

# Another market massacre in Baghdad

Henry Michaels  
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Last Friday, for the second time in two days, US missiles hit a busy market street in a working class district of Baghdad, killing and wounding scores of innocent civilians—the same slum dwellers that President Bush and Prime Minister Blair had claimed would rise up to overthrow the Iraqi regime as soon as the war began.

Dr. Osama Sakhari, speaking at Baghdad's Al Noor Hospital after a day of heavy raids across the capital, said he had counted 55 people killed and more than 47 wounded from the market in the Shu'ale neighborhood. The dead included at least 15 children.

Another Iraqi doctor, Hakki Is-mail Marzooki, said the deaths were in a residential area just 300 meters from his hospital. Dr. Marzooki described the scene as like a "massacre" and said there were no potential military targets in the area.

Arabic language television stations Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya broadcast pictures of bodies, including those of two children, and footage of people carrying coffins out of the hospital. They showed scenes of severed body parts and wounded toddlers bandaged and crying in hospital beds. Al Jazeera broadcast the grief-stricken funerals of those killed.

According to British journalist Robert Fisk, who visited the hospitals, at least 62 civilians had died by Saturday afternoon. He described "appalling scenes of pain and suffering": "A two-year-old girl, Saida Jaffar, swaddled in bandages, a tube into her nose, another into her stomach. All I could see of her was her forehead, two small eyes and a chin. Beside her, blood and flies covered a heap of old bandages and swabs. Not far away, lying on a dirty bed, was three-year-old Mohamed Amaid, his face, stomach, hands and feet all tied tightly in bandages. A great black mass of congealed blood lay at the bottom of his bed."

Fisk refuted American and British claims that an Iraqi anti-aircraft missile was responsible for the carnage. He cited the serial number and coding from a piece of the missile retrieved by an old man whose home is 100 meters from the bomb's two-meter crater. The serial number was 30003-704ASB 7492 and it was followed by a "lot" number: MFR 96214 09. There was no doubt about the authenticity of the metal fragment—Fisk saw it before the Iraqi authorities knew it existed.

Local residents said they had heard or seen the American jet that dropped the missile, in broad daylight and with perfect visibility in a clear sky.

Both Fisk and another Western journalist who visited the scene—Canadian Patrick Graham—observed that the bomb had been designed to kill and maim, not destroy buildings. They witnessed horrible shrapnel wounds and far-flung damage that contrasted with the relatively small size of the meter-wide bomb crater.

In Fisk's words: "The missile sprayed hunks of metal through the crowds—mainly women and children—and through the cheap brick walls of local homes, amputating limbs and heads. Three brothers, the eldest 21 and the youngest 12, for example, were cut down inside the living room of their brick hut on the main road opposite the market. Two doors away, two sisters were killed in an identical manner."

Dr. Ahmed, an anesthetist at the Al-Noor hospital, told Fisk: "We have never seen anything like these wounds before. These people have been punctured by dozens of bits of metal." One old man had 24 holes in the back of his legs and buttocks, some as big as quarter coins. An X-ray photograph showed at least 35 slivers of metal still embedded in his body.

Like the Al Shaab market massacre last Wednesday, when at least 21 Iraqi civilians were killed or burned to death by two missiles fired by an American jet, Shu'ale is a poor, Shia Muslim neighborhood of single-story corrugated iron and cement food stores and two-room brick homes.

Speaking freely without the presence of government officials, residents bitterly condemned the American and British forces. "This is a crime," a woman said angrily. "Yes, I know they say they are targeting the military. But can you see soldiers here? Can you see missiles?"

A few journalists did report seeing a Scud missile on a transporter near the Al Shaab area on Thursday and there were anti-aircraft guns around Shu'ale. But these weapons are known to present no threat to high-flying American war planes.

Despite the evidence cited by Fisk and Graham, the American and British governments are continuing to blame Iraq for the deaths in both market attacks, alleging that Iraqi workers are under orders to remove evidence that would support that claim. "A large number of Iraqi surface-to-air missiles have been malfunctioning. Many have failed to hit their targets and have fallen back onto Baghdad before exploding," a British government spokesman said.

Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf ridiculed these claims. "My explanation for their increasing

crimes against civilians is that they are feeling the weight of the series of defeats which we inflicted on them on the outskirts of the cities and in the desert,” he said.

