

An Anti-Colonial War Against The Americans May Have Already Begun

An Interview With Robert Fisk

by **Robert Fisk** and **Amy Goodman**, Democracy Now ; April 22, 2003

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Goodman : After spending a month in Iraq, could you describe your thoughts ?

Fisk : Well, my assumption is that history has a way of repeating itself. I was talking to a very military Shiite Muslim from Nashas about only five days ago and a journalist was saying to him "do you realize how historic these days are ? " and I said to him "do you realize how history is repeating itself ? " and he turned to me and said "yes history is repeating itself, and I knew what he meant. He was referring to the British invasion of Iraq in 1917 and Lt. Gen. Sir Stanley Maude, when we turned up in Baghdad and Sir Stanley Maude issued a document saying "we have come here not as conquerors but as liberators to free you from generations of tyranny." And within three years we were losing hundreds of men every year in the guerilla war against the Iraqis who wanted real liberation not by us from the ottomans but by them from us and I think that's what's going to happen with the Americans in Iraq. I think a war of liberation will begin quite soon, which of course will be first referred to as a war by terrorists, by al Qaeda, by remnants of Saddam's regime, remnants (remember that word) but it will be waged particularly by Shiite Muslims against the Americans and the British to get us out of Iraq and that will happen. And our dreams that we can liberate these people will not be fulfilled in this scenario.

So what I've been writing about these past few days is simply the following. We claim that we want to preserve the national heritage of the Iraqi people, and yet my own count of government buildings burning in Baghdad before I left was 158, of which the only buildings protected by the United States army and the marines were the Ministry of Interior, which has the intelligence corp of Iraq and the Ministry of Oil, and I needn't say anything else about that. Every other ministry was burning. Even the Ministry of Higher Education/Computer Science was burning. And in some cases American marines were sitting on the wall next to the ministries watching them burn. The Computer Science Minister actually talked to the marine, Corporal Tinaha, in fact, I actually called his fiance to tell her he was safe and well. So the Americans have allowed the entire core and infrastructure of the next government of Iraq to be destroyed, keeping only the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Oil. That tells it's own story. On top of that I was one of the first journalists to walk in to the National

Archaeological Museum and the National Library of Archives with all the Ottoman and state archives and the Koranic Library of the Ministry of Religious Endowment and all were burned. Petrol was poured on these documentations over them and they were all burned in 3000 degrees of heat.

Ironically, with all that irony, I managed to rescue 26 pages of the Ottoman documentation, the Ottoman library. Documents of Ottoman armies, camel thieves, letters from the sheriff Hussein of Mecca to Ali Pasha (Ottoman ruler of Baghdad) and when I got to the Jordanian border the Jordanian customs authorities stole these documents from me and refused to even give me a receipt for them, a shattering comment I'm afraid to say on the Arab world but particularly on the American occupation of Baghdad. After the Koranic Library was set on fire I raced to the headquarters of the Third Marine Force Division in Baghdad and I said there is this massive Koranic Library on fire and I said what can you do ? And under the Geneva Conventions the US Occupation Forces have a moral, whatever occupations forces there are, and they happen to be American, have a legal duty to protect documents and various embassies. There was a young officer who got on the radio and said "there was some kind of Biblical library on fire," biblical for heavens sake, and I gave him a map of the exact locations, the collaterals on the locations to the marines and nobody went there, and all the Korans were burned, Korans going back to the 16th Century totally burned.

So, somebody has an interest in destroying the center of a new government and the cultural identity of Iraq. Now the American line is these are Saddamite remnants, remnants of a Saddam regime. I don't believe this. If I was a remnant of a Saddam regime and say I was given \$20,000 to destroy the library I would say thank you very much and when the regime was gone I would pocket the money. I wouldn't go and destroy the library, I don't need to, I've got the money. Somebody or some institution or some organization today now is actively setting out to destroy the cultural identity of Iraq and the ministries that form the core of a new Iraq government. Who would be behind that and who would permit it to happen, and why is it that the US military, so famed for its ability to fight its way across the Tigris and the Euphrates river and come into Baghdad will not act under the Geneva Convention to protect these institutions ? That is the question. And I do not have the answer to it.

