and in one case a roof has caved in. I guess that is what is called 'collateral damage' and that makes it OK?

We worry about daytime bombing and the next round of attacks tonight with the added extra of the smokescreen in our skies.

### Sunday, 23 March 2003

I have Internet again – will post soon.

But I must apologize to the people at industrialdeathrock.com, because the amount of traffic this blog has been getting causes their servers to go down. I am very sorry. I should have been more careful.

Looking thru my mail I see that this blog has also been causing

blogspot problems. Sorry. And Blogger has been generous again with me and allowed this to go and help. Thanks. My mailbox is full because of the last two days of Internet black-out – going thru them now.

:: salam 3:24 PM [+] ::

8.30 p.m. (Day 4)

We start counting the hours from the moment one of the news channels reports that the B52s have left their airfield. It takes them around six hours to get to Iraq. On the first day of the bombing it worked precisely. Yesterday we were a bit surprised that after six hours bombs didn't start falling.

The attacks on Baghdad were much less than two days ago. We found out today in the news that the city of Tikrit got the hell bombed out of it. Today the B52s took off at 3 p.m. – in half an hour we will know whether it is Baghdad tonight or another city. Karbala was also hit last night.

Today's (and last night's) shock attacks didn't come from airplanes, but rather from the airwaves. The images al-Jazeera is broadcasting are beyond any description. First was the attack on Ansar el Islam camp in the north of Iraq. Then the images of civilian casualties in Basra city. What was most disturbing are the images from the hospitals. They are simply not prepared to deal with these things. People were lying on the floor with bandages and blood all over. If this is what 'urban warfare' is going to look like, we're in for disaster. And just now the images of US/UK prisoners and dead – we saw these on Iraqi TV earlier. This war is starting to show its ugly, ugly face to the world.

The media wars have also started. Al-Jazeera accusing the Pentagon of not showing how horrific this war is turning out to be and Rumsfeld saying that it is regrettable that some TV stations have shown the images.

Today before noon I went out with my cousin to take a look at the city. Two things: (1) the attacks are precise (2) they are attacking targets which are just too close to civilian areas in Baghdad. Look at the Salam Palace and the houses around it. Quite scary near it – and you can see windows with broken glass till very far off. At

another neighbourhood I saw a very unexpected 'target': it is an officers' club of some sorts smack in the middle of [ . . . ] district. I guess it was not severely hit because it was still standing, but the houses around it, and this is next door and across the street, were damaged. One of them is rubble the rest are clearing away glass and rubble. A garbage car stands near the most damaged houses and helps with the cleaning up.

Generally the streets are quite busy. Lots of cars, but not many shops open. The market near our house is almost empty now. The shop owner says that all the wholesale markets in Shorjah are closed now, but the prices of vegetables and fruits have gone down to normal and are available.

While buying groceries, the woman who sells the vegetables was talking to another about the approach of American armies to Najaf city and about what is happening at Umm Qasar and Basra. If Umm Qasar is so difficult to control what will happen when they get to Baghdad? It will turn uglier and this is very worrying. People (and I bet 'allied forces') were expecting things to be much easier. There are no waving masses of people welcoming the Americans, nor are they surrendering by the thousands. People are doing what all of us are: sitting in their homes hoping that a bomb doesn't fall on them and keeping their doors shut.

The smoke columns have now encircled Baghdad, well almost. The winds blow generally to the east, which leaves the western side of Baghdad clear. But when it comes in the way of the sun it covers it totally – it is a very thick cloud. We are going to have some very dark days, literally.

We still have electricity; some areas in Baghdad don't after last night's attack. Running water and phones are working.

Yesterday many leaflets were dropped on Baghdad. While going around in the streets I got lucky, I have two. After being so unkind to the people at [www.industrialdeathrock.com](http://www.industrialdeathrock.com), I don't know whether I should post images or not.

And we have had another e-mail attack, this time I was lucky again and have copies of those, the sender is someone called [blablaba@hotmail.com](mailto:blablaba@hotmail.com). I have not checked on that yet. Three of them are to army personnel and two to the general public, in which

they gave us the radio frequencies we are supposed to listen to. They are calling it 'Information Radio'.

:: salam 4:41 PM [+ ] ::

## Monday, 24 March 2003

The last two days we didn't have Internet access. I thought that was it and started what a friend called a 'pblog' – what you will read is what should have been the entries for the 22nd and 23rd.\* Blogger and Google have created a mirror to this weblog at [www.dearraed.blogspot.com](http://www.dearraed.blogspot.com), for those of you who have trouble with the underscore in the URL. There are not enough words to thank the people at Blogger for their help and support.

