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## 'Every Day Gets Worse And Worse'

■ Along a busy Baghdad street struck by missiles, shocked residents curse the United States and mourn.

By John Daniszewski, Times Staff Writer

BAGHDAD -- It began with the bombing of state television and radio, passed into the midday missile strike on a street filled with restaurants, car-repair shops and apartments, and ended with the steady thump, thump, thump of explosions far in the distance.

It was the seventh day of war in Baghdad.

"Every day gets worse and worse," Sahar, a 23-year-old with a birdlike voice, said with a sigh Wednesday. "I can't imagine what will be next week."

Sahar, who did not give her last name, had been assigned by the Information Ministry to guide, translate and keep an eye on foreign journalists. She had just returned from Al Shaab, an outlying district on the north side of Baghdad, where two missiles hit a busy street at 11:30 a.m., killing at least 15 people and injuring 30.

She said she had witnessed the burnt corpses and strewn body parts, the missile craters, the twisted automobiles and the vacant faces of dozens of people who had lost loved ones or were left homeless by the twin blasts. It was, she said, the worst thing she had ever seen.

"It is like Judgment Day," she said.

The missile strike resulted in the highest civilian toll in this city of 5 million since the conflict began, and occurred on a cold, sullen day in which windblown sand, smoke from oil fires and fog refracted the sunlight into dim, otherworldly shades of red and orange.

Why the missiles fell in Al Shaab remained a mystery. In Washington, a Pentagon spokesman said the street had not been targeted. Later, however, a Pentagon official in Washington confirmed that U.S. cruise missiles had been fired at an area near a Baghdad neighborhood and "might have killed some civilians."

On the street, people had no doubt who caused the deaths: the United States, and specifically President Bush, considered here by most people interviewed (in the presence of government minders) to be the main author of the war, rather than their own President Saddam Hussein.

"Death to Bush! Revenge on Bush!" onlookers shouted at an American correspondent before breaking into chants of loyalty to Hussein.

Among the victims was the family of Abdul Jabbar Mashhaddani. Of his 14 family members, nine were taken to a hospital to be treated for glass and fragment wounds, he said.

"Why do they try to kill civilian people? This is a peaceful place, nothing military, only civilians.... Let Bush go to hell," he said.

"I was at home having tea when it happened. I couldn't understand what it was," said Ali Rakhim, 45, a car mechanic. "The whole house just jumped up and down. Glass was all over us. All the furniture fell. Pictures fell off the walls."

### A Miracle

Although angered by the blast, Rakhim and his wife were celebrating a miracle. For 40 minutes, they had lost their 6-month-old baby, Ahmed, in the rubble. They thought he was dead. But suddenly, out of nowhere, the infant started crying and they followed the sounds to find him underneath a wardrobe that had sheltered him from a cascade of bricks and glass and plaster.

"I am so relieved," Rakhim said. "His right ear was torn a little, but we treated and bandaged it ourselves."

When he saw his son was safe, he praised Allah and began hurriedly to put their salvaged belongings into a minivan. Everywhere there were pieces of broken glass, yellow-brownish dust and rubble from the broken walls.

### Photo Gallery



Death Under an Orange Sky

March 26, 2003 (Flash)

### Video



Baghdad Neighborhood Hit

(AP)

March 26, 2003 (RealVideo)



Forces at Work

(AP)

March 26, 2003 (RealVideo)

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War briefing

March 26, 2003 (Acrobat file)

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"We can't live here anymore," he said. "We don't have a home. Why us? What have we done wrong?"

Outside on the street, 12 burnt cars littered the pavement and sidewalk. Five houses on either side of the wide roadway were charred and smoldering. Broken glass was everywhere. And a hard rain brought down slushy brown particles of mud that speckled clothing.

A car slowly passed with a cloth-covered coffin on top. A minibus full of black-clad women followed it. The windows were open, and two women stuck their heads out, screaming curses meant for Bush.

The anger was palpable. Mohammed Shumar, standing on the threshold of his brother's damaged home, demanded to know if people in America believed in God. Told that they did, he answered: "No, there is no God in America."

Another woman, Shoukia Naji, 55, said they were giving her grandchildren Valium so that they could sleep, and she feared that her own heart would simply stop.

Her daughter had been taken to the hospital, she said, standing in the light of a kerosene lamp because the electricity in the district had been interrupted.

Such accidents are working against U.S. interests and helping to cement the unity of Iraqis before the decisive battle for Baghdad, observed Mazin Samarai, a political scientist at Baghdad University.

"America makes one mistake after another," he said. "They have compromised the whole idea of democracy versus dictatorship."

"They shed innocent blood here. They say that they want to save the Iraqi people, but they kill them. Is it their idea of saving us?"

#### **On the Air**

Earlier, Information Minister Mohammed Said Sahaf told journalists that the bombing of the broadcast center of state radio and television meant that the United States wanted to stifle Iraq's voice in the world. But he said it would not work.

Even though the center was hit by precision bombs at 5 a.m. Wednesday, the Iraqi government managed to get one of its three TV channels up and running again by midday.

The airways were again filled with songs and paeans to Hussein, interspersed with documentary footage of past Iraqi wars and the Palestinian intifada against Israel — which Hussein says he is defending.

Sahaf said mobile transmitters would keep the station on the air.

Throughout the day, bombs continued to fall intermittently — mainly on the outskirts but occasionally in the center itself. In the seven days of the war, the thunderous booms and thuds have become a sort of background noise.

Often the air-raid sirens don't sound. But after particularly violent blasts, a prayer of "Allahu akbar" — "God is great" — is broadcast over the system of loudspeakers dispersed around the city.

With U.S. Army troops and armor now reported to be only 50 miles south of Baghdad, and another column of Marines working its way north from battle-torn Nasiriyah, residents are expecting a full-scale war to begin any day.

Then, many in this city believe, it truly will be Judgment Day.

*Special correspondent Sergei L. Loiko contributed to this report.*

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