Life reports

Wartime Citizen Journalism in the Digital Age

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Abstract

In what ways does wartime citizen journalism—through its form, style and content—either oppose or add to mainstream media coverage of the 2003-2011 Iraq War and how does it convey alternative messages about the war through eye-witness reports and personal observations? These questions guide the argument that the here researched weblogs—Boots on the Ground and Last of Iraqis—give life reports on the situation in Iraq during this historical moment. Life reports are shaped by the characteristics of critical internet culture, citizen journalism and blogging. By drawing upon current research, these terms are defined and used in a critical discourse analysis of sample material from both blogs and their comments sections. Using theories of postmodernity, digital culture, and the online public sphere, possibilities for critical reflection open up. By microscopically analyzing the content, form and style of both blogs with these theoretical tools in hand, it becomes possible to, at least partly, to lay bare the characteristics of wartime citizen journalism and how it carries the potential to enrich mainstream reporting.

22,387 words
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Introduction

I believe NO one can know or understand the situation in Baghdad unless he lives in it regardless if he was an Iraqi, Arabic or a westerner... I'm not saying that all the media organizations are lying or they are hiding the truth but I can strongly say that they don't have all the means to cover everything... I can't blame the media for this because after all it's business and they need viewers to keep their business going on so they have to give what the viewer wants.

Last of Iraqis, June 19, 2008

With the above, Dr Mohammed, an Iraqi blogger, answers a question repeatedly asked by readers of his blog: do the media report the Iraq War in a fair, balanced and accurate way? Dr Mohammed is a self-proclaimed citizen journalist, who, by means of his blog, wishes to tell the story of the Iraq War in a way that comes closest to what he perceives as the truth. Essentially, journalists have traditionally had the same goal. The difference is, Dr Mohammed argues, that journalists are restrained and limited by their profession to do so. This thesis discusses, theoretically, the same argument.

Knowledge of conflicts and military intervention is a question of representation, or, the creation of meaning through text and images, produced by meaning-makers such as journalists. War coverage—in professional and citizen reports—is essential to and often the only way of understanding a conflict that is far removed from home. Consequently, (amateur) reporters hold a powerful position: either because of their professional status or their positions as eye-witnesses, they hold a certain authority. Concerning this, cultural theorist Stuart Hall asserts that “knowledge, linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but also has the power to make itself true” (49). Authority and power instigate and strengthen claims of truth. Therefore, it is important to examine in what ways alternative discourses differ from generally held truths about major conflicts. This thesis attempts to distill key characteristics and differences from alternative or citizen war journalism and discuss the motivations behind them.

What people know about a conflict affects the political and decision-making processes, hence showing journalism’s pivotal position in a democracy. Historian Steven Hook summarizes the three functions of the press in the political process: first, the media provide a source of information and opinions for citizens. Second, the media act as agenda setters for policy makers. And third, they act as government watchdogs. Hook argues that the relationship between government and journalism is based on the premises of symbiosis; in other words, democratic
government cannot exist without a critical press and journalism needs a government for its stories (246-248). But what if the press does not function properly, according to citizens? In light of this question, Egyptian scholar Naila Hamdy poses that “fueled by technologies that have been noted to promote democracy and social change in an increasingly globalized world marked with interconnected communication networks . . . citizen journalists were initially triggered by the divisive 2004 war in Iraq to disseminate their communicative expressions” (55). Indeed, during the war in Iraq, citizens took on the role of journalists to deliver their reports of daily life in a conflict zone and their views on the war in general. This is increasingly made possible by the technologies of the internet, which gave rise to a new—and now socially ingrained—phenomenon in the media landscape: weblogging. The sum of the weblogs dedicated to the war in Iraq constitute a novel type of discourse within the media in general and the world of weblogs, the so-called blogosphere, in specific.¹

Historically, the global blogosphere’s maturation coincided with the war in Iraq. The war started with the invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003. In a coalition not backed up by the United Nations, the US and Great Britain mobilized more than 200,000 troops, five aircraft carrier battle groups and more than 600 aircraft and 30 cruise missile ships. A large-scale bombing campaign and a massive ground offensive converged in a “shock and awe strategy.” On May 1, 2003, President George W. Bush proclaimed victory in what was called the second terrorism war—the first being the toppling of the Taliban in Afghanistan (Hook and Spanier 305-311). The defeat of Saddam Hussein and his armies proved to be the easiest part of the conflict. Rebuilding Iraq, with a deeply resented population, active terrorist and loyalist cells, war-shattered economy and failing utilities became a wholly different challenge for the US government. Within this context, public support for the war, both foreign and domestic, began to falter drastically. US hegemony has since been under attack politically and physically. Anti-war sentiment rallies were held globally; millions gathered in Rome, London and Berlin. Within this context of public discontent, bloggers writing about the war found an enthusiastic, and often polarized, audience.

This thesis will revolve around the thought that the Internet in general and blogs in specific have stimulated a plethora of voices to emerge in the media covering the war in Iraq, ¹I am much aware of the boundaries of online citizen journalism in countries where the press and online activity is closely watched and censored. This dissertation focuses on the Western invention of journalism in countries in which it has matured and has been practiced without direct intrusion of the State. The influence of Western journalism has been apparent: Iraqi citizen journalists, of whom one shall be discussed later, use Western journalistic styles and practices.
rather than a relatively uniform news discourse as, especially, presented on television news shows. These new voices are often counter-hegemonic—anti-American, or contra-global—and can potentially contest homogenizing stories and the framing power of CNN-like news providers by directly referencing, addressing and criticizing them online. Combining the immediacy and spontaneity of the World Wide Web, these online citizen journalists may challenge, add to, and reflect upon dominant journalistic discourse. Thus they undermine traditional news coverage which claims journalistic, professional, ethical, and objective superiority. As Naily Hamdy states: “Similar to their western counterparts, citizen journalism enthusiasts [in the Arab region] fueled by the new communication revolution, both technologically and philosophically have chipped into government media hegemony and the private media powers, causing a deeply seated fear of citizen journalist empowerment” (71). The central questions that flow out of these thoughts is: How and in what ways does wartime citizen journalism—through its form, style and content—either oppose or add to mainstream media that covered the conflict and how does it convey new messages?

It will be argued that the weblogs discussed here are critical of any form of authority, emphasize personalized storytelling and oppose the mainstream media’s grand narrative. These characteristics can be labeled postmodern, because they depart from Modernist-progressive ideals of what is considered good journalism. On the one hand, fair and accurate reporting are the goals of professional journalists, but on the other, journalistic organizations cannot work outside market pressures nor without the rules and restrictions of its professional field, which are grounded in the 19th century. As Dr Mohammed argues, news organizations are limited in their coverage, due to business, ethical or practical reasons. Consequently, the practice of journalism is conditioned, which creates a vacuum for citizen journalism to fill. Because they emphasize immediacy, eye-witnessing and the experience of war, citizen journalists amend to the journalistic discourse in alternative ways, thereby criticizing mainstream media discourse about the war in Iraq. Using the tools and practices of citizen journalism, the bloggers provide alternative realities and truths about war. What is more, due to the participatory nature of the blogosphere, online political talk has at least the potential to reach and engage with otherwise politically silent citizens. As the examples used in chapters three will show, the act of commenting as performed by bloggers and their readers incites political deliberation and discussion. As will be argued here, because citizen journalism is a personalized form of
journalism grounded in subjectivity and the experience of daily life, it can spark political discussion.

Citizen journalism can potentially have an impact on what Michel Foucault has called “a regime of truth,” which is created by a society’s beliefs, mores and values (131-133). In an interview, Foucault stated that “‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it (133).” To a certain extent, professional journalism communicates dominantly held truths through its discourse. As a meaning-maker, journalism is inevitably part of this system of power because citizens depend on its suggested representations of reality. Citizen journalism is placed outside the confines of professional journalism and can, through its idiosyncratic form, style and content, alternatively frame reality. To illustrate this abstract thought, theories of critical discourse analysis, as formulated by the likes of Norman Fairclough, Donald Matheson and Stuart Allan, will be used. However, before analytically examining examples of citizen journalism, a working definition of citizen journalism and the picture of the theoretical debate concerning it will be provided. Second, the practice of blogging and, specifically, warblogging will described and examined. The main part of the research consists of a critical discourse analysis of the blogs Last of Iraqis by Dr Mohammed and Boots on the Ground Boots on the Ground by an American soldier called Kevin. Both reflected upon and criticized dominant media discourses and alternatively reported on the Iraq conflict. Lastly, the comments posted on these blogs will be linked and tested to the theoretical insights discussed in the first two chapters and to theories on the digital public sphere.

The upcoming chapters will discuss reports of life, lively reports, as well as life reports. However, live reports will not be at the center of attention. Life reports share live report’s immediacy and urgency, but they originate from the subjective experience of daily life. Actually living in combat zones grants authors of life reports a different type authority. Dr Mohammed, Kevin, and other citizen journalists in conflict areas faced—and still face—the horrors of war on a daily basis. They struggled with their experiences and one way to channel their grief and fear was by writing their blogs. Dr Mohammed and Kevin gave detailed and sometimes intimate insights into their lives in a warzone, from two completely different perspectives. The personalized and subjective aspects of citizen journalism give audiences the chance to create awareness of the consequences of war on the daily lives for those involved on the ground,
something mainstream journalism struggles with. However, it is not the goal of this thesis to argue against mainstream journalism’s role in covering war. Rather, the analysis of Dr Mohammed and Kevin’s blogs shows the potential citizen journalism has in creating an alternative type of discourse concerning the war in Iraq, thus adding to mainstream coverage.
Chapter One

Coming to Terms: The Ws of Citizen Journalism

What is coming to be called citizen journalism . . . is emerging as a practice in search of a theory.

Davis Merritt, 22

As David Ryfe and Donica Mensing show in “Citizen Journalism in a Historical Frame,” the principal functions of the press find their origins in Modernity and more specifically in the Progressive Era. During this historical period (1890-1920) journalism matured and redefined itself against the backdrop of social and political tensions and scientific innovation. Today, Ryfe and Mensings’s description still holds true:

Mainstream journalists imagine themselves as ‘trustees’ of the public, representing their interests and concerns in the corridor of political power. They see their primary purpose as delivering accurate, timely, relevant information to the public. They hold to this self-conception because they also believe that the ultimate safeguard of democracy is a well-informed citizenry. (Ryfe and Mensing 34)

Key professional standards in achieving accurate, timely and relevant reports are objectivity, truth-finding, and neutrality achieved through distance. Historically, journalism has been seen as information provider, agenda setter, watchdog and ultimately a fourth estate in Western democracies. This description of “good” and “relevant” journalism came under attack—and not for the first time—during the war and occupation of Iraq by a relative newcomer in the media landscape: the online citizen journalist.

This chapter will argue that, during war, the Progressive Era’s normative arguments of a “good” journalism which focuses on distance, objectivity, neutrality and truth-finding, do not have the capacity to depict human suffering that inevitably comes with war. Either because of ethical (“this is too horrific to publish”), censure/propagandistic (“this cannot be published due to embed regulations”), or business (“this will not sell”) motivations, journalists are limited by the codes and conventions of their professional field. As many scholars have argued, American and global audiences have, in recent conflicts, been fascinated by the spectacle of US military

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2 Other authors who have studied the origins of journalism include: Stephen Ward (on journalistic professional ethics); Michael Schudson (on the sociology and history of journalism); Jean Chalaby (on journalism as a Western invention).

3 Examples of other historical periods in which journalism was criticized publicly are the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and the Yugoslavia conflict.
superiority, “seeing” the war through the eyes of a precision bomber and given “clean” images that did not show the impact on the ground. Audiences became part of the military-industrial-media complex, or, what alternatively is called, militainment (cf. Stahl, Jaramillo, Mirzoeff).

American media discourse on the war in Iraq was largely based upon terms that followed militaristic lines of reasoning and ways of seeing. Hence, “independence” became a heavily charged word and was, for example, used by some freelance journalists to market themselves to attract an audience that could finance their trips to conflict areas. More generally, the internal struggle within journalism over how to cover the Iraq War gave rise to a citizen-engaged press and later to forms of citizen journalism that were critical of the mainstream media’s reports. This is illustrated well by accounts of daily life in the Iraq conflict area—clearly, the media were at war with themselves as much as engaged in a real one. These alternative reports rely on experience, emotional attachment, and the immediacy of “being there,” hence applying alternative frames to the war. Even though many of these accounts were partisan and advocated one side of the spectrum, they showed—to borrow from Deborah Jaramillo—the ugly side of war, without a pretty package. Before advancing any further with this argument, however, clear definitions of the terms used must be given; or, in journalistic terms, the who, what, when, where and why of citizen journalism will be answered.

**Who, What, When, Where?**

In a well-known essay Jane B. Singer poses the question: “who are these guys?” (Singer 139-163). Singer reacts to an emergent group of ordinary citizens who, at the start of the new millennium, started to write online about their lives and current affairs in a journalistic fashion, and consequently challenged the professionalism of journalism. Singer clearly displays what citizen journalism is *not*, namely a profession. Her essay voices a concern about the status of professional journalism in a digital age. Writing in 2003, the issues she raises are still very much relevant today, certainly when one attempts to define who these new online amateur journalists are. In her essay, Singer gives an overview of sociological insights into the notion of professionalism and locates traditional journalism within this. She states: “in effect, professionals seek to establish a monopoly on expertise that makes them irreplaceable, giving them the ability to control entry to their ranks . . . The standardized body of knowledge equips soon-to-be professionals with a sense that they share a cognitive superiority over the layperson, legitimizing
the social division of labor on which their ongoing status depends” (Ibid. 141). What she argues here is that professional journalist share common beliefs and practices which result in institutionalized work.

In this regard, professional journalism operates as an interpretative community. As Barbie Zelizer observes, the base of values and practices of journalism has been located by journalism scholars in journalism schools, newsrooms and places of social gathering like the pubs and bars in Fleet Street (14-15). Thinking about journalism academically, however, has historically created tensions between journalists and journalism scholars. Defining journalism has therefore resulted in continuous debate. Nevertheless, Zelizer provides an inclusive definition of the terms: “Seen as distinct from less organized modes of recounting public experience, such as rumor, gossip, or hearsay, journalism has come to refer to the organized and public relay of accounts of happenings in the world” (22). Attached to the term, according to Zelizer, are a set of crafts, “routines, skills and conventions” that individuals and groups employ in the process of making the news (22-23).

A certain amount of expertise and socialization through schooling and work in the newsroom are needed to enter the field of professional journalism. Additionally, Singer identifies professional codes of conduct and autonomy of the professional community. The exclusivity of a professional field leads to an imbalance of power regarding alternative forms of journalistic practices, certainly when a professional institution is a powerful actor in the knowledge and meaning making process. In other words, what is considered good journalism is, in part, determined by the professional journalistic field itself. Consequently, a hierarchal relationship between the professional and amateur exists. This imbalance of power is kept in place and further increased by professional recruitment, training and the structure of power in the professional field (Ibid 142). An important side note Singer provides is that no profession is in complete control of its boundaries. This lack of control has given rise to citizen journalism\(^4\), a practice that is not institutionalized and professionalized, and challenges the boundaries of the journalistic profession.

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\(^4\) Other terms, among several others, used in the literature to describe citizen journalists are: alternative journalism, participatory journalism, grassroots journalism, personal journalism, do-it-yourself journalism, black market journalism, postmodern journalism, citizen’s media, radical media and democratic media. See, for example, such initiatives as Independent Media Center, or Indymedia, which provides a platform for engaged amateurs and journalists to post their stories on local websites.
Citizen journalism finds its roots in public journalism, a highly debated concept theorized within academic discourse, that combines the professional practice of journalism and the news input of citizens. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the first efforts of bringing citizens into the journalistic process were centered on “news selection and encouraging dialogue about issues” and the aim was to “make public life go well” (Rosenberry and St. John III 3). This type of a citizen-engaged press is known as public journalism and revolved around the working together of citizens and journalists. Citizens would provide potential news stories and the professionals would work these out. However, simultaneous with the rise of the internet, “as a more citizen-initiated journalism unfolded, traditional notions of gatekeeping that for generations had confined the press to a narrow, proscribed model were swept aside” (Ibid. 4). Such phrases as “cyber-democracy” and “greater deliberative efficacy” were used to describe the growing role and power of non-professional journalists in the media. The famous line: “freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one” becomes less true with every new website (Liebling qtd. in Walker 84). The ownership of the means of production, dissemination and consumption changed dramatically with the introduction of the internet. It is important to note that this technology, potentially, has a democratizing effect on information processing. Where in the first instance people started interacting on existing news websites, they soon began their own websites, which is apparent in the humble beginnings of weblogs such as The Huffington Post, The Daily Kos, and The Drudge Report.

Gatekeeping is a pivotal concept in the discussion of journalism as a profession. Aaron Barlow argues that through notions of ethical rules, peer pressure, and standardized procedures professional journalists keep an eye on the “flights of fancy, tethering to the ground the information finally presented to the public” (Barlow 48). Barlow shows that collegial checks and news room codes keep individual journalist within their professional confines. Similarly, Axel Bruns writes that “gatekeeping simply refers to a regime of control over what content is allowed to emerge from the production processes in print and broadcast media; the controllers (journalists, editors, owners) of these media, in other words, control the gates through which content is released to their audiences” (Bruns 11). Next, Bruns introduces a term for online, peer-reviewed news: gatewatching. This principle is based on the practice of online news producers closely watching the output of different websites and discussing, linking to and commenting this. Hence, a producer-consumer network is established, which serves, ultimately, as a quality filter.
Barlow underwrites Bruns’s conclusion. He moves on by examining how gatekeeping operates on blogs written by citizen journalists. In summary, Barlow argues that gatekeeping on citizen journalist’s blogs happens on a peer-to-peer basis. The specific discourse or political tone on a blog is the rule to which stories are measured by other contributors and readers. This is an alternative way of gatekeeping, opposed to the newsroom gatekeeping done by journalists, which is based upon professional status. Novel ways of news selection and gatekeeping are changing news discourse. This leads John Palfrey and Urs Gasser to state that: “the traditional hierarchies of control of news and information are crumbling, with new dynamics replacing the old” (Palfrey and Gasser 256). These new dynamics of news production and control of information began to emerge when, gradually, ordinary citizens, who were active citizen journalists, were asked by newspapers to contribute and engage with professional journalism (Atton and Hamilton 64).

Comparing gatekeeping and gatewatching practices reveals the differences between professionally guided public journalism and citizen journalism. As is understood by proponents of the term, public journalism is based on the idea of active cooperation between professionals and amateurs. Citizen journalists work alone or with other citizen journalists in a network. Additionally, as Davis “Buzz” Merritt aptly put it: “the ideas that became known as public journalism emerged in the late 1980s as a theory in search of a practice . . . What is coming to be called citizen journalism, in contrast to public journalism’s beginnings, is emerging as a practice in search of theory” (Merritt 22). Citizen journalism is initiated on a grassroots level, which means it is practiced by individuals who operate outside the hierarchies of an institution, and is unrestrained by professional borders. Merritt, when he attempts to nuance his definition of citizen journalism, finds that:

It is too early in an emerging dynamic environment to locate citizen journalism precisely, and its ultimate attachment to the broad concept of traditional journalism is uncertain . . . Citizen journalism’s core exists in people motivated to tell other people about facts and events they believe are important and exchange thoughts about the meaning of the facts and events . . . Its practitioners readily accept, even relish, the fact that they are involved in public life. (Ibid. 27-28)

In this sense, citizen journalism does not differ from traditional journalism, with the exceptions that citizen journalists have little or no training in the professional field, no need for excessive capital outlay, and no access to media institutions (Atton, 2009, 265).

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5 What (the different aspects of) blogs are will be discussed in the next chapter. Barlow’s point, however, illustrates the self-regulatory aspect of citizen journalism, which is crucial at this point of discussion.
Chris Atton traces similar problems as Merritt. Building upon John Downing’s theories on radical media he shows how, indeed, alternative forms of media production are practiced, but lack a theoretical foundation in academic terms. This leads to confusion of terms, fragmentation and in some cases a lack of necessary organization. Combining the work of Haas and Rodriguez, he explains citizen journalism as an undefined project that attempts to make several small activist public spheres into a bigger, macro, public sphere with a goal to empower communities that normally do not have a (loud) voice (Ibid. 266). An example of such a project is Indymedia, the global internet-based news network. Summarizing previous research, Atton concisely argues that:

These ‘citizens’ media’ are aimed not at state promoted citizenship but at media practices that construct citizenship and political identity within everyday life practices. Rather than relying on the mass media to set the boundaries of political involvement, citizens use their own, self-managed media to become politically involved on their own terms. (Ibid. 267)

The definition of citizen journalism here can be amended with Atton’s line of reasoning. Not only the insight that citizenship and political identity can be constructed through the media practices of everyday life—so very present in the internet age—helps, but also that political involvement directly incites and/or flows out of citizen journalism and thus leads to a more politically engaged citizenry, as chapter three will illustrate. Atton continues: “Amateur media practices are always embedded in everyday life practices; they are therefore already located in broader political, economic, social and cultural contexts” (Ibid.). This political dimension of citizen journalism has to be regarded as one of the core aspects of its existence.

David Ryfe and Donica Mensing hold citizen journalism in a different light. They come to the conclusion that “citizen journalists find themselves in something of an intellectual cul-de-sac, essentially using the new tools at their disposal primarily for the old purposes of disseminating information,” while they, as Atton similarly argues, are capable of inciting social change, or at least give a critical perspective of society (Ryfe and Mensing 33). They are hopeful about citizen journalism’s potential and propose that “perhaps public journalism’s emphasis on public problem-solving represents a way for citizen journalists to flesh out interactivity’s potential in ways that will make in truly transformational,” because “unlike their professional brethren, citizen journalists insist that the value of news lies in the opportunity it affords to interact and engage with other citizens” (Ibid.).
The detachment of citizen journalists from the profession of journalism places them outside the market pressures that inevitably co-exist with it. Not only do citizen journalist not get paid (at least in the definition of citizen journalism used in this dissertation), but also they do not need to literally sell their products within a crowded and competitive market. Therefore, Atton is critical about Ryfe and Mensing’s notion of citizen and public journalism cooperating and Merritt’s notion of the institutionalization of civic or public journalism: “Despite its claims, public journalism, working as it does within the market and within long-standing organizational, institutional and professional structures, operates in similar ways to mainstream journalism (of which it is after all a part)” (Atton, 2003, 268). And later: “public journalism’s capacity to critically and substantively challenge the conditions of capitalism is severely curtailed by its very locations within capitalism” (Ibid.). In this view, journalism can be located within capitalist hegemony; public journalism is currently incorporated within the system; and citizen journalism is an emergent, critical form of counter-culture.

Accordingly, Atton places citizen journalism in a discussion of authority and power and the construction of reality and truth: “Alternative media construct a reality that appears to oppose the conventions and representations of the mainstream media. Participatory, amateur media production contests the concentration of institutional and professional media power and challenges the media monopoly on producing symbolic forms” (Ibid.). The image he sketches here shows that professional, mainstream journalism contributes to the construction of dominant ideologies through the formation of commonly held truths. Consequently, citizen journalism questions and challenges a regime of truth:

Alternative journalism suggests that authority does not need to be located institutionally or professionally; that credibility and trustworthiness can be derived from accounts of lived experience, not only from objectively detached reporting; and that there need be no imperative to separate facts from values. (Atton, 2009, 284)

In other words, what is considered as good journalism has a socio-historical basis. The values of professional journalism are modern and progressive, because underlying this type of journalism is the sense that “reality could be observed and documented from an objective viewpoint, an emphasis on constant change and timeliness, and a belief in being able to represent reality accurately” (Wall, 2005, 154). Contrarily, those of citizen journalism have a postmodern origin, because of the realization that:
There is no master narrative, no single interpretation of events. The regime of objectivity is only one of the many ways in which we might construct news. Once we acknowledge the social construction of news, why should we then reject alternative journalism simply because it is not subject to the same normative and epistemological limits of mainstream journalism? (Atton, 2009, 272)

Due to its insistence on challenging a master narrative, power and authority, citizen journalism can be read as a postmodern form of journalism. An important incentive of the challenging nature of citizen journalism is the internet. Merritt underwrites this: “The internet . . . restructured the architecture of information flow including, among many other things, the conversation upon which democracy depends” (Merritt 27). This conversation, based on social hierarchies, was traditionally between citizens and journalists and (for citizens) journalists and politicians. These conversational lines have now blurred. This led to a new genre in journalistic conversation, which, as Melissa Wall writes in her concise essay “Blogs of War: Weblogs of News,” emphasizes “personalization, audience participation in content creation and story forms that are fragmented and interdependent with other websites” (Wall, 2005, 153). These characteristics are what she calls “postmodern sensibilities” and are especially apparent in citizen journalist’s blogs concerning the war in Iraq.6

Another aspect of citizen journalism that makes it a product of its socio-historical context is its place. Internet does not have a geographical locale, but the stories circulating on it have. Representations of local experience have become available to a, more or less, global audience. The term “Glocal”—the combination of global and local—has become somewhat of a buzzword within many disciplines and professions that operate within internet culture. The word is applicable to the production, dissemination and consumption of citizen journalism as well: texts are produced in a local setting (physical circumstances, ideologies), but with a global audience in mind (Dr Mohammed writes in English); they are disseminated immediately and cached in global databases (which practically eliminates the chance of loss of the text); and they can be read directly on any device with internet access and a web browser by people in their own local setting.

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6 Whenever a crisis occurs, or a conflict with global implications like the Iraq War, mainstream media encounter difficulties in reacting to them, because they rely on routines that are based on objectivity and what has been called “faux detachment” (Wall 155). Citizen journalism is a reaction to journalism’s inability to report in a postmodern way. Similarly, the New Journalism of the 1960s—with its own formal idiosyncrasies focusing on character, scene, and dialogue—can be read as a reaction to journalism’s failure in dealing with the Cold and Vietnam War (Ibid.).
Citizen Journalism: A Working Definition

Drawing upon the literature on the subject, it is possible to contrive a definition of the term citizen journalism (and most of its synonyms). Because its practices are diverse and its uses are wide-ranging, it is impossible to come up with a one-sentence definition. Hence, a bullet-point description will have to suffice at this stage. Citizen journalism is:

* “Embedded within the everyday lives of citizens” (Atton, 2003, 267) and thereby driven by the politics of everyday life—which range from the difficulties of living in a warzone to the problems of a teenager.
* “Both driven and produced by citizens” and therefore bottom-up in terms of social activism, social responsibility and power relations (Ibid.).
* Not subjected to traditional gatekeeping institutions but checked on a peer-to-peer basis called gatewatching.
* Fragmented and hybrid in terms of place, form, and content, ranging from video items to blogs, fanzines and eyewitness reports from around the globe.
* Glocal, which means that locally produced texts are read globally.
* Non-institutionalized and placed outside the market, which means that it is unpaid and detached form professional beats, procedures, hierarchies, ethics and rules and is not affected by market pressure.
* Challenging dominant media and government representations of real events and thereby empowering voices that would otherwise not be heard.
* A practice without a theory; hence, it has no unifying goal or purpose. It is the result of changes within society, technology and journalism.
* Rooted in postmodern notions of personalization, audience participation, intertextuality and alternative story modes.
* An online form of journalism, because the World Wide Web is the only place where direct access to the production, dissemination and consumption of content are possible without the interference of a gatekeeping institution.
Of course, each of these points is debatable. This is partly due to citizen journalism’s ontological and epistemological fluidity, the actuality of the term, scholarly disagreement, and the resulting vagueness regarding the phenomenon. However, for the sake of clarity, the formulation here will act as the first stepping stone of the argument in this dissertation and as a guideline is the analysis phase. Chris Atton notes that the study of citizen journalism has a threefold purpose. In the first place it can act as a critique of traditional forms of journalism. Second, it suggests “other ways of journalism.” Third, it offers skills and opens possibilities to people who want to work in alternative media (Ibid. 271). It is helpful to keep these three purposes in mind when answering the question: why is there citizen journalism and what are its driving societal forces?

**Conflicting Realities, or the ‘Why’ of Citizen Journalism in Times of War**

Many reasons have been given for the emergence of a non-professional, citizen-driven press in the 21st century. In the view of Ryfe and Mensing “citizen journalists feel compelled to practice journalism not because they see the ethos of professional journalism as illegitimate, or because they wish to invent a new form of journalism. Rather, they feel compelled to do journalism because they believe that professional journalists are not doing their jobs” (Ryfe and Mensing 36). Matheson and Allan show that, in times of war, “a common thread in the reflections of many commentators concerned with how war is represented is the recognition that the categories of warfare and mediation are becoming increasingly difficult to separate from one another” (Matheson and Allan 9). Indeed, many commentators have argued that the media and military and political campaigns have integrated over the years, especially since the dawn of satellite television. Notably, in times and places of war, the modernist foundations of mainstream journalism are challenged, which results in one-sided reporting, “faux detachment,” and a focus on the bigger military picture and the spectacle of war, instead of personal suffering and death (Knightley 4-5). Citizens living in these areas, and soldiers on active duty there, experienced war in their own ways and saw this reality conflicting with its media representations.

Journalism has the remarkable ability to present its readings of reality as the truth. As Marcel Broersma has argued, the discourse journalism produces has a performative nature, meaning that by retelling events news reports add meaning to events and through linguistic representation they describe and produce phenomena at the same time. Upon this reconstruction of reality people can act and form opinions (Broersma, 2010, 15-17). Truthfulness and reliability
form the core of this producer-consumer relationship. This code between citizens and journalists has a socio-historical basis, which has been shaken by the postmodern distrust of authority. Namely, before a public can be persuaded by the performative utterances of a mass communicator like the press, this latter institution needs authority. This authority is contrived from the news agency’s reputation, which is measured by standards of “good” journalism. In a postmodern context, the foundations of what counts as “good” journalism have crumbled, due to government, military and market pressures. Additionally, the internet added to a sense of escape from authority: “free dissemination [on the internet] means lack of authority, and, ultimately, a lack of control” (Walker 48). Added up, this led to the general feeling in the public Ryfe and Mensing describe: journalists are not properly executing their jobs (36).

