

The attack on Amerli on 7th July, 2007

The attack on Amerli on the 7th July, 2007, was the worst incident of carnage in Amerli, and indeed, in Iraq's history. A suicide bomber detonated a powerful bomb on a lorry loaded with bricks and a food truck laden with explosives in a crowded market in the Turkmeneli village of Amerli. Some 98 homes were destroyed, nearly 100 others were affected, and 20 shops and 10 vehicles were destroyed. In addition, more than 153 people were killed and 350 were wounded, among them 25 children and 40 women. The explosion was very powerful and was among the deadliest since the war started in Iraq in 2003.



Figure 60 The location of Amerli in Turkmeneli



Figure 61 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion

The explosion occurred as families had gathered for their morning shopping. The blast levelled many homes in the small community. It looked as though an earthquake had happened in Amerli. The area that was completely destroyed was estimated at 6000 square metres. Explosives experts said that this huge explosion and the extent of the human losses suggest that the quantity of explosive materials used was approximately 10 tons.



Figure 62 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion

Many of the Turkmen bodies were trapped in the wreckage; the corpses were caught under the debris of the collapsed buildings. Some of the bodies had been burnt and others had been torn apart. Residents and emergency workers continued to dig for bodies under the rubble looking for their loved ones and trying to find the living.

The explosion on the 7th July, 2007, was a big disaster for the Amerli sub-district; all of the casualties were civilians and the death toll made it the second deadliest bombing since the USA-led invasion in 2003, although, in March, a truck bomb attack had killed 152 people in the northern Turkmen town of Tal Afar.



Figure 63 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion



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Figure 65 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion



Figure 66 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion



Figure 67 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion: photo by Stephen Farrell of The New York Times

After the explosion in Amerli, ambulances and private cars ferried dozens of corpses and wounded civilians to nearby clinics and hospitals, in which relatives waited for news of the missing. Rescuers were forced to move injured people to Tuz Khormatu, the nearest major Turkmen town, some 45 km (28 miles) away, for medical attention and some of the injured died on the way. Others were taken on to the Turkmen town of Kirkuk, the largest city in the region, for more intensive treatment.^[1]



Figure 68 A victim treated in hospital, Reuters/Slahal Adeen Rashid, 7th July, 2007

¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6279864.stm Saturday, July 07, 2007



Figure 69 A bombing casualty from the village of Amerli brought to a hospital in Kirkuk

The shrapnel from the explosion killed shoppers hundreds of metres away from the bomb. The local people in Amerli stated that they had never seen an attack like it. The whole village was shrouded in smoke and dust.^[2] Some political analysts and military experts stated that the market bombing in Amerli could be linked to political developments in the region, where a referendum on the status of Kirkuk province is supposed to take place by the end of this year. Kirkuk lies outside the Iraqi Kurdish region.^[3]



Figure 70 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion

The attack on Amerli was clearly among the deadliest in Iraq and it reinforced suspicions that al-Qaeda extremists were moving north to less protected regions beyond the US security crackdown in Baghdad and on the capital's northern doorstep. In a joint statement, US Ambassador *Ryan Crocker*

2 <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/3F9A26FB-AB37-4528-ACCE-3D8F5E081CEC.htm>

3 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6279864.stm Saturday 7th July, 2007

and US military commander *General David Petraeus* said that the attack against the Turkmen Shi'aa was 'another sad example of the nature of the enemy and their use of indiscriminate violence to kill innocent citizens'.^[4]

During a news conference on Sunday the 8th of July, 2007, in Baghdad, *Abbas al-Bayati*, a Turkmen member of parliament criticised the security situation in Amerli, saying that its police force had only 30 members and that the Interior Ministry had finally responded to requests for reinforcements only two days before the attack. In the absence of enough security forces, al-Bayati said authorities should help residents 'arm themselves' for their own protection.^[5]



Figure 71 A bombing casualty from the village of Amerli

4 Robert H. Reid, Associated Press Writer, *Violent weekend in Iraq kills over 220*

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Figure 72 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion



Figure 73 Some of the devastation caused by the explosion

The call for civilians to take up arms in their own defence was echoed on Sunday the 8th of July 2007 by the country's Sunni Arab vice president, *Tariq al-Hashemi*, who said that all Iraqis must 'pay the price' for terrorism. 'People have a right to expect from the government and security agencies protection for their lives, land, honour and property,' *al-Hashemi* said in a statement. 'The people

have no choice but to take up their own defence.’ He said that the government should provide communities with money, weapons and training and ‘regulate their use by rules of behaviour.’^[6]

