



- EDITION: U.S.
- INTERNATIONAL
- MÉXICO

GLOBAL public square

- Main
- Jobs
- Conflict
- Politics

- Innovation
- Culture
- GPS Show
- Quizzes

- Books
- Fareed's Take



The view from Alden's window in Jordan. (Courtesy: Alden Mahler Levine)
September 11th, 2011
04:30 PM ET

Recommend 86

Editor's Note: Alden Mahler Levine is a researcher at CNN International. She blogs at [Red Pen Brigade](#). The following is her recollection about hearing of 9/11 while living in Jordan.

By **Alden Mahler Levine**, CNN

It is hot, and I am tired. I am the kind of tired I get when I have to pack – the frustrated, anxious tired. Tired of having to think, make decisions, process, plan. It has been a very long week, fraught with social tension. The weight of my leaving hangs over me at all times like a gloomy raincloud, every bit as likely to burst into rainy tears at any moment.

Keep going, I encourage myself. Pack a little more. If you can focus for thirty more minutes, you can take a break. If you can focus, you can sit for half an hour and watch “The Bold and the Beautiful.”

This is a real motivation. It’s not so much that I’m addicted to the daily soaps, and I’ve never watched this particular show before moving here. But it is broadcast every weekday on Israeli television, and the local ladies never miss an episode. It disturbs me that the machinations of the powerful LA fashion world are equated with typical American life, but in watching, I share a powerful common bond with my neighbors. And today, the distraction is welcome.

At 4:30, I pour myself some juice and throw myself on my couch, flipping the television on and idly cycling through all six stations before settling on Israel 2.

What greets me there isn’t unusual, although it is unwelcome. Shaky hand-held camera footage of a building in flames. Smoke. A male voice droning on and on in Hebrew. I am jaded – and so, so tired – and I roll my eyes. Water in the background, I note... a bomb in Haifa? It doesn’t look like Tel Aviv. I’m not really paying attention. I am frustrated that the reward I promised myself has been thwarted by violence. I’m frustrated that there is so much violence. I am petulant. I want my soaps.

Then I notice that the droning Hebrew voice is droning over something. And that something sounds familiar. A voice from before, from a long time ago, from... is that *Katie Couric*?

Katie has dyed her hair since I’ve been gone, but that’s hardly the most important thing, why is Katie Couric reporting on a bomb in – Oh god. Oh god, oh god, oh god. It’s *New York*.

The thing about an event like that day’s is that it doesn’t matter how involved you are. I am nowhere near New York. I am not particularly worried about any close loved ones. I am safe, warm, well-fed, sheltered... and terrified. Everything has changed, from what was before to a total unknown. *What is going on? What comes next?*

Katie says there are rumors of other planes... the Pentagon... untold dead... untold hijacked vessels... I have had enough. I grab my backpack, a little money, and head for the bus stop. It isn’t my first choice. I never *leave* my village just as the sun is setting. It will mean paying for a taxi home, in the dark, the idea of which is objectionable for several reasons. But it doesn’t matter. In this moment, more than anything else, I need the connectivity of the internet.

I stand waiting by the Post Office. The main street is almost deserted; most people are home, relaxing after a hot day, preparing for the evening meal. Many of them, I imagine, are glued to their own television sets. I am optimistic that the buses are still running, but can only hope that all the bus drivers haven’t been distracted.

Finally Abu Saif’s bus rounds the corner. His bus is my favorite, and has never before failed to cheer me up – clean, new, brightly painted, decorated with cheerful good-luck charms and prayer beads. And Abu Saif never lets the young men treat me disrespectfully. But today I hardly care which bus it is; I just want to get to Irbid.

I board the bus and sit, shaking, staring straight ahead. Abu Saif looks at me out of the corner of his eye and says something to another bearded gentleman behind him. That gentleman turns to me and says, seriously: You... New York? Family?

No, no, thank God, I say.

Thank God, the stranger and Abu Saif agree. *Ya haram*. It is a profound shame.

When I disembark in the city, Abu Saif won't take my money. Not today, he says, not today.

I start to cry.

By the time I reach the internet café, the first tower has fallen; the second falls shortly thereafter. The normally chaotic back room is silent. Nearly every monitor displays CNN. Every eye follows me as I sit. After a few minutes, the café attendant brings me a juice I haven't ordered, and in polite, collegiate English, asks if everybody I know is okay.

I think so, I say.

Thank God, thank God, the room intones. *Ya haram*. It is a profound shame.

My parents are missing, and I am grateful for the assistance of a travel agent friend, who locates their plane and tells me they've been stranded in Amsterdam. I'm sure they won't have a fabulous time as refugees, but there is no cause to worry that they are in danger. My friends in New York are all present and accounted for. And it is a gorgeous night: breathtaking, intense, perfumed – the kind of night that always makes monotheism easy to understand and believe. Of course God speaks to people here, in nights like these. Sometimes God speaks of joyful things. Tonight, amid the beauty, God speaks only of sorrow.

I thank the cab driver, who has barely even made eye contact with me. This is unusual, for cab drivers. I suspect he's been listening to the radio. As I get out of the car, he says, God bless your country. *Ya haram*.

My apartment is dark and cool as I enter. The juice is there, where I left it; the pasta I'd planned for dinner; the sewing I'd meant to enjoy during my siesta. Everything the same. Nothing the same.

I have barely closed the metal door behind me when I hear a timid knock. I open the window in the door and see Noor, the youngest of my landlord's nine children. Mama wants you, she says. They're on the roof.

I follow Noor up two flights of stairs and find the family gathered at the west side of the roof. Abu Jameel is in the center, plastic chair tipped back and leaning against the roof-edge, steaming cup of tea balanced precariously on the cinderblocks, surrounded by children and grandchildren.

I sit in a chair vacated for me by a younger person, as propriety demands, and another child hands me a glass of minty tea and a plate of grapes. After the same brief exchange assuring everybody that my family is safe – thank God, thank God – I sit in silence. I usually sit in silence at these things. They speak of family business, in colloquial words, and most of it is completely beyond me. But tonight feels different, somehow.

Finally, Abu Jameel tips his chair forward and leans towards me soberly. The people who did this are not Muslims.

We don't *know* who did this, I begin, but it certainly looks like –

No, no, Abu Jameel interrupts. I know they *say* they're Muslims. They are *not* Muslims. He nods definitively. It is clear that nothing more will be said on this subject.

I nod, too. I understand what he means. But he isn't quite done.

I think maybe it's a good time, he says. You are about to leave us; you are going home, and people will ask you about us. I think God sent you here, so you could know us. You know me. You know my boys. You know we are good men. You know my wife, my daughters, are good women. You know the people of this village are simple, good farmers who love America. This is why God has brought you here. You will go back to America and tell them about the people of our village. *Ya haram.*

The views expressed in this article are solely those of Alden Mahler Levine.

Post by: [Alden Mahler Levine](#)

Topics: [September 11](#)