9.29 p.m. (Day 5)\*\*

Tonight we didn't notice any news channel reporting anything from Fairford about the B52s, but then again the bombardment hasn't stopped the whole day. Last night's bombardment was very different from the nights before. It wasn't only heavier, but the sound of the bombs was different. The booms and bangs are much louder. You would hear one big bang and then followed by a number of these rumbles that would shake everything. And there are of course the series of deep dob-dob-dobs from the explosions farther away. Anyway, it is still early (it is 9.45 p.m.). Last night things got seriously going at 12, followed by bombardments at 3, 4 and 6 a.m. – each would last for 15 minutes. The air-raid sirens signalled an attack around 12 and never sounded the all-clear signal. Sleep is what you get between being woken up by the rumbles or the time you can take your eyes off the news. We hear the same news items over and over. But you can't stop yourself.

The air-raid sirens are not really that dependable. When they don't sound the all-clear after a whole hour of silence you get fidgety. The better alarm system is quite accidental. It has become a habit of the mosque muezzins (the prayer callers) to start chanting *allahu*

\* These entries have been returned to their original order.

\*\* The following entries, up to 1 May 2003, were first posted by Diana in May as the Internet went down in Iraq. During this time, Salam kept a diary and e-mailed the entries to Diana on 7 May.

*akbar – la illaha ila allah* the moment one of them hears an explosion. The next muezzin starts the moment he hears another calling, and so on. It spreads thru the city pretty fast and soon you have all the mosques doing the Takbir for five minutes or so. Very eerie, but it works well to alert everybody.

Below you see one of the e-mails we got, in English, this is loosely translated.

The subject line is 'critical info':

**The world has united in a common cause. These countries have formed an alliance to remove the father of Qusay and his brutal regime. Qusay's father has tyrannized the sons of the Euphrates and exploited them for years and he has to be removed from power.**

**The coalition forces are not here to hurt you, but they are here to help you. For your safety the coalition forces have prepared a list of instructions to keep you and your families safe. We want you to realize that these instructions are to keep you safe, even if they are, maybe, not (appropriate) [*this is a bit difficult, because even in Arabic I don't get exactly what they mean, but it sure got my attention – are they going to ask me to stand naked in the garden or something?*]. We add that we don't want to hurt innocent people.**

**Please and for your safety stay away from potential targets, like TV and radio stations. Avoid travel or work near oil fields. Don't drive your cars at night. Stay away from military buildings or areas used for storage of weapons. All the mentioned are possible targets. For your safety don't be near these buildings and areas.**

**For your safety stay away from coalition forces. Although they are here for not your harm [*sic*] they are trained to defend themselves and their equipment. Don't try to interfere in the operations of coalition forces. If you do these forces will not see you as civilians, but as a threat and targets too.**

**Please for your safety stay away from the mentioned areas. Don't let your children play there. Please inform your family and neighbours of our message. Our aim is to remove the father of Qusay and his brutal regime.**

Then they list the frequencies for 'Information Radio'. They even plan to transmit on FM. What immediately caught my attention is the use of 'father of Qusay'. We don't say *walid Qusay* in Iraqi-Arabic, but use *abu Qusay*, and he is usually referred to as *abu Uday*, but then again Uday is obviously out of the game. No one sees him in meetings. Four of the e-mails came from a hotpop.com

account, one from Lycos and another from Yahoo. I don't think they expect anyone to answer. But it is mighty interesting to see what happens if I write to one of them.

Was watching a report on al-Jazeera a while ago about Mosul and its preparations. The reporter interviewed someone from Fedayeen Saddam. He said that he is in Mosul to 'kill the Americans and kill anybody who does not fight the Americans' – there, in one short sentence, you have the whole situation in Basra, and most probably many Iraqi cities, explained. Fear is deep and trust in the people-from-Foreign is not high.

:: salam 5:50 PM [+] ::

## Tuesday, 25 March 2003

10.05 a.m. (Day 6)

One mighty explosion at 12 midnight exactly. The raid lasted for ten minutes, then nothing. We had and are still having horrible weather. Very strong winds – hope we don't get a sandstorm.

In the oh-the-irony-of-it-all section of my life I can add the unbelievable bad luck that when I wanted to watch a movie, because I got sick of all the news, the only movie I had which I have not seen a hundred times is *The American President*. No joke. A friend gave me that video months ago and I never watched it. I did last night. The American 'presidential palace' looks quite good. But Michael Douglas is a sad ass president.

No Internet this morning, no Internet last night. And we just had an explosion right now (12.21). No siren, no nothing. Just one boom.

And another.

You can hear the sound of the planes. Look, this is what you hear the last two days when a huge explosion is coming: first the droning of what is, I think, a plane, then one small boom, followed by a rolling rumble that gets louder and suddenly BOOM! and the plane again.

