

ratitor's note: The following has been edited to remove the embolalia [**embolalia** (m-bo-la'li-ya) n. the use of virtually meaningless filler words, phrases, or stammerings in speech, whether as unconscious utterings while arranging one's thoughts or as a vacuous inexpressive mannerism] and minimally clean-up grammatical syntax to enhance readability.

The following is mirrored from its source at: <http://www.democracynow.org/fisk.htm>

**Live From Iraq, an Un-Embedded Journalist:
Robert Fisk on Washington's 'Quagmire' in Iraq,
Civilian Deaths and the Fallacy of Bush's 'War of Liberation'**
with Amy Goodman and Jeremy Scahill
DEMOCRACY NOW!
25 March 2003

Amy Goodman, Set the scene for us in Baghdad right now.
Democracy Now! Host:

Robert Fisk, It's been a relatively -- relatively being the word -- quiet night, there's been quite a lot of explosions about an hour ago. There have obviously been an awful lot of missiles arriving on some target, but I would say it was about four or five miles away. You can hear the change in air pressure and you can hear this long, low rumble like drums or like someone banging on a drum deep beneath the ground, but quite a ways away. There have only been two or three explosions near the center of the city, which is where I am, in the last twelve hours. So, I suppose you could say that, comparatively, to anyone living in central Baghdad, it's been a quiet night.
The Independent:

The strange thing is that the intensity of the attacks on Baghdad changes quite extraordinarily. You'll get one evening when you can actually sleep through it all and the next evening when you see the explosions red hot around you.

As if no one [is] really planning the things, it's like someone wakes up in the morning and says, "Let's target this on the map today." It's something which characterizes the whole adventure. If you actually look at what's happening on the ground, you'll see that the American and British armies started off [at] the border. They started off at Um Qasr and got stuck, carried on up the road through the desert, took another right turn and tried to get into Basra, got stuck, took another right at Nasiriya, got stuck. It's almost as if they keep on saying, "Well let's try the next road on the right." It has a lack of planning to it. There will be those who say that, "No it's been meticulously planned." But it doesn't feel like it to be here.

Amy Goodman: Can you talk about the POWs and television -- the charge that they're violating the Geneva Convention by showing them on television?

Robert Fisk: The Geneva Convention is meant to protect children. Hospitals are full of civilians, including many children who've been badly wounded.

It seems to me that this concentration on whether television should show prisoners or not is a kind of mischief: it's not the point. The issue, of course, is that both sides are taking prisoners and both sides want the other side to know of the prisoners they've taken. I watched *CNN* showing a British soldier forcing a man to kneel on the ground and put his hands up and produce his identity card and I've seen other film on British television of prisoners near Um Qasr and Basra being forced to march past a British soldier with their hands in the air. They (the American soldiers) weren't interviewed, it's true, although you heard at one point a man asking questions.

Clearly to put any prisoner on air answering questions is against the Geneva Convention. But for many, many years now in the Middle East, television has been showing both sides in various wars appearing on television and being asked what their names are and what their home countries are.

The real issue is that these prisoners should not be maltreated, tortured, or hurt after capture. When you realize that nineteen men have tried to commit suicide at Guantanamo, that we now know that two prisoners at the US Bagram base were beaten to death during interrogation -- to accuse the Iraqis of breaking the Geneva Convention by putting American POWs on television in which you hear them being asked what state they're from in the states, it seems a very hypocritical thing to do.

But one would have to say, technically, putting a prisoner of war on television and asking them questions on television is against the Geneva Convention. It is quite specifically so. And thus, clearly Iraq broke that convention when it put those men on television -- I watched them on Iraqi TV here. But, as I've said, it's a pretty hypocritical thing when you realize this equates to the way America treats prisoners from Afghanistan. Mr. Bush is not the person to be teaching anyone about the Geneva Convention.

Jeremy Scahill,
Democracy Now!
Correspondent:

Robert Fisk, you wrote in one of your most recent articles ("Iraq Will Become a Quagmire for the Americans ") [that] many people within the US administration were surprised to find the kinds of resistance they have [encountered] in places like Nasiriya. We have the two Apache helicopters that have apparently been shot down and many US casualties so far. Do you think the Americans were caught by surprise, particularly by the resistance in the south where everyone was saying that the people are against Saddam Hussein?