Goodman : There was a report today that said that the US army ignored warnings from its own civilian advisors that could have prevented the looting of Baghdad's National Museum-- this is from the London Observer. It said that the Office of the Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance set up to supervise reconstruction identified the museum as a prime target for looters in a memo to army commanders a month ago. The memo said it should be the second priority for the army after securing the national bank. General Jay Garner, who's taking over, is said to be livid. One angry reconstruction official told the Observer "we ask for just a few soldiers at each building or if they feared snipers then at least one or two tanks. The tanks were doing nothing once they got inside the city, yet the generals refused to deploy them.

Fisk : Yeah, well the Observer is always quite a bit late on the story. There was a website set up between American archaeologists and the Pentagon many weeks ago listing those areas of vital national heritage to Iraq which might be looted, damaged, stormed, burned. The museum was on that list. The museum, I have seen physically marked on the satellite pictures which the marines have to move around in Baghdad. They know

it's there, they know what it is. Now, when I got to the museum, which is far more than a week ago, there were gun battles going on between rioters and looters, bullets skittering up the walls of apartment blocks outside. It was quite clear when I walked in that looting was quite clearly.... Someone has opened the doors, the huge safe doors of the storeroom of the museum with a key. The looting was on a most detailed, precise and coordinated scale. The people knew what they wanted to go for. Those Grecian statues they didn't want they decapitated and threw to the floor. Those earrings and gold ornaments and bullring gods that they wanted to take, they took. And within a few days those priceless heritage items of Iraq's history were on sale in Europe and in America. I don't believe that that happened by chance.

Two of the interesting things : number one is the looters knew exactly what they wanted and they got it out of a country with a speed that we as journalists cannot get our stories out of the country. Secondly, a much more serious in the long term. The arsonists, the men who were going around burning, they must have had maps, they knew where to go, they knew what would not be defended by the Americans. In one case, you know this is a city without electricity, without water, I recognized one of the men who was burning things. He had a small beard, a goatee beard and he had a red t-shirt, and the second time I saw him, I looked at him and he pointed a [inaudible] rifle at me, he realized I recognized him. They were coming to the scenes of arsonists in blue and white buses. God knows where these buses were from. They weren't city corporation buses, although city corporation buses were being used by looters. But the arsonists were an army. They were calculated and they knew where to go, they had maps, they were told where to go. Who told them where to go ? Who told them where the Americans would not shoot at them or would not harm them ? This is a very, very important question that still needs to be reconciled and answered. And I do not have an answer. And none of my colleagues unfortunately have asked the American military in Qatar, in Doha what the answer is. Somebody told these people where to go, they had the maps, they knew the places to go and burn, they knew the American military would not be there and they went there and they burned. Who gave them those instructions, I don't know the answer. I really don't know the answer, but there is an answer, and we should know what this.

Goodman : Maguire Gibson, a leading Mesopotamian scholar from the University of Chicago, said he has good reason to believe that the looting or the stealing of the artifacts from the museum with men going in with forklifts and even keys to vaults... he has good reason to believe this was orchestrated from outside the country.

Fisk : There is certainly a reason to believe, Amy, that there were keys involved because some of the vaults I saw were opened with keys and not with hammers or guns or explosives. Fork lift trucks ? They had the ability to move heavy statues into trucks. When I got there, they had just done that. But I don't know if they used fork lift trucks, I think that might be a little too Hollywood. There were men who were guards to the museum in long gray beards who had taken rifles, [inaudible] Ak-47's weapons to defend what was left. But if you're saying to me "do I have evidence of fork lift trucks ? " -- No. Do I have evidence that they knew what they were coming for, yes ! Do I have evidence that this was premeditated, yes ! Do I believe that the arsonists were trained and organized from outside who knew whether or not the Americans would be present or whether the American military would defend certain buildings, yes ! They undoubtedly did know the Americans would not confront them.