I think this is a proper raid, because I can still hear explosions.

Laytah.

**Wednesday, 26 March 2003**

11.50 a.m. (Day 7)

Well, about the wishes for no sandstorm: I can tell you that the gods definitely don't listen to me. We had the fiercest ever. And it just went on and on. This morning everything was covered in sand. And not just a light film of sand, but a thick red layer. And to add to the absurdist comedy the gods are enjoying at our expense, they just drip-dropped a tiny bit of rain to make sure it all settled down, but didn't get washed away.

The skies cleared for a couple of hours around eight this morning and, as if on cue, the Americans entered the stage to make sure their role in this comedy is not forgotten and started bombing. Now we are being covered again by a new layer of sand.

My friend Stefan sent me an e-mail four days ago describing the whole thing as a Dadaist play. After the sandstorms, rain and the nonsense the news is churning out, I totally agree. Umm Qasar is under control. Umm Qasar is not safe. Basra is not a target. Basra will be attacked. Nasiriyah is under control. Nasiriyah sees heavy fighting. Would the news people please make up their mind? And the new addition to the war reporting absurdities is the 'Uprising in Basra'. From one side, the US/UK shout we were hoping/waiting for the cowardly Iraqis to stand up against their regime, and then Rumsfeld goes on TV and says 'Well . . . if they do it, we can't help them now.'

I talked to G. on the phone today. He stopped listening to the news two days ago. Don't accuse the Iraqi media of lies, because the rest are just as bad.

The reports about Iraqi TV going off-air are partially true. We don't get Iraqi TV, but other areas do. Maybe they are transmitting a weak signal or something. And we do have problems with electricity. Yesterday many areas in Baghdad had no electricity after 5 p.m., not all together, but one area after the other. Then it would come back for an hour and off again. I can't say whether this is because of the bad weather or the bombing. In some areas it was trees falling on electricity cables. Phones are still working. Unless where you live had its phoneline poles knocked off by the winds.

This morning I also met a couple of relatives from the south/south-west of Baghdad (outskirts – not within city limits). They say they have been under very heavy bombardment, probably smoothing the ground for the move on Baghdad. They also say that every now and then a couple of helicopters would hover very low to the ground. In one case, they were chased away by the landowners firing at them.

I would really like to say something about the Iraqi tribes and their farm land. There is nothing more important to them than their land. And it makes them squirm seeing the Iraqi army stationing themselves on it. This has been going on for a while, not just when the war started. They are unable to do anything about the Iraqi army taking their land, but no one minds them shooting any other people away. If the members of a tribe are living close to each other and using adjacent land plots, they will stand together to keep their area safe and that includes keeping the 'allied forces' away from their homes – and they are armed. Talking of tribes, tribe leaders are being called to different hotels in Baghdad and given big piles of Iraqi dinars.

**Thursday, 27 March 2003**

3.35 p.m. (Day 8)

The whole morning was spent cleaning up the mess created by the sand-rain-and-sand-again storm. Of course it was done to the beat of the bombardment. It has become the soundtrack of our lives. You wake up to the sound of bombardment; you brush your teeth to the rhythm of the anti-aircraft rat-tat-tats. Then there is the attack, which is timed exactly with our lunch-time.

Dishes are fun to do while you think about the possibility of the big window in front of you being smashed by the falling tons of explosives and so on. The first two days we would hurry inside and listen with worry, now you just sigh, look up to the sky, curse and do whatever you have to do. This, of course, is only because we live relatively far from where the action is these days. We only seriously worry about two stupid anti-aircraft guns a couple of hundred metres away. Having heard from the people who live close to 'targets' we can thank whatever gods or accidents that made us live where we do now.

Last night the bombs hit one big communication node in Baghdad. Now there are areas in Baghdad which we can't call and phones from/to abroad are pfffft . . . I have lost all hope that I will have Internet again. We drove to have a look and it is shocking, it looks as if the building has exploded from the inside. You can look thru three floors. It is just near the Saddam Tower in al-Ma'amun area. Thank God I can still call Raed. But he can't call some of his relatives. The operator just gives you the 'This number is not in use' automatic answer.

The streets are very busy. But Baghdad looks terrible with all the dirt. Everything looks like it has been camouflaged. And everybody is out in the street washing cars and driveways. A couple more stores are open and, amazingly, al-Sa'a restaurant didn't close for a single day. We all in Baghdad are very aware that we still have not seen the seriously bad days.

Basra on the other hand is in deep shit. One more word by Americans on TV about 'humanitarian aid' will make me kill my television. They have the audacity to turn us to beggars, while we will have to pay for the research and development of the weapons they are field-testing on us *and* they do it as if they are helping us with their 'humanitarian aid'.