Robert Fisk:

They shouldn't have been caught by surprise. There were plenty of us writing that this was going to be a disaster and a catastrophe and that they were going to take casualties. One thing I think the Bush administration has shown as a characteristic is that it dreams up moral ideas and then believes that they're all true and characterizes this policy by assuming that everyone else will then play their roles. In their attempt to dream up an excuse to invade Iraq they've started out, remember, by saying first of all that there are weapons of mass destruction.

We were then told that al Qaeda had links to Iraq. There certainly isn't an al Qaeda link. Then we were told that there were links to September 11th, which was rubbish. And in the end, the best the Bush administration could do was to say, "Well, we're going to liberate the people of Iraq." Because it provided this excuse, it obviously then had to believe that these people wanted to be liberated by the Americans. As Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz said a few hours ago (I was listening to him in person), the Americans expected to be greeted with roses and music and they were greeted with bullets.

I think what has happened is that (and as he pointed out) the American administration and the US press lectured everybody about how the country would break apart where Shiites hated Sunnis and Sunnis hated Turkmen and Turkmen hated Kurds, and so on. And yet most of the soldiers fighting in southern Iraq are actually Shiite. They're not Sunnis. They're not Tikritis. They're not from Saddam's home city. Saddam did not get knocked off his perch straight away.

I think that, to a considerable degree, the American administration allowed that little cabal of advisors around Bush (I'm talking about Perle, Wolfowitz, and these other people -- people who have never been to war, never served their country, never put on a uniform -- nor, indeed, has Mr. Bush ever served his country), they persuaded themselves of this Hollywood scenario of GIs driving through the streets of Iraqi cities being showered with roses by a relieved populace who desperately want this offer of democracy that Mr. Bush has put on offer -- as reality.

The truth of the matter is that Iraq has a very, very strong political tradition of strong anti-colonial struggle. It doesn't matter whether that's carried out under the guise of kings or under the guise of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath party or under the guise of a total dictator. There are many people in this country who would love to get rid of Saddam Hussein, I'm sure. But they don't want to live under American occupation.

The nearest I can describe it (and again, things can change -- maybe the pack of cards will all collapse tomorrow) but if I can describe it, it would be a bit like the situation in 1941. And I hate these World War II parallels because I think it's disgusting to constantly dig up the second world war. Hitler is dead and he died in 1945 and we shouldn't use it. But if you want the same parallel you'll look at Operation Barbarosa where the Germans invaded Russia in 1941 believing that the Russians would collapse because Stalin was so hated and Communism was so hated.

At the end of the day the Russians preferred to fight the Germans to free their country from Germany, from Nazi rule, rather than to use the German invasion to turn against Stalin. At the end of the day, a population (many of whom had suffered greatly under Communism) fought for their motherland under the leadership of Marshal Stalin against the German invader.

A similar situation occurred in 1980 when Saddam himself invaded Iran. There had just been, twelve months earlier, a revolution in Iran and the Islamic Republic had come into being. It was believed here in Baghdad that if an invasion force crossed the border from Iraq (supported again in this case by the Americans) that the Islamic Republic would fall to pieces; that it would collapse under its own volition; that it couldn't withstand a foreign invasion.

I actually crossed the border with the Iraqi forces in 1980. I was reporting on both sides. I remember reaching the first Iranian city called Horam Shar and we came under tremendous fire; mortar fire, sniper fire, and artillery fire. And I remember suddenly thinking as I hid in this villa with a number of Iraqi commandos, "My goodness, the Iranians are fighting for their country."

I think the same thing is happening now. Obviously we know that with the firepower they have the Americans can batter their way into these cities and they can take over Baghdad. But the moral ethos behind this war is that you Americans are supposed to be coming to liberate this place. And if you're going to have to smash your way into city after city using armor and helicopters and aircraft then the whole underpinning and purpose of this war just disappears. The world (which has not been convinced thus far, who thinks this is a wrong war and an unjust war) [is] going to say, "Then what is this for? They don't want to be liberated by us."

That's when we're going to come down to the old word: Oil. What's quite significant is in the next few hours the Oil Minister in Iraq is supposed to be addressing the press. That might turn out to be one of the more interesting press conferences that we've had. Maybe even more interesting, perhaps, than the various briefings from military officials about the course of the war.

Amy Goodman: We also have word that the Turks have also crossed over the border, thousands of Turkish soldiers, into northern Iraq.

