



IRAQ INVASION

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One Baghdad neighbourhood proud to resist US forces

AFP, Baghdad

More than 20 "martyrs" are buried under the olive trees outside the Abu Hanifa mosque, the name of each slipped into Pepsi bottles stuck in the ground. The Aadhamiyah neighbourhood, resident Faisal Sayed Jafar noted proudly, did not give a warm reception to US troops.

"We're the only part of Baghdad that didn't welcome the American soldiers with flowers," he said with a smile. "Of course, we paid a price."

Aadhamiyah, in the northwest of the capital, was the scene of a day-long battle Thursday that, according to residents, pitted US troops, fresh from their triumphant tour of central Baghdad the day before, against a dedicated mini-army of Iraqis and Arab volunteers.

Caught in the crossfire, the Sunni mosque of Abu Hanifa bore the scars. The minaret was nearly cracked in two from the tank fire, inside columns barely remained standing and the inner courtyard had gaping holes that could have been the work of attack helicopters.

Residents here said the head cleric at the mosque, Sheikh Wateq al-Obeidi, was taken prisoner with his two sons by US troops.

Jafar, a former trainer for the

national swimming team, refused to accept that many Baghdadis welcomed US troops.

"One mustn't be fooled by people's smiles. Inside, our hearts are bleeding," he insisted. "We refuse to accept the occupation and collapse of our country."

Neighbours said that among the dead were some civilians and Iraqi troops but also "fedayeen," or "patriots," from Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. "The fedayeen came from outlying neighbourhoods because they knew people here would be more supportive," said Riyadh Abdullah, a spice merchant.

But the Arab volunteers failed to understand their guns and grenades were no match for US firepower. Estimates are that up to 30 people died here Thursday.

"We were pleased to see the neighbourhood resist, but we suffered, and many didn't stay here because of the air strikes. Now we've got to return to normal," Abdullah concluded.

With chaos engulfing much of Baghdad due to a leadership vacuum, Aadhamiyah quickly organised a 30-strong army of volunteers -- some armed with revolvers, others simply with chunks of wood -- to protect the neighbourhood from looting.

At Friday prayers, "a doctor came to

tell us that hospitals had been looted and some patients had left their beds. The imam said one shouldn't take what belongs to everyone," Abdullah said.

In the absence of police and other authorities, the neighbourhood committee has been making rounds to clear trash and carry out other basic municipal functions.

"For 300 to 400 years we've taken pride in our neighbourhood," said another resident.

"This is where the mother of caliph Harun al-Rashid is buried," he said, referring to the fabled Abbasid ruler who died in 809.

Life has returned somewhat to normal. Men chat, play dominoes and sip tea behind the blown-out windows of a coffeehouse.

But in the neighbourhood's alleyways, debris from the battle still blocked traffic. The imam's blue Volkswagen Beetle lay in the ruin, along with around 10 other charred cars.

Children briefly came up with a game: exploring the inside of an abandoned US tank. But to their disappointment, troops came back Sunday and hauled it away.

Hamid Mohammad Ahmed's family saw the wall of their house blasted in by tank fire during last week's fighting.



A small boy hangs on to a GPMG (general purpose machine gun) held by a British soldier from C company of the 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment in Al Qurna, as he and colleagues from seven platoon patrol on foot near the biblical Garden of Eden. Today is the first time the British army has patrolled on foot wearing berets and not helmets.