And the Americans did not confront them. I actually got to a point where I was going around Baghdad a few days ago, and every time I saw a tongue of flame or smoke I'd race off in my car to the area, and the last place I went to that was burning was the Department of Higher Education/Computer Science and as I approached it I saw a marine sitting on the wall.

I bounded out of the car and raced back and thought I had better see this guy and I took his name down. His name was Ted Nyhom and he was a member of the Third Marine Fourth Regiment or Fourth Marine Third Regiment. He gave me the number of his fiancé Jessica in the states. I actually rang her up and said "your man loves you dearly" (he's a real person) and I said how the hell is this happening next door and he said "well, we're guarding a hospital" and I said "there's a fire next door, a whole bloody government ministry is burning. And he said, "yeah we can't look everywhere at the same time." I said, "Ted, what happened ? " and he said "I don't know." Now when you go to sit down... he was a nice guy, I was happy to ring his fiancé up and tell her that he was safe. But something happened there. There was a fire, an entire government ministry was burning down next to him and he did nothing. It didn't seem strange to him that he wasn't asked to do anything. Now there's something strange about that. It's not a question of whether American academic said, you know, is there something wrong with the moral property of an army that doesn't stop looting and arson. There's something terribly wrong there.

My country's army in Basra was also remiss in this way. Our Minister of Defense, Geoff Hoon, said 'oh well they were liberating their own property' when people were looting hospitals, for god's sakes. So the British don't get off on this either, but the Americans were the most remiss. And in the city of Baghdad against all the international conventions, particularly the Geneva Convention, which have a specific reference to pillage... in fact pillage appears as a crime against humanity in the Hague Conventions in 1907 upon which the Geneva Conventions of 1949 were based. There is a whole reference to pillage and the Americans did nothing. They did nothing to prevent the pillage of the entire cultural history of Iraq, of the museum, or the documentary history of the National Archives, or the Koranic Library of the Ministry of Religious Endowment or of the 155 other government locations around Baghdad. And one has to ask the question, why was this permitted to happen. I don't know the answer.

Goodman : We're talking to Robert Fisk, correspondent for the Independent newspaper in Britain. He has just come out of Iraq where he has spent the last month. He is back in Beirut where he is based. Robert, the hospitals, you spent a good amount of time there. Can you describe what you saw and perhaps what we're not seeing. If you can follow our coverage at all here in the United States.

Fisk : Well as a matter of fact this afternoon, I took several roles of film... real film, not digitized camera film into my film development shop here, and was looking again at the film of children who'd been hit by American cluster bombs in Hilla and Babylon whom I took photographs of. I'm rather shocked at myself for taking pictures of people in such suffering. I would have to say, and one must be fair as a correspondent, that I think that the Iraqis did position military tanks and missiles in civilian areas. They did so deliberately ; they did so in order to try and preserve their military apparatus in the hope that the Americans would not bomb civilian areas. The Americans did bomb civilian areas. They may or may not have destroyed the military targets ; they certainly destroyed

human beings and innocent civilians. War is a disgusting, cruel, vicious affair. You know, I say to people over and over again : war is not about primarily victory or defeat, it's primarily about human suffering and death. And if you look through the pictures, which I have beside me now as I speak to you, of little girls with huge wounds in the side of their faces made by the pieces of metal from cluster bombs, American cluster bombs, it's degoutant, as the French say, disgusting to even look at. But I have to look at them. I took these pictures.