Robert Fisk: I wouldn't be surprised. I don't know. You've got to realize that, although electricity and communications continue in Baghdad (I only know what I hear on the radio and television), as in all wars, covering it is an immensely exhausting experience. I simply haven't been able to keep up with what's happening in the north. I rely on people like you, Amy, to tell me. I have a pretty good idea of what's happening in the rest of Iraq. But not in the north.

Amy Goodman: Well can you tell us what is happening and what it's like to report there? How are you getting around? Do you agree with the Iraqi General Hazim Al-Rawi that you quoted that Iraq will become a quagmire for the Americans?

Robert Fisk: It's not just Rawi. We've had Vice President Ramadan [and] the Minister of Defense just over 24 hours ago giving the most detailed briefings. One of the interesting things is, whether or not you believe these various briefings are correct, the detail is quite extraordinary.

Certainly we're being given more information about what's been going on at

the front -- accurate or not -- than most of the Western correspondents have been getting in Qatar. You'll see pictures of journalists saying, "Well, I'm with the US Marines near a town I can't name, but we're having some problems. Here's Nasiriya and here's a bridge."

If you go to the Iraqi briefing they'll tell you it's the third corp, 45th Battalion. They're actually giving the names of the officers who are in charge of various units and what position they're in and where the battles are taking place. There is more detail being given out by the Iraqis than by the Americans or the British. Which is quite remarkable. It's the first time I've ever known this.

It may be plausible to think that all this information is accurate. When the Iraqis first said they had taken American prisoners, we said, "Oh, more propaganda." Then up comes the film of the prisoners. Then they said they'd shot down a helicopter, and the journalists here in the briefing looked at each other and said, "There's another story." And suddenly we're seeing film of a shot down helicopter. Then another film of a shot down helicopter. Then they said they had attacked and destroyed armored personnel carriers belonging to the US armed forces. We all looked at each other and said, "Here we go again, more propaganda." And then we see film on *CNN* of burning APCs.

There's a good deal of credibility being given to the Iraqi version of events. Although I'd have to say that their total version of how many aircraft have been shot down appears to be an exaggeration. We do have a moderately good idea, in that sense, of what's actually happening.

There are Iraqis moving around inside Iraq and arriving in Baghdad and giving us accounts of events that appear to be the same as accounts being given by various authorities. And no journalist can leave Baghdad to go to the south to check this out. But I do suspect that will happen in due course. I do think they will get journalists to move around inside Iraq providing they can produce a scenario that is favorable to Iraq.

But frankly, any scene that a journalist sees that is opposition to the United States would be favorable to Iraq. It may well be that, with the Americans only about 50 miles away from where I am, if they're going to try to enter Baghdad or if a siege of Baghdad begins (of course the Iraqis have boasted for a long time that this would be a kind of Stalingrad -- here come the World War II references again) we won't have to go very far to see the Americans fighting the Iraqis. We'll see them with our own eyes.

The Americans won't be arriving close to Baghdad. They already are close. When we'll be moving around -- you asked me about reporting -- it's not nearly as claustrophobic as you might imagine. I can walk out from my hotel in the evening, and, if I can find a restaurant open, I can get in a cab and go to dinner. No one stops me.

When I'm traveling around during the day, if I want to go and carry out any

interviews, if I want to do anything journalistic, I have a driver and I have what is called a minder; a person provided by the ministry to travel with me. This means that nobody I speak to is able to speak freely. I've gone up to people in the streets, shopkeepers, and talked to them. But it's quite clear that there's a representative of the authority with me.

I don't do any interviews like that any more. I think it's ridiculous. Many of my colleagues continue to point microphones at these poor people and ask them questions which they cannot possibly respond to freely. So I simply do not do interview stories. It's too intimidating to the person one is talking to. It is unprofessional and it is unethical to travel with anyone else on an interview of that kind.

But I can get into a car without a minder and go to a grocery shop and pick up groceries, bottles of water, biscuits, vegetables. I don't need to travel around with a minder in that case and nobody minds. In other words, it's not as though you're under a great oppressive watch.

Television reports now, by and large, when reporters are making television interviews, or when they're being interviewed by the head offices, now require a ministry minder to sit and listen. It doesn't mean they are being censored. But it means that they bite their lip occasionally. I will not do any television interviews with minders present so I don't appear on television here. The odd thing is that there is no control at all attempted over written journalism or radio journalism.