PHOTO: AFP

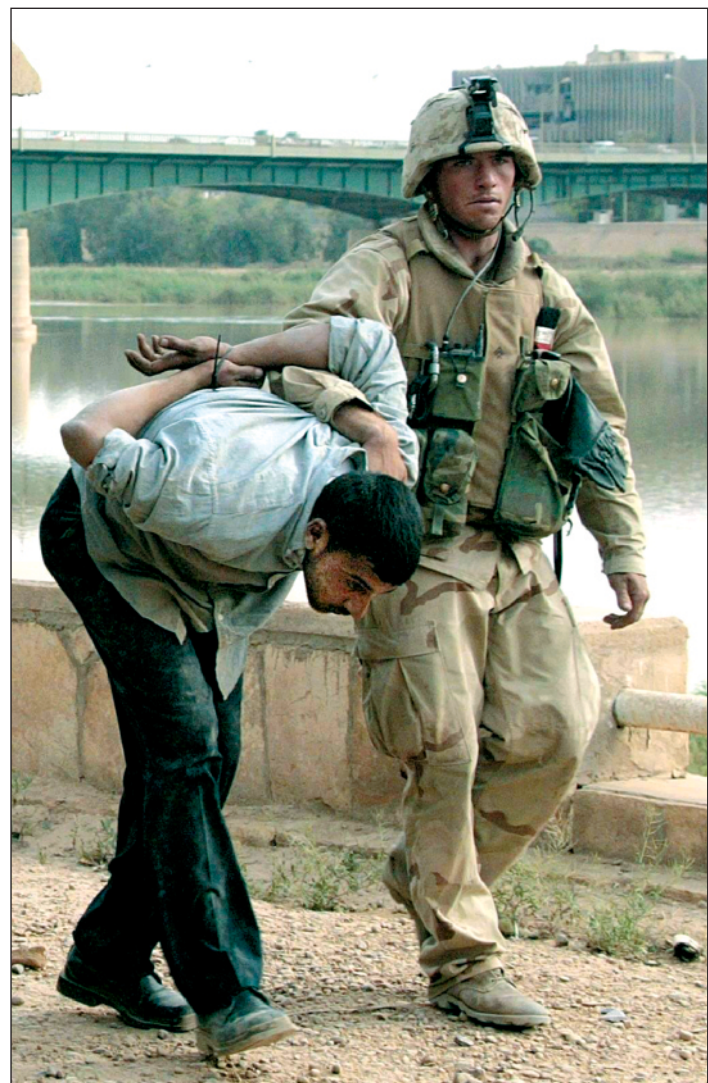


PHOTO: AFP

A looter caught inside a bank by US soldiers is taken away in Baghdad on Sunday. US forces detained suspected thieves for the first time in Baghdad, stopping 25 men on the east bank of the Tigris, an AFP photographer witnessed.

Syria would welcome weapons inspectors

AFP, Washington

A senior Syrian diplomat said his country was willing to accept international inspections to allay US fears that it has weapons of mass destruction and urged Washington to help rid the entire Middle East -- including Israel -- of such arms.

"We will not only accept the most rigid inspection regime, we will welcome it heartily," Imad Moustapha, the number two in the Syrian embassy here, told the NBC News program "Meet the Press."

"Go everywhere, but please to every country in this Middle East. You know very well that Israel is the country that is stockpiling nuclear weapons...Please help us free the Middle East from weapons of mass destruction," he said.

He flatly denied US accusations that Syria was assisting members of Saddam Hussein's regime, harbouring terrorists or producing weapons of mass destruction.

"It's been a campaign of misinformation and disinformation about Syria since even before the war started. This is just an ongoing series of false accusations," Moustapha told NBC.

He said the United States was using

Syria to mount a distraction from the chaos that the US-led military campaign in Iraq had left in its wake.

He also insisted that no member of Saddam's regime had fled across the border into Syria, and he called on the United States to take responsibility for securing the frontier.

"You have a huge US army in Iraq that has secured Iraqi western borders and you are controlling the situation there. If you have problems, please let the US army deal with these problems," he said.

Moustapha also accused the United States of provoking the Arab world with their choice of retired US general Jay Garner to run Iraq's interim post-war administration, because of his ardent pro-Israeli stance.

"The United States has a population of 270 million people...out of all those people, the person that has been chosen to rule Iraq is closely linked to (Israeli Prime Minister) Ariel Sharon and has been praising what Israel is doing to the Palestinians," he said.

"What about sensitivity towards the feelings of the Arab people? Can't people see or think here in the United States that at least, please, some respect for the dignity of the people?" Moustapha asked.

Two thousand police report back for work

Lack of security sparks more protests

REUTERS, Baghdad

More than 2,000 Baghdad policemen reported back for work on Monday to try and restore law and order in the Iraqi capital which has seen an orgy of looting and mayhem after Saddam Hussein's rule crumbled.