Local police and the mayor, *Mohammed Rashid*, told Reuter’s news agency that Iraqi officials have blamed *Sunni Islamist al-Qaeda* for the attack. The Amerli bombing was a blow to a USA-backed security crackdown in Baghdad, Iraq, and underscored the ability of militants to stage large-scale attacks despite the arrival of nearly 30 000 additional US troops in the country.^[7]

Nevertheless, groups of state officials travelled to Amerli on the 9th of July, 2007, to inspect the effects of the damage that was caused by the explosion and to provide solace to the families of the Turkmen martyrs. The state officials’ delegation, which was headed by the governor of *Salah al-Din*, and included the Councillor of Tuz Khormatu, the chief of police and members of the *Salah Al Din* government, were showered and stoned with bricks, as locals showed their protest and rejection of the presence of officials or reception.^[8]

The stoning came in response to the apparent failure of the state members to help them at a time when the local population was desperate for help and support.

The Turkmen locals in Amerli have accused the Superintendent of Police for the district of *Solyman Beg* of deliberate negligence. This led to the ousting of the governor of *Salahuddin* as chief of police for the district of *Solyman Beg* and *Amerli* because of the negligence, incompetence, damage, human loss and the magnitude of losses faced by Amerli that have transformed the region into a disaster region.

The refusal of citizens to receive government officials was a protest message to the government of *Nuri al-Maliki* because they had not moved earlier despite the magnitude of losses caused by the explosion. The citizens of Amerli were very angry about the absence of security and law, which meant that the Turkmen had become the victims of kidnappings, arrest and killing. All this happened because of the failure of the government to provide protection in the region.

In addition, because of the Arabisation policy, the sub-district of Amerli lacked the most basic needs of life and remains unchanged today. It lacked basic medical supplies, even cotton wool and other simple necessities, needed to provide first aid to the injured after the explosion. The citizens in Amerli extracted cotton from their pillows and cushions in order to apply it on the wounds of the victims to stop the bleeding.

To rescue the injured people who were trapped under the collapsed buildings and to remove the corpses, which stayed under the remains of the destroyed buildings (the Iraqi government had completely failed to bring any machinery), the Iraqi Turkmen Front leader hired machines from local companies at his own expense. Until the 9th of July 2007, according to reports received from the Amerli, almost 30 citizens were still missing. It should be noted that after the explosion, the injured were transferred to hospitals in Tuz Khormatu in small cars and private cars because ambulances and fire-fighters were not available in the district.^[9]

9.6 Turkey sends air ambulances to Turkmen town

Nearly 24 hours after the carnage in Iraq’s Amerli, humanitarian assistance from the Turkish Republic and other Turkmen organisations arrived in Amerli. Turkey swiftly sent two military air ambulances

6 http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070708/ap_on_re_mi_ea/iraq

7 www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=116100

8 Article by Salahadin Najioglu published on the Turkmentimes website, July 2007

9 Article by Salahadin Najioglu published on the Turkmentimes website, July 2007

to Kirkuk airbase on the 8th July, 2007, in order to extend a helping hand to those wounded and to transfer the Turkmen who were seriously wounded to Ankara hospitals for treatment.

The two planes, which each had the capacity to carry 14 patients, transferred about 21 injured to Turkey. The planes returned to Ankara late on Sunday the 8th of July 2007 with those seriously wounded who could not be treated in Iraq and the planes took off from the military airport in Ankara. However, one of those injured in the explosion died during the transportation to Ankara.

A Turkish diplomat in Iraq, in charge of coordination in Iraq had revealed that the United States officials did not oppose Turkey's proposal and accepted humanitarian aid by facilitating the procedures.

The injured were treated in Ankara hospital in the capital Ankara. In the meantime, Turkmen Member of Parliament, Fevzi Ekrem Terzioğlu and the President of Turkey, Nejdatt Sezer, separately visited the injured Turkmen in the hospital and the Turkish republic, and also called on Iraqi and US officials to provide swift help and support for the Turkmen in Amerli. However, three days after the tragedy, no assistance had arrived.