Indeed, there are times when it is harder for journalists to execute their jobs. The circumstances of war challenge the normative journalistic ideas of impartiality, fairness, and what is held to be the national interest (Matheson and Allan 7). Today, the media and warfare—originally two more separated categories—have blended together in various degrees and on different levels. They have increasingly become part of each other and are reinforcing themselves in the public sphere. Official versions of what happens at the frontline—which often support the war effort—are often guiding journalistic stories (Ibid. 9). The control over war imagery went as far that the Pentagon sought to buy satellite images of the inevitable carnage the 2001 bombings of Afghanistan left behind. The evidence of human suffering in the region was hoped to be reduced in this way. It is estimated that the first of the US attacks on Taliban targets cost around 1000 to 1300 civilian lives (Conetta). “No sustained effort was made to inform news consumers about the capability of munitions such as the ‘daisy cutter’ bombs dropped in the Tora Bora gorge” (Matheson and Allan 71). Instead the reports consisted of simulated and clean representations. Graphics and maps became important communal sites of knowledge:

Audiences are placed in these images intertextually somewhere between military planners and computer-game players, reducing the distance required for critical response to the war and making the suffering of those on the ground invisible, and thereby stimulating at the same time an audience consensus in favour of triumphant US military power. (Ibid. 61-62)

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7 This argument has been made by many authors, among whom: Daya Kishan Thussu and Des Freedman, War and the Media (London: Sage, 2005); Philip M. Taylor, War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992); Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin, War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010).
Much has been written on how command, control, communications, computer technology and intelligence are working together for strategic purposes. The US military’s ability to co-ordinate their forces is measured by the competence of this “C4I complex” (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence). Journalism is inevitably caught up in this, leading Chris Hedges to provocingly state that: “the Gulf War made war fashionable again. It was a cause the nation willingly embraced. It gave us media-manufactured heroes and a heady pride in our military superiority and technology. It made war fun” (Hedges 142-143). The representations Hedges is describing promoted a clean war, from the view of a precision bomber, which originated in the first Gulf War and the Bosnia-Serbia conflict. Exceptionally good professional reporting was there, but Hedges and Matheson and Allan point at a general tendency in journalism dominated by external actors and plagued by its own internal struggles.

An example of how political and military power is exerted in relation to the press is embedded reporting. A supply to the growing demand of frontline reports and a reaction to a lack of media access during the first Gulf War and the invasion of Afghanistan, embedded journalism, which is the attachment of a journalist to a military platoon, was a popular procedure during the Iraq War. Some 775 photographers and journalists were embedded in Iraq at the start of the conflict (Powell). Evan Wright, an embedded reporter during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, joined the United States Marine Corps, “which in its mission to defend the US Constitution allowed a reporter in its midst” (Wright 463). His book, Generation Kill, is based upon his reporting for Rolling Stone. It was made into a popular miniseries by HBO and describes his time alongside US Marines in Iraq. Wright’s story is exemplary of the type of writing that came from the pens of “embeds”; it is honest, full of the excitement that comes with battle, and speaks fondly, almost brotherly, of the represented soldiers. In a telling and ironic paragraph in his afterword Wright writes:

In the prologue to Generation Kill I quoted Lance Corporal Trombley comparing an ambush to playing Grand Theft Auto. The quote proved to be misleading to some. After the publication of Generation Kill, Trombley’s reference to Grand Theft Auto was cited in several news stories as proof that to the young men and women serving in America’s

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armed forces, war was no more real than playing a video game. It struck me that such analyses had it backward. It’s the American public for whom the Iraq War is often no more real than a video game. (Ibid. 462)

Wright not only shows that the actual experience of war is interpreted within existing frames of reference in traditional media, but also that the spectators are inserted in a first-person view of conflict at a safe distance. Many passages in his account of the invasion show how the Marines use popular culture to interpret events and many allude to CNN and FOX News coverage. Wright demonstrates that he becomes part of the platoon, losing much of the distance and objectivity needed for “good” journalism. Indeed, as Hook observes, “the White House correctly anticipated that the ‘embeds’ would identify with the troops and thus produce favorable reports of the missions” (260). Nicholas Mirzoeff, in his book on visual culture and the war in Iraq, agrees with Hook: “The embedded media told us bedtime stories with a single traditional moral, the old-fashioned triumph of Good over Evil” (Mirzoeff 90). This example might suggest that the US government actively tries to manipulate the news agenda.

Within the historical and social context described above, citizen journalism should be placed. Taking into consideration the definition given on page 17, it is possible to assert that citizen journalism is the result of a declining public trust of mainstream journalism. Indeed, a 2009 Pew Research survey finds that 63% of Americans believe news stories to be often inaccurate (Heinrich 160). Consequently, citizen journalism could be seen to undermine the performative discourse of mainstream media. The “truth-effect” of accounts of lived experience has potential in a media landscape dominated by constructed realities. Following Tumber and Webster, Matheson and Allan write: “in the age of the digital camera and the website . . . weaker forces . . . can disrupt, challenge and often counter the imposition of truth claims by the powerful” (18). Because citizen journalists write with a “particular stake in the suffering” and are not bound by professional codes, their mediations are closer to lived experience and the real than those of professional journalism. They are also ethically superior because they do not act as pawns of war. And, if war is fought on the premises that the “humanity of the other is silenced,” citizen journalism helps to politicize again what is depoliticized, namely, the other (Ibid. 94-95). Ultimately, dominant media discourse—depicting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as virtuous and virtual—can be disrupted by citizen journalists, because these “individuals are participating
in both the media and the conflict through their self-representations” (Ibid. 95). Hence, their credibility lies in their distance from power.

At this stage, the question “why citizen journalism?” can more pointedly be answered. In short, citizen journalism is as much the product of social change and an indicator of crisis within journalism, as it is the instigator of both. Individuals who have access to the material means for producing, disseminating, and consuming information accelerate a process of personal representation of lived experience. The creation and communication of meaning through a performative discourse like the press is no longer completely in the hands of the powerful. Because mainstream traditional journalism operates within the market and is always partly dependent of capitalist incentives, critical self-examination in times of conflict and crisis is always partly restricted. When “truth”—which journalism attempts to communicate—is seen as something that is not placed outside structures of power, it is also possible to locate alternative forms of journalism within its own structures of power/knowledge, providing reflections of reality that challenge dominant views (Foucault 131). Within the postmodern context, citizens felt that journalists were not doing their jobs, because they held to certain professional standards and were working within the confines of the dominant media discourse.

Furthermore, business interests of big media conglomerates increasingly change the shape and content of the news and threaten “the editorial independence of each news outlet” (Hook 253). This interconnectedness is exemplified by the fact that General Electric owns NBC and at the same time is primary contractor to the Pentagon. During the war in Iraq, journalism found itself in a tight spot. On the one hand, fair and accurate reporting are its goals, but on the other, it could not outmaneuver the market, new personalized technologies, and its own professional restrictions, thereby conditioning its own practice and creating a vacuum for citizen journalism to fill. Weblogging—or blogging, in short—became a new way for citizens to communicate lived experience and personal views on the world, while evading the market, politics and professional standards. The following chapter will focus on this practice and show how it correlates with journalism and the Iraq War.

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9 The links between the movie and gaming industries and Washington are even more evident: military subsidies are given to both on a regular basis through institutions such as the Hollywood Liaisons Office.
Chapter 2

Blogging the Iraq War

All those Rambo like journalist who came here with their satellite phones, laptops and digital cameras, how will they be able to tell what the Iraqis really think?

GeeinBaghdad June 25, 2003

Rather than bringing the war into people’s living rooms, the blog went some way to taking people into the war zone.

Donald Matheson and Stuart Allan 75-76

One online form in which citizen journalism is practiced is the weblog, or blog. Since its incarnation in the mid-1990s, blogging—the practice of maintaining and updating a weblog—has become a widespread phenomenon that has presented itself in multiple forms wherever there is internet access. Even though it is hard to measure exactly, the estimated number of people who started and maintain a weblog rises exponentially; the website Blogpulse\textsuperscript{10} counts a total of 174,131,502 blogs at the moment of writing, whereas more inclusive estimates count four times that number and more conservative subtract some 50 million. What makes counting blogs so difficult is that there is a large number of them that are sporadically or not maintained and updated and that there are many Content Management System providers.\textsuperscript{11} Additionally, what counts as a blog is a highly disputed topic. One of the characteristics of blogs is that they vary in terms of subject, form, style, audience, goals, etcetera. People make money with their blogs and there are hobbyists who talk about their favorite things in life. Therefore, an essential first step in this chapter is to provide a definition of “weblog,” or “blog.”

Secondly, the blog and the practice of blogging will be placed in the broader context of digital culture and public sphere theory. Many theorists in the field have argued that the blog and critical internet culture play an essential role in democratic processes today and are part of an online public sphere, a concept that has been under attack since its theoretical invention in the

\textsuperscript{10} Blogpulse’s data is mainly provided by the Nielsen Company.
\textsuperscript{11} Mapping the internet, of which the blogosphere is a relatively small part, proves to be a difficult or even an impossible project. The well-written and researched Wikipedia entry on the World Wide Web states that between 2005 and 2010 the number of web users doubled to an estimated two billion people and that there are more than three trillion unique URLs. Such figures can work discouragingly, but they also open up the possibility for exploration—even more so in the case of the hidden or Deep Web, which constitutes the largest part of the internet and consists of data that cannot be found by search engines.
1960s. It will be argued here that citizen journalism fits within, what has been called, the “redemocratization” of the public sphere and offers new ways of political deliberation. Thirdly, this chapter gives a short overview of relationship between the Iraq War and the place of the media, and more specifically, the warblog during the conflict. Fourthly, this chapter wishes to give an explanation of the warblog, a specific form of blogging that is the main concern of this dissertation. In times of crisis, and especially during the Iraq War, the number of people who started a blog that discussed it rose significantly (Herring et al., 2). As is demonstrated in chapter one, citizens tend to engage with dominant institutions like the press and the government through online platforms whenever they think these institutions are failing or are inadequate; warblogs maintained by non-professional journalists can be categorized as forms of citizen journalism. Warblogs have taken different shapes, from the eyewitness diaries of soldiers—so-called milblogs—and civilians, to political commentaries and discussions about military strategies. This multi-faceted aspect makes the warblog an intriguing form of social commentary and therefore provides an apt empirical illustration of the dynamics of media hegemony and how citizen-initiated projects can challenge political power explicitly and implicitly.

What are blogs?

In a concise, year-long analysis of weblogs Susan Herring and others state:

In the past several years, weblogs—frequently modified web pages containing dated entries listed in reverse chronological sequence—have gone from relative obscurity to immense popularity. Weblogs are popular in part because they enable easy, inexpensive self-publication of content for a potentially vast audience on the World Wide Web, while being more flexible and interactive than previous publication formats, print or digital (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2005). The rapid efflorescence of the blogosphere—the universe of available weblogs—has also been fertilized by a series of external events over the past few years that have inspired blogging activity: terrorist acts, political events, and natural disasters. Blogging about these events has attracted the attention of the mainstream news media, further contributing to the popularization and adoption of this new mode of computer-mediated communication. (Herring et al. 1)

The authors sum up some of the core aspects of blogging. Indeed, in terms of form, one characteristic of blogging is that the latest entry is displayed at the top of the website. This suggests that the readers of the blog are familiar with previous postings. Also, as with most online activity, blogging is relatively easy to practice, not costly and the threshold to produce, disseminate and consume content is much lower than with other forms of mass communication.
Interactivity is another key aspect of blogging: authors link to other blogs and websites and most of the time readers can react to and comment upon blog entries.

Bloggers often offer commentary on wide-ranging issues and in some cases these blogs and comments have a political dimension. The feminist phrase “the personal is political” covers the general ideas behind this type of blogging: personal views of the world are easily expressed in an online context. In a broad conception of political life, “external events” can drive ordinary people to make their views of them known to the world and hence act politically (Ibid.). The thought behind this is whatever interests an individual is almost always liked by many others. Of course, many blogs exist that do not seem to have any political dimension (e.g. hairstylists, collectors, and hobbyists). Even though, microscopically, within the practice of everyday life—of which blogging for many has become a part—instances of political deliberation can be located.

Jill Walker Rettberg, in her study of blogs, summarizes the blog as a “frequently updated Web site consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent appears first.” Additionally, Walker notes that its core aspects are “frequency, brevity and personality” and that there is always a social aspect involved in the process of maintaining a blog in the form of comments and user-generated-content (Walker 19-22). According to Stuart Allan, blogs are best described as “diaries or journals written by individuals with internet access who are in possession of the necessary software publishing tools” (Allan 212). Some of the other characteristics he names are that blogs offer a broad array of links to other sites, mainstream and amateur; they are almost always written in reversed chronological order; and sources are often acknowledged explicitly on blogs.

In summary, blogs consist of frequently updated, chronically reversed, entries that comment upon (an aspect) of daily life and perceived reality—whether it be political or personal—from the perspective and subjective position of the writer. Blogs tend to emphasize personalization, audience participation, fragmentation and intertextuality, characteristics which are, as described in chapter one, “infused with postmodern sensibilities” (Wall, 2005, 153). This focus on the lived experience of daily life and blog’s immediacy, authenticity, and spontaneity makes blogging a social practice that, especially in times of social upheaval, can provide critiques of the dominant social order. Western audiences could imagine or see the suffering on several news outlets, but some still “wanted to read or see them from people actually
experiencing the events. In this sense, the truth of blogs may have more in common with the truth of novels, art and poetry than with the facts presented by journalism” (emphasis mine, Ibid. 94). This is illustrated by the warblog, a genre within the blogosphere that emerged in the context of the second Iraq War, in 2003. However, before discussing the warblog, the context in which these type of blogs came into existence will be sketched.

**Blogs, Digital Culture and the Public Sphere**

Blogs exist in a worldwide network of people with shared practices and values that today can be termed a digital culture. In his essay “Participation, Remediation, Bricolage,” Mark Deuze asks the question “what kind of values and expectations are expressed in this ‘digital culture’” (Deuze 63). One of Deuze’s presuppositions is that the core aspects of a culture are expressed through its value systems. Deuze investigates the overarching and structural components of digital culture, not by looking at the common practices of it, but locating the general trends, norms, values, beliefs and the epistemology of digital culture. Deuze finds that the essential characteristics of digital culture are not historically specific to this day and age; rather, they are amplified by (the technologies of) the internet (64-66). One of the practices within digital culture that illustrates this point is weblogging. Pirate radio stations in the 1970s did much the same as blogs do today: “they broadcast unfiltered perspectives self-legitimized by their existence outside of, or in opposition to mainstream news media corporations” (65). Alternative news production dismantles “carefully cultivated hierarchical relationships between (mass) media consumers and producers” (Ibid.). This breaking down of traditional power relationships is eminently demonstrated by Deuze in his discussion of the principal components of digital culture, namely, participation, remediation, and bricolage.

According to Deuze, digital culture—and more specifically news production within digital culture—is to be explained through these terms. In regard to citizen journalism, these characteristics of online norms and values are pivotal. Participation, remediation, and bricolage are three concepts that underlie the practice of citizen journalism, but also the characteristic relationship that bloggers have with their readers. Therefore, it is necessary to give a quick overview of Deuze’s distillation of digital culture. A main assumption and fascination underlies Deuze’s research:
Something is going on in the daily lives of media users worldwide that makes them (us) accept the fact that reality is constructed, assembled, and manipulated by media, and that the only way to make sense of that mediated world is to intervene and thus adjust our worldview accordingly—which in turn shapes and renews the properties of media, more closely reflecting the identity of the remediating bricoleur instead of the proverbial couch potato. (66)

Hence, modern media users:

1) [Are] active agents in the process of meaning-making (we become participants).
2) Adopt but at the same time modify, manipulate, and thus reform consensual ways of understanding reality (we engage in remediation).
3) Reflexively assemble our own particular versions of such reality (we are bricoleurs). (66)

This type of reasoning links to the idea of networked individualism, of which the social world is constructed, “enhancing the capacity of individuals to rebuild structures of sociability from the bottom up” (Castells, qtd. in Deuze 67). In other words, digital culture, in which citizen journalism operates, potentially transforms otherwise passive consumers into active and engaged citizens who seek out alternative (digital) communities to interact and debate with otherwise socially (and geographically) distanced others.

The three principal components of digital culture have far-reaching effects on perception and representation of reality, the experience of social life, and the construction of truth, Deuze claims. Consequently, they impact, or at least give alternatives to the profession that, traditionally, provides for readings of the real and claims of truth, namely journalism. People who are active on weblogs as producers, readers, and/or commentators “consider their personal voice and opinions to be of added value, and they feel this sets them apart from the news media” (Deuze 69). These personal voices are a bricolage: they communicate a vast array of political beliefs and ideologies that can challenge, or underwrite, dominant readings of perceived reality. Deuze proposes that “remediation and distantiation in digital culture perhaps mean being deeply immersed in the system while at the same time attributing legitimacy and credibility to a self-definition of working against or outside of the system, as well as reforming the system from within” (70). As will be illustrated in the analysis phase of the blogs under research here, the participating remediator-bricoleur “identifies with many issues, choices, and lifestyles before voting or enacting some other kind of civic or otherwise emancipatory engagement” (Ibid. 70).
A dominant thought in academic work on blogs is that they “provide ordinary citizens with the opportunity to directly engage the public sphere in a manner previously absent in representative democracies” (Papacharissi, 2009, 29). The public sphere is a concept introduced by Jürgen Habermas in his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, published in 1962 and translated in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The thoughts Habermas expresses in this seminal book have been used in numerous critiques of the media’s role in societies. Especially in discussions covering the internet and the blogosphere, Habermas’s notion has been popular. Papacharissi describes the public sphere as follows: “the public sphere in a representative democracy is where citizens deliberate and debate public affairs, with public accord and decision making as implied goals” (2009, 30). In this light, the public sphere mediates between the state and society and is therefore essential to a democracy. Journalism and the media in general have traditionally fulfilled roles as communicators of ideas concerning the democratic process, but they are also at the heart of a decline of the public sphere: “public opinion is no longer a process of rational discourse but the result of publicity and social engineering in the media” (Dahlgren and Sparks 4).

From the beginning, Habermas’s theoretical model has been attacked as much as it has been lauded. Dahlgren and Sparks point out that a “major blind spot” in Habermas’s ideas is that they neglect the patriarchal character of the public sphere. The public-private dichotomy that forms the premise of public sphere theory results in the subordination of women and is therefore not inclusive (Ibid. 6). Secondly, Habermas does not speak of the existence of multiple or alternative public spheres. Dahlgren and Sparks justly hold that other, “plebeian” public spheres have been in existence that served as fora for democratic deliberation (Ibid.). The last traditional critique of Habermas’s original ideas is that the language in which the rational-critical debate is held and the results of such discussion are “strangely abstract and formalistic” (Ibid.). In other words, the public sphere and its language have never been solely rational-critical.

A fourth critique of Habermas’s notion in the digital age has been provided by Mark Poster who argues that his model is “systematically denied in the arenas of electronic politics” because it consists of a “homogenous space of embodied subjects in symmetrical relations, pursuing consensus through the critique of arguments and the presentation of validity claims” (265). In a digital culture, in which most political discourse occurs through information machines, the components of this model—homogenous space, embodied subjects, etc.—are not
in place. Rather, information technologies have, for a long time, been the carriers of political discourse. In this postmodern approach technology is not a threat to democratic deliberation; rather, it makes the concept of the public sphere more inclusive and stimulates political conversation. Moreover, digital political talk is much more diffuse, decentralized and it breaks down ethical, moral, economic, and political power houses and general conservative (patriarchal) ideas on society that have, in Habermas’s original idea of it, been an integral part of the public sphere (Poster 259-269).

Taking these valid concerns and theoretical insights aboard, new media scholars have shown renewed interest into theories of the public sphere. Online new media, as Zizi Papacharissi argues, have a political potential that goes against a representative democracy in which one-sided communication often isolates individuals into narrowly defined social and political positions: “whereas analogue media provided limited and structured opportunities for access to information and communication with the political structure, online digital media expand the set of tools monitorial citizens have at their disposal, so that may monitor developments and mobilize if necessary” (2009, 35-36). Blogs are key examples of this redemocratization of the public sphere because media consumers become producers. Because they emphasize personal and private views on the world, their main concern is to challenge “what other democratic institutions define as public or private, frequently modifying the established hierarchy of public issues by adding concerns previously considered private” (Ibid. 37). The direct communication between blog reader and writer shows how otherwise private concerns are at the heart of a novel kind of mediated political deliberation that is illustrated in chapter three.

The Iraq War and Blogs

The relationship between the media and the war in Iraq has been meticulously documented and commented upon by media scholars and political scientists. The media’s role as constructor of knowledge and public memory has been criticized in light of theories on the digital age; namely, the war has been fought as much on the ground and in the air, as it was fought in bits and bytes. The internet was attributed to be a major actor in what is called the “first global internet war” and that changed the way (especially American) audiences “viewed it” (Berenger 2). In John Berger’s famous phrase, it changed their “ways of seeing” (Berger). Internet became one of the
major providers of news about the war; 77 percent of Americans turned to the internet for their war news in the first weeks of combat (Schwalbe 1-2) and the established media often reported stories that originated from the Web (Berenger 1). As I argued elsewhere, using Berenger’s argument, blogs can cause a snowball effect because they are part of an immense converged network of news outlets (Smit 36). Especially in times of conflict, this is apparent. Johnson and Kaye recognize the effect blogs can have on other, more established media outlets: “Although Pew Research suggested that only 4% of Internet users turned to blogs during the Iraq War, they are important to study because their influence exceeds their readership” (165).

What is more, warblogs have the potential to contradict the military’s official reports of the war. In fear of this, the military shut down or censored several (Ibid). Johnson and Kay found that “blogs gained a boost in popularity during the days after September 11, 2001, and have emerged as an important source of news for a core of Internet users since the Iraq War began” (166). Based on previous research, the authors give several reasons for the increased popularity of blogs during the Iraq War. In short, Johnson and Kaye observe that warbloggers: a) give more insights into the war than reportages by professional journalists; b) are personalized; c) link to other sites which contributes to a healthy debate and a sense of community; d) present news faster; e) offer a broad (political) perspective; and f) show images that US media refused to show (166-167). Most blogs are not institutionalized, which results in a mostly unfiltered view of the war in Iraq. Especially at the earlier stages of the war, before the censoring, and in the stages of occupation—when most censoring was called off—this had a far-reaching effect on the blogosphere and the (traditional) media influenced by it.

Johnson and Kaye recognize this influence and a sense of community that instigates certain public and political participation. They propose that “[p]resumably, blogs sparked increased interest in the Iraq War and spurred readers to share what they learned on blog sites with others” (167). This added to a group identity—consisting of warbloggers and readers—that strived to be supportive, yet critical of the military and its leadership. Many warblog writers and readers are well aware of the human suffering, as is visible in their stories and photographs. These blogs have the potential to break through mainstream media narratives. Johnson and Kaye continue: “[b]logs may be places where ordinary Internet users, as recipients as well as providers of news and commentary, have a heightened sense of power to bring about political and social change” (169). Especially individual visual and written accounts of war that have gone public
can dramatically influence public opinion. This is visible with the Abu Ghraib pictures, but also in a more general sense with military blogging. As Alissa Quart pointedly puts it in her article on amateur photojournalism: “the photographs that define a war gone wrong are amateur ones: the amateurs snappers’ presence altered and also helped create the scenes of violence and humiliation” (16). The same could be said of bloggers—many of whom took pictures—during the war in Iraq and of whom two will be discussed in chapter three.

The Feisty Genre: Warblogging

In her chapter “The Taming of the Warblogs” Melissa Wall places the warblog within the discourse of citizen journalism. She points to the challenging nature of this form of blogging and the criticism that stems from these bloggers and that is aimed at, among other institutions, traditional journalism. She observes that the warblog is “a feisty new genre of blog that focused specifically on the terrorism wars” and that these blogs “have proven to be one of the most disruptive forms of citizen journalism and one of its greatest threats to traditional war reporting” (Wall, 2009, 33). It is this disruptive quality that makes the warblog a good example of citizen journalism in the blog form; it is political and challenges commonly held beliefs, yet it is written within the sphere of personal experience. As Matheson and Allan write:

[War]blogs were heralded for providing a voice that appeared to some commentators distinctive in its ability to produce independent, immediate and insightful accounts of what was actually happening on the ground. This led to a form of witnessing of conflict in which the individual reporter acted less a cipher . . . and more as the audience’s technologically enhanced eyes and ears. Rather than bringing the war into people’s living rooms, the blog went some way to taking people into the war zone” (Matheson and Allan 75-76).

Additionally, the warblog presents itself in multiple forms. There are those that comment upon war from a safe distance and those that are written by civilians and soldiers who are close to the destruction, suffering and death that inevitably come with war (Herring et al., 3-4). Even though, whether they hold onto more conservative or progressive political ideas, bloggers in warzones “differ from mainstream news media in their open discussion of personal outlook in their writing” (Ibid., 4). The various types of warblogs, e.g. the ones ranging from blogs written from the point of view of transgender and gay people or those that promote atheism,12 “challenge the

12 The weblogs LGBTQ Iraq and Atheeriragi are, respectively, examples of this.
narrow representations of Iraq usually produced by traditional media and thus embody fundamental characteristics of citizen journalism—that of expanding the ideological spectrum for news audiences” (Wall, 2009, 34). Added to being an (often immediate) eyewitness report, the warblog often explicitly and transparently advocates a certain cause, whether it is pro-war or anti-war, or, in terms of the Iraq War, pro-American or anti-American.

The most effective warblogs, that is, the ones that potentially can break through dominant media discourse, are those written from the frontlines and in combat zones. Matheson and Allan write about the effects that “being there” can have: “To show through a closely observed account that ‘I was there’ serves to silence alternative versions from those who were not present at that moment or place and to align the viewer with the witness’s stance” (92). This witness’s stance has always been an authoritative tool in the hands of journalists; “objective truth” is most powerfully constructed when a report is authentic. This is different with bloggers whose strength is, again, “their authenticity—but it is a different kind of authenticity from the promise that ‘this is true,’ given by mainstream media. This authenticity is evidenced by the immediacy of the bloggers” (Walker 101). The personal, immediate, and authentic accounts of life near or in the combat zones gives warblogs direct “political importance because of the significant global events they have been thrust into” (Ibid. 96).

This is demonstrated by the Iraqi blogger Salam Pax, who is often said to be the first Iraqi blogger who was globally read. During the invasion of Iraq, his writing style and the fact that he was so near the fighting and actually experienced war, led people in the West, among whom many journalists, to read his posts. Certain characteristics of his blog appealed to a global audience: “The details [Salam Pax] noted were of the sort that might be noted by a professional feature journalist, but the experience of hearing directly from a person who was there, involved in this horrible conflict, made reading the blog a far stronger experience than reading even an excellent article by a professional could be” (emphasis mine, Walker 95). To follow Wall, these characteristics are postmodern. As Wall and others claim, there is a societal urge, today, to experience first-hand reports of—specifically—human tragedy and life in general.

As for warblog’s credibility, “the rawness of their reports—perhaps marked by typos or offensive remarks—has provided citizen journalism forms such as blogging part of their credibility,” as sense of reality is thus constructed via warblogging; they are life’s reports (Wall,

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13 He was later asked by The Guardian to write a column and a blog.
2009, 36). Geert Lovink argues that “there is a quest for truth in blogging. But it is a truth with a question mark. Truth here has become an amateur project, not an absolute value, sanctioned by higher authorities” (Lovink 13). The more a blog writer shows of himself personally—his views, backgrounds, opinions—the more trustworthy he becomes in the eyes of his readers. This is what Walker calls “transparent bias.” By being more open, bloggers are more honest and credible. This is opposed to traditional journalism, which relies on the credibility of the institutions within which it operates (Walker 92).

Individually, blogs do not often alter the journalistic flow, nor military and foreign policies; however, the “plethora of voices now available in digital media combines to form information networks which may, potentially, reorient the social distribution of power and control of certain moments” (Matheson and Allan 107). Warbloggers tend to group together on index websites. Enthusiasts of the genre make it their job to inventory, organize and structure the war blogosphere, thereby combining the plethora of voices and magnifying their effect. Good examples of Iraqi bloggers who try to map the many warblogs that cover the Iraq War are Salam Adil or Abbas Hawazin. On their website Iraq Blog Count they massed more than three hundred blogs (inactive and active, famous and obscure) that deal with Iraq and mostly the war and its aftermath. A second example of a collection of warblogs is Milblogging.com, which is still very active in cataloguing the military blogosphere. The blogs that are linked to on this website give accounts of the life as a soldier in the US army and of those affiliated with soldiers who are on missions.

To summarize, warblogs are weblogs that comment upon wars through many voices. Because of their emphasis on immediacy, eye-witnessing and the experience of war, they amend to the discourse on war in alternative ways, thereby criticizing mainstream media discourse about war. Using the tools and practices of citizen journalism, these bloggers—whether they are soldiers or citizens—provide alternative realities and truths about war. To illustrate this point empirically, the next chapter will take two case studies and analyze them in terms of form, style and content. By doing so, the theoretical insights discussed above can be applied to these texts and give us a better understanding of the warblog, the blog in general and citizen journalism as an alternative discourse.

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14 The site is not maintained anymore, after being active for six years in the period 2003-2009.  
15 In 2006, Milblogging.com has been redistributed by Military.com, a large private organization that promotes the army. Hence, its grassroots origins have been undermined by business and military interests.
Chapter 3

Analyzing Form, Style and Content of Two Warblogs

I saw a huge number of national guards and US forces there, I noticed there are no cars in the street, and as we reached near the square they fired at us hysterically, What the F**k!!!!??, I screamed.\(^\text{16}\)

*LoI* June 22, 2007\(^\text{17}\)

Meanings are necessarily realized in forms, and differences in meaning entail differences in form.

Norman Fairclough 57

As the quotation copied above shows, Dr Mohammed amplifies what he writes by the way he writes. His style opens up new dimensions for expression. The exclamation and question marks, the lack of periods and the use of a swear word—and the self-censoring—influence what he tries to communicate: that he was under fire. This chapter will analyze samples from *Last of Iraqis* written by Iraqi dentist Dr Mohammed, who now lives in the US, and *Boots on the Ground* written by an American soldier named Kevin. The former stopped writing in 2010, the latter in 2007. By means of a critical discourse analysis it will be shown how citizen journalism can be practiced and in what ways it confines with the theoretical ideas concerning (war)blogging and postmodernism, which were discussed earlier. This method zooms in on language usage on the sentence level and simultaneously makes it possible to draw conclusions about the language above language, namely the implied language of identity and ideology. In a more general sense, this chapter will demonstrate how citizen journalism challenges mainstream journalism through its form, style and content. It will be argued here that, through their life reports, based on the experience of daily life, Dr Mohammed and Kevin were able to alternatively frame the Iraq War and provide a counter-cultural readings of the conflict. Secondly, the interaction between blogger and reader will be analyzed. As will be demonstrated, the comments section that follows each of Dr Mohammed’s and Kevin’s posts provides a platform for criticism and political deliberation.

\(^{16}\) The unit samples drawn from *Last of Iraqis* and *Boots on the Ground* are appended to this dissertation. Citations from these entries will be discussed in the analysis. These are as much unedited as possible because the plenty language errors need to be interpreted as being part of form and style that illustrate the concept of life report.

\(^{17}\) *LoI* and *BotG* will be used as the abbreviations for, respectively, *Last of Iraqis* and *Boots on the Ground*. 
This aspect of citizen journalism—its interactivity—is key in the discussion of alternative media as a constituting part of the online public sphere.