Excuse me, but it would help much more if you would stop dropping those million-dollar bombs on us – it is cheaper for us in the long run. As much as I don't like him, al-Sahaf did say it: 'crocodile's tears', indeed. One thing made me really laugh with delight, as the Red Crescent\* cars (Kuwaiti – and I would rather not say what I think about that) stopped at Safwan and started unloading – it got mobbed! People just went into the trucks and did the distributing themselves while the US/UK soldiers stood watching. And what did the Iraqis shout while they were around the trucks? *Bil rooh, bil daam nafdeek ya saddam!* ('We will sacrifice our souls and blood for Saddam!'). Catastrophic, and just starting.

Most worrying bit of news is something that I heard being reported by the US government: the Iraqi army is forcing all males to go into battle against Americans, threatening to kill their families if they

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\* The equivalent of the Red Cross.

don't. Telling them that I don't feel like fighting won't help much, I guess.

### Sunday, 30 March 2003

7.30 p.m. (Day 11)

Two one-person demonstrations on today's drive around the city.

One man chained to a tree just in front of the UN building in Abu Nawas. It looked rather comic. He was wearing a long leash and looked more like a dangerous person kept in check rather than an angry demonstrator. The building is empty and the glass is knocked out of most of its windows because it faces the river and many of the bombed palaces and buildings.

The other one-man effort was much more admirable – we even decided to honk our car horn and shout encouragement to him. He was standing on the intersection near al-Salhia, just beside the Ministry of Information, all alone and holding a sign saying in Arabic IRAQIS REFUSE TO TAKE ANY HUMANITARIAN AID FROM JORDANIANS AND EGYPTIANS. Right on! I wish I had the courage to stand with him, but he is standing in one of the most guarded areas at the moment. The Ministry of Information has been targeted, so was the Iraq TV building just off the road and Hizbis\* are all over the place. This probably means that the guy is a Hizbi himself, but still we refuse to take any aid from these countries after they have received the money for shutting up when it comes to the matter of Iraq.

The Ministry of information is getting cleared. Yesterday there were a million people in and around it – journalists are all stationed on the building. Today all the sat dishes have gone, the tents were being dismantled and there were very few cars with the letters 'TV' taped on them with duct tape. We saw them near the Palestine-Meridian Hotel. But we were watching al-Arabiya and the BBC – they seem to have their cameras somewhere else.

Today's tour of the city was following last night's bombings of the telephone exchanges in Baghdad. Many of them have been reduced to rubble. Last night saw one of the heaviest bombings.

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\* Party members.



Just after I wrote the entry in my diary all hell broke loose. There were two explosions or series of explosions, which shook the house like nothing till now. You could feel the floor shake under your feet and the walls rumble before you heard the sound of the explosions.

After seeing what has been done to the small telephone exchanges, I fear that the small one in al-Dawoodi might also be hit – and this is just too close to us. Since last night's bombings I can't call Raed too. G. can't call any of us since the first exchange was bombed. It feels like he lives in a different city. He is too far away and he can't call us.

No good news anywhere. No light at the end of the tunnel – and the American advance doesn't look that reassuring. If we had a mood barometer in the house it would read **TO HELL WITH SADDAM AND MAY HE QUICKLY BE JOINED BY BUSH**. No one feels like they should welcome the American army. The American government is getting as many curses as the Iraqi.

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## > April 2003

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### Tuesday, 1 April 2003

6.50 p.m. (Day 13)

There is one item which I have not thought I would need a big supply of: antacids. Air-raid sirens start wailing or the heavy bombs start falling – five minutes later I go for the drawer with the antacids. Now, every time the bombing starts my brother starts humming Nirvana's 'Pennyroyal Tea'... But Iraqi antacids have no flavour – it feels like you are chewing plaster of Paris.

Very heavy bombing the last two days. Although today it was very quiet, I bet the heavy bombing will resume tonight. It is getting heavier by the day. Somehow, when the really heavy ones fall you feel like the house will collapse on you. Around 2 a.m. yesterday a couple of explosions made the whole house sway – you feel the ground beneath you move. It is said that these were the bombs that fell on the 'Iraqi Village' – an orphanage. Well . . . we all know that what is called the 'Iraqi Village' is actually just part of a huge area used by the Republican Army, so no surprise it has been hit for the second time.

We went today to the Adhamiya district to look at the damage done there. Another small telephone exchange bombed to the ground. The commercial buildings around it have been turned to useless shells. It looks as if pushing one of the walls will make it crumble and fall. And just a couple of metres further, something which was a house is now a pile of rubble. A couple of streets away is the Iraqi Satellite Channel. You can see the transmission tower broken and bent, but we couldn't get near it – they had barricades on all the streets leading to it. The Adhamiya is a very