While I'm talking to you now, I'm sure this phone is being listened to. But whether they have the ability to listen to every phone call in Baghdad I doubt very much. I can say anything I want and I do. When I write I'm not worried at all about being critical of the regime here and I am. So it's really a television thing here that the authorities are more fixated with and the actual presence of the minder, who, in my case is a pleasant guy who does not have a political upbringing particularly. It's more of a concern, which I suppose one could understand if you saw it through Iraqi eyes or the eyes of the regime, that the reporter is not doing some kind of dual purpose.

Obviously, there is a tradition that journalists sometimes, unfortunately, turned out to work for governments as well as for newspapers or television. I think the concern of the Iraqis is that some vital piece of information doesn't get out to what is referred to by them as the enemy. Secondly that reporters are what they say they are.

This happened in Yugoslavia when I was covering the Serbian war. I was in there from the beginning of the war and most journalists were thrown out but I managed to hang on. At the beginning one couldn't travel anywhere in Serbia or Yugoslavia at all without a government official. After days and weeks went by, and you turned out to be who you said you were, and you were not at all interested in working for anyone but your editor and your newspaper, a form of

trust built up where they know that you disapprove of their regime but they vaguely know you're going to tell the truth. Even if it's critical towards Britain or America or whoever. And they leave you alone by and large.

I have been to Iraq many times. I know a lot of people here both in authority and civilians. I think people generally realize that *The Independent* really is an independent newspaper. So there's no great attempt to influence me or force me to praise the regime, for example, which is kind of a Hollywood version of what happens in these places. I've written very critically, with condemnation of Saddam and the regime and of all the human rights abuses here and the use of gas in Halabja and so on.

I think there's an understanding that as long as you're a real journalist you will have to say these things. Indeed one has to, one should. But that doesn't mean that we are laboring under the cruel heel, to use Churchill's phrase, of some kind of Gestapo. Again, this is not a free country. This is a dictatorship. This is a regime that does not believe in the free speech that you and I believe in. One has to do one's best to get the story out.

Amy Goodman: Do you think Saddam Hussein is in control?

Robert Fisk: Oh yes, absolutely. There have been a few incidents. There was a little bit of shooting last night and there were rumors that people had come from Saddam City and there were clashes with security forces or security agents and rumors of a railway line being blown up. Which was denied by the authorities. But there is no doubt Saddam is in control.

It's very funny sitting here, in a strange way, I suppose. If you could listen to some of the things that were said about the United States here, you'd laugh in America. But I've been listening to this uproariously funny argument about whether Saddam's speech was recorded before the war and whether they have look-alikes.

[Take] the speech that Saddam made less than 24 hours ago. A speech that was very important if you read the text carefully and understand what he was trying to do, has been totally warped in the United States by a concentration not on what he was saying but whether it was actually him that was saying it.

The American correspondent was saying to me yesterday morning, "This is ridiculous, we simply can't report the story, because every time we have to deal with something Saddam says, the Pentagon claims it's not him or it's his double or it was recorded two weeks ago." So the story ceases to be about what the man says, the story starts to be this totally mythical, fictional idea that it really isn't Saddam or it's his double, et cetera.

I watched this recording on television. All his television broadcasts are recordings because he's not so stupid as to do a live broadcast and get bombed by the Americans while he's doing it. The one thing you learn if you're a target is not to do live television broadcasts or radio for that matter or, indeed,

telephone. But if you listen and read the text of what Saddam said it has clearly been recorded in the previous few hours.

I can tell you, having once actually met the man, it absolutely was Saddam Hussein. But that's the strange thing you see. In the US, the Pentagon only has to say it's not Saddam, it's a fake, it was recorded years ago, or that it's a double, and the Hollywood side of the story, which is quite rubbish, it's not true -- it is him --, then takes over from the real story, which is 'What the hell is this guy actually saying?.'

Amy Goodman: What is he saying?

Robert Fisk: There were several themes. The first one, 14 times he told the Iraqis, "Be patient." Oddly enough, that's what Joseph Stalin told the Russian people in 1941 and 1942; be patient. He made a point of specifically naming the army officers in charge of Um Qasr, Basra, and Nasiriya and the various other cities which are holding out against the Americans. It was important that he kept saying, 'the army, the army, the Ba'ath party militia.' He was constantly reiterating that these things were happening. They were opposing the Americans and the Americans were taking casualties.

