

Trophy Hunting?

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, December 05, 2004

[DahrJamail.com](#) 5 December 2004

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

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Dahr Jamail's Iraq Dispatches

December 04, 2004 Trophy Hunting? Yesterday, before the usual morning gunfire in the streets which has become my morning alarm clock, Abu Talat phones me. There is very heavy fighting over in al-Adhamiya. Two giant explosions occurred around 6:15am, followed by mortar blasts, then constant, heavy gun battles that went on into late morning.

The Hamid al-Alwan mosque, a small Shia mosque in the predominantly Sunni area of Adhamiya had been hit with a car bomb.

Witnesses reported that the car had been left there at 6am, and detonated remotely.

After the first blast, people in nearby homes, hearing the screaming of the wounded, ran outside to help. As a group formed around the wreckage, a secondary, much larger explosion went off. In the end, 14 were killed, 19 wounded.

Smoldering vehicles, including a destroyed minibus, lay about the street in front of the damaged mosque. Pools of blood and body parts lay strewn about the scene. Nearby homes were damaged from the blast as well.

Residents took it upon themselves to evacuate most of the bodies and wounded to nearby al-Numan hospital, because ambulances failed to arrive until 45 minutes after the blast.

The interesting detail is that while US military are usually some of the first to arrive on the scene at bombings, they never showed up for this one. The Iraqi National Guard, who have a base in the ex-presidential palace less than one kilometer from the bombing, never showed up either.

The Iraqi Police, however, did show up at the scene. Most of them wearing facemasks to protect their identity (this is Adhamiya)...but one man, a muscular, arrogant, loudspoken policeman, unmasked, was yelling, "Of course this happened because this is a Shia mosque! The Sunni hate the Shia!"

Members of the crowd perceived his actions as deliberately provocative and inflammatory.

Aisha Dulaimy, a resident of al-Adhamiya said, "The reason for this car bomb is the Americans want to cause a split between the Shia and Sunni. But there has never been fighting between the Shia and Sunni in the history of Iraq. They want to make a struggle between us, but it will never work. They tried this before and people responded by making demonstrations together against the occupiers. So they will never make it. We are living as

brothers-Shia and Sunni. There is no difference because we all live in the same home, which is Iraq.”

She references an attack last winter in the large Shia mosque across the river in the Khadamiya district, which was followed nearly immediately by an attack on a Sunni mosque in Adhamiya. The attacks were perceived by both residents and religious leaders as attempts to divide the religious sects, so they held mass demonstrations together, Shia and Sunni, in a show of solidarity. They also prayed in one another’s mosques.

The nearly immediate reaction from the bombing yesterday was an intense mortar barrage on the nearby US military base followed by fierce clashes in Adhamiya.

Military helicopters and fighter jets roared overhead, scaring many people who feared they would be bombed.

A 16 year-old resident of al-Adhamiya, Ahmed al-Dulaimy, said, “The US jets are so loud, only flying 50 meters above our homes. They dropped three groups of many flares. When I saw them I ran to my house because I was afraid they would bomb us.”

In other news, Thursday the director of Fallujah General Hospital was shot and wounded by soldiers while he and two other doctors attempted to enter Fallujah in an ambulance in order to provide aid to families trapped there. They had gone into the city after having been granted permission by the military and Ministry of Health.

A friend of mine here who is a doctor told me that recently the Ministry of Health issued a directive instructing doctors not to talk to any media, particularly about patients who are wounded by the military.

Salam stayed the night last night since we worked late...hence we slept late today. Until 9:30 anyhow, when a huge blast nearby shook the hotel and rattled windows. I sat up quickly in bed, looked at him over on the couch and he said, “Good morning Dahr.”

I said, “Morning man, who needs coffee,” as I dressed and grabbed my camera and ran to the roof of a nearby hotel to locate the blast. A building blocked the exact locale, but the plume of black smoke rose above it-just over near the “green zone.” Interesting to have the photo then 10 minutes later in my hotel see it replicated on the TV.

It was a police station which was bombed. 6 Police dead, at least 60 cops and civilians wounded.

Photos dated from May, 2003 have been shown all over Jazeera today-showing Navy Seals torturing Iraqis. Up close shots of men with bloodied mouths with guns held to their heads, etc. You know the drill by now.

They were put on the net by the wife of a soldier who’d returned from Iraq.

John Hutson, a retired rear admiral who served as the Navy’s Judge Advocate General from 1997 to 2000, said the photos suggested possible Geneva Convention violations, as international law prohibits souvenir photos of prisoners of war.

Hutson said, “It’s pretty obvious that these pictures were taken largely as war trophies.”

Not too surprising, however, because there are also eyewitness reports now from refugees that some soldiers in Fallujah were tying the dead bodies of resistance fighters to tanks and driving around with their “trophies.”

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