**Introducing the Samples: Last of Iraqis and Boots on the Ground**

The topic of the Iraq War provides ample media resources to draw samples from. Therefore, the choice of blogs must have solid ground. The two blogs discussed here have not been discussed before in academic research, unlike the famous blogs *Where is Raed?* by Salam Pax and *Baghdad Burning* by Riverbend. This lack of academic discussion opens up new possibilities in the angle of research, for example in terms of form, style, content, personal biography and structural similarities of these aspects. Both Dr Mohammed’s *Last of Iraqis* and Kevin’s *Boots on the Ground* are hosted on the weblog provider blogspot.com. The blogs claim to be independent from institutions, business, media, or the military. Moreover, Dr Mohammed and Kevin explicitly state throughout their blogs that they want to show how the war impacts their daily lives and that, by writing this down, they paint a “real” picture of Iraq during the war. This aspect, among others, makes their blogs illustrative for citizen journalism and thus falls within the scope of this research.

Both blogs are plainly designed and especially *Boots on the Ground* carries no decorative features. *Last of Iraqis* uses white-on-black letters and red, *Boots on the Ground* white-on-blue, yellow and pink. Posted on *Last of Iraqis* are video clips (mainly from *Youtube*) and (personal) photographs. One entry on *Boots on the Ground* says that perhaps pictures will be added soon, but due to army regulation, the writer, Kevin, is still unsure whether to do so or not (Oct. 2, 2005). He decided negatively; pictures and videos do not appear on his blog. As is common for blogs, the last updated entry appears at the top of the webpage. In the right column readers can find popular items, links, e-mail address, and earlier posts, categorized per year and month. Additionally, *Last of Iraqis* features a “followers” section, a search option, and a “donate” button that enables readers to give money to Dr Mohammed, the writer of the blog.

The blog writers’ personal pages provide details about their interests and hobbies. Dr Mohammed’s profile page on Blogspot says he is a dentist living in Baghdad who writes on his

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18The US Army started to read blogs written by soldiers in Iraq in order to actively censor blogs that gave away strategic information and sensitive information via posts and pictures. Colby Buzzell, writer of the blog *My War: Killing Time in Iraq* was repeatedly warned by his supervisors to give away too much about the daily life of a soldier in Iraq, he writes throughout his book with the same title as his blog.
blog since 2007. His interests are technology, politics, science, traveling, cars, poetry and the arts in general. He likes watching movies, his favorites being Last of the Samurai, Saw, and Legends of the Fall. He claim to have read Crime and Punishment. In a section called “About” he writes that he is a 25 year old “true Iraqi who is sick of sects and violence.” He dislikes politicians who benefit from the war and he hopes to make a difference through his blog. Kevin´s profile page does not give much information about him. In his posts, he repeatedly tells his readers that he is careful about giving too much details about his personal life. Even though, through reading his blog readers know that he has a girlfriend in the Army who is a medic and that he is an Infantryman. He started writing his blog in 2003, just after the major invasion of Iraq. He claims that he traditionally votes Republican, but as he gets older he grows more moderate and criticizes politics in general. He likes watching (war) movies and documentaries (he even likes Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11, which is remarkable because Moore opposed the war in Iraq from the start) and playing video games. In his first blog he explains why he started his blog: “My goal in making this site is to give people back home and abroad on [sic] the daily life for the American soldier here in Baghdad, Iraq. I dont think the media covers this place that well” (October 24, 2003, “New Sheriff in Town”).

The comments on both blogs can be categorized in four types. First, there is the encouraging post, telling Kevin and Dr Mohammed to “hang in there,” “keep up the good work,” or that they have a good blog. The second type of comments consist of one-liners, general statements that try to provoke discussion or quotations. Third, there are the comments that directly react to the blog entry. These are often longer comments that can be oppositional or underwrite the post. In some cases these types of comments add information to the post that is relevant to the commentator, using hyperlinks. The last type of comment is reactionary. The comments in this category react to other comments posted and often provide links to other websites and news reports. In most cases they are written by people far removed from each other in political ideology or national geography. Both Boots on the Ground and Last of Iraqis provide a platform for right, moderate and left wing political ideas originating from an international readership.

19 For examples, see the appendix.
**Method**

To research these two blogs a critical discourse analysis and, at some points, a social constructivist analysis will be applied (Krippendorff 16). Critical discourse analysis works at the level of language above sentences, or the creation of meaning, knowledge, identities, and ideologies through language. Using this method, these underlying messages can be extrapolated from a text. Discourse has proven to be a hard term to describe. Its basic premise is that knowledge of the world around us is constructed through language and that, as a result, it limits our view of the world (Johnstone 3). Michel Foucault has extended the use of discourse. According to him, discourses are “linked ways of talking and thinking” that “constitute ideologies . . . and serve to circulate power in society. In other words, ‘discourses’ . . . involve patterns of belief and habitual action as well as patterns of language” (Ibid.) by which the minds of others are managed (Van Dijk 302). Both senses of the word discourse are intrinsically connected, as will be made clear in the following analysis; namely, form, style, and content of the blogs will be discussed—and thus discourse at the level of language and the level of power and ideology in these warblogs.

In order to ensure a critical discourse analysis, researchers in this field recognize that “our social practice in general and our use of language in particular are bound up with causes and effects which we may not be at all aware of under normal circumstances” (Fairclough 54). Critical discourse analysis gives researches the opportunity to look at texts from a distance to trace these causes and effects of their language and text. According to Norman Fairclough language is a “socially and historically situated mode of action” that can maintain commonly held beliefs and social power relations or challenge these in new, creative ways (54-55). One way to think of citizen journalism is that it is a social practice that challenges more traditional and socially ingrained forms of journalism. A central question Fairclough poses and which is applicable to the analysis here is: “in what ways is this communicative event normative, drawing upon familiar types and formats, and in what ways is it creative, using old resources in new ways?” (55).

Donald Matheson, in his book on media discourses, shows how critical discourse analysis is able to reveal meaning-sharing and meaning-making processes within mediated texts; language, in his view, “is being situated within . . . wider frameworks on the nature of thought, experience and society” (Matheson 3). Media and, more specifically, the two blogs analyzed
here, give their readers representations of the social world that can either follow predominant truths about reality or contradict or question this reconstruction. The notion that meaning is made, or constructed, by active agents with certain power and authority is crucial here. Hence, the meaning communicated to an audience can be deconstructed. By looking at the social status of the producer of meaning, its political agenda, and the content of what is communicated in a specific manner, it is possible to contrive ideological messages from a media text. The language and shape of the news, for example, are determined by “a systematic ideological bias” (Ibid. 5). To analyze these specific ideological prejudices, or normative practices and beliefs, is not to analyze the “building blocks of language,” but to look at how the use of language in the news has been molded under historical and sociological pressures (Ibid.). Consequently, to study blogs that cover the Iraq War alternatively, is to study the ideological incentives that gave rise to and shaped this alternative discourse.

“Analysis” describes the practice that comes with the study of discourse. Barbara Johnstone concisely writes: “what distinguishes discourse analysis from other sorts of study that bear on human language and communication lies not in questions discourse analysts ask but in the ways they try to answer them: by analyzing discourse—that is, by examining structure and function of language in use” (4). The meanings that can be derived from structure and function of a text are not static, but dynamic processes, because analyses are always already interpretations of data; they are readings. To structure their analysis and to enhance transparency, researchers of discourse break up texts, following selection criteria, into sampling units. “In unitizing, the researcher draws relevant distinctions within an observational field. This creates multiplicity of observations, information-bearing instances, or units for short and readies that multiplicity for subsequent analysis,” writes Krippendorff accordingly (97).

The analytically constructed research question of this dissertation can be formulated into an “if-then” statement: if citizen journalism is an alternative form of journalism, then it challenges traditional journalism discursively in form, style, and content. To answer this research question, the samples chosen in this analysis concern form and style—design, language use and way of narrating—and content. The latter is divided up into four types of samples: political reflections, criticism of journalism and the media in general, daily life reports and direct messages to the audience. These can be seen as specific types of discourse, or genres, that can be analyzed separately in order to show how they work out as social practices within citizen
journalism (Fairclough 56). By operationalizing the suspicions, knowledge and assumptions about the warblog this way, it is possible to procedurally account “for the drawing of inferences from that text” (Krippendorff 171). This type of relevance sampling, or purposive sampling, will help answer the research question posed and support the argument that citizen journalism challenges mainstream journalism in new and creative ways through its form, style and content.

**Unpolished Reports, or, the Meaning of Form and Style**

Like journalistic writing, blog writing follows certain unwritten rules regarding style. This fits in with what Marcel Broersma poses in his research on from and style in newspapers: “drawing the distinctions between what is said (content) and how it is said (form and style) is highly artificial, if not impossible. This emphasizes the interdependence of thought and its expression” (xiii). The style—and with that the content—of the blogs discussed here can be labeled as reflective; that is, they work within a partisan model, because both bloggers write from experience and express their opinion with a certain political goal in mind (Broersma, 2007, xiv). Additionally, through their style, the here researched bloggers express their discontent with the news style that is dominant within journalism today. The writers’ obvious and honest biases are expressions of feelings that originate from daily life. This is reflected in the informal styles and language forms used on both websites.

As can be read in the samples, the language of these two warblogs is mostly unedited. Especially in the case of *Last of Iraqis*, errors are common: comma splices, word inversions, and misspellings appear in every entry. Naturally, this is the consequence of writing in a second language (in the case of Dr Mohammed), the speed of writing, and limited technical support for language corrections. Additionally, both weblogs do not shy away from harsh language which corresponds with a typical characteristic of warblogs as noted by Melissa Wall (2009, 36). Often, the writing seems to be full of the adrenaline that comes with a just-occurred incident. To conjure up the general feel of the language used on both blogs, two larger samples are picked to illustrate this point:

I saw a huge number of national guards and US forces there, I noticed there are no cars in the street, and as we reached near the square they fired at us hysterically, What the F**k!!!??, I screamed, so we immediately stopped and turned back, what a frightening moment it was, although I'm sure they didn't want to kill us because they would if they want, we were a clear target, but they wanted to send a message; if you go any further
you'd be dead, and that what happened to many people yesterday in Adhamiya, there was a great number of casualties... The national guard themselves attacked the tomb and mosque of Abo-Hanifa which is very respected and important Imam for the Sunni, they attacked the mosque with gun-fire and grenades they walked in the streets screaming (literally): ‘Come out....(bullets).....You Sunni Bastards.....come out.....(bullets)....we will kill you all today.....F**k all the Sunii.....(bullets).....Cock sucking Sunni.....You sons of bitches...(bullets)’, and all the types of swearing there is, they fired at homes randomly, they destroyed any car in the streets, I think it's called terrorism !!!!! isn't it!!!, they continued doing that, until two of their hummers was destroyed and burned. (LoI June 22, 2007)

Or:

We just had some crazy shit happen during the raid. We rolled out pretty late. Can't say what time, mission sensitive. My position was the .50 cal on one of the hmmwv's, we were the first vehicle in the little convoy. My job was to cover down the road, and just in case we really need to reach out and touch a hajji, I have the .50 cal. It felt like 90 degrees even at night, still hot as hell... Finally, the team leader said ‘fuck it, take him out’ and the next shot went into the back of the Hajji’s head. 200 meter shot, it was an unbelievable shot, especially with the guy only using a 4x Acog scope on his m4. (BotG August 11, 2004)

These passages reveal the type of language used. Because of the swearing, and the militaristic abbreviations, the entry’s authenticity is strengthened. Both Dr Mohammed and Kevin use slang and words that only they and the social and professional group they belong to use. Kevin uses the US military’s technical terms and abbreviations and Dr Mohammed’s language is at some points abstruse due to word order inversions, misspellings and illogical sentence structures and his use of local words and names. This use of language points at these blogs’ detachment from the professional and interpretative community of journalists. Opinions, emotion, swearing, and slang are taboo in journalistic writing, but they increase the credibility of Dr Mohammed and Kevin as eyewitnesses of these events and thus as the people who are psychologically affected by the conflict.

In terms of narrative style, Melissa Wall identifies three characteristics in warblogs that are opposed to traditional journalism. According to Wall, traditional journalism is detached, neutral, and focuses on both sides of a story. Blog journalism, on the other hand, is personal, opinionated and one-sided. In her research she also found that blog journalism presents itself in fragmented story forms that are often incomplete and textually open (Wall, 2005, 162). These findings correspond with the style used in the warblogs analyzed here. There is no structured format the writers adhere to—like the journalistic inverted pyramid. Indeed, both writers,
through their style, convey a sense of intimacy and a feeling that they are “someone the readers can believe they know, someone who is not manipulated by a corporate boss or a filter of professionalism” (Ibid. 165). For example, Kevin’s accounts quoted above show how a team leader decides to take out an Iraqi who poses a threat for the convoy. Kevin’s following fascination for the shot is a subjective remark that would not pass the gate in professional journalism, but nevertheless shows what happens psychologically in the heat of battle. A journalist would need a quote in his or her story about an event like this because of the rules of reportage—factual, professionally distanced, both sides of the story. Normatively speaking, this makes a journalist’s report somewhat artificial and detached. Here, Kevin shows his ability to write a life report through his explicit use of personal thoughts, observations and emotions, which is in direct contrast with the (unwritten) rules of traditional journalism.

Michael Schudson’s famous phrase “the politics of the narrative form” are certainly applicable to both blogs (54). This idea is best made clear through examples. The entry “I shouldn’t be alive,” posted on June 27, 2007, by Dr Mohammed and “Saddam City,” posted on March 29, 2004, by Kevin clearly show how narrative form and style affect the content and vice versa. In “I shouldn’t be alive,” Dr Mohammed recounts how he drove through several neighborhoods in Baghdad, taking pictures and recording video material for a possible documentary and a blog entry. He sees a minivan next to the road, ridden with bullet holes and moves toward it. Suddenly, he hears gun shots fired close by. Three policemen drag him out of the car and start to rob him of his valuables, kicking and hitting him with guns in the process. He concludes:

I have never been humiliated like this before, that is so hard for me, I feel like I'm going to explode, they insulted me and rubbed me and there was nothing I could do, if I did anything they would kill me right away. That's unfair, that's too much for any man to handle, we have a famous say in Iraq (Hameeha Harameha) which is translated (who guards it steels it), OH how true is that ... will this ever end....but what I'm really sad about is my wife ..., She is so depressed and afraid, she is very traumatized from what happened, she is having nightmares, I'm afraid that will affect her studying and exams, I don't know what to do. (LoI June 27, 2007)

The desperation in this life report speaks for itself. By showing what the situation in downtown Baghdad is like for the civilians living there, Dr Mohammed simultaneously makes a political statement: something needs to be done against injustice. His style enhances this message; the conventions of English language use and journalistic practice are left behind and are replaced by
a raw and unpolished report of not only what happened, but also what a human being feels in such a situation. Close readers of his blog may note that Dr Mohammed sometimes tries to mimic Western journalistic styles, but through his choices, which maybe born in necessity, in narrative form and language style—stream of consciousness writing and use of punctuation marks—in this particular entry, he captures what he thinks mainstream journalism does not: the situation in Baghdad at that specific historical moment, through the subjective lens of someone whose daily life revolves around surviving in a conflict area. “I'd like to tell something that I think few had heard about from the media,” Dr Mohammed writes (June 22, 2007).

This is exactly what Kevin tries to do in his entry “Saddam City.” He describes how he was part of a Quick Reaction Force that was sent into a run-down part of Baghdad to stop attacks on a small American convoy located there. He expresses his frustration with Army officers and the locals. As Kevin portrays it, his commanding officer lacks the necessary leadership skills during the threatening situation that develops: his reaction force is attacked and is not commanded to strike back. The local Iraqis are selling their goods next to the road, while the Americans had just been under attack. Kevin describes a gruesome scene:

One of the hit Hmmwvs didn't look anything like a vehicle, just a hunk of burning and smoking rubble. I can never forget the pieces of brain matter that was on the ground and people were unintentionally stepping on. It was very frustrating for me and my friends. We wanted to go after those responsible. They didn't even kill any military personal, they were Civil Affairs. Luckily only 1 died, the loses are always small. We fight a group that claims to be brave and fighting for Iraqis, and yet, in alot of their own ambushes they set up against military convoys they kill more of their own and seem to think of it as acceptable. However, if we get into a fire fight and some Iraqi bystander dumb enough to watch gets wounded, we are murders. Their logic just doesn't seem right most of the time.

Alot of people you talk to who are not Iraqi and have been to Iraq talk about how frustrating their people's logic is.

In this instance, Kevin’s life lies in the hands of his commanding officer, whom he thinks is incapable of taking charge. Kevin narrates his perceived reality in a way that negatively frames this officer and Army leadership in general. In his view it’s his commanding officer’s fault that people are now stepping on brain matter. As a rhetorical tool, this might persuade readers to take Kevin’s stance; he is the expert and the authority because he experienced the consequences of

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20 In general, milblogs are critical of their direct commanding officers, depict horrific scenes, emphasize stupidity on the part of the Iraqis and show the power of new media—this is also expressed in the book and TV series Generation Kill (Smit 55-58). The stress that is connected to redistributing the power over one’s actions to someone else results in online criticism toward direct leadership.
bad leadership. As revealed though Kevin’s word usage, an angry tone underlies this entry and it is also directed to the Iraqi population. The last sentence in the quotation is a choice in rhetorical style that would not be accepted in mainstream journalism, because the latter often adheres to a distanced and neutral style. Kevin voices frustrations on the personal level through words and phrases like “I can never forget,” “It was frustrating for me,” “we fight,” “dumb enough,” and the last two sentences of the post, but also by giving a subjective observation and directly commenting upon it.

Through their style, both bloggers try to establish a relationship with their readers. By writing in an unpolished fashion, they align themselves with the language of everyday talk. Because Dr Mohammed and Kevin use the language of their respective communities—highly-educated English speaking Iraqi citizens and politically conservative American soldiers in Iraq—they adhere to what Raymond Williams has called radical-popular journalism and, more broadly, alternative journalism (Atton and Hamilton 11). Moreover, their blogs are specialized on daily life in Iraq, idiosyncratic, viewed by some as “sectarian and strange” and placed outside commercial-popular logic (Williams 22). This becomes clearer in the discussion of the content of these blogs, but the form and style this content is presented in magnifies their challenging mainstream journalism’s representations of the war in Iraq.

**Letting the World Know, or, the Content of Warblogs**

In general, all the posts on both blogs are persuasive in their content; that is, through the choice of topics, subjective observations, direct messages and appeals, they attempt to prove that their reports describe the “real” situation in Iraq and by doing so they try to get public support. Sometimes, entries are explicit messages that call for action on the part of readers. In one post Dr Mohammed writes that a close friend of his has gone missing for four days and next asks his readers to “contact me on my email if you can help with anything” (November 3, 2007). More generally he pleads that “We Iraqis must love each other rebuilding our country, we must put aside our differences because we used to live in peace and love despite those differences” (March 19, 2008). In another post, “Urgent…..attention required,” he calls out: “I’m in sorrow for the way Iraqis are treated in the ‘new, liberated, democratic and luxurious’ Iraq !!!! I WANT THE WHOLE WORLD TO KNOW” (emphasis in original, May 17, 2008). In a particularly cautionary post about the kidnapping of children in Iraq he warns: “So for all the Iraqis who
reads this; take care of your kids and watch them all the time, never leave them alone or let them go out alone at least these days and if you don't have kids then please spread the word among the people you know who have kids” (LoI May 24, 2009). In other direct messages to his readers Dr Mohammed asks for donations to cover his expenses maintaining his blog, which can be read as a sign of his call for direct involvement of his readers.

*Boots on the Ground* is mostly written in the form of a diary or a private letter in which Kevin gives his own view of the situation in Iraq and illustrates this with descriptions of daily life. He often reacts generally to comments regarding his posts. In “Politics and the Military,” he explicitly tells his readers that the goal in his writing is to give life reports:

First off, I don't know why people bring their political ideology here. My site is about my experiences in Iraq and experiences of others. Also, to see how I feel about it and see things through the eyes of an American soldier in Iraq. I don't talk about politics because the US military is an Apolitical organization. We are not the CIA or NSA. We are not brainwashed zombies. (January 23, 2004)

And in “Thanks for the Support”:

Wow, I can't believe how much e-mail I have been literally flooded with today. I must have gotten more than 100 e-mails. So, my site must be starting to get really popular. I am not really sure if that is a good thing. I'm really sorry if I am not able to write all of you back, I just don't have the time. (October 28, 2003)

Sometimes he is frustrated with his readers, especially when they comment negatively and critically, as becomes clear in “Counter-Attack in Iraq”:

I am no longer going to tolerate people who are sitting back home in their easy chairs and drinking beers trying to explain to me how the situation is in Iraq. I will no longer tolerate them telling me how to do my job. I will no longer tolerate them trolling. You can try and hide behind the freedom of speech all you like. However, being on the internet and getting on here and discussing the topics I post is a PRIVILAGE, it is NOT A RIGHT. If you don't like what I post, you don't need to even be reading what I write. (February 18, 2004)

These types of posts stimulate discussion and debate and they show how direct messages to and interaction with his readers invoke a sense of community and belonging. In the comment sections beneath his posts, supportive and oppositional views vary, but he writes that most of the emails he receives are supportive.21

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21 Comments and reactions by the blogs’ readers will be discussed more expansively in the next chapter.
The core of both blogs consists of daily life reports. Often, these reports contain political reflections, criticism and direct messages as well. In both cases they show the deterioration of Iraq and its impact on daily life. The constant lack of electricity, the heat, explosions, high prices, lack of good drinking water and material, boredom and sense of danger are recurring themes. Often, these posts are shocking and communicate the fear and hopelessness that come with living in a combat zone. Especially *Last of Iraqis* tells gripping stories of life threatening situations. One vivid example of this is the post “Me, My Wife and the Sniper,” written on July 9, 2007. Dr Mohammed writes that he and his wife were walking down a street to reach his father. He explains that the neighborhood is dangerous and therefore the taxi would not enter it. They exit the cab and enter Antar Square. Suddenly, they hear a high caliber gun shot. Dr Mohammed’s wife panics and he pushes her toward safety. The pair wait and decide to continue, but when they do Dr Mohammed hears a gunshot and sees how the bullet impacts the ground right next to him. They hide in a building and encounter a group of frightened people. One of the women in the group tells the couple that the shooter killed a mother and her daughter in front of her eyes. He continues:

> I was so shocked I asked her : is he in the Olympic Club building ?She said :yes!!!!!!!
> That's amazing, this building is controlled by the national guards, in fact this building is a bunker now for the national guards, the sniper must be a National Guard member , otherwise how could he be in the building???.

The immanent sense of danger Dr Mohammed describes is magnified by his writing, using commas where periods should be placed. *What* happens is almost too horrific to believe but because of the details he uses in describing places, people, surroundings, but also through the matter-of-fact way he writes, his credibility is increased. Journalists only rarely enter such situations, and would presumably not describe it this way due to editorial intervention and professional distance. Also, Dr Mohammed protecting his wife has a rather dramatizing effect on

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the narrative. Furthermore, this post has another, political layer. Dr Mohammed not only describes the event but later also attempts to find out who the shooter was and why he attacked them. He ends this entry by a sinister remark: “I don’t know when will death get me!!! I have cheated him many times now.”

*Boots on the Ground* deals differently with the sometimes shocking realities of war which are evident in daily life. Kevin tells his readers more than once about mortar attacks and bombings, fellow soldiers in his platoon getting killed or wounded in action, or Iraqi civilians that befell the same faith. Bravado and machismo and trivializations are used to cope with trauma, suffering and loss:

Funny how the explosions that happened around us when I was in Iraq never really bothered me, I could even ignore them. I even slept through the Al-Rasheed hotel attack incident that happened about a mile away and shook the place. I didn’t think it would really have any effect on me. (March 29, 2004)

Some posts talk about nightmares and dreams in which he relives the action. Other entries refer back to his earlier emotional distance and numbness:

I’ve gotten used to this work schedule, though I am sure in 20 years I will pay for it in some manner of post traumatic stress syndrome or something. I read in a magazine somewhere that the average grunt in Iraq spends more time in combat than World War 2 vets and Vietnam veterans. (May 16, 2005)

However, many of Kevin’s posts talk about the boredom of a soldier’s life. Much of his time he spends waiting, doing training missions, administrative jobs and watching movies. Many other milblogs state the same and boredom is something that is picked up in the remediations of soldier life in Iraq, for example in the TV series *Generation Kill* and Kathryn Bigelow’s Oscar winning film *The Hurt Locker*. The tension between doing nothing and extreme combat stress is something that shines through in his posts. In “Hard Times” he writes “I am excited to go home and see my girlfriend. To get out of the Army and start moving on with my life. I hope I will never be one of those people who get so accustomed to American life again that I will forget all the sacrifices we have made over here. We all gave some, some gave all (May 26, 2005).”

Stuart Allan’s remarks explain what is happening in the writing process here. Most of the entries written by Dr Mohammed and Kevin are “spontaneous actions” which are motivated by their urge to “bear witness to crisis events unfolding around them” (Allan 219). Such blogs as Dr Mohammed’s “provide web users from around the globe with viewpoints about what life is like
for ordinary Iraqis, viewpoints otherwise likely to be routinely ignored or trivialized in their
country’s mainstream news media” (Ibid. 228). As can be read in the samples, the stories on the
blogs speak for themselves, “their importance all too apparent for users looking beyond the
narrow ideological parameters of much Western news coverage” (Ibid. 229). The questions
asked and statements made through direct messages have a binding function; the audience feels
connected. This effect increases with the sharing of personal thoughts and feelings through the
reports on daily life.

Explicit political reflections appear on both websites alongside these more personal
stories and are backed up by them, illustrating the reflective style of both blogs. By showing
what direct effect political life has on daily life, the authors enhance the impact of their political
beliefs. Although Kevin writes that “I will have an unbiass’d oppinion, so I’ll even be critical
toward what the US military does here in Iraq” (October 24, 2003) and “first and foremost, this
is not a political web page. Also, the military is an apolitical organization. So, I will not discuss
wether I believe the war was the right thing to do or not” (March 15, 2004). Another post says
that anti-war protesters should “blame Bush and the US government, but don’t blame the guys
living day to day one day at a time trying to survive trying to support their family thousands of
miles and make it by in the world” (April 22, 2004) and “I do think this war was not necessary in
that I don’t believe Iraq was a threat to us, however I think it is justified in saving 28 million
people from a ruthless dictator” (October 25, 2003). Another telling post comes just after the
scandal surrounding the Abu Ghraib pictures. Here, Kevin takes the side of the Bush
administration, which said the abusers were “bad apples”:

Now these soldiers have put the lives of their fellow soldiers at risk by making Iraqis
cross from moderate to angry toward the USA, and like other dumb criminals, they took
pictures that incriminated themselves. I think the USA is going to have a long and hard
time getting those who trusted the USA to trust us again. This I know, couldn’t have
come at a worst time for President Bush. These soldiers do not deserve to wear the
uniform of the US Army. Their actions were dispicable and unAmerican. (May 1, 2004)

Kevin thus portrays the US military as detached from the American political apparatus, which it
never is. When Washington affects his daily life, he responds with a frustrated remark:
It has become clear that the guys in Washington are not good at spending money properly. I see all these ICDC and other Iraqis and US military driving around in $50,000 dollar SUVs and $70,000 cars. This really irritates me. This is probably the reason why it is so hard to get new parts for broken equipment . . . I think it is laughable that the Republicans claim to want a small and more efficient government, and yet they screw things up more than the democrats have done in awhile. This is really irresponsible spending. I don’t think US or Iraqi military need $60,000 vehicles to get around in the country. (February 16, 2004)

Although Kevin claims to be politically neutral, his frustrations experienced in daily life are aimed at people who are, in his own terms, “sitting back home in their easy chairs and drinking beers” (February 18, 2004). The main reason he gives for writing from Iraq is that he wants to share his views on how the situation is there. By reading his blog, he writes, people get a better view of Iraq during the occupation. Whether or not this is the case, by reading blogs like Kevin’s, readers are presented with life reports which bring news about Iraq from an alternative perspective and in different styles and forms, hence addressing issues that affect daily life in a form that evokes a sense of authenticity and connection.

This is also the goal of Last of Iraqis. Dr Mohammed has a clear political agenda. He is supportive of the American troops, has moderate, pro-Western political beliefs, is a religious Sunni (which is the oppressed minority in Iraq) and a fierce opponent of the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his militant Mahdi Army. The latter is a recurring subject of his political posts. The complicated situation on the streets of Baghdad during the occupation is explained by Mohammed: the Mahdi Army battles the US Army in Sadr City, a district of Baghdad, which Kevin calls Saddam City. The Mahdi Army is a violent group of young, religious Shiites who are a constant threat to the stability in Baghdad, Mohammed repeatedly tells his readers. In “The Complete Story of Muqtada and Al-Mahdi Army” he writes: “I made this post after a very exhausting research, in order to get the tiny details about him, In this post I’ll try to tell every detail about this man who had a major role in the destruction and sectarian violence in Iraq” (June 20, 2007). These and other entries are supported by reports of his often violent encounters with the militia and the effects these have on his and his wife’s emotional wellbeing.

Another trope in his political blog entries is the difficulty he has in positioning himself as a pro-American Iraqi. On the one hand, he supports the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s regime, but on the other, he is proud of his nation. This tension he shows in the post “5 years of blood and tears,” written on March 19, 2008. He describes how he, on April 9, 2003, gathered in front
of the television with his family to watch the news covering the invasion. That day, the Americans tore down Saddam Hussein’s statue located in Firdos square. Dr Mohammed is shocked:

I felt great anger, not because I love Saddam but because this is the Iraqi president and they are making fun of him, and humiliating us, they could just bring down the statue and the message will be clear, did they have to do that, at this moment I turned to the professor who I really admire and saw him crying with an angry red face, I was shocked to see him like that, I looked at my family and they were so grim and angry, then I saw my father’s eyes filled with tears, he always didn’t like Saddam, his regiment or their acts, he was always talking bad about them and how they are destroying Iraq, but it's not about Saddam anymore, It's Iraq...It's our country, it's the country my family left Europe to return to and help building it despite all the great chances offered to them in Europe...it's the country he dedicated his life to serve (by the way my family is far away from politics and they never interfered in it).

At the moment the Western media’s lens was aimed at the now iconic scene of an American soldier draping an American flag over the head of Saddam’s statue, politically moderate Iraqis were offended by that same act. In what proves to be an exemplary post, he continues to give personal reflections on the occupation and he provides statistical data to illustrate his point. He finishes this entry with an emotional call:

We Iraqis must love each other and help each other rebuilding our country, we must put aside our differences because we used to live in peace and love despite those differences, we must stand together and forget our personal interests and focus on the most important thing; our country, I wish these words can reach all the Iraqis, I’m begging you stop supporting anyone, support your country and it's best interest, love each other and always think Iraq must come first forget about your sect, your political views and your tribe always think of Iraq, don't give the invisible hands any more chances, let us be united so we can be strong again.