In some ways, his speech was not unlike that of George W. Bush. He talked about fighting evil, of fighting the devil. Although there's no connection that's something that bin Laden used to say a lot. The idea of good versus evil has become part of a patois for every warring leader whether it be Bush or Saddam or anyone else.

But there was also this constant reference to the anti-colonial history of Iraq. The need to remember this was a battle against an invader. That these people were invading from another country. This was not Iraq invading the US. This was the US invading Iraq. It was not a speech that was delivered with a great deal of passion and Saddam is capable of emotion. He read from a text. It wasn't Churchillian. Here we go again, World War II grasping at me like a ghost.

But it was an interesting text because of its constant repetition. Wait, we will win eventually. And it was quite clear what came over from it. Saddam believes Iraq's salvation -- at least the salvation of the regime, shall we say -- is just keeping on fighting and fighting and fighting until the moral foundations and underpinnings which America has attached to this invasion have collapsed. In other words, if you can keep holding out week after week, if you can suck the Americans into the quagmire of Baghdad and make them fight and use artillery against them in civilian areas, that will undermine the whole moral purpose they've strapped onto this war.

Frankly, having listened to the various meretricious reasons put forward for this war, I think he's understood one of the main reasons why it's taking place and thus has decided he's going to go on fighting. Of course, once you apply unconditional surrender -- World War II -- isn't that what Roosevelt did at

Casablanca, there is no way out.

It was an interesting moment last night when Tariq Aziz was asked by a journalist, "Can you see a way out? Is it possible to have another peace?" Tariq Aziz looked at the journalist as if he'd seen a ghost and he said, "What are you talking about? There is a war." I asked Tariq Aziz, "You've given us a very dramatic description of the last seven days of the war. Can you give us a dramatic description of the next seven days?" "Just stay on here in Baghdad and you'll find out," he said.

Jeremy Scahill: What are you seeing in terms of the preparations for the defense of Baghdad? The people that we've been interviewing inside of Iraq, both ordinary Iraqis as well as journalists and others, are saying that there aren't visible signs that there are any overt preparations underway. What's your sense?

Robert Fisk: It doesn't look like Stalingrad to me. But I guess in Stalingrad there probably weren't a lot of preparations. I've been more than twenty miles outside of Baghdad and you can certainly see troops building big artillery emplacements around the city. I mean positions for heavy artillery and mortars, army vehicles hidden under overpasses. The big barracks of long ago, as in Serbia before the NATO bombardment, have long been abandoned. Most of these cruise missiles that we hear exploding at night are bursting into government buildings, ministries, offices and barracks that have long ago been abandoned. There's nobody inside them. They are empty.

I've watched ministries take all their computers out, trays, even the pictures from the walls. That is the degree to which these buildings are empty. They are shells. Inside the city there have been a lot of trenches dug beside roads, sandbag positions set up. In some cases, holes dug with sandbags around them to make positions on road intersections, to make positions for snipers and machine gunners.

This is pretty primitive stuff. It might be World War II in fabrication. But it doesn't look like the kind of defenses that are going to stop a modern, mechanized army like that of the United States or Britain. I think the US is a little more modern than we are. I don't think it needs to be because America's power is in its firepower, its mechanized state, its sophistication of its technology.

Iraqi military power is insane. These people are invading us and we continue to resist them. Active resistance is a principle element of Iraq's military defense. It's in the act of resistance, not whether you can stop this tank or that tank.

The fact of the matter is, and it's become obvious in the Middle East over the last few years, the West doesn't want to take casualties. They don't want to die. Nobody wants to die. But some people out here realize a new form of warfare has set in where the United States, if they want to invade a country, will bombard it. They will use other people's soldiers to do it. Look at the way the Israelis used Lebanese mercenaries of the South Lebanon army in Lebanon.

Look at the way the Americans used the KLA in Kosovo or the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan.

But here in Iraq there isn't anyone they can use. The Iraqi opposition appears to be hopeless. The Iraqis have not risen up against their oppressors as they did in 1991 when they were betrayed by the Americans and the British after being urged to fight Saddam. They're staying at home. They're letting the Americans do the liberating.