The Iraqi regime, which was brutal and cruel and is very happy, was very happy in every sense of the word, to use these pictures as propaganda, must also of course have its own responsibility for this. But for me, the most appalling admission came when the civil coalition, which means the Americans, the British and a few Australians, decided to bomb an area, a residential area of Monsur, with four 2000-pound bombs. I hate to use these childish phrases like "bunker-busters" but these are the same bombs they dropped on Tora Bora to try and get the caves where Bin Laden was hiding in 2001 in Afghanistan. And these huge bombs destroyed the lives of a minimum of 14 civilians [in Monsur]. The central command in Doha, Qatar said they believed Saddam was there, and that they would send forensic experts. But I went there a week after the Americans entered Baghdad and no forensic experts had been sent there indeed. And the morning I turned up, I'm talking about 4 days ago, the decomposing, horribly smelling body of a little baby was pulled out of the rubble and I can promise you it wasn't Saddam Hussein, but the Americans went on insisting their forensic scientists were searching to see if Saddam Hussein had died there. Well, he did not and nor did their forensic scientists bother ; they didn't even care about going there. Outrageous. I'm sorry to say. Outrageous. I have to be a human being as well as a journalist.

Again, one needs to also say that Saddam Hussein was... is ^ I'm sure he's still alive ^ a most revolting man. He did use gas against the Iranians and against the Kurds. And I also have to say that when he used it against the Iranians, and I wrote about it in my own newspaper at the time, the Times, the British Foreign Office told my editor the story was not helpful because at that stage of course, Saddam Hussein was our friend ^ we were supporting him. The hypocrisy of war stinks almost as much as the civilian casualties. But let's go back to the hospitals. The Americans used cluster bombs in civilian areas, where they believed there were military targets. Near Hilla, I think the Iraqis probably did put military vehicles. That does not excuse the Americans ; there are specific references and paragraphs in the Geneva Conventions to protect what are called 'protected persons', that is to say civilians, even if they are in the presence of enemy combatants. But I think the Iraqis did put military positions amongst civilians. I can go so far as to say that at the museum, which was looted to the great disgrace of the Americans, prior to the American entry into Baghdad, it was clear when I got to the museum after the American entry, that the Iraqi army had placed gun positions and gun pits inside the museum grounds, at one point next to a beautiful 3000- year-old statue of a winged bull. There were other occasions when I could clearly see SAM-6 mobile tracked missiles parked very close to civilian houses. The Iraqis did use civilians as cover. And the Americans, knowing they were there, bombed the civilians anyway. So who is the war criminal ? I think both of them are. There you go. That's the story.

Goodman : Robert Fisk, do you have any idea about casualty numbers right now ?

Fisk : No, it's impossible. Amy, it's impossible. You know, I took my notebook ; I can tell you how many people in each ward were wounded in particular wards, or in particular hospitals. I can tell you which doctors told me how many people died in A, B, and C hospitals on certain dates, but when it comes to the overall figure, the losing side has no statistics, because of course the statistics die with the regime and the winning side controls all the figures. Thousands of Iraqis must have died. There was one particularly terrible scene on what was known as Highway 8. It was the main motorway alongside the Tigris river, with some university of Baghdad on the other side of the river, where for two and a half days, American soldiers of the 3rd Infantry division were fighting off ambushes, most of them members of the Republican Guard. They mounted there and I talked to all sides here. I talked to survivors, I talked to civilians, I talked to the Americans on the tanks. The ambush began at 7 : 30 on the last Monday of the war in the morning. And the motorway was quite busy with civilian traffic. The American 3rd Infantry Division commander told me that he saw civilian traffic and he ordered his men to fire warning shots, which they did he said two or three times, after which they fired at the cars. And he said 'I had a duty to protect my men.' I have to be fair and quote what he said. He said "I had a duty to protect my men, to protect my soldiers and we didn't know if they were carrying RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades) or explosives.' But cars which did not stop were fired at by United States tanks of the 3rd Infantry Division.