Here, Dr Mohammed takes on a political role. “The best interest” of Iraq are, according to him, stability and unity among Iraqis themselves, who are highly sectarian. By “invisible hands” he points to foreign political influence and extremist groups. By using a forceful style (the word “must” is used four times) he addresses the urgency of the problem. What is more, posts like these show how the political viewpoints of the writer are illustrated by instances of everyday life.

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23 The scene was heavily televised on a global scale. Many journalists stayed at the Palestine Hotel on Firdos Square, where the statue was located. Critical commentators noted that the event was staged. British columnist Robert Fisk wrote in *The Independent* on April 11 that the instance provided the “the most staged photo opportunity since Iwo Jima.”
In this respect, they provide an alternative way of reporting the war in Iraq. Journalists seldom call for political change so explicitly and especially not from personal experience, but often do so through quotations of others, or through an analysis backed up by experts, because of their professional codes and conventions. Dr Mohammed’s post copied above shows that he is part of a community and that he writes in the best interest of that community. Journalists tend to keep a professional—and ethical—distance from their sources, even if they have completely immersed themselves in a community. This, sometimes literal, distance is what professional journalists are criticized for by citizen journalists.

In some posts, both writers directly attack the mainstream media. Whether it is CNN, Fox News, or Al-Jazeera, they do not give the “full true story,” as Kevin puts it (October 24, 2003). He writes that often American soldiers book successes but that “you wont ever hear about this stuff in the news, probably because they think the world ought to know just about how big of a failure Iraq is and how we are losing the hearts of Iraqis” (November 2, 2003) and that “Al-Jazeera is very guilty I think of trying to glamorize this terrible movement [terrorism] going on in Iraq” (September 22, 2004). Later he even writes: “It’s come to my attention or at least it would appear that Al-Jazeera, whom I equate as the Arab version of the Fox News Channel. All they do is spread filthy propaganda and promote violence in my opinion” (January 8, 2005). In “Clarifying Confusions” Dr Mohammed starts an explanatory post with “I have been asked by many westerner friends and readers so many times about the reality of the situation in Iraq and especially in Baghdad. Many are confused about the truth, many are manipulated by the media and most of them have the same question ‘is the situation good in Baghdad as we hear?’” He even gives an explanation for the view that the media are not covering the violence in Baghdad enough: the news agencies need to sell their stories. He concludes with a hopeful notion: “I wish I was successful in giving you somehow a clear view of what is happening in Baghdad which has been abandoned even by the news” (June 19, 2008).

Bloggers like Dr Mohammed and Kevin attempt to give report on their life that show what life really is like in Iraq. Their conviction is that mainstream journalism cannot and is unwilling to do this. By linking and alluding to news articles and other blogs, they amend to and
criticize the discourse on the Iraq War in new and creative ways. They try to establish connections with their readers by writing from experience and in a language that is authentic and “real” and nearly without the conventions of journalism. Also, they invite them to react to their stories through comments, something that mainstream journalism only sporadically allows. The genres they use to bring across their message are divers; in some cases a posts starts off as a news report but gradually turns into an analysis and in the ends transforms into an opinionated column or political pamphlet. The characteristics of citizen journalism given in chapter one are well articulated in Last of Iraqis and Boots on the Ground, even though these blogs are written from seemingly very different perspectives. Both blogs are critical of any form of authority, emphasize personalized storytelling and oppose the mainstream media’s grand narrative—whether this is Al-Jazeera’s or CNN’s. These characteristics can be labeled postmodern, because they depart from Modernist-progressive ideals of good journalism, which are, according to both authors, not capable of telling the whole story of the war in Iraq. This can be seen as being part of critical internet culture, of which citizen journalists and the people who comment on their stories are part.

What Comments Say

Political thoughts constitute a large part of the blog entries of Last of Iraqis and Boots on the Ground. Through their reflections on daily life, Kevin and Dr Mohammed become instant contributors to the political discourse surrounding the war in Iraq. Because they claim to give true reports on lived experience, they become experts on the topic in the eyes of their readers. Structural similarities can be located in their practice of maintaining a blog. Both writers contribute to and act within digital culture, which is guided by idiosyncratic principles and rules. By analyzing the comments that react to both Kevin’s and Dr Mohammed’s blogs, it will be demonstrated how certain characteristics and behaviors within digital culture play out and how these interact with online political deliberation. Hence, not only digital culture as a way of life, but also as a means to make sense of political issues will be investigated.

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24 For examples, read the posts by tom_abb (reactionary comment on BotG), Anonymous (reactionary comment on LoI), and Tom in Texas. These and other posts link to news websites like BBC, Al Jazeera but also to other blogs, Wikipedia and other websites.
On both *Last of Iraqis* and *Boots on the Ground* readers actively engage with the writers. On average, each post has between 50 and 80 comments. Some posts on both blogs stir more readers; sometimes over a 150 readers comment extensively on entries. The content of the comments broadly range in topic. Some are personal motivations to show commitment to the blogger’s cause. In Kevin’s case many try to uplift his morale by telling him that he “does a good job” as a soldier in the US Army. Dr Mohammed is often told he should continue writing and keep up his spirit. Other types of comments are mostly following the three characterizations of digital culture Mark Deuze has identified. Indeed, people who (re)act on blogs are bricoleurs who participate and remediate. Simultaneously, the commentators are divided politically and their personal political backgrounds are often a patchwork of several convictions. One commentator’s profile called Jonadab, reads: “I'm a socially and economically conservative, progressive and liberally educated, dedicated fundamentalist Christian (Anabaptist/Pietist), and a computer geek (with Unix-oriented tendencies).” As Papacharissi argues “this private citizen is not politically disinterested; on the contrary, this citizen is politically interested in modes that are not easily captured via aggregate measures, such as polls, and has a political appetite that is not satiated by mass produced content” (Papacharissi, 2009, 39).

A few characteristics of people who react on blogs should be noted. On topics that concern “mass produced content” commentators show to be avid participators and bricoleurs; that is, they tend to place hyperlinks to other (news) websites or news bulletins to back up their arguments or to refute a point made by other commentators and traditional media outlets. As can be read on the weblogs, and in the selection samples attached to this dissertation, Kevin and Dr Mohammed often react to comments, prolonging discussions and keeping them up-to-date and to the point. Commentators engage in discussions that flow out of posts. Right- and Left-wing ideologies collide and both sides try to prove their points by providing numbers, figures and views and opinions of people who they think are worthy critics. Sporadically, rude and blunt comments are made, but mostly commentators are respected. It should be noted, though, that it is practically impossible to get extensive background information about the people who post on blogs. Most do not have a profile page. Consequently, anonymity is crucial to communication on blogs—and elsewhere on the Web. The idea that people can say what they want in the way they want lowers the threshold to express opinions, but it can also be the cause of derogative language, both in form and content.
A good example that shows the characteristics stated above is the comment section of the post “Bad things got worst, good things are lost” posted on Saturday, November 3, 2007, by Dr Mohammed. The entry itself combines personal grief and political commentary. First, he posts that one of his good friends was captured by US troops. Second, he compares the situation in Iraq at the moment of writing and the period under Saddam Hussein. He writes that under Saddam there was at least electricity and cheap gas and clean water. Additionally, there was a sense of safety “unless he [the Iraqi citizen] is interfering in politics.” In his view, the things Iraqis gained after the invasion were “mobile phones, Satellite dish and the increase in salaries which was accompanied by a horrifying increase in the cost of living.” The post got commented 144 times and sparked a lively discussion among the blog’s readers. The first comment by Xavier sets the tone:

So much injustice. What if the competing armed sectarian factions decrease or altogether cease their attacks in order to lull the Iraqis and Americans into a false sense of security that would justify a major troop pull out? The Republicans would tout it as a victory and the Democrats as something long since overdue. Then, with the Americans mostly gone, the final struggle for power in Iraq enters its final violent stages. There needs to be a sustainable and fair foundation of government and security before a troop pullout. Otherwise chaos can quickly grow. This could take many more years. (November 3, 2007)

Xavier uses Dr Mohammed’s post to contradict the news that October 2007 had been the best month regarding violence and killings since the invasion, which added to the sense of improvement in Iraq. Many other comments criticize the way Western media framed the situation in Iraq as improving, while Dr Mohammed—and with him many other Iraqi bloggers—experience their standard of living being worse than before the invasion. This post also shows the interaction between bloggers and commentators. In the comments section Dr Mohammed reacts to everyone and even brings other views into the discussion:

about democracy let me tell you something an American soldier told me today in the email, he said lietrally "I agree with your latest post that Saddam Hussein was actually the best thing going for Iraq. I didn’t realize that until I actually started meeting Iraqis and realized that a majority of Iraqis need someone to slap them around so they stay in line...if you let them roam free you invite Al Queda and other crooks and power hungry freaks to come in and beat up the peaceful civilians." and I totally agree with this soldier and will write to him so he make comments here. Democarcy can't be that easy in Iraq, you should read about the Iraqi society as I told you, then you will understand why, I
Dr Mohammed repeatedly tells his readers that he is not pro-Saddam, but that he is anti-sectarian. In his view, the violence among Iraqis is the result of the means of control Saddam Hussein provided—even though this was dictatorial. Dr Mohammed attempts to explain the complicated political situation in Iraq to a global audience through his blog. In the comments section he provides nuances and updates and he engages in discussion with people who disagree with his views. This ties in with the conversational characteristics of citizen journalism. Commentators, ranging from 17-year old “Friendly American” and Iraqi “Um Ayad” to the cynical Left-wing “Indigo” and Right-wing “Tom in Texas” can participate in seemingly endless political deliberation.25 This only shows a fraction of the public blogosphere that deals with the Iraq War; however, it illustrates the political potential of the practices of blogging and commenting. Direct impact of blogs on the political process is hard, or even impossible, to measure, but the comments show the potential citizen journalism has to let people engage with otherwise politically distant topics.

One of the most telling discussions on Boots on the Ground started after Kevin posted “Bush’s Speech” on May 25, 2004. He writes that, after he finished a field training for that day, he saw bits and pieces on the news about a speech President Bush gave. Kevin likes Bush’s determination concerning Iraq, but he will not back him up politically because “it’s highly unprofessional of a soldier to criticize someone in his chain of command.” He continues stating that he is “not pro war, I think war is bad, but just because citizens may get caught in the crossfire, doesn't mean it is not unjust. I also get really offended when people have the nerve to call the US occupation of Iraq as brutal, especially since I was there for a year and didn't notice any of this brutality.” Here, he takes position against some media that emphasize the military’s brutality. Even though Kevin claims to only provide opinions he formed through experience and his being there, he contradicts himself by entering into political reflections about stability in the region: “I believe the government will eventually will be overthrown by some kind of Syrian backed or Iranian backed party that may take over power. It is too big for all those surrounding nations to resist.” Additionally, he gives his view on the Israel-Palestine conflict: Israel should

25 The core of Dr Mohammed’s readership consists of these and some 30 other regular commentators who, in most cases, have their own blog. The rest of his readers and commentators are mainly anonymous.
stop its military activity and take diplomatic measures an thereby resolve the tensions with other countries. He writes, “I think people dieing over religious territory is really non-sense” and “Jerusalem should become an international city” but that “Israel has every right to defend herself from attackers.” Entering in such highly controversial subjects consequently leads to extensive discussion. This is amplified by Kevin’s claim that he does not enter into political talk and that he only writes about what he experiences. This indicates that personal experience is never far removed from political idea. Even though he claims not to engage in political debate, Kevin automatically ties in opinion with his personal observations, which leads to political talk and observations in the comment sections.

The first comments to “Bush’s Speech” set the tone of the discussion. “Sleepless in Chicago” writes: “Glad you never actually witnessed any of the crap the media keeps talking about. It makes me feel better to hear you say that” (May 25, 2004) and “Rich in NYC” comments: “the worst reporter in Iraq, bar none, has to be the BBC's Orla Gerin (sp?). She's hands down the ‘Queen of the Middle East Handwringers.’ If she were reporting on the most joyous event in the world it would still sound like a human rights catastrophe from her viewpoint.” These are the first of the 185 comments made on this entry, authored by 35 different people. Like Last of Iraqis comments contain statistics and hyperlinks to other (news) websites and blogs to support opinions. This is exemplary of the characteristics stated in chapter one: Kevin does not moderate this discussion, but the commentators do that themselves; “Guest” asks if the quantity of swearing can be kept down and “Sharon” writes “Of course you are entitled to your own opinions, but it would be nice if you thought for yourselves instead of presenting hackneyed right wing rhetoric rather than real ideas based on careful research.”

As both examples used in this chapter have shown, the act of commenting on blogs lowers the threshold to engage in political deliberation and discussion. Citizen journalism—and more specifically warblogs—is a personalized form of journalism that can spark political discussion because it is grounded in subjectivity and experience of daily life. In this sense, it adds to and often criticizes traditional and mainstream journalism. Last of Iraqis and Boots on the Ground eminently demonstrate the characteristics of citizen journalism pointed out in chapter one. In short, both blogs are written and commented upon by producer-consumers, who keep each other in check on a peer-to-peer basis. The blog entries and the following comments are highly fragmented in terms of form, place, and content and are conversational. This latter point is
illustrated by the constant use of hyperlinks to other texts and the references to other comments and posts. In terms of content, many blog posts and comments criticize mainstream media for not telling the complete or “true” story of the war in Iraq. Indeed, as Mark Poster argues, today discussions of the workings of democratic deliberation within the public sphere has partly moved from face-to-face communication to electronic and digital mediated discourse (264-265). Additionally, the traditional carriers of political messages have become important political actors themselves, or, as Brian McNair puts it, “the media are politics, and the politics are the media” (ix). This is one of the reasons why citizens have sought to find alternative media that deal with political meaning-making. Due to the participatory nature of the blogosphere, online political talk has at least the potential to reach and engage with citizens who might be otherwise politically silent.
Conclusion

Amen, to everything written above, both in post and comment.

R.J. Adams on LoI Jan 2, 2008

Citizen journalism is an extensive field of inquiry and therefore leads to many debatable issues, both practically and theoretically. In the first chapters rudimentary and seemingly plain questions, have shown to have complex and extensive answers that are not detached from critique. By answering questions such as “what is citizen journalism?” “what are blogs and warblogs?” chapters one and two simultaneously enter into a discussion that is controversial in the study of journalism, as well as the practice of it. On the one hand, academic researchers might critique the normative stance of researchers within the study of alternative media. Indeed, certain idealism foregrounds research into the practice of citizen-initiated journalism. However, the hopeful notion that citizens might criticize, through the use of online platforms, their governments and political situation in their countries has just recently proven to have real effects in the Arab region. On the other hand, journalists might attack amateur productions for various reasons, ranging from content to form and style. Indeed, the eye-witness reports and political analyses of citizen journalists often do not live up to the standards of the journalistic profession. However, these amateurs often explicitly tell their audiences that they do not want to. Citizen journalism, in light of this dissertation, should be seen as the watchdog’s watchdog. By alternatively framing reality and criticizing its professional brother through life reports, citizen journalism shows how traditional journalism is limited by its own rules, codes, conventions and socio-historical construction.

As the warblogs of Dr Mohammed and Kevin have shown, the practice of citizen journalism has its own rules and conventions. In this regard, a theoretical perspective on a mainly practical phenomenon has been given. Unlike public journalism, citizen journalism has been a practice without a theoretical foundation. Using theories of postmodernity, digital culture, and the online public sphere, possibilities for critical reflection open up. By microscopically analyzing the content, form and style of both blogs with these theoretical tools in hand, it becomes possible to, at least partly, lay bare the mechanics and construction of citizen journalism. Dr Mohammed and Kevin, and their readers, are participating and remediating bricoleurs who focus on personal narrative and the experience of everyday life and critique
authority and institutions such as government, the press and the military. These postmodern characteristics potentially incite political deliberation within the online sphere, which, in its turn, can stir political action in non-virtual communities. This last step was not within the scope of this research project and might be a logic and necessary next stage of research on the topic.

It was not the goal here to argue the end of professional journalism. In part, a part of the bigger picture journalism is in today was sketched, and insights into the workings of citizen journalism were given. As with many professional fields, journalism as a practice as well as an idea has been criticized by amateurs. Some within the field might feel this as an attack on their professional standards, which, in many cases, leads to excellent reportages. However, the concerns expressed by Kevin, Dr Mohammed and their readers should be seen as the logical outcomes of our postmodern era. On a general level, citizen journalists argue that journalism and the media in general have grown into and intertwined with the market and politics, the very powerhouses it ought to criticize. Bloggers and others who, as amateur consumer-producers, work on the fringes of the media world explain, represent and give meaning to reality in ways that can be seen as counter cultural; that is, they criticize the hegemonic position of the press from their own ideological and idealistic stances not through live reports but life reports.

Knowledge on the war in Iraq, with its literal geographic distance from American audiences has been wholly constructed by mediated representations. Therefore, the way media professionals frame the conflict is of utmost importance for an audience to conceive it. This dissertation has zoomed in on the representation of the war two citizen journalists give their audiences and it has placed these in the wider perspective of journalism. Further research regarding this topic could delve deeper into this framing of the war in terms of form, style and content of journalistic productions. As a meaning-maker, the press and its amateur derivatives play a large role as actors within the political performance of any nation. Therefore critical reflections of journalistic representations should expose the socio-historical construction of the press. Citizen journalism can do this within the practical field, while it is up to researchers to theoretically critique the institution that strives to be the mirror to reality.
Bibliography


Appendix I

Blog entries cited in dissertation. These posts are kept as unedited as possible.

*Dr Mohammed – Last of Iraqis* ([http://last-of-iraqis.blogspot.com/](http://last-of-iraqis.blogspot.com/))

**Monday, May 28, 2007**

**Another Bloody day**

Yesterday was another bloody day with massive destruction and dead bodies with every possible method of Explosion. But I'll only talk about what I witnessed. I went to the clinic as always. It was a terribly hot day, so I felt thirsty, I went to buy a cold drink, as I reached the clinic door there was a loud explosion that shook the ground. I stood in shock, I realized it was very near, the seconds passed as years, then I saw people running towards us from around the corner, there was a scene that really made my heart bleed it was that homeless psychotic man running scared with the most horrified facial expression, I really took pity on him, then I asked a man who was at the site of the explosion about what happened, he told me that a police patrol car parked on the side walk had exploded, the police men were having their breakfast in a restaurant near their car (pick-up) and then two insurgents on a motor-bike passed by and threw an explosive bag in the car and just as they passed it exploded right away leaving a lot of casualties among the civilians, a lot of shops had damaged, and the picture above is for a pigeon who died in this explosion, I've taken the photo as I was going back home after work. About 15 minutes after the explosion there was another one but it seemed far, and then my phone rang, it was my wife she told me that the explosion was very close to her college, it was at the roof top of the hospital next to her college, there wasn't a lot of casualties, I think that this explosion was to terrify people not to kill them, in order to deprive them from the treatment as they will think twice before going to the hospital and in this way terrorism will achieve one of it's goals by making the life even harder, I wonder how could they pass all the check points at the gates of the hospital and plant the bomb!! is it possible that the national guards or the police had a role in it!! I think so.
Saturday, June 2, 2007

Going to school in Baghdad

They say that some pictures speaks for them selves and I think this is one of those pictures, but I'll talk about what's beyond this picture, I'll talk about feelings and facts.

I don't think that anyone wants to view this scene even in his nightmares, then what if it's in real life. You can see that the mother and her son doesn't seem to care about this dead body not because they are cold hearted or have no feelings on the contrary but because they are used to see this almost every morning. If you live in Baghdad you wake up in the morning to see different types of dead bodies, some of them were killed by an explosion and haven't been carried away like the one here, some being kidnapped and tortured then killed and thrown on the side walk by the militias just because they are from a different sect, some are taken by the police or the national guards without any charges just because they were at the site of the explosion or the clash and being kept in jails at least for a year and if they were lucky they wouldn't be dead and I should mention that a large percentage of the police or the national guards are loyal to some militias mostly Shiite militias. And what makes the situation even worst is that the terrorists are using a new disgusting technique, they tend to booby-trap the corps so when anyone try to pick up the dead body it will explode on him, like the torture and death isn't enough so they disrespect the human being even more by doing this. So what the national guards or the police doing now!! they make the situation even worst they shoot the dead body to be sure it's not booby-trapped, and of course civilians will not get near them either for the same reason they shoot a dead body that has been in the street for about 2 days with such a hot weather, what could be worst, even death in Iraq is like no where else, even the dead can't have peace, and for example the count of the dead bodies for today is 29 in Baghdad and 15 in Baakoba and there is a statistic that the number of civilian casualties has raised 30% in May and today Al-Qaeda has announced responsibility for the killing of an Iraqi couple who works at the American Embassy after they were reported missing.

so I think this is not a small number and that supports what I say that you might see a dead body almost every day on your way to work, college or school.
neighborhood of sorrow

This video (I have taken a week ago) shows the road to Adhamyia(one of the most ingrained neighborhood in Baghdad) which is controlled now by Al-Qaeda, I have video-taped it myself at 2pm. It is heart-burning video for any Iraqi. The video starts from 'Antar' square where Adhamyia starts, passing through one of the most active and crowded streets in the past then turning to 'Althobat' St. which was also one of the beautiful streets of Baghdad with shops and people walking around, it used to be very active neighborhood in the past. For those who doesn't know Adhamyia I should give a short assay about it: Adhamyia before the war was a very nice and quiet neighborhood in which a considerable number of Shiite families and majority of Sunni living side by side in peace, and there was absolutely nothing bothering in this neighborhood. Saddam legislated a law that states any one who wasn't born in Adhamyia before 1948 can't own a land or a house in it (Adhamyia is the only neighborhood that has such a law), so it's obvious that all the people who live in Adhamyia are long-time neighbors and that what makes this neighborhood so special, when you enter it you feel the intimacy between the people there, in addition to the great shops and the beautiful streets where people used to walk in the afternoons, it was great, just great. Till the war begun where it started to get worse, It was the last place where Saddam was seen in Baghdad (after the statue has fallen down) so there were heavy clashes between the US army and the remnants of the former Iraqi Army and special forces which caused a great deal of destruction. after that it was considered to be the Sunni stronghold although as I mentioned there were many Shiite there, so Al-Qaeda was trying to have control over it and they succeeded eventually in the last year. It's a terrible place now, one can feel the destruction in every brick of each wall, the asphalt of the streets feels like it has been mixed with sadness and tears. where ever you point your head you see signs of death and destruction and I think that's Al-Qaeda goal in order to undermine the authority of the government, and that what happened in it, they started killing the Shiite families so the rest of them decided to leave the neighborhood if they weren't threatened, the militants are every where on their motorbikes and cars, it's unusual if 30 minutes passed without the sounds of bullets or an explosion, the streets are so empty. there is no single police patrol car or national guard hammer that can stop inside adhamiya, if they pass in it's streets then they will be driving insanely fast, in the video before the intersection (before it's end) there is a wreck of concrete, that was a national guard check point 10 days ago, it was constructed about 20 days earlier, and I'm not over exaggerating if I say that every 15 minutes they are attacked by the militants whether Al-Qaeda or the Islamic army or whatever militants there is, until they forced them to leave this checkpoint. before that checkpoint you will see a long street that had three of the most famous super markets in Baghdad, that street used to be very crowded, it takes about 15 minutes to pass it and now as you see it took me about a minute. then you will see the burnt up shop which used to be a home appliances shop, I used to be a customer, unfortunately now it's just a wreck. And I'm just another Iraqi wail over his country and the neighborhood in which he spent most of his life and had the most beautiful memories there.
Wednesday, June 20, 2007

The Complete Story Of Muqtada and Al-Mahdi Army

I made this post after a very exhausting research, in order to get the tiny details about him. In this post I'll try to tell every detail about this man who had a major role in the destruction and sectarian violence in Iraq.

History

Muqtada was born in 1974 in his grandfather's house. Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr’s father, was a well-respected figure throughout the Shiite Islamic World. He was murdered, along with two of his sons, allegedly by the government of Saddam. Some believe it was an insider job carried out by the orders coming from Najaf in February 1999, the stronghold of the al-Sadr clan. Muqtada’s father-in-law was executed by the Iraqi authorities in 1980. As Muqtada al-Sadr lacks the religious education and degrees required by Shiite doctrines, he does not claim the title of mujtahid (the equivalent of a senior religious scholar) or the authority to issue fatwas (religious edicts); consequently, he bases his religious authority on his lineage alone. Before the assassination of his father, his principal employment was as his father's doorman, responsible for greeting guests at his father's home. He wasn't respected by the people in Najaf for many reasons because of the lack of religious education as I mentioned and also because of his childish behaviors, they said he was fond of video-games (which doesn't suit a cleric) he was always seen in video-games casinos and that's why he got the nickname (Muqtada Atari) or (Muqtada play-station) he also used to wear jeans (before the war) and that's something shameful to a cleric or even any man living in the governments (except Baghdad) because people their and the tribes consider the jeans for fagots.

Assassinations and violence

His relationships with other Shiite clerics are tense, and occasionally violent. Some of his followers are alleged to be responsible for the assassination on 10 April 2003 of Imam Abdul Majid al-Khoei. This is accounted for by the fact that the perpetrators used ropes to pull Abdul Majid al-Khoei and his aide's bodies across some alleys near the Shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, and shouted slogans claiming vengeance for the assassination of al-Sadr. The al-Khoei Family, however, do not hold Muqtada al-Sadr responsible and have blamed Ba'athists for the killing.
There was a dispute over the keys to the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf. The mosque contains the tomb of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and, according to Shi’a belief, heir to the Prophet's legacy. It is among the most sacred Shiite sites, and also the source of a considerable amount of revenue. The traditional hereditary holder of the keys, Haidar Raifee fled for fear of his life after the fall of Saddam's regime. Mr. Raifee was widely believed to be an agent of Saddam's Ba'ath party, who had informed on countless Shiite opponents of Saddam's regime. Many of these activists and their families were allegedly tortured and killed by Saddam's Mukhabarat, the former Iraqi secret police. Al-Khoei, with the backing and protection of American and British armed forces, felt that he was in a position to broker a reconciliation between Muqtada al-Sadr and the hereditary custodian of the Shrine (or Kiliadar), Haidar Raifee. Al-Khoei escorted Haidar Raifee from hiding back to his post at the mosque. Al-Khoei’s support for Haidar Raifee would be considered an extreme provocation by the Shiite public in the city. Having lived in exile for 12 years in Britain, and having met with Tony Blair and Jack Straw, Al-Khoei had been hand-picked by the Americans and British to become a prominent leader in the Shiite community in Iraq. Al-Khoei was thus accused by many of taking orders from, and thus acting on behalf of, the American Government. His support for the Ba’athist Raifee was used as a pretext for his murder by a Shi’a mob. Witnesses have said that they were confronted at the mosque by an angry mob, some of whom shouted "Raifee is back". They called him an "animal" and threatened to beat him with their sandals (a traditional Iraqi insult.) According to reports, al-Khoei fired his pistol in the air to get the crowd to back off. However, rather than retreating, the angry crowd surged at al-Khoei, Raifee, and the nearby civilians. The mob killed Raifee with bayonets and knives; al-Khoei was chased down and killed in an alley near the headquarters of al-Sadr, not far from the mosque where Raifee had died only a few minutes beforehand. Muqtada al-Sadr claims that the murderers were not his followers, and that he in fact sent men to prevent al-Khoei’s murder. The al-Sadr family sent and published official condolences to the al-Khoei family, but it's clear to everyone that Muqtada is responsible. The initial warrant against al-Sadr produced after U.S. forces decided to shut down his newspaper, Al-Hawza Al-Natika (Speaking Hawza), alleged that members of the mob claimed to be there on al-Sadr’s orders, and that he had instructed them not to kill al-Khoei inside the mosque. Al-Khoei’s close followers did not blame al-Sadr for the murder (the wanted to prevent any disturbance might happen and some say they were concerned about their safety), but instead publicly blamed former Ba’ath party members who also hated al-Khoei (in complete contradiction of his kindness to Raifee).

The opposition

Shortly after the US ousted Saddam and his Ba’ath regime, al-Sadr voiced opposition to the Coalition Provisional Authority. He subsequently stated that he had more legitimacy than the Coalition-appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). In September 2003, he declared a shadow government, in opposition to the IGC officials, who were chosen by the US. In April of 2003 his followers, organized as the Sadr Bureau, began providing services throughout Sadr City, then still known as Saddam City. The services ranged from health care to
food and clean water. Later in 2003, residents of Sadr City meeting in neighborhood caucuses elected neighborhood councils, and ultimately a district council to represent the Sadr City District. The Sadr Bureau, aided by the Mahdi Army, attempted to remove the new District Council by force of arms and occupied the District Council Hall for several weeks. Finally, Coalition forces removed them from the premises, and the elected District Council resumed their duties. Despite this action by the Coalition authorities, the Sadr Bureau and the Mahdi Army have continued to act within Sadr City almost unhindered by US and Iraqi forces (most of them are loyal to Al-Sadir). Members of the elected District Council have been continually threatened, and some have been attacked for their alleged co-operation with the Americans.

Al-Mahdi Army

Muqtada al-Sadr and a rare portion of Religious Shiite Islamics created what is called Jaish Al-Mahdi at 28 June 2004. The Mahdi Army began as a small group of roughly 500 seminary students connected with Muqtada al-Sadr in the Sadr City district of Baghdad, formerly known as Saddam City. The group moved in to fill the security vacuum in Sadr City and in a string of southern Iraqi cities following the fall of Baghdad to US forces. Gradually, the militia grew and al-Sadr formalized it in June of 2003. The Mahdi Army grew into a sizable force of up to 10,000 who even operated what amounted to a shadow government in some areas. Al-Sadr's preaching is critical of the US occupation, it's known that this army is responsible for the killing and threatening of a massive number of Iraqis mainly Sunni and some Shiite. And about the soldiers of this army, it's known to most Iraqis that his followers are mainly former prisoners who run away from the prisons after the war, and criminals, thieves and thugs, in addition to that a wide range of police and national army members are loyal to him.

Who is Al-Mahdi?

In Shiite Islamic eschatology the Mahdi is the prophesied redeemer of Islam. Though the advent of Mahdi is not a universally accepted concept in Islam, there are basic differences among different sects of Muslims about the timing and nature of his advent and guidance. Most Muslims believe that the Mahdi will change the world into a perfect and just Islamic society alongside Jesus before Yaum al-Qiyamah (Day of the Resurrection). The exact nature of the Mahdi differs according to Sunni and Shiite Muslims; the Mahdi is not mentioned in the Qu'ran.

