

As a little girl, I listened to my grandmother's tales of the history she lived under the Ottomans, the British occupation, and finally nationalism under the Baath party and under Saddam. I often thought how fascinating it must have been to have lived through such rich history and be able to tell stories about it.

At the time of the execution of Saddam, I connected with that memory of Grandma, and realized how important is the history I live through right now, as an Iraqi living in the United States and as an Iraqi in exile torn between the love of my native town Baghdad and my love for my home country, the United States.

On the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq, I repeat the same statement I made two years ago, on the second anniversary of the war:

The occupation is demoralizing and humiliating, and the minute American troops pull out, it will be the end of the rising death toll American as well as Iraqi.

I cannot convey to you how difficult life is in Iraq. The shortages; the lack of electricity; tanks rolling through the streets night and day; gunfire, killing, kidnapping; explosions.

The Iraqi health care system used to be called "The Jewel of the Arab World," and today it's in shambles. An average of 200 bodies wind up in the Baghdad morgue every day, and that's just Baghdad. For them, it's 9/11 every day.

I understand why some American soldiers are violent and ruthless — because they're afraid, and I don't blame them. However, such acts are still violations of the Geneva Convention and result in the death of innocents. My Uncle Saleem died last Ramadan in crossfire in the Yermook district where he lived while shopping for bread before breaking his fast.

Let me give you another image: a typical Iraqi living room, where a half-dozen women and girls bound and clearly terrified, cower before soldiers in camouflage, who are seeking evidence of insurgent activity during a routine night raid of a civilian home. How is that not terrorism? And why do we wonder why they hate us?

This war on terror is a sham. Iraqis have been brutally terrorized under Saddam for 34 years, and for the past 4 years under the American occupation.

Here is a statement made by my brother Haythem and my cousins Khaldoun, Basil, and Sinan, who live in Baghdad: "What we see in Iraq now is civil war, and the bombings of mosques, schools, and hospitals, for example, are actually perpetrated by occupying agencies in order to justify a continued coalition presence."

These are my dear kin. They survived six years of war with Iran, Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein, 13 years of sanctions, Shock and Awe—and now they just want peace.

An immediate withdrawal of American troops would mean an immediate termination of the aerial bombing of suburban safe houses, the single greatest killer of Iraqi civilians.

It would spell the end for U.S. military prisons containing thousands of citizens who are being held without charges. It would stop the use of depleted-uranium munitions that many blame for a surge in Iraqi children born with physical and mental deficiencies.

It would end the training and arming of paramilitary Iraqi "death squads" that spread death and fear throughout the country. And it would put the more than 100,000 mercenaries on the U.S. payroll out of work. They are the so-called "security contractors," but it's really war profiteering, and that's illegal.

If we don't stop using our tax dollars to ruin the lives and families of Iraqi civilians, we'll reap what we sow. that's not a threat but merely a fact and a natural outcome.

I would like to end with a poem I have written recently: the title is

My Beloved Baghdad

They ask you about a poet burdened by nostalgia
They ask you about a lover seeking a land for her soul
In a woman's body made of water and mud
They ask you about the excess water of the sea
And about the thirst of the river for the water
They ask you about Mesopotamia's mysteries
They ask you about the jasmine's and the rose's pain
They ask you about the palm trees and fields
Scattered by winds and bombs

Tell them, my friend

Tell them I am a palm tree that stands against the gusty winds, that
withstands all the years,
Tell them I am the lover, the storms, and the clouds
Night dwells in your beautiful eyes, my beloved Baghdad,
and I am afraid of the dark

Peace/ Salam

May Saffar