US forces captured the city last week after more than two weeks of aerial bombardment, but could do little to quell the chaos and lawlessness that has since swept the capital, prompting angry protests from many residents.

Several hundred Iraqis staged a new demonstration on Monday outside the Palestine Hotel, base for the international media in Baghdad, to complain about the lack of security in the city.

About 50 of them chanted: "Islamic state! Islamic state! Not American, not American!"

"It's the richest country in the world. We have all the resources, not just oil. This is just colonisation," said one protester, Sabah Mahmud, 50. "Where is freedom? There is no water, no electricity."

Major General Zuhair al-Nuami, head of the police department at the interior ministry under Saddam, urged police to get back to work immediately, patrolling city streets,

manning checkpoints and keeping traffic flowing.

Baghdad would normally have a police force of around 40,000.

On Monday, over 2,000 turned up at the Police College, a large building in eastern Baghdad, to register for work.

Many stopped working last week as U.S. forces closed in on the capital. Others sought to come out of retirement.

Some wore uniforms, many did not, fearing reprisal attacks by local residents who have vented their anger at decades of Saddam's harsh rule.

A handful of police cars were parked outside the college. Nuami appealed to his force to bring back up to 150 new cars that had only recently entered police service.

In often stormy exchanges, some former policemen shouted that they had been imprisoned or forced to retire under Saddam.

Inside the college, some attacked a bronze statue of Iraq's deposed leader with hammers and metal bars.

In Basra, Iraq's second city, local police are already working alongside British troops to restore order and help fill the power vacuum left after Saddam's fall.

There are thousands of Alis

KIM SENGUPTA IN BAGHDAD, The Independent

"Why do you all want to talk to Ali? There are hundreds of children suffering like him, and we are getting more every day," said Moufak Gabriel, the hospital director, as we arrived to see Ali Ismail Abbas, the injured 12-year-old boy who has become the centre of a British media frenzy.

All around him at the Saddam General, the worst-equipped hospital in Baghdad, in its most violent slum, Saddam City, there was pandemonium. Staff were barricading the gates as dozens of people, some ill, some seemingly healthy, struggled to get in. The danger lay beyond their groups of men with guns, knives and staves silently watching.

Every other big hospital in Baghdad including Al-Kindi, where Ali was initially treated, had been ransacked by mobs of looters. So he had been transferred here and now he lay on a soiled bed, under a neon light, in a room with broken windows and water on the floor.

The pitiful pictures of Ali, his arms reduced to bandaged stumps and his body covered in burns, biting his lip in pain and grief, have been carried by newspapers around the world. He will become one of the enduring images of war. For millions of people around the world, Ali is already the face of this

conflict. Perhaps one boy's tragedy is easier to comprehend than the enormity of grief and pain visited on an entire nation.

Yet three weeks of war have certainly left scars on countless other Iraqi children. There are no reliable figures for the numbers killed, orphaned or maimed. Thousands will have been affected by contaminated water as the power supplies in cities such as Basra and Baghdad were bombed. The immune systems of these children were already depressed by malnutrition after years of sanctions. Even before the war, experts warned the UN that Iraqi children were already suffering "significant psychological harm" from the fear of bombing and death.

The facts of what happened to Ali are as follows: an American missile smashed into his home in the village of Zafaraniya, 30 miles from Baghdad, as his family slept, just after midnight. He was severely burnt and both his arms had to be amputated.

His father, Ismail, and mother, Azhar, who was pregnant, were killed.

Ali has black curly hair and hazel eyes. His aunt Jamila and a nurse brushed away the flies. "If I had hands, I would shake your hand," he said. "They cut them off after the bomb. I want my hands."

We stood there awkwardly. Rahim al-Kinani, the doctor treating him, said

he had been told that newspapers in Britain had launched an appeal on his behalf and that he would have artificial arms soon.

How much of this Ali understood was not clear. He wanted new hands, he said, but he definitely did not want to go to Britain. Ali cried a little and then, unprompted, began to say what happened that night. "We had all gone to bed and there was this loud noise and smoke. I felt very scared and I was in much pain. I kept shouting for my mother. I did not know at the time what had happened to her."