The Mahdi, according to Shi'ite tradition, will arise at some point before the day of judgement, institute a kingdom of justice, and will in the last days fight alongside the returned Jesus against the Dajjul, the Antichrist. However, like most religious concepts, various Muslim traditions have ascribed different characteristics to the Mahdi. There have been several personalities over time.
who have considered themselves the Mahdi prophesied in Islam, the notion of a Mahdi as a redeemer to establish a society has lent itself to various interpretations leading to different claims within minorities or by individuals within Islam. The first historical recorded reference to a movement using the name of Mahdi is al-Mukhtar's rebellion against the Umayyid Caliphate in 686, almost 50 years after Muhammad's death. Al-Mukhtar claimed that Ibn al-Hanifiya, a son of the fourth Caliph Ali (the first Imam of Shi'ite), was the Mahdi who would save the Muslim people from the unjust rule of the Umayyids. Ibn al-Hanifiya was not actively involved in the rebellion, and when the Umayyids successfully quashed it, they left him undisturbed.

the famous story about Al-Mahdi is that he fell into a well (some say trapped in a cave) and he went into a sleep. And before the judgment day he will rise again.

**Al-Hawza and Rebellion**

At the end of March 2004, Coalition authorities in Iraq shut down Sadr's newspaper, al-Hawza Al-natika, on charges of inciting violence (as a side note, al-Hawza is also the name of the religious institution (of colleges), in Najaf, which was headed by Sadr's father). The Coalition authorities said false reporting, including articles that ascribed suicide bombings to Americans, could spark off violence. Sadr responded by mobilizing many Shi'a followers to demonstrations, protesting at the closure of the newspaper. But, the demonstrations escalated throughout the week in number and militancy. On April 4, fighting broke out in Najaf, Sadr City and Basra. Sadr's al-Mahdi Army took over several points and attacked coalition soldiers, killing dozens of foreign soldiers, and taking many casualties of their own in the process. At the same time, Sunni rebels in the cities of Baghdad, Samarra, Ramadi, and, most notably, Fallujah, staged uprisings as well, causing the most serious challenge to coalition control of Iraq to date. Paul Bremer, then the U.S. administrator in Iraq, declared on April 5, 2004 that the militant cleric was an outlaw and that uprisings by the cleric and his followers would not be tolerated. It emerged that, some months earlier, an Iraqi judge had issued an arrest warrant for al-Sadr on charges relating to the murder of al-Khoei. This had apparently been kept secret for some time but was now announced publicly by Bremer. Several senior U.S. politicians opined that the revolt would push back the date for the transfer of power to the IGC, but the handover nevertheless occurred on June 28, 2004, two days ahead of schedule.

**August 2004 hostilities**

After the 4 June truce with the U.S. led coalition forces, al-Sadr claimed to take steps to disband the Mahdi army. In a statement, he called on resistance members from outside Najaf to "do their duty" and go home. U.S. forces in Najaf were then replaced by Iraqi police. Al-Sadr told supporters not to attack Iraqi security forces and set himself up to become a political force, announcing his intention to form a party and contest the 2005 elections. He said the interim government was an opportunity to build a unified Iraq. Interim President Ghazi Yawer gave assurances that al-Sadr could join the political process, provided he abandoned his resistance
movement. Iraqi officials also assured al-Sadr that he was not to face arrest. Despite the promises of the Iraqi government, in late July Sadr announced his intention to boycott the upcoming national conference, as did the Association of Muslim Scholars (Sunni organization). Although al-Sadr initially promised to support the conference, he changed his mind, claiming through a spokesman that it was "a sad joke" and "a trick on the Iraqi people" because of the allegedly undemocratic process for selecting the delegates. On 31 July, al-Sadr's representative in Karbala, Sheikh Mithal al-Hasnawi, and al-Hasnawi's brother were captured by U.S. and Iraqi National Guard troops in a joint raid. Sadr representatives condemned the move, reportedly saying "We demand that they be freed, and if this is ignored then we will respond at the appropriate time."

The June settlement was broken after Iraqi policemen and U.S. troops surrounded al-Sadr's home on 3 August, resulting in heavy gunfire, mortar shelling and grenade blasts. The apparent aim was to arrest al-Sadr and destroy his movement. The decision to extend a firefight into extended combat is reported to have been made by U.S. Marines, without the approval of the Pentagon or the Allawi government. On August 5, via his spokesman Ahmed al-Shaibany, al-Sadr reaffirmed his commitment to the truce and called on U.S. forces to honor the truce. He announced that if the restoration of the ceasefire failed "then the firing and igniting of the revolution will continue." The offer was rejected by the governor of Najaf ("There is no compromise or room for another truce") and U.S. officials ("This is one battle we really do feel we can win"). In the days that followed, fighting continued around the old city of Najaf, in particular the Imam Ali shrine and the cemetery. The Mahdi army was heavily outnumbered by some 2,000 U.S. marines and 1,800 Iraqi government security forces, and outgunned by superior U.S. firepower, including attack helicopters. On August 13, the resistance was trapped in a cordon around the Imam Ali shrine. The Mahdi resistance is thought to have suffered hundreds of casualties in the fighting, while U.S. Marine casualties were fairly light. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, arrived in Iraq and began travelling with a "peace convoy" towards Najaf "to stop the bloodshed." By the next day, an agreement brokered by Sistani required the Mahdi resistance movement to disarm and leave Najaf and U.S. troops to withdraw from the city. Resistance men began handing in their weapons after al-Sadr asked them to do so and left the complex escorted by worshippers. The U.S. welcomed the agreement and vowed to respect a ceasefire. U.S. forces have stayed out of the center of Najaf since, and as of September 2004 the city was largely under the control of the Iraqi police. On August 30, a tentative peace agreement was reached between the Iraqi government and al-Sadr to disarm his resistance in Sadr City in Baghdad. But the next day, Prime Minister Iyad Allawi unilaterally pulled out of talks, cancelling the peace proposal. The New York Times reported that Allawi had wanted to enter in armed conflict with al-Sadr due to his rising popularity after the standoff in Najaf. Fighting continued in Sadr City into October 2004, with the Mahdi resistance movement sustaining losses numbering in the hundreds. The physical infrastructure of Sadr City also suffered damage during this period and there were reports of substantial civilian casualties. Ultimately al-Sadr agreed to a ceasefire, and subsequently agreed to participate in the January 2005 election process.
Capture of Amarah

On October 19, 2006, al-Sadr's Mahdi Army seized control of Amarah government in the south of Iraq. Hundreds of militiamen linked to Muqtada al-Sadr battled local police and members of a rival Shiite militia in the southeastern city of Amarah, destroying police stations and seizing control of entire neighborhoods, in apparent retaliation for the arrest of one of their fighters. According to Western intelligence officials, though, Mr. Sadr appears to have lost control of part of his militia, which has splintered off into freelance death squads. In fact, it remained unclear whether he had approved the Amarah uprising before it began. Witnesses said a message from Mr. Sadr was blared over loudspeakers from vehicles in Amarah October 20, 2006, calling on gunmen to lay down their weapons. The order was widely disregarded.

Ethnic Cleansing of Sunni

Muqtada al-Sadr's militia have been involved in widespread ethnic cleansing of Sunni, especially those living in Shiite areas. Reports also indicate that the death squads which have been responsible for the deaths of many Sunnis are not the actions of rogue elements but "a carefully orchestrated response to the attacks of Sunni extremists" by Sadr's Mahdi Army. His public statements have on occasion condemned violence against Sunnis as well as terrorist attacks directed against the Shiite population. He has exhorted his followers not to fall into the trap of retaliation leading to civil war. He claims that America stands to gain the most from an Iraqi civil war which would require the continued presence of US troops and put the US in the role of political referee and powerbroker between the warring factions. But everybody knows that this is just talking and even the most ignorant man knows that he is responsible not only for the cleansing of Sunni but for some Shiite too.

Abo-Diri' and Adhamyia

Abo-Diri' (diri' means shield) is a leader in Jaish Al-Mahdi, not alot is known about him but he was an ex-convict for killing and raping cases, he is known for his brutality, in july 2006 he attacked Adhamyia (majority Sunni) with a massive number of Al-Mahdi Army, they wear black clothes with horns on their heads, they killed many of the citizens and clashes started between Al-Mahdi Army and the people in Adhamyia defending for them selves. My father and my wife (who were in my father's car) almost get killed in this attack as they came face to face with Al-Mahdi Army but my father managed to run away from them.

Relations with al-Sistani

Relations with the most powerful cleric in Iraq, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, have also been tense. Al-Sistani's more conservative clerical leadership is often in conflict with the radical young al-Sadr. Al-Sistani is said by observers to draw support from established, property-owning
Shiites, while Muqtada al-Sadr's support is strongest among the urban poor, many of whom see him as their champion. Additionally the murder of al-Khoei, the son of al-Sistani's mentor, may be a source of tension. The conflict is more about temporal than spiritual matters; al-Sistani controls donations from pilgrims and wealthy donors, which al-Sadr also apparently covets. His followers attempted to seize control of the al-Sistani-controlled holy sites in Karbala in October 2003 but were repulsed, with dozens of people killed and injured. Armed clashes between al-Sadr's al-Mahdi Army and the Badr Organization have broken out with significant bloodshed resulting. However, Sistani has thus far refused to publicly chastise Sadr for the spring uprising against the US, instead decreeing that both sides should avoid incitement to violence and condemning the coalition for its tactics.

2006

On March 25 2006 Muqtada al-Sadr was in his home and escaped a mortar attack. This attack was disputed, as the ordnance landed more than 50 meters from his home. Al-Sadr's considerable leverage was apparent early in the week of 16 October 2006, when Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered the release of one of Al-Sadr's senior aides. The aide had been arrested a day earlier by American troops on suspicion of participating in kidnappings and killings.

On October 25, 2006 U.S. soldiers uncovered a book after a raid in the Washash neighborhood in Baghdad with information about Mehdi Army had engaged in a systematic campaign of violence and intimidation to clear out Sunni residents in this town. 27 Dec 2006 Muqtada al-Sadr's top aide, Saheb al-Amiri was killed in a raid by U.S. troops in the Shiite holy city of Najaf. On December 30, 2006 people loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr infiltrated the security detail for Saddam Hussein's execution, chanted "Muqtada" and taunted Saddam, and got it all on film, which then circulated on Arab television and the internet. And there are rumors that Al-Sadir possesses the rope in which Saddam was hanged, and that a kwaiti business-man is ready to give any amount of money for this rope.

2007

On February 13, several sources in the US government claimed that Muqtada al-Sadr had left Iraq and fled to Iran in anticipation of the coming security crackdown. US military spokesman Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell reinforced this account on February 14, but a member of Iraq's parliament and an aide to al-Sadr have denied the claims. Sami al-Askari, an adviser to Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki claims "as far as I know he is still in Iran" and "he's a very secretive man." On March 30, it was reported that Sadr, through clerics speaking on his behalf, "delivered a searing speech ... condemning the American presence in Iraq ... and calling for an anti-occupation mass protest on April 9...." This call to protest was significant in that, since the beginning of the American "troop surge" (which began on February 14, 2007), Sadr had ordered his "militia to lie low during the new Baghdad security plan so as not to provoke a direct confrontation with the Americans." Following fourteen weeks of hiding, on 25 May 2007 Al-
Sadr reemerged. Driving in a long motorcade from Najaf to Kufa, Al-Sadr proceeded to deliver a sermon to an estimated 6000 followers in the main mosque. Reiterating his usual condemnation of the United States presence in Iraq, Al-Sadr's speech also contained calls for unity between Sunni and Shiite. Many saw the speech as an effort to reign in his militia, which has broken into several factions since his departure. Several of these factions have been accused of violence against Sunnis.

**Burning the Sunni Mosques, Facts about Al-Mahdi army from Iraq**

Muqtada Al-Sadir and his militia is known for burning Sunni mosques, just in the last week they burned about 6 mosques, and the real number of the burned-up Sunni Mosques in unknow but it's a large number for sure. They are also known for killing the Sunni by torturing them to death whether by drills or acids and many other methods, also the members of Mahdi Army is referred to in Iraq by Al-Mkapsleen (which means they are on drugs) because most of them are always high on drugs. In addition to accusations for raping and kidnapping for ransom and car theft.

**Friday, June 22, 2007**

**Completion of a Wall, Beginning of Suffering**

First of all I'd like to say that I don't live in Adhamyia, I live at the borders of it, that means I can hear almost every loud explosion or clashes that happens there, in addition to that, many of my relatives and friends lives there and I used to hang out there (till last year) so I'm emotionally attached to Adhamyia for those reasons, anyway I'd like to tell something that I think few had heard about from the media.

Yesterday was a disastrous day not only for the people who lives in Adhamyia but for any real Iraqi, and when I say real Iraqi I mean the people who loves their country and all the people who lives in it, wishing for the situations to settle down. Anyway yesterday was Thursday and I used to visit my parents in-law who lives in Adhamyia every Thursday and stay there to have a nice lunch with the family gathered together, that became a tradition since I got married. We used to have a lot of fun, so yesterday when I was at work there was a patient waiting and he asked me to treat him as fast as I can because he is in a hurry as he said, "I live in Adhamyia the situation is really messed up there," so I asked my senior (also lives in Adhamyia) to check about that, and he said: yes, almost every street in Adhamyia is blocked today it seems that something big will happen today, I was a bit worried. After I finished my work I came back home to change
and go to my parents in-law house with my wife, and before we reach Antar square (It's the beginning of Adhamyia, you can see it at the beginning of the video of Neighborhood of sorrow). I saw a huge number of national guards and US forces there, I noticed there are no cars in the street, and as we reached near the square they fired at us hysterically, What the F**k!!!!??, I screamed, so we immediately stopped and turned back, what a frightening moment it was, although I'm sure they didn't want to kill us because they would if they want, we were a clear target, but they wanted to send a message; if you go any further you'd be dead, and that what happened to many people yesterday in Adhamyia, there was a great number of casualties.

Yesterday Adhamyia wall has been completed and with this completion I can assure the whole world that the massacres will never end there, as it starts from the first moment this damn wall construction has finished. This wall will be a lot worst that the Berlin wall, people there will starve to death if not killed by the National Guards or the militias, they built this wall to prevent the odour of death and fermentation of corps from spreading out, they built it to hide the crimes inside, it was built to mask the failure of a government, this wall is a statue for the suffering of Iraqis, the intentions are clear from the first moment this cursed wall had been completed, the aim of this wall is to prevent the truth from reaching the media, to kill and torture every citizen there, but I take the burden for publishing what really happens behind this wall which will soon be covered by blood of Innocent Iraqis.

So we turned back home, as soon as I reached I opened a local radio station using my mobile because there is no electricity at that time, and I heard the news that the wall has been finished today, I knew the disasters will start from this moment, I made a few calls to the friends and family to check on them, and I knew what happened back there. As soon as the wall had been finished they(national guards) prevented any one from entering the neighborhood, and I mean literally NO ONE because a car for the Red Crescent was carrying food supplies and medications to the hospitals and the wounded there, they didn't let it in!! Why this hatred?? aren't they humans or what??anyway after they completed the wall, patrols of the national guard were all over Adhamyia Breaking and destroying the shops and markets, killing civilians in the streets and firing at the mosques there (Suni). The national guard them selves attacked the tomb and mosque of Abo-Hanifa which is very respected and important Imam for the Sunni, they attacked the mosque with gun-fire and grenades they walked in the streets screaming (literally):"Come out....(bullets)....You Sunni Bastards.....come out.....(bullets).....we will kill you all today.....F**k all the Sunii.....(bullets).....Cock sucking Sunni.....You sons of bitches...(bullets)" , and all the types of swearing there is, they fired at homes randomly, they destroyed any car in the streets, I think it's called terrorism !!!!! isn't it!!!, they continued doing that, until two of their hummers was destroyed and burned. One of them made a hole in the street which caused the fracture of a main underground water pipe and that added another disaster to the list, the street was drowned in water and left the houses and people there without a drop of water to drink, to cook or even to wash their hands, so now there is no electricity, no water, no land-phones and no single soul in the streets of Adhamiye. After these hummers being destroyed the national guards (who's loyalty is a question) became even more offensive they started breaking into houses taking any
men they find to unknown destination, two of the young men they have taken is students in the dental college. They blocked all the streets about and I mean all the streets, some of my relatives were at work and couldn't get back home, it was impossible for any one to walk a single yard in the street, my wife's uncle was trapped two blocks from his home and couldn't reach it. This terrible situation continued till 6 p.m when my relatives reached their homes, and I don't think they will be able to leave there homes any time soon to go to work or college, what a situation, no water, no shops, no food supplies, no medications, it's obvious they want NO LIFE in Adhamyia. Why didn't the media cover these acts? why did they build the Adhamyia wall? the simple short answer is to mask the crimes they do, it's a big new Abu-Gharib where a new torture and killing methods will be used......

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

I shouldn't be alive

Yesterday I was in the most terrible horrifying situation. I don't know what to do to release the rage and pain tearing my heart apart, I thought that if I write a post about what happened it may make me feel better......

2 days ago me and my wife were talking about our memories and times together, and the memories even before we met each other, we remembered the life before the war and how the neighborhoods were, how beautiful most of them were, how much fun and safe Baghdad was, we talked for hours. both of us were so sad because we don't have photos for Baghdad before the war and the beautiful scenes in it, more than that we even don't have pictures for the last year!! which was a lot better than this one..... then a thought came to me, why don't I go on a quest to take photos for most of the areas of Baghdad ?? that would be a great documentary and then I might even write a post about it !!! so I told my wife and she get really angry about the thought she said: "are you crazy!!!!! do you want to get killed, please don't go, pleeease." So I told her I wouldn't, but the next day which was yesterday, I couldn't resist the temptation of this quest, every one knows me, when I want to do something I'll do it even if I know in my heart that it's wrong but I'm a kind of bull-headed, after I finished work I got to my car determined to visit most of Baghdad's neighborhoods, I took my handy cam and drove my taking amazing videos
starting from the clinic I work in, I had taken a video of a police pick-up truck loaded with dead bodies and driving insanely fast with the policemen shooting at the air, and many other destructed sites in my way. I went through many neighborhoods, but I wanted to go to Al-Mansour neighborhood which was one of the most beautiful and classy neighborhoods in Baghdad which I heard that it's a wreck now, as I reached there I saw a mini bus in the middle of the street, there was glass around it, it was clear that this mini-bus was exposed to drive-by shooting so I concentrated my vision on it and pointed my handy cam. as I reached near the bus I heard gun shots!!! it was extremely close to me!!! I turned my head and I saw a police man pointing the AK-47 at me and shouting: "YOU, Stop right now, I swear by Ali I will kill you" I was very shocked and scared, I didn't know what to do, or what I have done wrong!!! I stopped then he approached with 3 other police men who were obviously members of Magaoer Il-Dakhelia (special forces of the ministry of interior), he approached the door and opened it, dragged me out of the car then pushed me against the car with very rough manner, then he pointed the rifle at my forehead between my eyes, screaming: "I swear I'll kill you if you move a thumb, you worth shit to me" till this moment I didn't know what have I done, I was unable to speak. meanwhile, one of the police men with him entered my car and carried the handy cam. After I got kicked and hit with the back of rifles, I knew that they are angry because I have video-taped their failure, they suspected that I'm Sunni but I lied to them and told them I'm Shiite as my name is not related to any sect, so they wouldn't find out. What tears my heart apart that I got insulted and abused verbally and physically by people from the lowest level of society and for no reason at all, just because they wanted to rub me!!! they took my handy cam and my mobile and refused to give it back to me, they stole them from me, they stole the handy cam which I worked hard for two months to afford it, I deprived my self to save money for the handy cam... and those despicable thugs stole it from me, I have never been humiliated like this before, that is so hard for me, I feel like I'm going to explode, they insulted me and rubbed me and there was nothing I could do, if I did anything they would kill me right away. That's unfair, that's too much for any man to handle, we have a famous say in Iraq (Hameeha Harameha) which is translated (who guards it steals it), OH how true is that..... will this ever end.... but what I'm really sad about is my wife.... She is so depressed and afraid, she is very traumatized from what happened, she is having nightmares, I'm afraid that will affect her studying and exams, I don't know what to do.

Monday, July 2, 2007

**Daily Life In Baghdad**

I've been asked many times now to write about the daily life in Baghdad, before I begin I'd like to tell anyone who reads this post that there is no over exaggerating at all, the post might seem so gloomy but that's the life in Baghdad and even the strongest words can't describe the feelings or what is really happening in the so-called homeland. I wake up every morning before my alarm rings not because I'm so vibrant but because I'm wet with my sweat, after a long exhausting night without electricity because the electricity comes
one or two hours a day, some days it doesn't come at all, anyway so I wake up feeling that I have been in a fight not sleeping, all my muscles aches, with the worst mood ever. I go to work on foot as it is more convenient to walk than by car (it takes about the same time due to the blocked streets) In my way I watch the ugliest scenes, concrete blocks, bombed cars wrecks, shells of bullets in the streets, one can feel the sadness and sorrow where ever he points his head. On my way to the clinic I amuse myself with the same routine thoughts (will this misery ever end?, will Iraq be peaceful again?, how long can we tolerate?, when will I die?, will any one finds my dead body and be buried respectfully as I deserve?.....etc) and as I reach the main streets (which has been closed for more than 4 months) I remember how this street was filled with cars and people not long ago just one year, I can't believe how the situations became worst in this last year, the curve just dropped dramatically, as I get to the clinic the first thing I do is to hug the air conditioner as I have missed it in my home because every Iraqi house doesn't depend on the National electricity as we call it, in each 4 or 5 blocks there is a big generator owned by someone that we pay him monthly depending on the Amperes we take from him, so what most of the Iraqis use is the Air-cooler, it's a cooling device that uses water and economic in electricity, it's not efficient as the air-conditioner but it works. we have Air-conditioners in every room but it's a decoration now thanks to the ministry of electricity. anyway I work with the music of bullets and mortars in the background and confrontations in the clinic's street occasionally, after I finish work, I walk back home, the heat is unbearable that after 5 minutes of walking I feel my shoes is on fire, I can't wait to get home and take it off, in fact I can't wait to take all my clothes off and my skin if that was possible the heat now is 50 (122F) and more, so when I reach home, as usual there is no electricity I wait 2 hours till the generator works (The working hours of the generator is scheduled) and will shut-down after 2 hours, we have lunch and we go to sleep and wake up wet with sweat also!!! we sit on the sofa (me and my wife) talking and waving the Mahafa (it's a traditional Iraqi hand fan) trying to stay alive, in the weekends this is the time where we go shopping from what we call a super-market but in fact it's just a relatively big shop that has most of the food supplies available in Iraq, and that's the only fun we have in our life!!! I'll give some facts: In Baghdad there is only about 5 opened respected restaurants, no single coffee-shop or cafee, there was three clubs in the past none of them are safe enough to go to, there is only three commercial streets that one can walk in and do shopping that is relatively safe and when I say safe I mean there is no sectarian violence but still there is confrontations, mortars, road-side bombs, car bombs and some times snipers but it's safe from the Iraqi point of view, but the problem is that it's far from my home and the road is dangerous and by the way life ends in Baghdad at 8pm every one should be home at this time, any way the generator works again after three hot hours, we drink tea and smoke Hubble-Bubble (Narjela) with the laptop on my lap checking my emails and my blog and watching TV at the same time, later we prepare dinner and go to our garden to eat there, later we either watch TV or a Movie or spending time on the Internet, and we go to sleep. Believe me when I say we haven't been out to have fun for three months now (most of the Iraqis life are like this with some differences and sure with more troubles), we decided that the day my wife finishes the exams we
will go to the restaurant (one of the five) and to hell with the danger, we are in need of fun, we can't take it anymore, and maybe when I go there I would take some pictures of something good in Baghdad. I wish they don't blow it before we go!!

**Monday, July 23, 2007**

Checked by Americans

2 days ago, At 4:00 pm I came home from a trip to buy my wife something beautiful and elegant as a graduation gift (which is impossible to find) I came home empty handed, I was so annoyed that there are few good shops in Baghdad and with stuff that has no taste at all, I was so sad that I couldn't find anything that is good enough for this great occasion (My wife's graduation).

As I reached home and changed, the bell rang!! who would come to visit us? I haven't heard this bell for a long time now! I immediately went to the kitchen to see who's on the door, There was 5 American Soldiers and Two Humvees on my door!! Oh, God, I wish that there is nothing wrong, I walked through the garage and as I reached the outer gate wearing shorts only, I noticed the troops smiling I was relieved because as I think this means that it's a normal routine check, My house hasn't been checked before.

I opened the gate they said "SALAM O ALAEKM" I smiled as they said so, I told them that I speak English so I don't need an interpreter, some of the interpreters are dangerous they work as double agents, they work with the Troops and at the same time they give information either to a militia or a gang, but the interpreter came in with them, one of the troops said: 'We wish you don't mind if we came in?" I told him that there is nothing wrong, I'm glad and asked him for one minute just to tell my wife so she can be ready.

They waited in the garage and I told my wife to be ready, then I came out to them and asked them to come in, they walked through the house just looking around, it was obvious that I'm a peaceful man, they were so civilized and very nice, they did nothing that bothered me, they were very nice, in fact, I had fun talking to them, as one of them was kidding with me "If I were you, I'd throw parties here, with lots of whisky ... Do you have whisky?" I laughed and said no, there were amazed by the home the lieutenant asked me if I had worked before as an interpreter, and I said no, "where did you learn this American accent?" he asked. later we sat down in the kitchen I gave them Soda, and the lieutenant who was a very nice man started talking to me about the electricity issue and that they are trying to improve it especially in this good, peaceful neighborhood as he said, he said that they have a plan to block this area from the neighboring areas with blocks and main gate guarded by people from within the neighborhood not the police or the army, I though this is a good idea but they should be careful when selecting these guys, that's what I told them.
Then he talked about how they are going to rebuild the schools of the neighborhood, and we had a few laughs as we were kidding with each other, I figured out that they want to be friendly with this neighborhood and build good relations, as he said it has been 6 months we haven't been targeted in this neighborhood "WE LOVE THIS NEIGHBORHOOD" as he shouted, then the lieutenant gave me a mobile number and asked me to call if anything wrong is happening or if I saw a false checkpoint, or any other security issue I face.

They talked about how bad Adhamiya is, as one of them said I hate it there, we are attacked all day long, we can't do things like what we are doing now, then they left the house and started to check other houses in the block, I figured that it's better for both of us, It's better for the US troops to be friendly with the people in the neighborhood as they will be safer, and better for the civilians if the troops feel safe in their area so they will stay there so this means that the neighborhood will be safer, that's my opinion but many disagree with me, such as my neighbor who said that they are the root of every trouble in Iraq, they caused everything, i told him that if what you say is true, then you should blame the US government not the soldiers they are people like you and me, they do what they have been told, they didn't choose it, he didn't agree with that, he asked me, what about the people who were killed by the US troops only because they were in the street the minute they got attacked? I was unable to answer this question, but I told him that you are right, but I'll give you their excuse, they say that they are in a hot zone, they got attacked they are scarred so they started shooting everyone because everyone is a suspect to them and in this way people will hate and prevent anyone who want to attack the US troops, I think this is the plan, I have nothing certain, but what I found out that those guys were very nice and polite, I wish that all the US army is like them but it's impossible to have such a large number as the American Army and all of them are good guys.

Friday, September 7, 2007

Electric farse
Electricity is one of the major issues that troubles the mind of Iraqis, depriving them of sleep, forcing them to work harder to pay for the alternatives, preventing many from doing their jobs and increase the stress for Iraqis in general.

This photo is for some of the wires that goes out of our neighborhood generator. I read a few articles here and there about rebuilding and improving the national grid and that the ministry of electricity needs about 50$ Billion to do so! and 36-48 months to finish the work in this security conditions! as Kareem Wahid said, the minister of the electricity.
He also said that 96 new power plant will be built, 44 of them working on diesel fuel which is abundant as the minister said!!! the rest will operate on heavy fuel.

He also said that the national grid is producing 5,000 mega watt while it should produce 9,000 mega watt to cut the long periods of outages.

I don't know much about electricity because I'm a dentist not an electrician, but I think what the national grid is producing is more than half of what it should produce, that means the electricity should be available at least for 8 or 10 hours! because he said to cut the long periods not 24/7 hours of electricity? then I would like to ask him why the electricity didn't came to my block for 5 days now? 5 days without electricity and he is saying that it produces more than half of what should it produce. Well, I know the answer, because they are not being fair in giving the electricity. For example; the neighboring block has electricity almost all day long, most of Al-Kademiyyah have electricity all the day, but there's almost no electricity in Adhamiya. Where ever there is a house for someone in the government the electricity never outages in his neighborhood. If they are fair in distributing the electricity then the problem will be a lot easier.

There is another thing I want to ask the minister about? Are you a fool or a liar? He said that the diesel fuel is abundant!!! then why it has been about two months with out electricity in our clinic? Wasn't it because we don't have diesel fuel? The clinic is governmental it's not a private clinic. Where is the abundant diesel fuel? I think he is both a liar and a fool.

Some studies said that about 30% of the refined fuel is stolen and sold to the black market, 30% is some thing large but that means the diesel should be late for a week not more than two moths if it's abundant as he said, something else, who is stealing the 30% of fuel? It's the ministry itself, in the past the fuel trucks are taken by the gangs on the roads but not anymore because they are accompanied by police, national Guards and sometimes US troops, then who is stealing the 30%, it obvious and doesn't need more talking, they are stealing it, they are selling it to the black market, as one of the "fuel lords" told me that they buy it from the refinery for higher prices and the difference is in the pockets of the ministry or the employees.
Some people suggest building solar plants or wind turbines, from my opinion that is a great idea but I don't know much about this subject, but I think if it works in Iraq someone should have done it already, I think the wind turbines are not suitable because of the sand and sand storms, it's very dusty in Iraq, if you clean the floor today, it will be covered by dust 2 days later, I think the dust will cause troubles to the wind turbines, but the solar plants is a very good idea, I don't know what is keeping people from having them, I'll do some search in the Internet and ask some people about it.

Another thing about the time to finish the power plants, he said it takes 36-48 months, we have heard this thing before, we heard that the electricity will be excellent by the year 2007, that's what they said in 2003. If it takes so much time how did Saddam finish the rebuilding of the power plants in less than a year? was he a wizard or something? it was in a worst condition after the gulf war, it was totally destroyed, it's true that it wasn't very good right after the war, but the outages were much less than now, it was according to a schedule, and before the beginning of the war we used to have electricity at least 20 hours a day, that's the ultimate dream now.

Another obstacle is the corruption and stealing, many high officials in the ministries of oil and electricity are corrupted and they take their own cut (which is large) out of the money that should be used for the improvement of the infrastructures. Most of the employees are corrupted from the highest rank to the lowest, they never do anything without an extra payment or a share.