The massacre came amid signs of a shift in the US-British war policy to target civilian facilities throughout Iraqi cities, including Baghdad. US and British bombs and missiles pounded the capital repeatedly on Friday in the heaviest day of raids since the war began. The raids knocked out many telephone lines—a deliberate strike against civilian infrastructure.

Massive 2,000 kilogram “bunker buster” bombs were dropped for the first time later the same day, destroying television and other media facilities in the capital’s center. Among the targets hit were studios used by international reporters. The explosions shook large parts of the city, including hotels housing foreign journalists.

Despite Pentagon claims that these are legitimate “command and control” targets, they are civilian facilities. Their destruction is a bid to stifle coverage of both the devastation of Iraqi cities and the outraged response of Iraqi people. More broadly, the devastation of civilian infrastructure is an attempt to turn the population against the Iraqi regime.

An AFP reporter saw a 50-year-old man wounded when a missile hit a communications center in a residential neighborhood on Sunday as workers were clearing rubble from previous strikes. Overall, Iraq claims that 4,000 civilians have been killed since Bush launched the war on March 19.

Shaken by the depth of popular resistance to their invasion, Washington and London are changing their troops’ rules of engagement, instructing them to be more willing to kill civilians in urban areas. According to media reports, the new rules will place less emphasis on minimizing civilian casualties and more on destroying the enemy, even if Iraqi military personnel are intermingled with civilians.

The BBC reported that military policy had changed from “winning hearts and minds” to treating all Iraqi residents as possible combatants, a shift reinforced by Saturday’s suicide bomb incident in which an Iraqi soldier killed four Americans at a military checkpoint.

One *New York Times* dispatch from Diwaniya, Iraq, gave a glimpse of the reality that many civilians have been shot down already. Marine Sergeant Eric Schrupf, 28, confirmed that bystanders had been killed in nearby villages. “We dropped a few civilians, but what do you do?” he said. He recalled one such incident, in which he and other members of his unit opened fire on an Iraqi soldier. He watched a woman standing near the Iraqi soldier go down.

The second market massacre has fueled hostility to the US-led invasion throughout the region. “Monstrous martyrdom in Baghdad,” was the headline in *Al-Dustour*, a newspaper in Amman, Jordan. “Dreadful massacre in Baghdad,” said Egypt’s mass circulation *Akhbar al-Youm* newspaper. Photos of two young victims of the blast covered half of its front page.

“Yet another massacre by the coalition of invaders,” read the main headline in Saudi Arabia’s *Al-Riyadh* daily.

“Those pictures have showed that America’s war is not only against the Iraqi regime and the Iraqi army, but also against the Iraqi children and elderly. How can we trust them now?” said Mahmoud Sahiouny, 19, a Syrian computer science student who lives in Beirut.

While the American and Western media have barely reported the incident, news of it quickly spread via email and the Internet. The *Washington Post* found a group of women at an Internet cafe in Cairo, for example, displaying some of the email they received on Saturday, containing pictures of funerals, wailing women, mourning men and the bodies of children in cradle-sized coffins.

“This is a media war, and America will realize sooner or later that we Arabs have a million alternatives now,” said Rana Khoury, 20, a political science student at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. “What really hurts is when I turned to American stations, they were talking about the humanitarian aid that the allies are providing for the Iraqi people. They didn’t even mention those who were massacred.”

Some of the people interviewed by Western journalists said they hated leaders like Saddam Hussein but were now ready to fight the US and British forces. “Bush is an occupier and terrorist. He thought he was playing a video game,” said George Elnaber, 36, an Arab Christian and the owner of a supermarket in Amman. “We hate Americans more than we hate Saddam now,” he said.

In Cairo, even figures with ties to the United States political establishment expressed anger. “Mr. Bush has lost us. We are gone. Enough. That’s the end,” said Daa Rashwan, head of the comparative politics unit at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo. “If America starts winning tomorrow, there will be suicide bombings that will start in America the next day. It is a whole new level now.”

“It is as if you are watching a horror movie,” said Summer Said, a journalist for the *Cairo Times*, an English-language newsmagazine. “I thought, at first, okay, maybe it isn’t a war for oil. Maybe America does want to help. Now, it’s genocide to me. Is the American government trying to exterminate Arabs?”

“This war is affecting civilians primarily. I did not expect to see civilians bombed and I feel exceedingly angry,” wrote Ezzat El Kamhawy, a respected Egyptian novelist. “This war can only harm the future of democracy in the area.... What is happening now does not implicate the future of the Arabs alone but the future of America herself.”



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