

Baghdad Burning

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, December 14, 2004

<http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/> 14
December 2004

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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... I'll meet you 'round the bend my friend, where hearts can heal and souls can mend...

Sunday, December 12, 2004

Fuel Shortage... It has been a sad few weeks.

The situation seems to be deteriorating daily. To brief you on a few things: Electricity is lousy. Many areas are on the damned 2 hours by 4 hours schedule and there are other areas that are completely in the dark- like A'adhamiya. The problem is that we're not getting much generator electricity because fuel has become such a big problem. People have to wait in line overnight now to fill up the car. It's a mystery. It really is. There was never such a gasoline crisis as the one we're facing now. We're an oil country and yet there isn't enough gasoline to go around...

Oh don't get me wrong- the governmental people have gasoline (they have special gas stations where there aren't all these annoying people, rubbing their hands with cold and cursing the Americans to the skies)... The Americans have gasoline. The militias get gasoline. It's the people who don't have it. We can sometimes get black-market gasoline but the liter costs around 1250 Iraqi Dinars which is almost \$1- compare this to the old price of around 5 cents. It costs almost 50,000 Iraqi Dinars to fill up the generator so that it works for a few hours and then the cost isn't so much the problem as just getting decent gasoline is. So we have to do without electricity most of the day.

Cooking gas has also become a problem. The guy who sells us the gas cylinders isn't coming around because apparently he can't get the used cylinders exchanged for full ones. People are saying that it costs around 10,000 Iraqi dinars to buy one on the street and then, as usual, you risk getting one that might explode in the kitchen or be full of water. We're trying to do more and more of our 'cooking' on the kerosene heater. The faucet water is cold, cold, cold. We can't turn on the water heater because there just isn't enough electricity. We installed a kerosene water heater some time last year but that has also been off because there's a kerosene shortage and we need that for the heaters.

I took my turn at 'gasoline duty' a couple of weeks ago. E. and my cousin were going to go wait for gasoline so I decided I'd join them and keep them company. We left the house at around 5 a.m. and it was dark and extremely cold. I thought for sure we'd be the first at the station but I discovered the line was about a kilometer long with dozens and dozens of cars lined up around the block. My heart sank at the discouraging sight but E. and the cousin looked optimistic, "We just might be able to fill up before evening this time!" E. smiled.

I spent the first hour jabbering away and trying to determine whether or not gasoline was actually being sold at the station. E. and the cousin were silent- they had set up a routine. One of them would doze while the other watched in case a miracle occurred and the line actually started moving. The second hour I spent trying to sleep with my neck at an uncomfortable angle on the back head rest. The third hour I enthusiastically tried to get up a game of "memorize the license plate". The fourth hour I fiddled with the radio and tried to sing along to every song being played on air. (It should be mentioned that at this point E. and the cousin threatened to throw Riverbend out of the car).

All in all, it took E. and the cousin 13 hours to fill the car. I say E. and the cousin because I demanded to be taken home in a taxi after the first six hours and E. agreed to escort me with the condition that I would make sandwiches for him to take back to the cousin. In the end, half of the tank of gasoline was kept inside of the car (for emergencies) and the other half was sucked out for the neighborhood generator.

People are wondering how America and gang (i.e. Iyad Allawi, etc.) are going to implement democracy in all of this chaos when they can't seem to get the gasoline flowing in a country that virtually swims in oil. There's a rumor that this gasoline crisis has been concocted on purpose in order to keep a minimum of cars on the streets. Others claim that this whole situation is a form of collective punishment because things are really out of control in so many areas in Baghdad- especially the suburbs. The third theory is that this being done purposely so that the Iraq government can amazingly bring the electricity, gasoline, kerosene and cooking gas back in January before the elections and make themselves look like heroes.

We're also watching the election lists closely. Most people I've talked to aren't going to go to elections. It's simply too dangerous and there's a sense that nothing is going to be achieved anyway. The lists are more or less composed of people affiliated with the very same political parties whose leaders rode in on American tanks. Then you have a handful of tribal sheikhs. Yes- tribal sheikhs. Our country is going to be led by members of religious parties and tribal sheikhs- can anyone say Afghanistan? What's even more irritating is that election lists have to be checked and confirmed by none other than Sistani!! Sistani- the Iranian religious cleric. So basically, this war helped us make a transition from a secular country being run by a dictator to a chaotic country being run by a group of religious clerics. Now, can anyone say 'theocracy in sheeps clothing'?

Ahmad Chalabi is at the head of one of those lists- who would join a list with Ahmad Chalabi at its head?

The borders are in an interesting state. Now this is something even Saddam didn't do: Iraqi men under the age of 50 aren't being let into the country. A friend of ours who was coming to visit was turned back at the Iraqi border. It was useless for him to try to explain that he had been outside of the country for 10 years and was coming back to visit his family. He was 47 and that meant he, in his expensive business suit, shining leather shoes, and impressive Samsonite baggage, might be a 'Jihadist'. Silly Iraqis- Iraqi men under 50 are a sure threat to the security of their country. American men with guns and tanks are, on the other hand, necessary to the welfare of the country. Lebanese, Kuwaitis and men of other nationalities being hired as mercenaries are vital to the security of said country. Iranian men coming to visit the shrines in the south are all welcome... but Iraqi men? Maybe they should head for Afghanistan.

The assault on Falloojeh and other areas is continuing. There are rumors of awful weapons being used in Falloojeh. The city has literally been burnt and bombed to the ground. Many of the people displaced from the city are asking to be let back in, in spite of everything. I can't even begin to imagine how difficult it must be for the refugees. It's like we've turned into another Palestine- occupation, bombings, refugees, death. Sometimes I'll be watching the news and the volume will be really low. The scene will be of a man, woman or child, wailing in front of the camera; crying at the fate of a body lying bloodily, stiffly on the ground- a demolished building in the background and it will take me a few moments to decide the location of this tragedy- Falloojeh? Gaza? Baghdad?

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