The security conditions is also something major, why does the militants or the insurgents attack the electricity lines? the oil lines is something we know, to prevent the US from benefiting from the Iraqi oil, that's what they say, but why the high voltage towers and the people who works for the ministry of electricity? from my point of view, they are attacking the employees because they look at them as traitors, because they work with the government and the US, and sure they want everything bad to happen to Iraq, and about the high voltage towers and cables, I'll tell a story from an eye witness who lives in a town near the high voltage towers, he said that he knows a guy who was a sniper in the old Iraqi army, they say that he is very sharp, and never misses a shot, he is handicapped, he was injured in the war and uses a wheel chair now, some merchants or contractors as he said comes to him almost every day with sniper ammo, a bottle of liqueur and some good cash, what he does is to shoot the high tension cables from both sides and then it will fall and they can take it. another story from the same person; every few days some men comes in a truck then they tie the high voltage towers to the truck and they bend it and cut the cables to use it, the media blames the insurgents for these acts, it's true they do this sometimes
but most of the times it's an organized theft, whether it's by the militants, gangs, ministry employee or the minister him self, even Al-Maliki is taking his share from every aspect possible, they are taking their share of Iraq and leave us with our every day struggle.

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2007**

**Cholera's phobia in Baghdad**

Me and my wife were staying up late watching movies few days ago, I wanted to make us some tea, I went to the kitchen and I was filling the kettle from the tap water, and I don't know why I felt uncomfortable with the water, I decided to fill a glass cup so I can see the water. What a shock, I immediately brought the camera and took the picture and video. Is this drinking water or is it rice water? what are those floating things? I know about the cholera, I know it might be epidemic in Baghdad but I'll be so lucky if this water only contains cholera bacteria! how could they give us this water, why should I respect or obey or even recognize my government they are not providing us with electricity, water and even security, each Iraqi house should be a country and have a flag and it's own government, I depend on my self on electricity, water and even security, what a farce.

Not every day the water is like this, but even if it's color is clear, that doesn't mean that it's clean and suitable for drinking, Bacteria are colorless!

Next day I talked to my friends in the clinic about the water and they said that it was the same in their houses. that means all Baghdad or most of it was supplied with this liquid that I can't name it "water", one of my colleagues said that he drank it, what could i do? as he said.

that's when I decided to do something, something should be done to stope the cholera in Baghdad.

I decided to use the donation money to buy cholera vaccine (Dukoral), water filters and clean drinking water for me, my wife, my friends in the clinic and my neighbors, of course that depends on the amount of donations, I'll start with us and then to the friends and neighbours because the vaccine isn't cheap it costs about 95$ without the shipment fees from the site of abc online pharmacy, I will look if I it's available in Jordan then I'll ask my relatives there to buy it and send it to me.

Now I buy mineral water for my wife because she had an infection in her stomach few months
ago because of the water as the doctor said, she has a weak stomach, but for me I still drink from the tap water.

I don't want to see any of the people I know suffering from cholera or any other disease because of the water they drink, as I have mentioned in earlier posts that 5,000 cases of cholera has been reported in northern Iraq. When I hear about people die because of the violence and explosions I can't stop the violence, but I can try to stop the cholera infections, at least I want to try.

Update:
Cholera in Baghdad has been confirmed, and what I was afraid of since I got back to Baghdad has happened. 2 cases of cholera in Baghdad and one in Basra, and by the way the count of cases in Iraq is about 24,532 cases of cholera now as the latest WHO report says, and the poor government doesn't have chlorine!! that's what they said, my sick government said that the chlorine has dried up this year because the terrorists used it in their attacks!! did the terrorists took the chlorine from the government? what are they talking about? it's the life of thousands and they lie! Iraqis got used to be killed by an explosion or an assassination or even die in the sick government's jails, but they are not used to die of cholera's diarrhea!

I will not accept to die like this. dehydrate and die! what a sad way to die.

The government's allegation about being irresponsible about the cholera in Baghdad is that the terrorists used the chlorine in their explosions and that the trucks that carries the cholera are waiting at the borders.

It's true that the terrorists used the chlorine in some explosions at the beginning of this year, but did they take it from the government? why do the government talk about it then? let's say that they did take it from the government and the government is connived with the insurgents, the number of chlorine attacks wasn't that much to deplete all the chlorine in Iraq.

If the trucks that carries the chlorine is waiting at the borders, why don't you let them in, aren't they carrying chlorine for you? they are carrying about 100,000 tons of chlorine can't you control where will they go, can't you take it and hold it somewhere safe and use it to save the Iraqis from the disaster?

I noticed that many detergents and cleansing agents is missing from the market because it contains chlorine, that was about 3 weeks ago because I wanted to use some of them to purify water, they say that the government has prevented their import.

They didn't let the chlorine in and they will not, in order to prevent the terrorists from attacking with chlorine, but for them it's OK if the cholera attacked Iraqis, because the sick twisted government wants to look good to the rest of the world with reduced insurgents attacks and to the hell with the Iraqi people, let them die.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2007

Bad things got worst, good things are lost

Very Important:
3 am at November 4, a very very close friend of mine was captured by the US troops after they got attacked in his neighborhood, he and a bunch of young men in Almansoor neighborhood was arrested because they suspected that they might be behind the attack, but I know him very very well, he can't be behind it, he is a dental student that just wants to finish his college and be a dentist, please if anyone can help with this I'll be more than grateful.

It has been four days and no one knows anything about him, his family is dying, they are very
concerned about it, please help needed as soon as possible. At least we want to know if he's OK and where he is? Contact me on my email if you can help with anything.

When I want to clear my view about the differences in Iraq before and after the war in the shortest words, I would say "Bad things got worse and good things are lost".

I'm sitting in my garden trying to relax, smoking a grape flavoured Hubble-bubble, I'm seizing the chance that the weather is so great and I'm trying to remember how we used to live and how we live now, remembering the good old days. Can you imagine that a 25 years old man is remembering the good old days! this thing should be for old people not a young man, but in Iraq even young people aren't thinking or living the same way young men do in other countries.

I was thinking how would it be now if the war didn't happen? I'm thinking what would I be doing at this moment? it's 8p.m. I might be in my clinic that I fear to open, I might be with my wife having a drive in the beautiful streets of Baghdad or at least I would be having dinner in Al-Ilwia social club but sure I wouldn't be at home.

I'll give a quick idea about the life in Iraq before the war, The electricity was no problem since the year 2000, before that the cut-outs were programmed so the one can know when it will come and when it will go out, the water was certainly not a problem, the fuel was not a problem in fact it was so cheap that no one cares about it. No one should be afraid for his life or feel threatened unless he is interfering in the politics, joining the apposition or a party against the regiment or if some one talks bad about Saddam and his regiment or makes jokes. Those were the boundaries so if some one wants to live peacefully he shouldn't do those things, it's true many times innocent people are killed because they suspected they were against the regiment but the numbers are way less than the numbers killed these days, at least there were boundaries that the one knows about, but now anything you do is against the boundaries. At that time Saddam didn't allow people to travel easily, they should go through many processes to do that if they were allowed, for example doctors and members of the army were forbidden from travelling unless they were sent by the government, but they could forger a passport that says they are not in the forbidden categories like my sister and many many did and it costs less than getting a new (G) legal passport now, and now all the countries are not accepting Iraqis like they have a lethal disease or they are some kind of freaks, Syria made visa for a limited slice of the society, Jordan is a known story and so on..... it's almost impossible now to leave Iraq, it's more like a big torturing prison.
When I think about what did the Iraqis benefit from the war and the alleged freedom and democracy I only find: Mobile phones, Satellite dish and the increase in salaries which was accompanied by a horrifying increase in the cost of living. At that time the opposition (who took control now) was screaming about the innocent Iraqis who were killed for no reason by Saddam and his regiment, where are they now? where are they from the shocking number of dead innocent people? where are they now from the millions who got threatened? where are they from the millions who were forced to leave Iraq? I know where are they, they are counting the money they are stealing every day with a disgusting satisfied smile on their ugly faces, that's if they were not involved in the joy of killing innocents for sectarian reasons or for no reason at all. If we count the number of innocent people Saddam killed they wouldn't exceed the number of people that dies in 3 months (I'm not counting the war casualties, because it's a war no matter how wrong the reason was). I'm not defending Saddam or his regiment and will never do, he was a tyrant, a dictator and a criminal but he isn't worst than the ones who govern us now, in fact he was better at least he kept some dignity for the Iraqis, at least he did some good things, I want one good thing that the post-war government did? or built?

Saddam was hanged by Muqtada's followers at a holy day for the killing of 148 civilian in Al-Dijail (if that number was true), but I want to know how much did Muqtada kill? a 148 civilian is the count of deaths in Baghdad for a peaceful week. am I wrong or what? why aren't the responsible for the killing of innocents now hanged also? at least that would be justice.

The picture above is for Baghdad before the war (from Zeyad), I wish I could take a picture now in the same spot to make the difference clear but I'm afraid that's impossible, because there will be no lights, a complete darkness, the river wouldn't be captured because of the concrete blocks and simply I can't stand there and take a picture because it's a sensitive area and every body knows what will happen to me, but you can put a black picture with a grey line at the bottom (the concrete wall) and it will be the recent photo!

I don't need to talk about the safety and going out now because everybody knows about it, but I need to say that in the past I used to go out till 3 a.m. and sometimes later without any slight fear on my life or my belongings and believe me when I say it was safer than the US because from what I've heard it's not that safe there to be in the streets at that hour. In the social clubs you could see families having lunch or enjoying an evening or a party till that hour, Oh how I miss those days.

I was reading the news yesterday and I noticed something that got my attention, they were saying that October was the best month in this year regarding the casualties and explosions and that they arrested many terrorists I would say that this might be true, the conditions are a bit better but it's still not good or even close to that, it's only a bit better. it came to my attention that the number of the people they have arrested are so similar each month, it's like a joke, it's like they have a certain number that they should arrest and in my opinion that's the cause the national guards or the police sometimes goes to a certain neighborhood and arrest everyone they see, even kids sometimes, they have a required number of arrests no matter whether they were innocent or guilty! because as I think it's impossible that they suspect and arrest almost the same number every month.
And finally I would like to mention something that really teared my heart apart and made me lose the hope even more in a good future for Iraq, a friend of mine X who is still in college (dentistry college) has failed in the Orthodontics for the 5th time, I couldn't believe that he is so dull that he couldn't pass it after all these tries and repeats, I asked him before the last exam about his continuous failure and he said "I swear I answered well, I'm sure I should have succeeded but I don't know what's wrong?" but after he failed for the fifth time he went to the chief of the department and asked him about his marks and why did he fail. He answered him calmly with a smile of revenge on his damn face :"weren't you in the student's union before the war?" and X told him"Yes, I was!!!" the doctor said"That means you were in the Baath party, right?" X answered with a shock"Yes , I was. but every one who wants to be in the union must be a Baathiest!!!" so the doctor said with the ugliest smile "Then don't dream of the success in Orthodontics, you will never do"

That was a highly-educated Orthodontics specialized doctor who thinks, behaves and talks that way, how could Iraq rise up again with those sick idiots in it, now I wouldn't blame the uneducated young people who got driven by the sectarian current, if the educated are like this.

Poor Iraq , Poor real Iraqis.

**Tuesday, December 18, 2007**

**Deterioration**

The most painful feeling you can have is when you see your neighborhood on the verge of destruction, the deepest sorrow is when you watch the place where you lived all you life and where you dreamed to live being raped by criminals! When you watch the situation in your neighborhood deteriorates and there is nothing you can do, that's the real pain and that's where it's more than enough.

Controlling the emotions and the rage is becoming hard day after day as the destruction and terrorism crawls closer to me.

Yesterday was one of the bloodiest days I have ever witnessed (By my self), I was going back home from work, I was driving my car in my neighborhood streets while listening to the radio, as I was two blocks away from my home, I noticed children running scared from a side street and my neighbors are rushing into that same street, I stepped on the peddle to see what was happening, the radio was a bit loud so I couldn't hear anything so I turned it off and I heard gunshots, they were close, so so close. I reached the side street and I saw the most horrible thing a man can see, there was a car (Kia minivan) escaping and two men shooting at us from it, half of their body was out of the window and they were shooting at us (me and the neighbors) and there were two men on the side walk, drowned in their blood, I wanted to follow them but then I remembered I don't have a gun or any weapon what will I do? in addition to that they were shooting, that means I'll be shot before I reach them, so I decided to go the wounded men and try to help them, at this time the minivan managed to escape, I stepped out of the car and ran to them, one of them was shot in the head and the chest, it was a sure thing that he's dead, the other one wasn't dead yet, he had several shots in his chest and abdomen, I tried to carry him and he was making that terrible voice, he was in the agony of death; struggling and coughing blood, I knew he will die within seconds, so I gently placed him on the pavement; I didn't want him to die in my arms, at this time all the neighbors were out in the street, one of them went to call the
national guards from their checkpoint, another one called an ambulance to take the dead bodies. Every one was shocked, this is the first time that such things happen in our neighborhood, everyone had tearful eyes, I was in shock and really angry, there was a kid screaming "I saw them, they were carrying the two men in the car then they pushed them out and killed them, then they escaped" few minutes later the national guards arrived to the scene and they forced us to get away so I don't know what happened later, I went home. They weren't from the neighborhood so we couldn't know who they are or why they were killed, but one of them was wearing a gray shirt, he might, just might be in the Adamiya's awakening! And was kidnapped by AQ and killed in my neighborhood, no one knows for sure till this moment who were those two dead men, but whatever, they were two human beings that were killed two blocks away from my home and right in front of me. And as usual nothing was mentioned in the news, they said that 30 unidentified dead body were found in Baghdad.

As I reached home, I was very sad, angry and afraid. I was so depressed. Many things were circling in my head, one of these things is a decision I made to leave Iraq as soon as possible, I'm thinking seriously about that.

A few hours before that incident there was an attempt to assassinate the chair man of Baghdad's health office in my neighborhood also, it wasn't successful. Later that day there were three explosions, two were very close and one was a bit far, I couldn't know were they were.

At that night the door bell rang, it was a very dangerous and strange thing to hear the door bell rings at 9p.m.

They were the national guards, they wanted to search the house, it was the first time the national guards search my house, they were polite but not very friendly. I told their officer "please, take good care of this neighborhood, we don't want it to be ruined" he told me "why, what happened?" I laughed and said "Haven't you heard about the two dead men" he said "NO", I laughed to my self and though, if he didn't know that two men were killed in the street that he is searching then how would he be able to protect us?

Everything was smooth and they left after they completed searching the house, now the image is beginning to complete, the militias and AQ from the surrounding districts are crawling to our neighborhood as it hasn't been controlled by anyone till this moment, so I think there will be a bloody confrontations between the Shiite and Sunni militias for the control of this neighborhood specially if we know it's a mixed neighborhood.

It's clear that the safe areas are becoming dangerous. And there's another thing that concerns me, tomorrow is the Islamic holiday "Eid" and there is a strong rumor that there will be 50 explosive cars during the four days of Eid, I wish it's just a rumor and nothing will happen, I wish; but not all what I wish I can get!
5 years of blood and tears

On March 20th, 2003
The siren woke me up,
it's the war, I hate that sound more
than anything else, I ran downstairs
from my bedroom to see what's on TV, we had a satellite receiver at that time although it was illegal to have one.

My family and I were switching channels when the first missiles hit Baghdad, I saw it on TV at the same moment, it was horrifying and heart breaking, it's true that we have been throw two wars before, it's true that I lived all my life except for two years in wars or in its consequences but this one was different, it was different before it even started, this time Iraq will either be occupied or will endure many years in wars and then it will be occupied…it was common sense that it's a lost case, The Iraqi army is so exhausted, old army supplies, no Iraqi air force to resist the supreme US air force, the army and intelligence is infiltrated by spies and corrupted members, most of the soldiers have no faith in their leader or the government as a whole and most important of all it was the strongest armies in the world against an exhausted desperate but brave Iraqi army.

But still there was something inside me wishing for a miracle to happen.
The air raids were at night, so during the day life it was somehow normal, especially during the first days. Like I said Iraqis are used to wars and they know how to handle it. We; like most Iraqis made a well, stored supplies and fuel. During the early days of war I used to go out, visit my friends to see if they have survived the night and we would stay together till dusk, that's when I had to get back home and the shop owners start to close their shops.

We managed the situation well until Baghdad's electricity was attacked, and with it the fuel
became scarce and that was the beginning of the hard days… the attacks increased and it was in the morning also, that's when we felt that it was a really fierce war.
Many of my friends and relatives left Baghdad to Diyala or Anbar but we decided to stay home, if we are going to die then it should be in our home.
I really admired the bravery of the Iraqi army in Um Kasir, Basra, the southern Iraq and Baghdad's airport. I was so proud of them and I wished this will be the case in all Iraq, but unfortunately there were traitors holding high ranks like Saif AlRawi who gave Baghdad on a plate of gold.
At the noon of April 9th, 2003 my family and a distant relative's family (who were a professor) were sitting in our living room watching news as always…and we saw the most shocking, non-imaginable scene on TV, it was Alfirdos square and the US troops surrounding it with Saddam's statue in the middle, I remember when the US soldier covered the statue's head with the American flag, I felt great anger, not because I love Saddam but because this is the Iraqi president and they are making fun of him, and humiliating us, they could just bring down the statue and the message will be clear, did they have to do that, at this moment I turned to the professor who I really admire and saw him crying with an angry red face, I was shocked to see him like that, I looked at my family and they were so grim and angry, then I saw my father's eyes filled with tears, he always didn't like Saddam, his regiment or their acts, he was always talking bad about them and how they are destroying Iraq, but it's not about Saddam anymore, It's Iraq… It's our country, it's the country my family left Europe to return to and help building it despite all the great chances offered to them in Europe… it's the country he dedicated his life to serve (by the way my family is far away from politics and they never interfered in it).
At that day I couldn't sleep, I stayed awake thinking of what might happen to Iraq, to Iraqis and to us, I spent the night thinking of what will it be, but I never imagined it would be like this, I never did.
At that time I though the US government will keep its word, I though that Iraq will be a free, democratic and luxurious country, or in the worst cases it would be better than before, but I was sad because we will be an occupied country also, how naïve I was!
At the dawn the most intense and sever confrontation happened near my house, the bullets were coming from everywhere, there was no part of a second without the sound of at least 20 bullets, it continued like this for more than an hour with explosions and helicopters roaming over the house, it was like a front line battle.
In the morning I heard my neighbor saying that the US troops are in our street and every one should carry a white flag if he wants to go out, I was so curious so I made a white flag and got in the car with my cousin and I saw them, it was something really strange, it was the first time I face an American soldier, I saw the tanks; they are so big and scary, I pitied the Iraqi tanks, how could they stand in front of these moderate war machines, "it was a lost case from the beginning" I said to my self. 

Later the resistance started in Adhamiya, we heard the rumors that the American tanks have a magnetic filed and that's why the anti-tank missiles (RPG) can't hit them and that the resistance in Adhamiya have painted them with mud and now they can hit the tanks…it was a resistance at that time but gradually it turned to something else…it turned gradually to terrorism.  

The looting started and I wished I can kill every single looter…I remember the US soldiers standing there and doing nothing to them, I saw the Iraqi museum being looted; the US troops should have done something it's not only the Iraqi history it's an important part of the human history and it's being looted in front of them, I saw the banks being looted and the fire exchange between the looters and the US soldiers are doing nothing and that was my first disappointment, I remember when I was standing in front of my house and the looters pass by me and I spit when every one of them pass by me, I wanted to hit them as hard as I can, I remember when some guy passed by me and was carrying a chair!! He stole a chair! A normal one, I couldn't handle my self and I asked him" why do you do that?" and he replied "I don't know, it just came to me"!!!! They were a disgrace on Iraq and Iraqis, Iraqis were called Ali-baba because of those thugs, I was so ashamed and angry. Then burning government buildings followed looting, I don't know why did they burn the buildings? Were they members of the former regiment? Wouldn't the new regiment use it? We heard many rumors about who did it and why but there was nothing certain. 

Then day after day the situation was deteriorating, every new day is worst than the one before, it started with Iraqis killed by explosions and road side bombs then the killing of high ranked members in the former army then it reached the kidnapping and asking for ransom and then the kidnappers started killing their kidnapped even if the ransom was paid later there was the fierce campaign to kill, threaten or displace doctors, dentists, scientists, professors and merchants in fact it was a campaign to get rid of any one who is capable of rebuilding Iraq, it was a campaign to kill Iraq's brain. 

Then there were the various attempts to start the civil war and ignite the sectarian violence which
was going from failure to another by the patriotic Iraqis, until that dark day which I'll never be able to forget as long as I lived, when the holy shrines of the two Askari Imams in Samaraa was attacked and it was the perfect opportunity for the seekers of Iraq's destruction to start acting quickly to ignite the sectarian hatred and violence, I remember when the mosques were burned and Imams were killed, I remember that ugly day, the streets were empty and everybody stayed in their homes while the militias were destroying and killing, spreading fear and hatred and eating Iraq alive.

From that day on the sectarian violence escalated in a frightening way it was like cancer taking over Iraq's body, harvesting innocent souls, feeding from fear and hatred, making life even more difficult, leaving more than 1,400 widow women without a supporter, forcing millions to leave their houses and their neighborhoods and forcing more millions to flee the country and tolerating the humiliation they get in the countries they escaped to just to be alive.

During these 5 years I have experienced everything, two of my relatives kidnapped, 6 of the people I know closely including relatives and close friends have been killed, I can't count the number of people that I know who were murdered, my niece who is 7 years old girl died in an explosion, most of my friends and relatives have left the country, I watched my teachers and college professors being killed or kidnapped one after the other, I have been near an explosion countless times, I have witnessed uncountable number of dead bodies and crying families taking their dead beloved from the forensic medicine building, I have seen 3 men at different times being shot to death in front of me, I have been through militias checkpoints several times, Me and my wife have been targeted by a national guard sniper for a reason I didn't know till this moment, I have seen dead bodies left on the side walk and no dares to bury them, my family have been threatened and forced to leave the country and I joined them and stayed in Jordan/Amman for about a year and then had to return back despite the horrible situation and the extra danger on me being threatened, but what can I do, I tried desperately to find a job there but like most of Iraqis, I couldn't. I'm just one Iraqi and I have such loses, imagine 28 million one like me, how much loses does the Iraqis have?

I remember when I returned to Baghdad in the beginning of 2007, I remember when I passed by the first neighborhood in Baghdad when one is coming from Jordan by car which is Al-Jami`a, when I saw the abandoned streets, the destroyed buildings and the exploded car bodies laying in the street without a single human being walking there, I couldn't handle my self, I burst in tears and cried, I cried for Iraq, I cried for my beautiful Baghdad, I cried because I have never
imagined that it will be like this, I cried because Iraq is lost, I cried because Iraq is not for real Iraqis anymore, Iraq has been raped by everyone, everyone had a role in raping Iraq, Iraq was like a cake and everyone wants his share not caring what will happen when he press his knife to split his share.
I continued crying as I passed by every neighborhood remembering how it was and how it is now, and like that wasn't enough!! when I reached a checkpoint for the police they stopped us, they wanted to take me (kidnap me) but thanks to my wife's tears and all the money I have in my wallet, they let me go, it was so horrifying, I reached home and never get out doors for a whole week.
5 years have passed since the invasion of Iraq, 5 years of blood and tears, 5 years of horror, death, grief and sorrow.
After those years Millions of Iraqis are displaced inside Iraq or are refugees in other countries, millions have died for various causes, widows without a supporter, children without parents, houses being taken over and people without a place to sleep, it is one of the worst disasters in the history; it is a disgrace on humanity.
After those years Iraqis became like a lethal disease, no country lets them in, Iraqis are rejected everywhere, Iraq became like a torturing prison for those who didn't leave earlier, even the neighboring countries are rejecting the Iraqis, for an example Jordan which was build by Iraqis and Iraqi money…they reject Iraqis, humiliate them, detain them for at least a day in the airport prison and return them back, like what happened to me and my wife twice, we just wanted to see our families and relax there.
And I think now is the time for numbers to speak and I should make it clear that these numbers are much less than reality. I took most of the statistics from here.
Iraqi loses:

Iraqi civilian casualties over 600,000 (this is much less than reality because the ministry of health refused to give statistics to the UN several times and even when they did they didn't give the real number, and there are so many cases that are not reported and many are missing so they are not included, I personally know 3 missing persons) so I'd personally estimate the casualties by 1,400,000 Iraqi civilians.

Iraqi police and soldiers killed 7,951….and I would estimate them 10,000.

Journalist killed 127, 84 by murder and 43 by acts of war. 14 of them were killed by US forces.

Iraqi insurgent killed (roughly estimated) 55,000 and by the way I'd like to think how many of them were killed for suspicion? Because my father was shot while he was driving his car, he didn't see the convoy, they shot the car's tank but thank god it didn't explode, and a distant relative was killed because he was driving at night and didn't see the convoy, I'm thinking that he was listed among those 55,000 although he didn't own a gun!

Iraqis displaced inside Iraq as of May 2007 2,250,000 so I think it reached 2,750,000 now.

Iraqi refugees according to the UN statistics are about 1.5 million in Syria, 750,000 in Jordan, 150,000 in Egypt, 50,000 in Iran and 20,000 in Turkey. These numbers are for refugees who registered in the UN, I think it has been a long time since they announced those numbers. I believe that more than 40% of refugees in Jordan are not registered so I'd estimate the number of refugees in Jordan by 1,250,000, and in Syria 2 million.

Iraqi unemployment rate is 27% to 60% where curfew not in effect.

Consumer price inflation in 2005 is 50% and I think it reached 70% or 80% now, it's too expensive to live in Baghdad these days, I lived in Amman and in Damascus and they were much cheaper than here, I spend about the same amount in the month although there I never stayed home and rarely ate at home, I was in a vacation and I was outdoors most of the time, while here I got out once in the month maximum.

Iraqi children suffering from chronic malnutrition is 28% in June 2007 according to the CNN.

The number of Iraqi physicians before 2003 is 34,000

Iraqi physicians who have left Iraq since 2003 are 12,000

Iraqi physicians murdered since 2003 are 2,000

And I should say that most of the physicians who were murdered or had to leave Iraq are the highly specialized, very famous and well-known physicians.

Average daily hours Iraqi homes have electricity is 1 to 2 hours a day! According to Ryan
crocker in Los Angles Times July 27, 2007. Sometimes in July it's 1 hour every two days. Pre-war daily hours Baghdad homes have electricity is 16 to 24 hours a day. For my home it was 20 to 24 hours a day. Iraqis without access to adequate water supplies is 70% according to the CNN.

USA casualties:
More than 3,979 soldiers killed, 29,320 seriously wounded.
Non US troops casualties 308 including 175 from UK.
30% of US troops develop serious mental health problems within 3 to 4 months of returning home.

War expense:
Spent and approved war spending is about $600 billion of US taxpayers' funds.
Another $200 billion was requested for 2008 so the total is close to $800 billion.
The cost of deploying one US soldier for one year in Iraq is $390,000.

Just keep in mind that Iraqis aren't just numbers, they are people, they have families and friends, they had a life to live, they are not just number you see or hear in the news, just count the number of deaths above whether it's for Iraqis or Americans and think with your self, does it worth it? NO, there is nothing in the world that worth those frightening numbers, that's if something was achieved. Is the world safer now? Is the Middle East safer now? Is the west safer now? Are Iraqis free? We used to have one Tyrant and now we have hundreds of them, is the terrorism defeated?
What happened has happened, now everyone should do something to put an end to this, The USA government should accelerate its movements, not only because they have invaded Iraq and they should do what they have promised but for their people, soldiers and their families, for their economy which is deteriorating, I don't want the US troops to leave just like that and leave everything as it is, they are in Iraq and they should leave it at least when it's like it used to be. It has been 5 years and the USA with all its technologies, money and science couldn't rebuild the electricity grid to provide Iraq with at least 12 hours of electricity.
We Iraqis must love each other and help each other rebuilding our country, we must put aside our differences because we used to live in peace and love despite those differences, we must stand together and forget our personal interests and focus on the most important thing; our country, I wish these words can reach all the Iraqis, I'm begging you stop supporting anyone, support your country and it's best interest, love each other and always think Iraq must come first forget about your sect, your political views and your tribe always think of Iraq, don't give the invisible hands any more chances, let us be united so we can be strong again.
Note: This is the shortest post I could write about this subject because if I wanted to say all I have in mind then I'll need a book!!!

Saturday, May 3, 2008

Not again!!!!
Yesterday we were getting back from my wife's relative house who invited us over lunch with other relatives (the few ones that are still in Baghdad)...we had a wonderful time and a very delicious food...it was great to be with the distant relatives that we weren't able to meet because of the terrible conditions.

It was just great and we were really happy but as it was getting darker it was time to get back home.....we got back in two cars, me and my wife in one and the rest in another car. Everything was good until we reached an Iraqi army checkpoint, there were two soldiers, a tall one and a short one, I almost stopped near them and both of them gestured for me by their hand to go...so I did like I do in the countless checkpoints, as soon as I passed them one of them shouted, I didn't understand what did he say but I was almost sure it wasn't for me; he just gestured for me to go! But my wife shouted "STOP, he is shouting on us" he shouted again and this time I heard him saying "STOP NOW" so I immediately stopped and they were running at the car with their rifles pointed at me, they were screaming "get out of the car immediately and bring the car papers with you" so I smiled to them and took the papers and headed to them while they were still pointing the rifles at my head. The short one aggressively took the papers from me and pushed me hard and said "take your woman home and get back to us, I'll never give you the papers...GO NOW" I kindly smiled to him and said "I'm sorry if I did something wrong, but what did I do?" he said" shut up and take your woman home" I was burning from the inside but I kept the smile on my face and behaved calm; I immediately remembered all the comments in the previous time. I told him "my dear brother, I'm like your young brother (he was younger than me but in Iraqi this is a sign of respect) please just tell me what did I do and I'll do whatever you want" he looked at me in a disgusted way and said "you didn't respect the law, you didn't respect us and you didn't respect Al-Maliki because we are here according to his orders" I really wanted to say F*** you and F*** AlMaliki that son of the b***h but instead I said "on my head, you and Maliki (In Iraqi that means great respect) I'll never disrespect you, the law or AlMaliki, didn't you gestured to us to go and so I continued if you ordered me to stop why wouldn't I stop!....please sir have mercy and let me go, I'm a dentist and I haven't touched a gun in my life, please I have a family that depends on me, please let me go and I'll never do it again...I'm sorry I didn't understand that you want me to stop...I beg you" and I kissed his head (that's another sign of respect) but he became angrier than before maybe because he felt my weakness! I don't know, but it was sure that he will never let me go, he said "OK get back and sit in your car and I'll tell you how can you go" !!! God, the trouble is deeper now, I don't want to talk about what did he want, but I'll be so lucky if he wants money, but I have a beautiful young woman in the car...God, I don't want to even think about the untellable....At that moment God interfered, I saw my wife's relative who is an old women,
she is very religious and her prayers are always granted, she was walking toward us…I remember when I went to Amman two years ago and they weren't letting young men into Amman and she was traveling with us, she walked with me when I was going to the Jordanian intelligence officer and said" don't worry, god will be with you and you'll get in" and it happened!!…I was the only man that got into Amman in that day!! Anyway, she was walking toward us and her mouth was murmuring a prayer, thank god she saw us when the soldier stopped us and she waited to see if a trouble will happen and when she saw what happened she got out of the car and headed to us, when she reached me she said" Don't worry, I'll fix it" and she went to the bastard soldier and I couldn't believe my eyes!!! He completely changed into another person and said "OK aunt, I'll give him the papers but that's only for you" she said "he is my niece, tell me what have he done so that I know what to blame him for when we get back" and the bastard said "he knows what have he done"….etc. He had nothing to say because I haven't done anything wrong…we took the papers and got in the car…I can't describe the situation my wife was in… 5 more minutes and she will break down.