I walked down the line of cars which were torn apart by American tank shells. There was a very young woman burned black in the back of one car. Her husband or father or brother beside her, dead. There was the leg of a man beside another car which had been blown clean in half by an American M1-A1 tank. There were piles of blankets covering families with children who had been blown to pieces by the Americans. It was a real ambush. They were fired at by RPG -7's. In one case, one tank I saw (the American commander took me around) who'd received five hits, one of them on the engine. And he had opened fire at a motorcycle carrying two members of the Iraqi Republican Guard. One had died instantly. I found his body beside the road with his blood dribbling into the gutter. The other was wounded and the American brought him back to the tank, gave him first aid and sent him off to a medical company. The American commander ^ the same commander who told his tank crew to open fire on the civilian cars ^ told me that he saved the life of the second Republican Guard who was on the motorcycle and the guy survived. I have to assume that's correct. I didn't see him. But three days later, the bodies were still, including the young woman, were still lying in the cars. And bits of human remains were lying around in blankets. The stench was terrible. There were flies everywhere. The American officer then told me that he had asked the Red Crescent, the Muslim equivalent of the Red Cross, to move the bodies and the cars were removed. But they were still there, along with the bodies the next day. That's a fact. I saw.

Goodman : What about the journalists ? It looks like there is the highest percentage of foreign journalists, as a percentage of foreign casualties, that we have seen in a long time. It looks like the number at this point is 14 journalists killed as well as the shelling of the Palestine Hotel.

Fisk : Well, I think that the number of journalists covering war ^ indeed, the number of journalists in general ^ is increasing all the time. And so I suppose, it's not a very romantic thing to say, but I suppose that as the number of journalists increase, the number of casualties among

journalists will increase as well. There were a number of incidents which we seem to have understood. The ITV reporter, who got north of the American lines near Basra, was returning and got shot by US Marines, along with his crew. Another British reporter who may or may not have committed suicide, I don't know, which has nothing to do with the Americans or the Iraqis per se, if that's the case. We have the Palestine hotel, which is one of the more serious cases of all. That particular day began with the killing of the journalist from Al Jazeera, the Qatari/Doha television chain, which of course became famous in Afghanistan for producing tapes and airing tapes of Osama bin Laden. I had by chance, four days before Tariq [Ayoub]'s death, on the roof of that television station, been giving a broadcast myself live to Doha. And while I was broadcasting, a cruise missile went streaking by behind the building and literally moved over the bridge on the right and carried on up the river Tigris and there was an airstrike behind me. And I said to Tariq afterwards, I think this is the most dangerous bloody newspaper office in the history of the world, you know ? You're in really great danger here. There were gun pits on the right. And he agreed with me. And four days later, while he was on the roof preparing to do a broadcast, an American jet came in so low, according to his colleagues downstairs, they thought it would land on the roof, and fired a single missile at the generator beside him and killed him. About three and a quarter hours later, an American M1A1 Abrams tank on the Jumeirah River bridge, about three quarters of a mile from the Palestine Hotel where the journalists were staying, fired a single round, a depleted uranium round, as I understand, at the office of Reuters where they were filming the same tanks on the bridge.

I was actually between the tank and the hotel, when the round was fired. I was trying to get back from a story, an assignment I'd been on, what I'd put myself on. And the shell with an extraordinary noise swooshed over my head and hit the hotel... bang ! Tremendous concussion. White Smoke. And when I got there, two of my colleagues, one from Reuters and one from Spanish Television, both of whom were to die within a few hours, the first one within half an hour, were being brought out in blood-soaked bed-sheeting. And a Lebanese colleague, a woman, Samia, with a piece of metal in her brain. She recovered. She had brain surgery. She's married to the London Financial Times correspondent here in Beirut. She survived. The initial reaction was very interesting because the BBC went on air saying it was an Iraqi rocket-propelled grenade. Someone wanted to frighten the press. Then it emerged, thanks be to God for the attempt to get the truth, that TV3, a French channel, had recorded the tanks' movements and I actually rushed to their Bureau and they showed me the videotape and you saw the American tanks for five minutes beforehand, in complete silence ^ there was nothing happening ^ going onto the bridge, moving its turret, and then firing at the hotel. The camera shakes and pieces of plaster and paint fall in front of the camera. Clearly, it's the same shot. Four or five minutes in which nothing is happening. Now I was in between the tank and the hotel and there was complete silence. And when initially the Americans said they knew nothing about it, when it became clear the French had a film, before the Americans realized how long the film was running for prior to the attack, they said that the tank was under persistent sniper and RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) fire which is not true. I would have heard it because I was close to the tank and the hotel and it would have been picked up on the soundtrack, which it wasn't. This statement was made by General Buford Blount, the same 3rd Infantry Division commander who boasted that he'd be using depleted uranium munitions during the war in