If the Americans want to liberate them, fine, let the Americans do it. But the Americans aren't doing very well at the moment. We've already got a situation in Basra where the British army have admitted firing artillery into the city and then winking on afterward talking about 'We're being fired at by soldiers hiding among civilians.'

I'm sorry -- all soldiers defending cities are among civilians. But now the British are firing artillery shells into the heavily populated city of Basra. When the British were fired upon with mortars or with snipers from the crag on the State or the bogside in Delhi and in Northern Ireland, they did not use artillery. But here, apparently, it is O.K. to use artillery on a crowded city.

What on Earth is the British army doing in Iraq firing artillery into a city after invading the country? Is this really about weapons of mass destruction? Is this about al Qaeda?

It's interesting that in the last few days not a single reporter has mentioned September 11th. This is supposed to be about September 11th. This is supposed to be about the war on terror. But nobody calls it that anymore because deep down nobody believes it is. So, what is it about?

It's interesting that there are very few stories being written about oil. We're told about the oil fields being mined and booby-trapped, some oil wells set on fire. But oil is really not quite the point. Strange enough, in Baghdad you don't forget it. Because in an attempt to mislead the guidance system of heat seeking missiles and cruise missiles, Iraqis are setting fire to large berms of oil around the city. All day, all you see is this sinister black canopy of oil smoke over Baghdad. It blocks out the sun. It makes the wind rise and it gets quite cold. Here, you can't forget the word oil. But I don't hear it too much in news reports.

Amy Goodman: I wanted to get you comment on Richard Perle's piece in *The Guardian* where he said "Saddam Hussein's reign of terror is about to end. He will go quickly, but not alone: in a parting irony, he will take the UN down with him."

Robert Fisk: Poor old UN. Very soon, the Americans are going to need the United Nations as desperately as they wanted to get rid of them. Because if this turns into the tragedy that it is turning into at the moment, if the Americans end up, by besieging Baghdad day after day after day, they'll be looking for a way out. And the only way out is going to be the United Nations. At which point,

believe me, the French and the Russians are going to make sure that George Bush passes through some element of humiliation to do that.

But that's some way away. Remember what I said early on. The Americans can do it. They have the firepower. They may need more than 250,000 troops. But if they're willing to sacrifice lives of their own men, as well as lives of the Iraqis, they can take Baghdad. They can come in. But I look down from my balcony here next to the Tigris River. Does that mean we're going to have an American tank on every intersection in Baghdad? What are they there for? To occupy? To repress? To run an occupation force against the wishes of Iraqis? Or are they liberators?

It's very interesting how the reporting has swung from one side to another. Are these liberating forces or occupying forces? Every time I hear a journalist say 'liberation,' I know he means 'occupation.' We come back to the same point again which Mr. Perle will not acknowledge. Because this war does not have a UN sanction behind it, I mean not in the sense of sanctions but that it doesn't have permission behind it. It is a war without international legitimacy. The longer it goes on the more it hurts Bush and the less it hurts Saddam.

We're now into one week and there isn't even a single American soldier who has approached the city of Baghdad yet. The strange thing (looking at it from here in Baghdad) is the *ad hoc* way in which this war appears to be carried out. We heard about the air campaign. There is no air campaign. There was not a single Iraqi airplane in the sky. This isn't Luftwaffe faces the Battle of Britain or the Royal Air Force or the USAF. This is aerial bombardment.

The fighting is going on on the ground. There wasn't meant to be any fighting, but there is. It's the way in which during the first night there was some distant rumbling and we were told that the war had begun. It wasn't the bombing of Baghdad but a one-off attempt to kill Saddam.

I guess someone walked into the White House and said, "Mr. President, we're not planning to start until tomorrow, but we've got this opportunity to kill Saddam." "OK, let's have a go, let's try it." Then we have this big blitz the following night, and a much bigger one the next night, where I was standing in the middle of Baghdad literally watching buildings blow up all around me. A whole presidential palace went into flames right in front of me. It was extraordinary. An anarchical sight of red and gold colors and tremendous explosions and leaves dropping off the trees like autumn in the spring. Then the next night was quite quiet. And then last night, for example, most of the attacks by the cruise missiles were in the suburbs. And it was possible (until you rang of course) to sleep.