I asked the old women and my wife if he gestured me to stop and both of them said no he told you to go because I though I didn't pay attention, our relative said "you haven't done anything wrong, it's jealousy…they hate people like us because it's so obvious that we are the real Iraqis…just look at your self and look at him, your shoe worth him and all his family."

During the ordeal many things were running through my head, I was thinking about the previous trouble that I have faced and remembered the comments; that really helped me to be cool, I was thinking about my dead friend; Omar who was killed by the Iraqi army in a situation like mine, he was talking with my other friend on the phone when he reached a checkpoint for the Iraqi army in Harthia neighborhood so he placed the phone aside and my friend could hear everything through the phone…it was so similar to my case but they took him and the next day his dead body was found in a garbage!!!

I know you are bored from the same story being told over and over by me but this is what the ordinary Iraqis go through everyday despite the countless explosions and assassination. That's the army and police that should protect us!! How funny.

Few days ago there was another ugly crime, it was a female doctor that I indirectly know, she was in the fourth year of ophthalmology board, she was living with her mother because her father is a consultant of the Yemeni president and they were staying here because the doctor was waiting to finish her degree and they would go to Yemen after that, the doctor and her mother were home and it was noon when gunmen entered their house, stabbed and drilled them million times and then they tied them to chairs and burned them up…no one knows the real reason behind this crime…and it's hard to know the details in Iraq about a murder that involved women because of honor…but I know one thing…who did this aren't human at all.

I'm so convinced now that I shouldn't go out of my neighborhood unless I have an important business…at least in my neighborhood I know many people who could help me if anything like this happened… May god burn alive all those who were responsible for this.
SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2008

Urgent…..attention required.

Today I have been an eye witness of one of the cruellest crimes committed against innocent Iraqis…I've seen something very similar to the crimes of Black water….I was shopping at about 11:30 am from a compound of super markets and I saw the Turks shopping, they have parked their cars (armored navy blue Mercedes A class) and they were on foot; carrying their guns and wearing armors, it's something ordinary to see them there, they always do shopping from there …I was going to that compound when I remembered I want to buy meat so I entered the butcher's shop which is 50 meter away from the supermarkets, after 5 minutes I went out of the shop and as soon as I stepped out of the butcher's shop I noticed that the rifle of one of the Turks shot accidentally (or that's what I think it was) then the other Turks started shooting randomly (I think they though they were attacked), they were shooting at people like they are not humans, they were shooting like they were shooting at dogs…people started to run and others tried to hide and I immediately went back to the Butcher's shop…they continued shooting and the whole crime took about 1 or 2 minutes then they ran back to their cars and went away without thinking of what have they caused and who was injured or killed, few minutes later I went to the site and I saw the people who were there carrying two men…one of them was an old man injured in the head and was unconscious (most probably he was dead) and the other one was covered with blood but I think he was injured in the leg and torso (I think he will not survive)…I can't describe what my feeling was…no words can be satisfactory to see innocent people killed like this for nothing they have done…and the ones who killed them just went away like nothing happened…IRAQIS ARE HUMANS ….the ones who were killed are HUMANS not sheep….then the people who were carrying the injured stopped taxis and they took them to hospitals…I saw two casualties but some say there were more on the other side of the street…I'm not sure but I saw two…and blood was allover the place…WHY? I just want to know why the Iraqi blood is so cheap in the world's eyes…I'm sure it wasn't mentioned in the news and that what makes me even angrier…I swear I felt a deep urge to write this post…this post is one the posts that I really needed to write….I want to expose what happened and I beg anyone who reads it to spread the word because this is the only thing Iraqis can do…there is no one to ask justice from…no where to press charges…justice can't be obtained in Iraq and justice is not for innocent Iraqis….so the only thing we can do is spreading awareness…Who gave the authority to those Turkish bastards to shoot in a crowded street? Who are they to do that? I want justice…I want revenge for those poor innocent Iraqis who died in front of me and I want justice's revenge, at least I want the whole world to know what they did, although I'm sure nothing will be done like in the case of Black water… I can't describe what I felt today…it was a combination of fear (during the incident) and anger, disgust and an urge for revenge after it… I'm in real sorrow for what Iraq is now, I'm in sorrow for the Iraqis who get killed every day in crimes like this and their families can't do anything, I'm in deep sorrow for those innocent people who died today…I'm in sorrow for the way Iraqis are treated in the "new, liberated, democratic and luxurious" Iraq !!!!
I WANT THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD TO KNOW.

Sunday, May 24, 2009

Watch the kids
Few days ago we were getting back home at night from a visit to a relative of us, when we reached our neighborhood; two blocks away from my house, we noticed a gathering of people at the door of one of the houses, it was clear from the faces of the people and the way they were acting that something unpleasant happened.

I stopped the car and got out to offer my help in case they needed it. Unfortunately there was nothing I or anybody there could do because their son was kidnapped an hour ago from their very same street! He is a 7 years old kid, his father is a mechanic and about a year ago he started working with the Americans as people say…the kidnappers called and they asked for ransom, his parents didn't tell us how much exactly do they want.

I was a bit scared to be honest, because this might be the start for troubles and crime in my neighborhood, I thought the kid was kidnapped because his father works with the Americans but later I begun to doubt that.

At that night a friend called and I told him about the incident and he told me that his neighbor's son was also kidnapped two weeks ago and he was about the same age as my neighbor's kid. His parents paid the ransom and he was released but it seems that kid was smart because from several signs and evident he was able to tell his parents exactly where was held and he told them that there were 15 other kid held with him.

The parents called the police and they were able to rescue the rest of them and capture the thugs.

At that time I made an impression, it seems that this will be the new technique that will be used by the low life criminals, so I wanted to make a small search about the subject.

Yesterday at work I asked many of my colleagues and many of them heard or witnessed such incidents.

One of them had a young brother who was going to school with his friends; they were walking as a group when a car stopped by and two men disguised in women's robes got out of it and kidnapped one of their friends, till now his parents haven't heard anything about him!

I reached a conclusion that kids are the primary target for the gangs now, and the reason is so rational (criminally peaking); they are much much easier to kidnap and force to get into the car, the kid may scream and cry as he wants because no one will interfere (people will think they are his parents) and the parents are ready to pay all they have and more, when they kidnap the father who will get the money for them? And they solved this issue with kidnapping kids.

So for all the Iraqis who reads this; take care of your kids and watch them all the time, never leave them alone or let them go out alone at least these days and if you don't have kids then please spread the word among the people you know who have kids.
I think I have to go to work now.

May God protect us all.

Thursday, June 19, 2008

Clarifying confusions
I have been asked by many westerner friends and readers so many times about the reality of the situation in Iraq and especially in Baghdad. Many are confused about the truth, many are manipulated by the media and most of them have the same question "is the situation good in Baghdad as we hear?" in fact not only the westerners ask about these things; I was talking with my father today and he asked me about the situation because he though it's very good (from what he hears in the news) and he was asking me "Should I come back? I can't take it anymore, I want to get back...It's very good now, right?"

So I though to clarify things in a detailed manner because I believe NO one can know or understand the situation in Baghdad unless he lives in it regardless if he was an Iraqi, Arabic or a westerner…I remember when I was in Amman for some time and despite that I was watching the news most of the time but I was so shocked when I got back in 2007, I couldn't stop crying when I was passing by a neighborhood after another and see what I didn't expect …I'm not saying that all the media organizations are lying or they are hiding the truth but I can strongly say that they don't have all the means to cover everything, they are under a very strong pressure from various sides and above all most of the people of the world are sick of hearing about Iraq and the disasters and death in it so I can't blame the media for this because after all it's business and they need viewers to keep their business going on so they have to give what the viewer wants.

Things got better! That's right; it got better but is it good yet or close to being good? No it's not...Is it close to normal, is there a hope for such thing? No it's far way from being normal and I can't see hope for such thing at least not in the 10 coming years…Is it violent? Yes it is…The worst period was between late 2006 to middle 2007; it was the bloodiest times for Iraqis so when comparing to those times the situation is less violent but please don't forget that at that time Baghdad was like a living hell, it feels like hell has broken loose…at those times when someone goes out of his home his family should consider he might not come back again but now his family can expect him to come back…Baghdad is still violent, there is a large count of daily civilians casualties, unidentified dead bodies, road side bombs, explosive cars, kidnapping and criminal acts and there is something I need to make clear that is the pattern of violence; between 2004 to 2008 violence was almost everywhere and everyone was a target but now the situation changed for many reasons that I'll mention later in this post.

I'll start with Adhamiya…Adhamiya is much much better, in fact I can say it's very good or that's what who is not from there feels when he enters it…you would see people and families walking in the streets with a wide smile on their faces, vast majority of the shops have reopened and there is a strong rebuilding movement and there are many shops that are being built, in fact there is even a mall being constructed and everything feels great but unfortunately that is not the case
with the rest of Baghdad and unfortunately I don't live there and the sad truth is that not everyone knows what is happening behind the scene....I'll start with the reasons for which I think Adhamiya became like this; the first and the prime reason for this is the propaganda! Adhamiya was the stronghold of AlQaida and it was almost impossible for a US convoy to pass in a street there twice without being attacked...it was the pride of AlQaida and that made it the most important goal for the US troops because if they controlled Adhamiya then they will show the world that they succeeded and the surge is working very well and they have won the fight with AlQaida, the Sunni insurgents, the resistance call it whatever you want...they wanted to show the world that they are doing great over there...they paid very generously for everything and they were so determined on keeping it like this...but what happens underground is not mentioned and even many of the residents of Adhamiya don't know about it...there are many criminal acts that are being carried out in Adhamiya and I strongly believe that high ranked officers in the Iraqi army and the awakening movement is involved in it but unfortunately I don't have enough evidences...for the past month only, there have been 6 to 8 kidnapping cases in Adhamiya and today I was going to Adhamiya when I noticed Iraqi army humvees surrounding a block near an Iraqi army checkpoint and the soldier in that checkpoint stopped me and asked me to open the trunk so I opened it but didn't got out of the car so he called me and said "Bro. when anyone stops you to check your trunk be sure to get out of the car and see what is he doing because how could you know that we haven't placed anything in your trunk? An explosive pack for example..."(he continued searching)...sorry for bothering you but we have a kidnapping case" I thanked him for the good advice he gave me and I remembered what just happened the day before yesterday...a car exploded at about 4pm between the ministry of health and the Shiite entailment in Bab Al-Moaatham, it wasn't a suicide bomber, it wasn't a parked car; it was an innocent man who was driving his car when it exploded because of a sticky bomb and this is the newest way to carry on an explosion...this info. Was provided by a guard in the ministry and I saw the pieces of the car the next day in the area.

Now back to Adhamiya where there is an attack on the awakening or a road side bomb with a range of about every two or three days which is never mentioned anywhere...many of the road side bombs are found before they explode.

Regarding the sectarian violence in the form of campaigns I must say that it has much recessed but the targeting of specific individuals or figures is still unchanged and in my opinion this might be a temporary state and this is happening now (also in my opinion) because of the fierce persecution for AlMahdi army and the loss of many strongholds for AlQaida...so both of them are busy with the adaptation to the new situation and as soon as the resettle I fear they will start again just like the period at the beginning of the law forcing plan when the armed groups were in a waiting state to see what will come up.

So what I want to say is that things are good in few areas of Baghdad like Adhmaiya and Kathomia but unfortunately this is not the case in all Baghdad and one must not skip the fact that
the people living in those areas must go elsewhere whether it was for studying, working or even buying or doing important errands…and about the majority of Baghdad things haven’t changed much, and I was thinking that I might see it good but I strongly believe you would not if you came here…it’s a bit less violent but it’s still violent…still there are explosions and they are a lot, still there are kidnappings and they are more than the beginning of this year, still there are sectarian violence, still there are a lot of dead bodies.

I wish I was successful in giving you somehow a clear view of what is happening in Baghdad which has been abandoned even by the news.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2009**

**Bloody Tuesday (much more beyond terrorism)**

Fate is really strange and extremely unpredictable; Tuesday was just another normal day with nothing more than usual, I woke up in the morning and went to work while my wife and daughter were still sleeping (as my wife is still on maternity leave now), I reached the hospital and started working just like any other day with nothing extra on my mind.

As it was about 10:20am I heard a far explosion but it was obviously a strong one because of the doors’ shaking, moments later it was followed by another one, I was about to start drilling a cavity for a patient there an extremely loud explosions, the windows were opened and the room was filled with dust. A moment of absolute silence followed and the bullets shooting started. It’s so strange when such things happen how the human mind reacts to it; somehow it’s like everything round you stood still; the body is paralyzed and there is a huge load of adrenaline pumped into the system to protect the body from potential danger and that causes the heart to beat so fast just like the rest of the body parts of organs, everything is ready to give it’s maximum power, then there is the shake; just like an engine warming up for a race.

It was one of the strongest explosions I have ever witnessed; I thought it was at the door of the hospital. In the waiting room, the women started crying and their kids were screaming and some of the patients started calling and I could hear them clearly when one of them said on the phone
“it was near X??!!”, (X) is a very close thing to my house … I literally jumped from my chair, ripped my lab coat off and started running…I ran in a speed I never thought I could reach with one thing and only one thing which is my family, whether they are alive or not, are they injured or not…I didn’t try to call them because if I couldn’t reach them (which is a normal thing due to the bad mobile services in Iraq) I might die of concern so I decided not to call and go straight to them.

I reached my car and started racing the wind, and the more I get closer to the house the more damage I was able to notice and more stressed the people in the street are. I reached home in a record time, I opened the car’s door and started running towards the house’s outer gate while I was looking at my home and I noticed that all the windows are broken and that’s when my legs couldn’t carry me anymore, I stumbled and fell on the floor, I rise again, started running and kicked the door, It seemed like ages, really it felt like a year till I reached the inner door, I opened the door and I started crying, I was crying the happiness tears. Just as I opened the door I saw my wife and daughter sitting on the couch and holding each other…I ran to them and hugged them both and I was checking them and crying, they were unharmed, thank god, the living room was filled with shattered glass but both of them were unharmed, what a miracle, thank you God.

Usually in the mornings my daughter stands by the window and watches the street but at that day few minutes before the explosion my wife took her and sat with her on the chair near the heater not like any other day when they sit beside the window, it’s a real miracle….

This will never end; I just want to know who did those sick 5 explosions, killed and injured hundreds of innocent Iraqis… I’m just wondering how he can sleep at night. May you burn in hell, may god make you suffer all your life and after it, I wish he will not die young, I wish he dies of 200 years and sees everyone around him suffers and during those 200 years I wish he sees all sorts of humiliation and suffers from all kinds of diseases but still alive, all that wouldn’t compromise for one drop of blood of those innocent people.

It’s just a political play, raising the fortunes of the government’s heads and following neighboring countries agendas…nothing more and nothing less.

Images below are for my home.
Kevin – Boots on the Ground (http://bootsonground.blogspot.com/)

Friday, October 24, 2003

New Sheriff in Town
I am a Soldier of the United States Army, currently serving in Baghdad, Iraq. My goal in making this site is to give people back home and abroad on the daily life for the American soldier here in Baghdad, Iraq. I don't think the media covers this place that well. I will have an unbiased opinion, so I'll even be critical toward what the US military does here in Iraq. However, I will also re-iterate, that a lot of stories on the news don't always give the full true stories. Anyway, that is my goal, I hope I can get as many people as possible to visit this site.

Saturday, October 25, 2003

About Me
People have been starting to ask more about me and what my job over here in Iraq is. So I’ll explain, I’m a Infantryman (aka Grunt or Trigger Puller) in the United States Army. My job here in Iraq is mostly to provide security for this this small building in this nice residential area, about 5 others that do the same. We also have Iraqi guards that we have hired to help with security, such as posting them at barriers outside our building making sure only friendly vehicles can get inside, they are armed with AK-47s. On the other hand, my job before also has been going on raids. I myself have been on about 4 raids since I’ve been here. I am a m249 SAW gunner, which is a light machine gun, but I have been issued an M4 for raids and such, it’s not easy to be fast when you’re carrying a 20 pound machine gun around. I was born in Michigan, which I miss very much, I haven’t been home since last Christmas, and we left in March. Expecting to stay here for a year, though we haven’t ruled out maybe having to stay for a year and a half, like the 101st Airborne are having to do. Someone asked me how is it we have internet? Well, the military is having little areas set up with computers and phones for soldiers to go to so they can get a chance to e-mail or call their family. Plus, Iraqis are setting up a lot of internet cafes for soldiers inside their compounds. Currently, we are 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, usually it’s 8, but I guess Iraq has Daylight Savings before everyone else, so once the US hits daylight savings the time should go back to normal. Before the war, I was convinced the President was doing the right now, now I have a more moderate view about the war. I don’t think the President lied, and there are probably WMD buried under some rock somewhere, after all, any Iraqi I’ve talked to said they believe Saddam had WMD. But I do think this war was not necessary in that I don’t believe Iraq was a threat to us, however I think it is justified in saving 28 million people from a ruthless dictator. There are reasons why I like being in Iraq and reasons I don’t like it. For one, it is really interesting talking to people from another part of the world, and one thing I’ve notice, they aren’t all that different than us Americans. But also, home just seems so much like the perfect place after being here in Iraq, power goes out several times a day, and many bombed out buildings from the bombings. However, here, I feel like I am making a difference, and that boosts morale for me and helps me to keep staying focused on what I have to do.
Sunday, October 26, 2003

Exciting Day
Well, another interesting thing has happened today. At about 9pm, while working on the computer, checking all my e-mail, I heard what can only be described as loud thumps, the sound of mortars getting shot out of tubes. 2 of them to be exact, and followed by 2 loud booms. Another attack on coalition forces I guess, it happened what appears to be within a mile from here. Probably 81mm Mortars, because it was too loud to be 60mm mortars and not loud enough to be 120mm mortars. Everyone scrambled around, running to their rooms to get their weapons and all ran onto the roof incase we were under attack. The guy we had on guard though said the attack took place alittle bit aways. We could see the dust cloud in the distance where the mortars fell. No one probably got hurt, and I doubt the news will cover it, since this does happen often, but not in this particular area. This is just attacks being carried out to try and cause as much chaos as possible hoping to get the USA to leave, and who can blame them? For so many years America has always cut and run when it's soldiers die, pathetic weak leaders we have. Despite many many resistance cells and fedayeen cells that get uncovered and arrested or killed, which we find these cells all the time, despite all the successes (you never hear about in the news) we've had in cracking down on these guys, they still manage to hit us. We can make this Iraq a great place, but it is going to take patience and time.

Tuesday, October 28, 2003

Brave Iraqi Police
I have found a ray of light in this dark time. 40 or so Iraqis were killed and more than 200 seriously injured. It is very sad that this had to happen to ordinary people doing their job and trying to make Iraq a better place. The Iraqi Police were hit the hardest. Immediately, you would think that many would put down their badges and quit after all the death and chaos of yesterday. Yet, they all are still there, doing their job. It is truly amazing, and I am deeply inspired by it. These guys are heroes, not only to me and the Iraqis, but to the rest of the world. They are so brave, that they are still out doing their job, because it is the right thing to do. They are so selfless, they are like the fire fighters of 9/11. Seeing them just like any other day is so amazing, and they probably all know at least one of their buddies was killed or hurt in those bombings. God smile on the Iraqi police and God bless a free Iraq.

POSTED BY KEVIN AT 6:52 PM
Comments (2)

Thanks for the Support
Wow, I can't believe how much e-mail I have been literally flooded with today. I must have gotten more than 100 e-mails. So, my site must be starting to get really popular. I am not really sure if that is a good thing. I'm really sorry if I am not able to write all of you back, I just don't have the time. About 99.9% of all the e-mails I get are thanks and support for what we are doing over here. Of course there is that little .1% that always got something bad to say. Many people say we are heroes, but I think all of us look at this as just a job that needs to get done. Thank you so much for all the kind e-mails, and I will try to post everyday.
Sunday, November 02, 2003

Possably Last Post
Since I am leaving soon, and uncertain if I'll be able to write again. I figured I would go out with a bang and put up a big post for people to read. So, I just thought I would write about what I think of Iraq and some of my experiences I would like to share.

First, I would like to state, though I'm sure you can already tell. That I have a optimistic view of Iraq. I think Iraq has the potential to be a really great nation in the middle east. They were before, such as before Saddam, when the Dinar used to equal 3 US dollars. Iraqis have told me Saddam didn't care at all for the Iraqi people, and only cared about his family. I have even been told of a really horrific event that happened after the first Gulf War. Saddam had some 200,000 people killed. Those are the resistance fighters and all their families that got cleaned out too. However, some 5000 children somehow survived this onslaught. Saddam figured 5000 children would cost too much money to feed them. So, his solution was to have them all buried alive. 5000 children were buried alive because he cared more about his income than of these poor children. I not only hear this from one Iraqi, but from many many Iraqis that I have talked to.

On a lighter note, before the regime fell. There was a particular road and river that the regime stated was for regime personal only. If you were an Iraqi caught anywhere near these places, you would be shot and killed. After the regime fell, you could spot Iraqis down by the shore of this river and just staring for a long time. Just because they were never able to before. Also, many Iraqis would drive up and down this road because they never could. We told a few Iraqis about what it was like in America. They were awe struck at what we told them about our government. That you could actually go into the White House and tour around and see where the President actually lives. Not only that, what really made their jaws drop was that you could go to the US Capital or any Capital and talk to the elected officials. They were so amazed by the fact that we had the freedom to do this, even if we had to be checked for weapons. They just couldn't believe stuff like that was possible. At that moment, I really felt proud to be an American and proud to have liberated Iraq.

Just about every night, you can hear gun shots and see tracers flying in the air or hear faint explosions. But lately, we've had a bunch of attacks in the last few weeks. The other day there was a little gun fight between Iraqis. It was probably a thief though. Mortars have hit different position occupied by Americans. However, the Iraqis are terrible shots and terrible with any kind of weapon, so mortars are usually off target and don't hurt anyone. Same with many ambushes on Americans where they managed to hit everything except for their intended targets. Alot of the times Americans kill or capture the attackers. You wont ever hear about this stuff in the news, probably because they think the world ought to know just about how big of a failure Iraq is and how we are losing the hearts of Iraqis. Plus, we are FLOWING with Iraqis coming up to us and giving us information on these resistance groups. Alot of these people are being arrested. Though, with all these big successes we've had, there is still much more to do. I don't see Iraq becoming stable for awhile now. I think eventually it will get there, most Iraqis are getting sick of the attackers. And talking to humanitarian aid workers, we've been told that Iraqis are upset that they are seeing less and less American patrols going through town. It is a relief for some of
them to see that we are still here.

I have made many Iraqi friends and I even have given a few of them my mailing address so they could still talk to me. For the most part, they are good people and like America and appreciate us getting rid of Saddam and bringing them democracy and a chance for a much better future. However, I do feel doubt sometimes if this place will get better. I wont sit here and pretend that this is a really great place. It still has ALOT more to go before it can be a great nation. I wonder to myself sometimes if we did the right thing. I constantly am in a battle with myself on many of these issues. Wether it be, will Iraq get better or do the Iraqis really appreciate this. I have even sometimes felt hate for the Iraqi people after hearing a friend got injured or hearing about other times when Americans have died. I sometimes think we should just leave these people and worry about our own country. But, we can't do that now, that is just what the enemy want us to do. We can't leave now, and in these times where I doubt myself I think of all the people here who need us to stay and be strong. I am always able to see many rays of hope. I think Iraq can be a great nation and it probably will, but it's hard to believe that sometimes.

I enjoy doing this job, I actually feel like i'm making a real difference. Though, sometimes it's not always like that. However, for the most part, I am optimistic and think Iraq will become a better place. It is just a small group that don't want it and hate being out of power. I hope you all enjoy reading my blog. I just wanted to let people see what it was like through my eyes. I hope you all have learned alittle more about yourself, me, and Iraq because of it. God Bless you all, America and a free Iraq.

**Sunday, December 21, 2003**

**Christmas is Coming**

Only 4 more days till Christmas. We have alittle radio with us that we listen to the AFN (armed forces network) radio station. They are now playing Christmas music. Hard to believe that it's that time of the year already. Maybe, if I'm lucky, I'll be able to call my family on Christmas. You can probably tell, my lack of posts in the last few days that it's getting busy over here. We are starting to do patrols again on a daily basis for a few hours a day.

The other day was my first time interacting with the Iraqi people since we left our previous station. So, finally getting to go out and do some patrols again felt really good. As we drove around, Iraqi kids would run up and wave to us. Also, I saw a woman pick up one of her kids in the field and move toward the house quickly. At first I thought she was probably protecting her kid, afraid we might raid their house because we had stopped there for a minute checking out a suspicious fighting position. Instead, what she was doing was getting closer and whisper to the child and pointed at us with a smile. Other people were just curious and stopped what they were doing in the field and walked over by the road and stared at us. Later on, we were driving in the middle of the road with a care coming towards us. For some reason, I can't remember exactly why, we stopped in the middle of the road. This blocked the car, and the guys inside didn't seem to happy about us. One guy even had the nerve to stare us down. So, I gave him back a stern glare. We don't play around with these Iraqis when they try bold stuff like that. Also, we've been getting hit by mortars and RPGs the last few days. So, everyone is pissed with the locals just standing around like nothing is happening. It looks really suspicious to us. Anyway, doing that patrol really felt good to get out again. Should be doing a whole lot more.
Sunday, December 28, 2003

More Insurgent Attacks
Coalition Forces have suffered some more loses. I don't know the exact number, but it took place at Karbala. These people aren't battle tested or really trained for this kind of thing. The Bulgarians, Italians or Polish. So, more and more attacks are shifting from American targets to other members of the Coalition. Over 170 Iraqi civilians were injured in these attacks, and newspapers like Al-Jazeera have the nerve to call these terrorists freedom fighters against an occupying power. I guess Nazi Germany gave occupation a bad name and the world occupy seems like something evil. I'm not saying fighting for land is good, but when the Romans did it, they improved life in that area alot.

The CPA has been doing a great job thus far fighting militarily. Capturing DOZENS of terrorists on a daily bases. Sometimes, innocent people get rolled up sometimes. I am sure it upsets them, however, it is necessary. One good thing though, more and more counter-terrorists groups are being activated and taking over the job of raids and everything else. Though, our military has done a fantastic job with fighting the terrorists, despite an average of 1 death a day. The only way it will be won is by cooperation between Iraqis and CPA and IP (Iraqi Police) and Iraq's own military. I think the Coalition has set Iraq up for success. I don't any doubt in my mind that the new front on the war on terror in Iraq will be won by both CPA and the Iraqi people. We just have to be resolved and patient.

Over AFN Radio I heard a new song that just came out. The song uses the same music as the "Grandma got ran over by a Reindeer" only with the lyrics "Saddam was arrested in a rat hole. Hiding from the Soldiers in tikrit." I don't know the name of the band, but it was really funny to listen to. It probably boosted most troops moral at least a little bit after hearing that song.

Wednesday, December 31, 2003

IED Blast
Today, at approximately 2200 hours or 10pm. An IED (Improvised Explosive Device) exploded outside our perimeter wall. The explosion was really loud and rattled the windows. It made me jump good too. Over the radio they reported 2 soldiers were wounded, they gave no further detail than that. Also, they said it was a Calvery unit that got hit. For awhile we haven't had an incident like this in long time.

We've found IEDs before, alot thanks to local Iraqis reporting them. Though, there was one Iraqi that kept reporting IEDs and asking for a reward. So, we used this chemical detection stuff to make sure he wasn't handling any explosives. We think he was just trying to make money by planting and reporting IEDs. Anyway, we do get a lot of help from locals on IEDs that they spot. Other times, we spot them as well. This just somehow unfortunately slipped through our nets.
Friday, January 02, 2004

Happy New Year
I just want to say Happy New Years to everyone. Hopefully, this will be a much better year and alot less negative events taking place around the world. I should be going on R&R leave soon. I can't wait to go home. It's been alittle over 10 months. America seems so much like a Utopia to me after being here for such a long tour.

Lately the post we are attached to has been getting mortared everyday for the past 4 days. This is actually intense lately. Normally they would probably attack once a week. However, this is a sign of desperation, I believe.

Anyway, we had aircraft flying over doing scouting missions on the areas where they have been firing mortars from. At 2100, we got hit by mortars. So, we and QRF immediately deployed to check patrol around and try to find the enemy. Later on, a aircraft called in saying it spotted 4 suspicious vehicles traveling down the road where the mortars have been coming from recently. They stopped at a near by house. We were ordered to go raid the house and try and find out if they were the news doing it. I can't get too detailed, for operational security. But we only found an AK-47 and handgun. We even used a chemical test on all the suspect's hands for any residue that is left from handling mortars or any kind of explosive. That turned up negative. So, it ended up being a dry hole. It was an exciting night to say the least. We haven't gotten a chance to do any raids in awhile.

Friday, January 23, 2004

Politics and the Military
Sorry for all those people who keep visiting my site and haven't seen really hardly any updates. I am just home, and my life is pretty boring here. The only thing I can really talk about is what is on the news.

First off, I don't know why people bring their political ideology here. My site is about my experiences in Iraq and experiences of others. Also, to see how I feel about it and see things through the eyes of an American soldier in Iraq. I don't talk about politics because the US military is an Apolitical organization. We are not the CIA or NSA. We are not brainwashed zombies. We aren't put in classrooms being taught the greatness of democracy and America. We live normal lives just like anyone else. We are just here to do a job. Some may not believe in the merits of why we are there, but we put that aside and still get the job done. People's lives are at stake, and we have to focus on our task at hand.

As my time in Iraq draws to a close. I find out that my Girlfriend who is also in the Army stationed in the USA. Will soon be leaving for Iraq. This is actually kind of hard for me since I never really got to see her much before the war, and only just now starting to catch up before I go back for alittle bit before coming back. She should be going before I even get back. This is really hard on a relationship, but we are both strong and I think we will get through this. However, I worry about her, I really don't want her to goto Iraq after all that I've had happen
around me. She is well trained, and so are her buddies but it still worries me alot that she is going.