an interview with Le Monde in March, a month ago. And he then said that there had been sniper fire and after the round was fired by the American tank, the sniper fire had ceased. In other words, the clear implication was that the gunfire had come from the Reuters office, which was a most mendacious, vicious lie by General Blount. General Blount lied in order to cover up the death of journalists. It was interesting that when indeed the Americans actually arrived in central Baghdad within a day, no journalists were raising these issues with the Americans who'd just arrived. They should have done... I did actually. And in fact two days later, I was on the Jumeirah bridge, and climbed onto the second tank and asked the tank commander whether he fired at the journalists and he said "I don't know anything about that, sir. I'm new here." Which he may well have been. How do I know if he was there before or not ? But that tank round was fired deliberately at the hotel and General Blount's counterfeit - the commander of the 3rd Infantry Division - was a lie. A total lie. And it was a grotesque lie against my colleagues. Samia Mahul had a piece of metal in her brain, A young woman who's most bravely reported the Lebanese civil war. And against the Ukrainian cameraman for Reuters and against the Spanish cameraman in the room upstairs. It was a most disgusting lie. And as a journalist, I have to say that. And General Blount has not apologized for it. So far he has gotten away with his lie. I'm sorry to say.

Amy : le Nouvel Observateur, the French Newspaper, is reporting that a US Army captain named Captain Wolford said unlike what the military reported, he did not see sniper fire from the Palestine hotel. But he did see what he thought was light glinting off of binoculars from one of the hotel's balconies. He said he had never been told the Palestine Hotel was the home base for almost all the international journalists in Baghdad and assumed the...

Fisk : Well, yeah I've heard this story. I know this. Well, if American commanders in the field are not told the intelligence information about where people are in what hotels, it doesn't say much about the American military. Look I don't think the American military people are inherently wrong or awful or bad. You know, I met lots of American soldiers and Marines of course. Marines insist on telling me they're not soldiers, which is an odd thing for a Brit to hear, but I have to accept it. They were decent people. One young Marine came up to me. He wanted to use my mobile phone to call his home and I let him, of course. And he said "I'm really sorry, sir, about the death of your colleagues." Like he meant it. I don't think these are intrinsically bad people. I think the idea that there's some ghastly, you know, evil moving among the American military is not true. I don't believe that. I think they're decent people and I think they want to be decent people. When their generals lie, it must be hard, as Buford Blount lied. General Blount lied about the journalists. He lied. He was a [inaudible] soldier.

But the ordinary soldiers I met, I think they were quite sympathetic. I think they understood. And I think that in some cases, they were very upset about what had happened to our colleagues, but they were also upset about civilian casualties whom they'd caused. You know, when on Highway 8, I was interviewing the American tank commander who'd given the order to fire at the civilian cars on the road, I thought he was a decent person. I have to say that when I read my notes afterwards, and I reflected upon the fact that the bodies of the innocents were still lying in the cars three days later, I was less inclined to be kind to him. I was less inclined to think he was a nice person. But I don't think that the American soldiers were bad people. I think they believed in what they were doing, up

to the point that you can. I think that they believed that their war was an honorable one, even though I don't think it was. But I think that they had been previously misled and I think something has gone wrong with the leadership of the American military when you can have a general like Blount lying about the press. If to see a flash of what appears to be a camera or some kind of reflecting instrument in a window is to be the signal for capital punishment for those who are legitimately filming the war for an international news agency, something has gone terribly wrong. I think the real problem at the end of the day lies in the White House, with President Bush.