Figure 74 Member of Iraqi parliament, Iraqi Turkmen Fevzi Ekrem Terzioğlu meeting the injured Turkmen in Ankara Gata Hospital, 9th July, 2007



Figure 75 A bombing casualty from the village of Amerli, is treated in Ankara Gata hospital, 9th July, 2007



Figure 76 Member of Iraqi parliament, Iraqi Turkmen Fevzi Ekrem Terzioğlu meeting the injured Turkmen in Ankara Gata Hospital, 9th July, 2007

Soon after the attack, Abdullah Gül, a foreigner minister of Turkey, harshly condemned the attack, while expressing his deepest condolences to the Iraqi people and the government, in a statement issued on Saturday the 7th of July, 2007. In the statement, Ankara called for the establishment of national cohesion and peace in Iraq without any discrimination of religions, religious sects or ethnic identities: *'The peace of mind of all of our brothers in Iraq is of primary importance to us and as Turkey, we will do our part for maintaining peace of mind for all in Iraq.'*

In addition, the Turkish Ambassador to Iraq, *Derya Kanbay*, and the Consul General in Mosul, *Hüseyin Avni Botsalı*, contacted the Shiite Turkmen deputy, *Abbas Bayati*, also with a member of the Turkmen Vefa party ('Fidelity') Movement, *Feryad Tuzlu*, and related Iraqi officials in order to learn the details as soon as possible after the attack.

The deputy Iraqi minister, Mr Adel Abdelmahdi, met a delegation from the Turkmen and discussed how to provide the necessary assistance to the families of Amerli. In the meantime, the Iraqi Turkmen Front in Kirkuk and Tuz Khormatu aided the families of Amerli by sending a truck carrying food and essential material for the families affected by the explosion. In addition, representatives of the Turkmeneli Party, Ali Mahdi and the correspondents of two Turkish television channels, TRT and Channel_D Television Station, and other Turkmen politicians were the first at the scene to offer their support and condolences to the people of Amerli.



Figure 77 Turkmeneli Party deputy Mr Ali Mahdi in Amerli

Moreover, financial support and assistance was collected outside of Iraq for those affected by the bomb in Amerli, in places such as Canada, the USA, Denmark, Holland, Germany and Turkey.



Figure 78 A truck carrying essential material for the Turkmen, sent by the ITF



Figure 79 Distribution of food and supplies by the ITF

This was followed by the provision of truckloads of food and medical aid to those in the affected area. The Iraqi Turkmen Front has continued such assistance in full swing, in order to provide a helping hand to the needy people. The Iraqi Turkmen Front in Kirkuk and their members in Amerli have continued to participate in the removal of the debris from collapsed buildings left by the devastating explosion. In addition, Amerli was visited by a delegation from the *Salah al-Din* provinces, headed by Ali Hashim Mukhtar Oglu, who is the ITF representative in Tuz Khormatu. However, in the mid afternoon of the 10th July 2007, amid angry protests by residents against the government, Mr Abbas al_Bayati, the Secretary General of the Islamic Union for Iraqi Turkmen, arrived in Amerli accompanied by a delegation representing the party, in order to provide his support and support to the victim of the explosion and also to participate with the people in grief, promising to provide necessary assistance to the victims.^[10]

¹⁰ Article by Salahadin Najjoglu published on the Turkmentimes website, July 2007



Figure 80 Distribution of food and supplies by the ITF, donated by the Al_takaful Charity in Denmark to victims of the explosion, 17th August 2007



Figure 81 Distribution of food and supplies by the ITF, donated by the Al_takaful Charity in Denmark to victims of the explosion, 17th August 2007



Figure 82 Distribution of food and supplies by the ITF, donated by the Al_takaful Charity in Denmark to victims of the explosion, 17th August 2007



Figure 83 Distribution of food and supplies by the ITF, donated by the Al_takaful Charity in Denmark to victims of the explosion, 17th August 2007



Figure 84 Iraqi police try to interview the driver of a truck that exploded in the village of Amerli, Iraq, Saturday, the 7th July, 2007, while being treated in a Kirkuk hospital (AP Photo/Emad Matti)



Figure 85 A bombing casualty from the village of Amerli being treated in Kirkuk hospital, Saturday, the 7th July, 2007 (AP Photo/Emad Matti)



Figure 86 A bombing casualty from the village of Amerli treated in a hospital in Kirkuk, Saturday, the 7th July, 2007 (AP Photo/Emad Matti)



Figure 87 Bombing casualties, from the village of Amerli, Saturday the 7th July, 2007



Figure 88 A bombing casualty from the village of Amerli, Iraq, is taken to Kirkuk hospital for medical treatment, Saturday the 7th July, 2007 (AP Photo/Emad Matti)



Figure 89 A bombing casualty from the village of Amerli is treated in Kirkuk hospital, Saturday the 7th July, 2007 (AP Photo/Emad Matti)

The author



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