**Tuesday, February 03, 2004**

**The Welcome Wagon**

Finally, returning I received a nice welcome back. Which was a mortar attack early in the morning. I woke up for that one. Most other guys slept through it. The day I got back, they have been getting attacked for 3 days straight. Which is really interesting. So, now it's been 4 days straight. Once, a 120mm mortar hit by a bunch of mobile home like houses where soldiers were going to sleep. One piece of shrapnel penetrated 5 of these buildings. Luckily, no one had moved into them. I always thought it was a big mistake where they were building them anyway. I guess some of these contractors or officers aren't paid to think a whole lot.

The transition from going home to back here was alot harder than I thought it would be. Being pretty used to and comfortable with the environment in Iraq, though it was at times hostile was something I was just used to. However, coming back was really hard for me. I'm starting to get the hang of it again. Though, it hasn't been real easy. It shouldn't take too long for me to get back into the swing of things.

**Monday, February 16, 2004**

**Weather**

The weather changes unbelievably fast. It now is starting to rapidly get warm. It was averages of about 60 just 2 weeks ago, now it's upper 70's. However, yesterday we had a sand storm that quickly went through. The sky and everything turned reddish orange and viability was not good. After it cleared up, it was windy and cold the rest of the time. Now, today it is about 70 again. The good thing is, we won't have to put so much cold weather clothing on as we have had to in the past. The bad news, it is going to get pretty hot soon. Thank God we won't be hear for a whole lot longer.

It has become clear that the guys in Washington are not good at spending money properly. I see all these ICDC and other Iraqis and US military driving around in $50,000 dollar SUVs and $70,000 cars. This really really irritates me. This is probably the reason why it is so hard to get new parts for broken equipment. I thought that was what this whole bill they just passed was all about. So that soldiers could get better equipment and parts to fix broken equipment. It takes weeks for the Army to finally provide us with new equipment. Radios are breaking, guns are going down. How are we to be an effective fighting unit with machine guns that aren't working so they are provided with a M4 Carbine. In this job, we look at our weapons as though they are our protectors. Your weapon is your life and someday you may have to rely on that weapon to save your life or your buddies life. I think it is laughable that the Republicans claim to want a small and more efficient government, and yet they screw things up more than the democrats have done in awhile. This is really irresponsible spending. I don't think US or Iraqi military need $60,000 vehicles to get around in the country.
Wednesday, February 18, 2004

Counter-Attack in Iraq

Yesterday we got attacked by some kind of missile system. Shortly after, you could hear several more explosions. Immediately, over the radio they said to ignore the second volley of explosions because it was a counter-barraige against the attackers. The counter-attack took place within 1 minute of the attack. Later on, QRF was organized and immediately dispatched toward the area. What they found was a few dead Iraqis and a home made missile tube for launching missiles. They think others were wounded and got away in a truck or some kind of vehicle. While I was on leave, apparently this happened before where they used a counter-attack fire mission and messed up some insurgents pretty bad. It feels good when you can react to stuff like this, because you don't feel helpless.

I have also come to the realization that in fact, an apology was not necessary in my previous post about the IP station attack. In no way did I insult those who died. My whole point was that it is frustrating when things like this happens because it can easily be used for propaganda and recruiting by the terrorist groups. I am sorry for what happened to the IP that day, but also I remind people that they turned down an offer for assistance by the 82nd Airborne. It is inspiring to think of the IP and other security forces stepping up to the plate. On the other hand, this small victory will also inspire more attacks like these in the future. It is a ridiculous point to blame at the US Army for the lack of firepower the IP had. In Iraq, all IP have AK-47s. That is a sufficient weapon for self defense. I hope people don't think we should start arming them with .50 caliber machine guns and AT-4 light anti-tank weapons.

I am no longer going to tolerate people who are sitting back home in their easy chairs and drinking beers trying to explain to me how the situation is in Iraq. I will no longer tolerate them telling me how to do my job. I will no longer tolerate them trolling. You can try and hide behind the freedom of speech all you like. However, being on the internet and getting on here and discussing the topics I post is a PRIVILAGE, it is NOT A RIGHT. If you don't like what I post, you don't need to even be reading what I write.

Monday, March 15, 2004

Human Shields

The human shields that went to Iraq kinda of upset me. So, I think I will give an idea on how us soldiers felt about the whole anti-war campaign that was going on before the war.

First and foremost, this is not a political web page. Also, the military is an apolitical organization. So, I will not discuss whether I believe the war was the right thing to do or not. I remember before the war started, I remember watching TV with people in buses going to Baghdad and being interviewed by reporters. They were human shields. This really got my confused because it amazed me how someone would try to defend a terrible man like Saddam. Then what really amused me was when the reporter went up to a human shield and asked if he was actually willing to die. His reaction was that of, as if he didn't think about getting killed at all. He wanted like all of a sudden he realized he could die and maybe it was something he didn't want to do. He paused a few seconds and unconvincingly said he was committed. He
also had a real feminine voice which also made me kind of laugh. I would watch MTV, and it
would make my blood boil. They kept running ad after ad after ad about innocent people dieing.
This infuriates me, because it felt like a personal attack. It also sickened my friends who were
watching it and got so upset they turned they tv off. The reason why I and probably the others get
so offended is it feels like a personal attack on me when they talk about innocent civilians killed.
It feels like they are saying I have no morals and that I would deliberately target unarmed people
in a fire fight. There will always be innocent people who accidently end up in the wrong place at
the wrong time. War is a messy and ugly business, but you have to consider sometimes how
many other people might die if not have going to war. I wish there could be no war, but reality is,
it has been with us since our beginning and will be there at our end. The famous quote from
Apollo "Only the dead have seen the end of war." It pissed me off royally when I saw on MTV, a
teenage guy that was being interviewed on one of the anti-war ads that his mom would send him
to Canada if there was ever a war. I couldn't believe someone would be so selfish about
themselves. We also kept getting frustrated with Saddam stone walling. If he had nothing to hide,
why was he doing it? People say we were invading their privacy. I think that is a load of crap. I
don't think Americans would have minded if UN inspectors went into the White house, US
Capital Building, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, and any other government
buildings or factories to make sure we weren't making bio weapons. We were also upset about
the fact that when there is a world crises, everyone in the world begs the USA to come to the
rescue. When they USA does not come and "save the day" we are accused of standing by and
letting bad things happen when we had the power to stop them, and when we do something like
this, we are just as bad as Hitler and our military forces are evil and the US Army is a bunch of
killers like the Waffen SS. I wish the world could stop being hypocrites.

Monday, March 29, 2004

Saddam City
There is a very run-down part of town in Baghdad which the military calls Saddam City. At the
moment, many locals now refer to it as Sadr, named after a very popular Muqtada al-Sadr in that
area. The military still refers to it as Saddam City though, the name just kind of stuck. It is where
the most resistance can be find in Baghdad. In fact, the military pulled out of that area awhile ago
because of the attacks. It is considered to be even alittle more dangerous than Fallujah, but
Fallujah is a big city, and Saddam City is a neighborhood. I had to be on a QRF (Quick Reaction
Force) to quickly respond to a small American convoy that was attacked there. The convoy was
made up of 2 Bradleys, one at each end of the small column and a few Hmmwv's. It came under
attack from RPGs and the attackers quicker ran into the side streets and got away. It was VERY
frustrating because the NCO (Non-commissioned Officer) didn't have a handle on the situation
or seem to know what he was even doing. Plus, the Bradley's hadn't even attempted to strike
back at the attackers. In the Infantry, we believe you need to be tough and firm and willing to use
force or the enemy will use that as a weakness and attack you. That is why they attack in
neighborhoods, to exploit it for that very reason. It was also very frustrating to see all the Iraqis
just walking around like nothing had happened at all. Guys were still selling goods in their carts
right by the roads, they totally seemed oblivious. One of the hit Hmmwvs didn't look anything
like a vehicle, just a hunk of burning and smoking rubble. I can never forget the pieces of brain
matter that was on the ground and people were unintentionally stepping on. It was very
frustrating for me and my friends. We wanted to go after those responsible. They didn't even kill
any military personal, they were Civil Affairs. Luckily only 1 died, the loses are always small.
We fight a group that claims to be brave and fighting for Iraqis, and yet, in alot of their own ambushes they set up against military convoys they kill more of their own and seem to think of it as acceptable. However, if we get into a fire fight and some Iraqi bystander dumb enough to watch gets wounded, we are murders. Their logic just doesn't seem right most of the time. Alot of people you talk to who are not Iraqi and have been to Iraq talk about how frustrating their people's logic is.

Yesterday I had a bad dream about being back in Iraq. I dreamt I was in a big open field with mountains in the background. Me and my buddies were behind a bunch of small dirt mounds and somewhat dug in. While the Iraqis were dug in their own small mounds and trenches. Both sides in a line and about 200 meters apart. I was assigned to an m240 Bravo machine gun. We got into a fierce fire fight. The Iraqis kept bringing in more and more reinforcements. As a bunch of them came in a group, I quickly mowed down a bunch of them with the weapon before they hit the ground and took cover. We were losing alot of our own guys. However, it seemed like we were winning. Until, I looked and say Iraqis drag up 120mm and 81mm mortars to their front position. They started firing rounds through the tubes and started killing ALOT of us. For reasons I wont say, this is really strange because it is not in American military doctrine to put mortars at the front in a fire fight. A few guys shouted mortars and pointed towards the mortars, and themselves got blown up. Until me and few guys sprayed in that direction and finally killed them. Once that happened, they all started to retreat. I noticed this and quickly shouted "they're retreating!" and for no reason at all a high ranking sergeant yelled at me "it's not called retreating it's called breaking contact!" A much of them gathered up in a group while running away, I took quick advantage of this and shot and killed many of them until they loaded up into their trucks and drove off. Right then, I woke up from that. Aside from that, during a ceremony where the rest of our Company finally came back from Iraq. They had the division band there and all. They were practicing until one of the drummers with the really big drum, I don't know what it's called. He beat it, and it sounded just like an explosion from an RPG, the way it echoed inside the building. I and a few others jumped and thought for a second we were under attack. Funny how none of the explosions that happened around us when I was in Iraq never really bothered me, I even slept through the Al-Rasheed hotel attack incident that happened about a mile away and shook the place. I didn't think it would really have any effect on me.

**Thursday, April 22, 2004**

**More Bombings**

Some car bombings in Basrah killed 70 people, 18 of them being children. Surprisingly, Basrah has been a really passive city with hardly any bad things making the news. Though, I'm sure alot of fire fights go unreported there, just like when I was in Baghdad during my 1 year Combat tour. Alot of people keep telling me to keep my head down, so I guess these are people who think I am still in Iraq. The truth is, I just arrived back in the States from Iraq in late march. I was there during the war. Now, I am back home in the States watching the news just like everyone else, though I still have sources inside Iraq now. Friends of mine in other units that are still there that I talk to from time to time. I was going to stop posting back when I just got back from Iraq, but many people encouraged me to stay on and keep posting about my experiences and what I thought about current affairs.

I've gone through numerous internet chat rooms, some you can tell are all foreigners because of
all the frothing hate they have towards the USA and it's military they express. I especially get annoyed when they talk about the US military deliberating targeting civilians. This is very ignorant way of thinking. Soldiers are just doing their jobs, they were told to go to Iraq, they didn't have a choice, and people have the nerve to criticize them when they have to defend themselves. Blame Bush and the US government, but don't blame the guys living day to day one day at a time trying to survive trying to support their family thousands of miles and make it by in the world. Soldiers are human beings just like anyone else, we have family who care about us and worry about us, we are not robots.

I think what is happening in Fallujah, is a battle in Iraq that was supposed to take place during the war, but never did. In the beginning, it was like a big race toward Baghdad. A lot of cities were bypassed to avoid fighting and to go straight for the Jugular. So, a lot of the fighters never got a chance to confront the US forces, and I think this was probably a big mistake. Hopefully, this can be resolved soon.

Saturday, May 01, 2004
Ugly Images and Possible Deployment?
Images were recently released of US Army Military Police abusing Iraqi prisoners. They were very disturbing to say the least. Now these soldiers have put the lives of their fellow soldiers at risk by making more Iraqis cross from moderate to angry toward the USA, and like other dumb criminals, they took pictures that incriminated themselves. I think the USA is going to have a long and hard time getting those who trusted the USA to trust us again. This I know, couldn't have come at a worst time for President Bush. These soldiers do not deserve to wear the uniform of the US Army. Their actions were despicable and unAmerican.

Things are happening, training deployments have been cancelled. There are rumors of us going back to Iraq soon. Our Commanding Officer told us not to worry about the rumors, but he is going to get more information for us, since he did say something was happening and he knew more than he was supposed to. I am not believing the rumors, in the military, you get so many false rumors you get to where you don't believe any rumor you hear. However, this is very interesting and at least it helps time go by faster cause it seems less boring I guess.

Wednesday, August 11, 2004
Contact!
Here is one of my entries into my journal while I was in Iraq. I've really been not saying much about what I did over there because much of it was classified, so a lot of what I wrote in the past was about my opinions of the war and some of the minor events that took place on a daily basis. This is just a glimpse of the other stuff we had to do.

Journal:

24 June 03

Another hot ass day in Baghdad. Not a DAMN cloud in the sky. I don't even remember the last time I've seen a fucking cloud. This weather is so frustrating sometimes. Having to go outside and pull force protection on this big house. I walked over the Iraqi guard outside, Aesa and we
talked a little while about how his family was doing and about targets he told us about for us to hit. He is kinda like our little spy who goes out and gets intel for us. We've taken down like 15 Fedayeen cells operating already. These punks are all about waving their guns in the air and shouting to kill Americans and how brave they are around a tv camera. Then, when we bust the door down, we've had a few literally shit their pants and we come in with such fierosity, they don't even know what to do because they're scared shitless. How impressive.

It's been awhile since I've seen any action after April. So, I'm pretty pumped up for this raid we are about to do in a few hours. Gotta do fuckin PCIs on my equipment, making sure it all works. This shit gets really old after doing 15 raids. Plus having to do it at night, you're all fucking tired and not motivated. The first time, you are nervous, not knowing what to expect. Maybe some asshole will pop out of the window and throw a frag outside. Or maybe the door is booby trapped. Then you get addicted to it after your first successful raid. Then after a bunch it becomes really irritating. I hate doing night time raids, especially when we have follow on missions. You come back and just rack the fuck out in your bed.

We just had some crazy shit happen during the raid. We rolled out pretty late. Can't say what time, mission sensitive. My position was the .50 cal on one of the hmmwv's, we were the first vehicle in the little convoy. My job was to cover down the road, and just in case we really need to reach out and touch a hajji, I have the .50 cal. It felt like 90 degrees even at night, still hot as hell. Our objective was this block with a decent sized house with a hajji who is apparently in the Fedayeen higher ranks and the fucker has been paying off people to attack Americans. They passed the photo of a facial shot taken from a camera of the guy we are after, so we all should be able to get this guy if it came down to me having to do it. We rolled over to the house, and just before we were going to breach the fence surrounding his house, we spot the asshole peaking out of his window and quickly disappear. Immediately, one the guys pointed his weapon at the window but the guy was gone in a flash. Everyone ran their asses off to get back to the hmmwvs. It was time to lock the neighborhood down and make sure the cock sucker doesn't escape. We flew down the road, I had to hold onto the .50 to make sure my ass didn't fly out of the turret. Each one went to a different corner on the city block. There we waited for like 13 minutes, until over the radio you could hear the other team say they spotted the guy running with a handgun in his right hand. One of the guys said to fire over the dudes head to get him to stop. So, one of the guys fired close to 10 warning shots as this guy was running through the field, he didn't even turn back to look he just kept running. Finally, the team leader said "fuck it, take him out" and the next shot went into the back of the Hajji's head. 200 meter shot, it was an unbelievable shot, especially with the guy only using a 4x Acog scope on his m4. The medics ran over to the guy and started giving him IV's, and see if maybe they could save him. There was nothing they could do. So, we just put the body on a hmmwv and stopped by one of the morgue. His brother, who turned him in, we told him we were sorry. He looked really disappointed in his eyes and just said "I just wish he didn't run." We got back to our building we are staying in, and I at some snacks and finally went to bed.

**Wednesday, September 22, 2004**

**Insurgents or Terrorists?**

I for one am getting tired of new organizations sugar coating the name of these ruthless barbarians. Why do they call these groups conducting suicide bombing and killing hostages
insurgents? Why don't they just call them what they are? Terrorists plain and simple. Lets forget about the whole argument about whether there were terrorists in Iraq before the war. There seems to be a real fundamental problem in the middle east. These people frustrate the hell out of me, it's like they want to live in the dark ages. Al-Jazeera is very guilty I think of trying to glamorize this terrible movement going on inside Iraq. Other news organizations need to grab their balls and not worry about controversy and call these animals what they really are. I also think it is shameful for people to use the argument these people have the right to resist. Since when is Resistance setting up a check point, kidding napping everyday normal Iraqis and then forcing them to dig their own graves and then executing them. Since when is Resistance putting a thousand pounds of explosives in a car and blowing yourself up in a crowd hoping to kill as many people as possible resistance? Since when is holding hostages for a complete false reason like women being in US guarded prisons resistance? This really upsets me about people, because they are against the war, they can't see past how wrong and horrible these acts of terrorism is. If you call this resistance, I think you need to get your head examined, because all of these is painfully obvious to terrorize Iraqis and stop the political process going on in Iraq. It is so ignorant that people can sit there and say they have the right to resist. How the hell can you call this terrorism resistance????? These people are Terrorists, they are not "insurgents" or "freedom fighters" or any other kinds of words used to glamorize them, they are TERRORISTS plain and simple.

Saturday, January 08, 2005

Flip-Flopping Al-Jazeera?
It's come to my attention or at least it would appear that Al-Jazeera, whom I equate as the Arab version of the Fox News Channel. All they do is spread filthy propaganda and promote violence in my opinion. They interview only people that would say stuff like the US is an empire taking over the world. That type of statement is outrageous. The only land the USA has under it's control is herself and many islands. Sovereign authority has been given to the Iraqi government, even if it is an interim government, the USA is not calling the shots on whether it can conduct military operations without that government's consent. I also don't see the Armies of the United States moving across the Eastern hemisphere conquering nations as we go. These beliefs are just caused by people disagreeing with US policy and take things way out of text and make outrageous statements like this. Besides all this with Al-Jazeera calling Americans imperialists. Now, they have completely done a flip flop and have said there should be elections but they need to be delayed. I find it funny how someone equating the USA to a fascist regime and making claims like we will never make democracy are the ones that say we should wait for it to be peaceful. If the Sunni want to have a part, like they seem they do, why the hell wont they put their guns down and be apart of this instead withdrawing from the elections because they say it's too violent in the region when it is THEM who are the ones causing the problems. While at work today, while we were doing processing for leaving for Iraq, in line one of my buddies started making some funny jokes about Al-Jazeera. Making fun of all the Arab conspiracy theories, he said "Now Al-Jazeera say we knew about the Tsunami but didn't warn them because we wanted the Muslims to be punished." It's frustrating being a soldier who has gone to war in Iraq and knows in which way the United States military conducts itself, which it does not do what many Arabs and anti-war people would have people believe. Being just a normal American it disturbs me to see the view people have of the US military and the US in general, but being an American
soldier it's a direct attack on me. Everyone likes to pick on the big guy because it makes them feel better about themselves.

Tuesday, February 22, 2005

No New News
Another BORING day here in Iraq. But, boring is bliss for me. I am not in a hurry to get shot at. Just laying around watching DVDs and working out at the gym. Got to drive around in new Hummers that are armored more than the regular up armors. I actually like driving this one more than the lighter ones. It feels more comfortable to drive. The seats aren't bad either, unlike the older ones, they are pretty comfortable. It's amazing how much the DOD spends on Hummers that aren't even up armor and yet they are pieces of shit. Always having to get something repaired. The lowest bidder strikes again. Despite that, these new ones are really good quality. Got to make sure the Air conditioner works for when it starts to get very hot here.

5 important Senators came to Baghdad to see how things are doing over here. Though they are in the Greenzone where I am not. Anyway, that's all the news I have for now.

Monday, April 18, 2005

Still VERY BUSY
I finally got a day off! WOHOO! Lately, we have been working our ass off. Lately it has been about 4 to 5 hours of sleep a night, and almost out in the city twice as long as a normal 8 hour shift. Though, it has been very quiet. Probably that is a testament to all of our hard work lately. I won't be able to probably blog for 3 or 4 more days because of the work schedule.

Not much else has been going on. I have been watching season 1, 2 and 3 of the Family Guy for something to laugh about. It is funny out in the field, because when we are all just bull shitting with one another out in the city, we joke about stuff we see in funny movies or Family Guy. It is a great escape from reality.

You don't feel the stress put on you from all the dangerous stuff we have to do. Until, you go to sleep and start dreaming of bad stuff. Recently, I had a dream me and a buddy were in the United States but it was like Iraq where we were occupiers but the suburbs we were in very nice. Me and him raided a house, and as I looked out of the window I saw a car speed down the street and jump the curve onto the yard with grass. I yelled to my buddy "Fuck! It's a car bomb!" I ran but as soon as I started to run the car blew up and sent shrapnel all over through the house. My buddy was seriously hurt in the leg, I was miraculously unhurt. I woke up right after my friend was moaning from the pain and I ran to go an assist him. My buddies that had their vehicle hit by the suicide car bomber have report of having bad dreams every night of always seeing their truck getting blown up or something else. It is strange how you don't feel really nervous or stressed, but subconsciously, you are under alot of stress.
Monday, May 16, 2005

Back Into The Shit
Well, my free time has been completely obliterated. I'm not working 12 hours, I'm working about 14 hours average, and there is no day off. Our whole platoon is pretty much tasked out, so only a few guys get a day off, and so you can imagine the rotation is long before you get a break. The funny thing about it is, this isn't even bad. I can't complain at all. I've gotten used to this work schedule, though I am sure in 20 years I will pay for it in some manner of post traumatic stress syndrome or something. I read in a magazine somewhere that the average grunt in Iraq spends more time in combat than World War 2 vets and Vietnam veterans.

Not much has been going on. Things have been pretty quiet lately. Which is awesome I think. Any day we don't take direct fire or indirect is a great day. Though the other day we almost got into a fire fight, luckily we found out before engaging them. We thought they were firing at us because one of our reported hearing bullets whiz by their head. Who knows, maybe someone in the group was shooting at us. Another unit quickly responded and told the assholes to cut it out.

Thursday, May 19, 2005

Moved To Another Place
Besides the fact that I have been very very busy patrolling the streets of Iraq. Our unit also moved to another location, so only now have I got the chance to write in my blog. Not much has been going on, although some Iraqis grew some big balls and were shooting mortars off in a location just a few blocks from us. Their target was a nearby American base. We took off after them, but they got away before we saw them. It was a tough break. Hopefully we will get them next time.

I love rolling around in the Hmmwv with a .50 cal machine gun in the turret. It is the most satisfying sound in the world to hear that thing going off in a fire fight. Just because there is no place for the enemy to hide from that gun. I really like the M240 too, but the I think the .50 cal should be set as the standard weapon every patrol has to have. One thing guerilla warfare taught us in Vietnam is when you bump into the enemy or get caught in an ambush, firepower is key to getting out alive.

500+ Iraqis are dead at the hands of insurgents and terrorists. All deliberately targeted, trying to destabilize the country. It is sad to see this, when I know in my own country. Americans would NOT stand for this type of thing happening in our own country.

Thursday, May 26, 2005

Hard Times
We have been EXTREMELY BUSY. It takes about a week of work before you are rotated to where you get a day off. So, I cannot post for almost an entire week. I am doing ok. I lost another good friend recently. He will be sorrowly missed. However, no time to dwell on that, we have to
keep our heads in the game and stay focused. There will be time to mourn the loss of another brother later. Before, we were relocated to a different place when we were so busy. So, we could not take showers for days and days, even though we were sweating bullets during the day. So morale was kinda low. However, now it is different, we have showers close by and so no one really complains about it anymore.

Our time over here is drawing to a near end. In the short time I have been here. I am so excited to go home and see my girlfriend. To get out of the Army and start moving on with my life. I hope I will never be one of those people who get so accustomed to American life again that I will forget all the sacrifices we have made over here. We all gave some, some gave all.

Friday, June 03, 2005

Crazy
My ears are still ringing from a fire fight we just had recently. It wasn't too long lasted maybe for only 2 minutes. No Americans got hurt, I don't know if any of the enemy were killed. They were running as we were firing. The funny thing about 5.56mm, the ammo you use for m4 or m16, is I've seen many cases where a guy was shot 4 times or so and barely flinched. So, we may have wounded a few of them without knowing. This is my first fire fight I've had during my second tour.
Appendix II

Comments posted on *Last of Iraqis* and *Boots on the Ground* can be found on both websites directly under the entries. Due to the length of all these comments, they will not be included with this dissertation. Some exemplary comments are copied here.

*Last of Iraqis*

**Motivational comments:**

**Lynnette In Minnesota** said...

Good luck, Mohammed.

**Darren** said...

May your travels be blessed as you travel to Jordan. I will pray that your chance to enter and stay will be granted. Thank you for voicing your opinion. God Bless

Comments on “Bad things got worst, good things are lost”

**One-liner comments:**

**Anonymous** said...

no peace for traitors,

You are another imbecile who needs ignoring

**Anonymous** said...

The brave resistance will kill as many Iraqis and blow up as many power plants as possible to defeat the invaders and occupiers.

**Directly responding comments:**

**Xavier** said...

So much injustice. What if the competing armed sectarian factions decrease or altogether cease their attacks in order to lull the Iraqis and Americans into a false sense of security that would justify a major troop pull out? The Republicans would tout it as a victory and the Democrats as something long since overdue. Then, with the Americans mostly gone, the final struggle for power in Iraq enters its final violent stages. There needs to be a sustainable and fair foundation of government and security before a troop pullout. Otherwise chaos can quickly grow. This could take many more years.

**Jhondie** said...

Hello :) I thought maybe I can give you some information, hopefully without getting myself in trouble. Al Sahwah, if it is the same group, started fighting Al Qaeda in Al Fahdhl. It started about
10 days before Ramadan ended. By the time Ramadan was over Al Sahwah won complete control of the Sunni areas of Al Fahdl. Soon after that the citizens living in Al Muthanabi area asked that we get Al Sahwa to patrol their streets as well. Ofcourse we agreed and made the coordination to prevent friendly fire. The American comander from Adhamiya had a meeting with the leader of Al Sahwa in Fadhl and soon after that they were in Adhamiyah. I dont know about Adhamiyah but I know in Al Fahdl, all the members were soldiers of the old regime. They are very good and highly organized. They wear the red checkered head dress and Camo pants. They don't like Americans... but they have accepted our help. Hopefully we can leave before the tension between us reaches a boiling point and violence starts again. Peace be with you.

**Reactionary comments**

**Tom in Texas said...**

*Indigio:* In between pizzas and raping Iraqi children, this is what they do:

"**The Longest Morning**": The story of Heroism, Courage, and Loss in the Face of Impossible Odds


Vernon Richards said...

"Thank-you soldiers all, and also to Mr Emanuel for bringing it to us. Brave men like Morley, Willis, Moser and Corriveau are all that stand between our children and bearded pukes trying to reach their 72 virgins via murder, rape, slavery, and other forms of Islamic piety."

**Mohammed:** In addition to calling perry shallow (above), *Indigo* has previously also called Michael Yon shallow. What reporter in Iraq does she think is deep? Yon (the Ernie Pile of IRAQI FREEDOM) deserves a Pulizer, but it'll probably go to Gore.

Are there no LEADERS of IRAQ that the PEOPLE can support????

**Anonymous said...**

tom, that's a French Canadian you responded to. They hate Americans even more than English speaking Canadians!

And I do not consider the BBC article that Une canadienne posted to be completely unbiased. I think all the bloggers they wrote about are Sunni Arabs. You see, tom, the Sunni Arabs of Iraq are apparently the "last" of the "real" Iraqis. Poor, persecuted souls. May God help them redominate Iraq so Iraqis can return to the peace they had under Saddam Hussein, and so the good people of the world can sleep at night knowing that Iraqis are living in peace once again, like they did before 2003.
Boots on the Ground

Motivational comments:

Jose Cuellar  
keep up the good work over there me and my bro will be joining ya'll over there. WE PRAY FOR ALL OF OUR TROOPS OUT THERE

sandra  
keep up the brave work you are doing. I pray for everyones safe return and world peace.

One-liner comments:

RG  
Kevin, Will you get the $25,000,000.00 reward money if you "bust a cap" into Zarqawi's ass? If so, sign me up and lets get an M1-Abrams and go to Fulluja, I with you Dude

se  
Mike, I can't stop laughing, you typical leftist liberal idiot! Yeah, never cloud the issues with the facts!

What a clown.

Directly responding comments:

RG  
Kevin,

If the Kerry looses and yet claims he has won or it is too close to call Bush the winner, there is one Iraqi you might can get the guys in Iraq to send over to help Kerry in the denial department. Baghdad Bob (Saddams former Iraqi Information Minister).

In regards to a Bush win he could do a Democratic Spin the day after the election such as; "This is a lie of the olooj editors of this infidel site. I am not afraid and neither should you be. I repeat, there are no Arnolds in Sacramento. Never!"

Chris From Canada  
Good luck in Iraq Kevin and thanks for you service in the American Army, remember it dosent matter how much training you have..it can just be wrong place wrong time.

As for "It's one thing to be against the war, it's a whole other thing to wish for people to die because you are against the war. Anyone making anymore ignorant comments like that will also join the banned list." if that is in reference to Oino Sakai's comments..he wished death on the insurgents not you and your counterparts who fight boldly. If you weren't refering to Oino Sakai my apologies. Sincerley Chris From Canada
Reactionary comments:

Joe12B
"the administration is incompetent, our forces are being used for policies that obviously weren't well planned out or have been politically, financially and god only knows motivated by what else (Israeli proxy wars??)"

-tom_abb

You just can't believe it can you, that the real goal here is to root out and destroy those who would destroy us. Your Clintonian pre-9/11 world view is dangerous, preemption is a right we have more than earned.

Israel is our creation and our allie, so it only stands to reason that we support her. There are Israelis on the ground with us in Iraq, but it's not something they say on the news.

Instead of nitpicking mistakes, you should focus on the big picture and realize that the terror war has been an overall success thus far. Granted, Iraq is complicated, but a task this huge takes time.

Germany wasn't rebuilt in a year, why should Iraq be any different.

tom_abb

Rg.. ahh I get it now, better might than right..

btw, was it wrong for Germans to question their government in 1939? Was their perspective a threat to the Reich's security if it didn't fall in line?

If my perspective scares you, these guys must be treasoness. What do you recommend, executions? http://www.ivaw.net/

JoeB, a success? Where do you get your news from? Please listen to our Arab allies once in a while and listen to what they have to say. There are other perspectives out there to be heard besides what's on Faux. But I guess that would be unAmerican.