There were a number of American Marines and soldiers I met who were very helpful to me in understanding what was happening. At one point, I was next to an American tank that came under fire ^ I don't know where from ^ and I thought the soldiers behaved with great restraint. They could have shot at civilians. In some cases, I know in other places in Baghdad, they did and killed people and I think it was a war crime to have done so. But in the American tank I was close to, they did not. And those soldiers behaved admirably. I have to say that. I think they were frightened, I think they were tired. They hadn't washed etc. but I'm sorry, I don't get too romantic about soldiers who invade other peoples' countries. But I thought their discipline was probably pretty good, to be frank. In other places, it was not. But again, you know, war is primarily about suffering and death, not about victory and defeat and not about presidents who ^ oh, I'm so tired of talking about your president. Or indeed the president of Iraq who's a pretty vicious man frankly if he's still alive. Where is he ? That should be your last question, Amy : Where is Saddam Hussein ?

Goodman : Well. I'm not there yet. But you mentioned your Colleague...

Fisk : You're going to ask me where he is, aren't you ? (they laugh)

Goodman : OK, where is he ?

Fisk : You know what, I have this absolute fixation that he's in Belarus, the most horrible ex-Soviet state that exists : Minsk. I tell you why I think this. This is long before the Iran ^ sorry, Freudian slip ^ long before the Iraq war, I had this absolute obsession that Minsk ^ I've been to Minsk ; it's a horrible city ! It's full of whiskey, corruption, prostitutes and damp apartments. Very, very favorable to the Ba'ath party of Iraq. And I noticed in the local newspaper here in Beirut, I fear about six or seven weeks ago an article that said that the Olympic committee of Belarus in Minsk had invited Uday Hussein, beloved son of the 'great ruler of Iraq', to a chess tournament in Minsk and I thought, My God, this is where they're going to go. And if you think of all the stories which may be complete hogwash of how they got out by train with the Russian ambassador through Syria, where else to go but Minsk ? I actually mentioned it to my foreign desk and my foreign editor said "Off you go to Belarus !" and I said "No please, please, not Belarus ! I've been there before. It's awful !" But I do have this kind of suspicion maybe he's there. But there you go. He may be in Baghdad. He may be captured tonight. I really have not the slightest idea.

Goodman : Robert Fisk, you mentioned your Lebanese colleague who has shrapnel in her head and said she covered the civil war in Beirut, which brings us to a piece you did about questioning whether what we're going to see in Iraq is the beginning of a civil war between the Sunni and the Shiia. What do you think now ?

Fisk : Well, if it's not the beginning of a civil war between the Sunni

and the Shiia in Iraq, it will be the beginning of a war of liberation by the Sunni and the Shiia themselves against the Americans. My feeling is that there will be a war ^ it may already have begun ^ against the Americans by the Iraqis. The Kurds will play a different role for all kinds of reasons, but the Sunnis and the Shiias may well find some unity in trying to get rid of their occupiers. You know, one can't help in the Middle East but be struck by the ironies of history. Just over a week before ^ no, two weeks before America invaded Iraq, a document went on auction. It's a public auction in Britain at Swinden in southwestern England. And I made a bid for it. As a matter of fact, I found out it was going to go on sale and it was the official British document issued by Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Maude after he invaded Iraq with the British Army in 1917. And it was his proclamation to the people of the Zilayah, that's to say the governorate of Baghdad. And I quote from the first paragraph : "We come here not as conquerors, but as liberators to free you from the tyranny of generations," just like President Bush says he's come now. I actually wrote about this document in the newspaper and said it was going to come up for auction which was a very bad mistake because the auctioneers rang me up from Swinden, England to Beirut when I was actually interviewing, ironically enough, three Iraqi refugees here in Beirut. And they said do you want to bid for it, the bidding has started. I said yes I will bid for it. And it was originally going to go for US \$156. And so many readers of the Independent who'd read my article turned up ^ it actually went for \$2000. And God spare me, I bought it. So now I am the owner of Sir Stanley Maude's document, telling the people of Baghdad that the new occupiers, the British Army of 1917, had come there as liberators, not as conquerors, to free them from the tyranny of generations of tyrants and dictators. And now, you know, a few weeks later, there I am in Baghdad, listening to the American Marine Corps issuing an identical document, telling the people they'd come not as conquerors, but as liberators, and I wonder sometimes whether people ever, ever read history books.