It's as if someone down there in Qatar or in CentCom in Tampa, Florida, or somewhere is saying, "Ok, let's send another twenty tonight. Let's send 300 tonight. Where should we send them? Let's send them here." It's as if the whole idea of the war was not planned militarily. It was planned politically. It

was planned ideologically, as if there's an ideological plan behind the war. It started with al Qaeda. It moved on to weapons of mass destruction. Then we're going to liberate the people. And it's all going wrong.

Whatever kind of ideological plan there was has fallen to bits. Now, of course, maybe Saddam falls in the next few days. Maybe Baghdad collapses. I actually believed and wrote in the paper a few days ago that it's possible that one day we'll all get up and all the militias and the Iraqi soldiers will be gone and we'll see American soldiers walking through the streets. But I don't believe that now.

Amy Goodman: Last question: Have you been to the hospitals of Baghdad?

Robert Fisk: Yes. Quite a few of them. The main visit I made was to one of the main government hospitals on Saturday morning after a pretty long night of explosions around the city in which of course quite a lot of these cruise missiles exploded right on their targets. Others missed them and crashed into civilian areas. I went to one hospital where (the doctors here are not Ba'ath party members) the chief doctor I spoke to was trained in Edinburgh where he got his FRCF.

He went very coldly down his list of patients. He had 101 [of] whom he estimated 16 were soldiers and 85 were civilians. Of the 85 civilians, twenty were women, six were children. One child and one man had died in the operating theater during surgery. Most of the children were pretty badly hurt.

One little girl had shrapnel from an American bomb in her spine and her left leg was paralyzed. Her mother was, rather pathetically, trying to straighten out her right leg against it as if both the legs, if pointed in the same direction, she'd somehow regain movement in the left side of her body. Which, of course, she did not. Other children were on drip feeds and had very serious leg injuries. One little girl had shrapnel in her abdomen which had not yet been removed. They were clearly in pain, there was a lot of tears and crying from the children. Less so from the young women who had been hit. One woman was actually 17. They weren't all young.

In one case a woman and her daughter were there. The woman said to me that she had gone to see a relative and she had gotten out of a taxi. Her daughter, whom I also spoke to, was standing in front of her. There was a tremendous explosion, noise, and white light, as the woman said. The girl was hit in the legs and the woman was hit in the chest and legs by shrapnel. They were lying next to each other in hospital beds.

This is not the worst kind of injuries I have ever seen. And I've seen just about every injury in the world including people who've virtually got no heads left and are still alive. And I didn't see that. But if you're going to bomb a country you will wound and kill civilians. That is in the nature of warfare. We bomb. They suffer. And nothing I saw in that hospital surprised me.

Amy Goodman: Robert Fisk, we're going to let you go to sleep. General Colin Powell said that foreign journalists should leave as the campaign of so-called 'shock and awe' is initiated and it has started. Why have you chosen to remain in Baghdad?

Robert Fisk: Because I don't work for Colin Powell. I work for a British newspaper called *The Independent*. If you read it, you'll find that we are. It's not the job of a journalist to snap to the attention of generals. I wrote a piece a couple of weeks ago in my newspaper saying that before the war began in Yugoslavia, the British Foreign Office urged journalists to leave and then said the British intelligence had uncovered a secret plot to take all the foreign reporters hostage in Belgrade. I decided this was a lie and stayed -- and it was a lie.

In Afghanistan, just before the fall of Khandahar, as I was entering Afghanistan, the British Foreign Office urged all journalists to stay out of Taliban areas and then said the British intelligence had uncovered a plot to take all the foreign reporters hostage. Aware of Yugoslavia, I pressed on to Khandahar and it proved to be a lie. Just before the bombardment here, the British Foreign Office said that all journalists should leave because British intelligence had uncovered a plot by Saddam to take all journalists hostages. At which moment I knew I'd be safe to stay because it was of course, the usual lie. What is sad is how many journalists did leave. There were a very large number of reporters who left here voluntarily before the war believing this meretricious nonsense.

I should say that the Iraqis have thrown quite a large number of journalists out as well. But I don't think it's the job of a journalist to run away when war comes just because it happens to be his own side doing the bombing. I've been bombed by the British and Americans so many times that it's not 'shock and awe' anymore. It's 'shock and bore,' frankly.

Amy Goodman: Thank you, Robert. Good night, be safe.

Robert Fisk: Good night, Amy, I'm going to bed.

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