

Just Go...

People are seething with anger- the pictures of Abu Ghraib and the Brits in Basrah are everywhere. Every newspaper you pick up in Baghdad has pictures of some American or British atrocity or another. It's like a nightmare that has come to life.

Everyone knew this was happening in Abu Ghraib and other places... seeing the pictures simply made it all more real and tangible somehow. American and British politicians have the audacity to come on television with words like, "True the people in Abu Ghraib are criminals, but..." Everyone here in Iraq knows that there are thousands of innocent people detained. Some were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, while others were detained 'under suspicion'. In the New Iraq, it's "guilty until proven innocent by some miracle of God".

People are so angry. There's no way to explain the reactions- even pro-occupation Iraqis find themselves silenced by this latest horror. I can't explain how people feel- or even how I personally feel. Somehow, pictures of dead Iraqis are easier to bear than this grotesque show of American military technique. People would rather be dead than sexually abused and degraded by the animals running Abu Ghraib prison.

There was a time when people here felt sorry for the troops. No matter what one's attitude was towards the occupation, there were moments of pity towards the troops, regardless of their nationality. We would see them suffering the Iraqi sun, obviously wishing they were somewhere else and somehow, that vulnerability made them seem less monstrous and more human. That time has passed. People look at troops now and see the pictures of Abu Ghraib... and we burn with shame and anger and frustration at not being able to do something. Now that the world knows that the torture has been going on since the very beginning, do people finally understand what happened in Falloojeh?

I'm avoiding the internet because it feels like the pictures are somehow available on every site I visit. I'm torn between wishing they weren't there and feeling, somehow, that it's important that the whole world sees them. The thing, I guess, that bothers me most is that the children can see it all. How do you explain the face of the American soldier, leering over the faceless, naked bodies to a child? How do you explain the sick, twisted minds? How do you explain what is happening to a seven-year-old?

There have been demonstrations in Baghdad and other places. There was a large demonstration outside of the Abu Ghraib prison itself. The families of some of the inmates of the prison were out there protesting the detentions and the atrocities... faces streaked with tears of rage and brows furrowed with anxiety. Each and every one of those people was wondering what their loved ones had suffered inside the walls of the hell that makes Guantanamo look like a health spa.

And through all this, Bush gives his repulsive speeches. He makes an appearance on Arabic tv channels looking sheepish and attempting to look sincere, babbling on about how this 'incident' wasn't representative of the American people or even the army, regardless of the fact that it's been going on for so long. He asks Iraqis to not let these pictures reflect on their attitude towards the American people... and yet when the bodies were dragged through the streets of Falloojeh, the American troops took it upon themselves to punish the whole city.

He's claiming it's a "stain on our country's honor"... I think not. The stain on your country's honor, Bush dear, was the one on the infamous blue dress that made headlines while Clinton was in the White House... this isn't a 'stain' this is a catastrophe. Your credibility was gone the moment you stepped into Iraq and couldn't find the WMD... your reputation never existed.

So are the atrocities being committed in Abu Ghraib really not characteristic of the American

army? What about the atrocities committed by Americans in Guantanamo? And Afghanistan? I won't bother bringing up the sordid past, let's just focus on the present. It seems that torture and humiliation are common techniques used in countries blessed with the American presence. The most pathetic excuse I heard so far was that the American troops weren't taught the fundamentals of human rights mentioned in the Geneva Convention... Right-morals, values and compassion have to be taught.

All I can think about is the universal outrage when the former government showed pictures of American POWs on television, looking frightened and unsure about their fate. I remember the outcries from American citizens, claiming that Iraqis were animals for showing 'America's finest' fully clothed and unharmed. So what does this make Americans now?

We heard about it all... we heard stories since the very beginning of the occupation about prisoners being made to sit for several hours on their knees... being deprived of sleep for days at a time by being splashed with cold water or kicked or slapped... about the infamous 'red rooms' where prisoners are kept for prolonged periods of time... about the rape, the degradations, the emotional and physical torture... and there were moments when I actually wanted to believe that what we heard was exaggerated. I realize now that it was only a small fragment of the truth. There is nothing that is going to make this 'better'. Nothing.

Through all of this, where is the Governing Council? Under what rock are the Puppets hiding? Why is no one condemning this? What does Bremer have to say for himself and for the Americans? Why this unbearable silence?

I don't understand the 'shock' Americans claim to feel at the lurid pictures. You've seen the troops break down doors and terrify women and children... curse, scream, push, pull and throw people to the ground with a boot over their head. You've seen troops shoot civilians in cold blood. You've seen them bomb cities and towns. You've seen them burn cars and humans using tanks and helicopters. Is this latest debacle so very shocking or appalling?

The number of killings in the south has also risen. The Americans and British are saying that they are 'insurgents' and people who are a part of Al-Sadir's militia, but people from Najaf are claiming that innocent civilians are being killed on a daily basis. Today the troops entered Najaf and there was fighting in the streets. This is going to cause a commotion because Najaf is considered a holy city and is especially valuable to Shi'a all over the world. The current situation in the south makes one wonder who, now, is going to implement a no-fly zone over areas like Falloojeh and Najaf to 'protect' the people this time around?

I sometimes get emails asking me to propose solutions or make suggestions. Fine. Today's lesson: don't rape, don't torture, don't kill and get out while you can- while it still looks like you have a choice... Chaos? Civil war? Bloodshed? We'll take our chances- just take your Puppets, your tanks, your smart weapons, your dumb politicians, your lies, your empty promises, your rapists, your sadistic torturers and go.

Bagdad Burning – Riverbend (Iraqi Girl Blog)
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