"I do not remember much after that. I was taken to a hospital in Zafaraniya. After that they brought me here and the doctors cut off my arms."

Ali has six sisters, aged from six to 20, and a 10-year-old stepbrother. They are now being looked after by an uncle.

His aunt Jamila used a corner of her chador to wipe the boy's eyes. "He cries all the time. There is nothing I can really say to console him," she said.

Two floors away, in another ward of Saddam General, lay 11-year-old Fouad Abu Haidar. He has lost his left arm, half his face is hidden by bandages and he may lose one of his eyes. He suffered his injuries during another air attack, 10 days ago, near Iskandiriyah, in the southern suburbs of Baghdad. A 14-year-old cousin, Karim, died when the missile struck their house just after nine

o'clock in the evening.

Fouad has not had anyone visit him from the Western media, and no promises that he will also benefit from the generosity of the British people. His father, Haidar Hussein, said he was glad to know about the concern of the British people but felt nothing but anger about what had happened. "No one has told me anything about any money from Britain. But this is a war by Bush and Blair. They did this to my son and other children, women, men. Why didn't the British and American people stop their leaders from doing this? What is the justification in bombing ordinary people?"

"Now the Americans are in Baghdad, and look what is going on here. There is looting and killing and the Americans are also killing Iraqis. What is their justification?"

There are other wards and other young victims. A three-year-old boy with a fractured skull, and Jenan, a girl of nine with her foot blown off who has also had to be transferred from Al-Kindi. She said: "It hurts a lot, all the time. I do not think I will be able to walk again. I do not know what is going to happen to me. I feel very, very sad."

Her grandmother, sitting beside her, started to cry.

US troops seek Iraqi help after bombing their cities

REUTERS, Baghdad

After destroying Iraq's army and bombing its cities, US forces are now asking for the help of ordinary civilians in taking full control of Baghdad -- and they appear to be getting it.

Whether they support the US-led invasion or not, most Iraqis are pragmatic enough to help the Americans when asked, and many are voluntarily offering up information on local paramilitary positions and weapons caches.

Hadi Gashim, a 54-year-old father of five young children, went to see the soldiers as soon as they entered his area of southwest Baghdad this weekend to tell them about a weapons cache in an elementary school 25 yards from his home.

He said paramilitaries took over the school a month ago and that he and other neighbours were terrified it would draw the attention of US bombers and fighter jets.

"We were worried and scared the aircraft, or the tanks, would attack it. And we could die. We want this danger gone," he said outside his home on

Sunday as soldiers hauled about 250 crates of 82mm mortars out of the school and onto trucks.

The trucks were provided by other local residents after soldiers walked the streets looking for help.

Some were reluctant at first, saying their vehicles were broken down or the keys were lost, but they changed their minds when told they could go with the trucks and they were needed only to clear weapons and ammunition from the neighbourhood.

"We have to get rid of all these things. We have children and we don't want them harmed," said Hussein Ali, handing over the keys to his truck after a short negotiation on a street corner.

But as US troops venture out onto the streets in search of help, they are hearing demands as well as making them.

This weekend, almost every time troops and civilians met, people told the soldiers they wanted them to put a stop to the looting that has erupted across the country since Saddam Hussein's government collapsed.

"You must stop the looting. You must be responsible for our security. It is our money, our things being stolen. You must stop it," one man said as he berated two soldiers.

Another demand is the quick restoration of basic services that were cut off by bombing raids on the capital.

Even here, many Iraqis are pragmatic.

"It doesn't matter who rules us as long as there is law," said Hadi Gashim, a man with a booming laugh who says he neither supported nor opposed the invasion but is happy Saddam has been toppled and would accept US rule if they rebuilt the country.

"I want my children educated. We want electricity, water. We want freedom and peace and security. Whoever can give us this, that is good," he said.

But not all Iraqis have welcomed US troops, and not all American soldiers feel at ease.

"Their mouths are smiling but their eyes are not," a member of the 101st Airborne Division said of one group of Iraqis.