Goodman : We're talking to Robert Fisk, the correspondent for The Independent. He is tired. He has just come out of Iraq after a month...

Fisk : He's definitely tired, Amy. He's very definitely tired, yeah.

Goodman : Well, I wanted to ask you about ^ you might have heard about Judith Miller's report in the New York Times, saying a former Iraqi scientist has told a US military team that Iraq destroyed chemical weapons and biological warfare equipment only days before the war began and also said Iraq secretly sent unconventional weapons and technology to Syria starting in the 80's and that more recently...

Fisk : (overlapping) : How amazing... how amazing... how very fortunate that that special report should come out now. Listen, every time I read Judith Miller in the New York Times, I nod sagely and smile. That's all I'm going to say to you, Amy. I'm sorry. Don't ask me to even comment upon it. It's not a serious issue.

Goodman : Then let me ask you about the targeting of Syria right now.

Fisk : Look, Syria will not be invaded by the United States because it doesn't have enough oil. It will be threatened by the United States, on Israel's behalf perhaps, but it doesn't have sufficient oil to make it worth invading. So the answer is : Syria will not be invaded.

Goodman : As you leave Iraq and you look back at what you saw, what are key areas that you see as different, for example, than the Persian Gulf War and what happened afterwards and what are you going to pursue right now ?

Fisk : Well, we've got the first occupation of an Arab capital by a Western army since General Allenby entered Jerusalem and since Sir Stanley Maude entered Baghdad. We did have the brief period of French and American armies entering Damascus and indeed Beirut in the second World War. But that was part of a Vichy French Allied War. It wasn't part of a colonial war. We now have American troops occupying the wealthiest Arab country in the world. And the shockwaves of that are going to continue for decades to come, long after you and I are in our graves, if that's where we go. And I don't think we have yet realized ^ I don't think that the soldiers involved or the Presidents involved have yet realized the implications of what has happened. We have entered a new age of imperialism, the life of which we have not attempted to judge or assess or understand.

Well, I'm 56 now - maybe I'll never see the end of it, I probably won't. But my goodness me, I've never seen such historical acts take place in the 27 years I've been in the Middle East. And the results cannot be good. I don't believe we've gone to Iraq because of weapons of mass destruction. If we'd done that, we would have invaded North Korea. I don't believe we've gone there because of human rights abuses because we connived at those abuses for many years when we supported Saddam. I think we've gone there for oil. And though we may get the oil, I think the price will be very high. More than that, I don't know. You know, my crystal ball, as I always say, has broken a long time ago. But I'll keep on watching the story, I guess, because like my father who was much older than my mother, was a soldier in the first World War, I want to keep watching history happen. I would, however, yet again, for the umpteenth time on your program, Amy, quote Amira Haas, that wonderful journalist for Ha'aretz, the Israeli newspaper, who said "the purpose of journalism is to monitor the centers of power" and we still do not do that, and we must monitor the centers of power and we must try to question why governments do the things that they do and why they lie about it. And we don't do that. We don't do that.

Goodman : Well Robert Fisk, I want to thank you for doing that.

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