



# IRAQ INVASION

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## America shaken by images of PoWs

### Outrage as interviews with injured prisoners broadcast

THE GUARDIAN, Washington

The last time American prisoners of war were paraded on television - when the corpses of soldiers were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993 - US public opinion quickly came to view the conflict as a disastrous debacle, and troops left soon afterwards. Yesterday's footage caused outrage among politicians and the public, and threw media organisations into a panic about how to deal with it.

The CBS television network was the only major broadcaster to show the tape, and it did so while Donald Rumsfeld, the US secretary of defence, was still in the studio.

Immediately afterwards, reportedly after being contacted by the Pentagon, the channel agreed to show it with the prisoners' faces blurred. Interviewed later on CNN, Mr Rumsfeld said: "Television networks that carry such pictures are, I would say, doing something that's unfortunate".

CNN itself did not show the video, choosing instead to carry repeatedly a single still photograph from the Arab-language news channel al-Jazeera, showing uniformed corpses lying on the floor, but without any identifying features. It warned viewers that the images were "disturbing".

At a briefing in Qatar, Lieutenant-General John Abizaid said he was "very disappointed" that al-Jazeera had screened the

footage, promising to "hold those [responsible] accountable for their actions," including possible breach of the Geneva convention. "I would say the pictures were disgusting."

Pentagon officials, aware that the captured soldiers' names would inevitably become public soon, scrambled to inform their families. Officials issued an alert to media organisations repeating their request that the prisoners not be identified until the families knew.

But around El Paso, home to the Fort Bliss military base from which the missing soldiers came, the news was permeating too fast to be controlled. Anecita Hudson, from Almagordo outside El Paso, identified herself as the mother of Joseph Hudson, the name given by one of the soldiers interviewed on Iraqi TV. She had seen the footage on a Filipino television station she subscribes to.

"It's my son. My son is OK," she told a reporter from the El Paso Times. "I'm praying my son will be all right."

Confusion reigned at the base, where a press conference was called off at the last minute, just as Colonel Ben Hobson was walking towards the podium. He reportedly received a call from a three-star general in Washington instructing him to call off the event.

Base officials said army chaplains, and a "family readiness group" founded by spouses of the

men and women serving in Iraq, were in touch with some of the families involved. "The army is fully prepared to take care of its own and will see to it that the families of these soldiers are taken care of in the proper way," a statement issued by Fort Bliss authorities said.

The US army insisted that the events would not cause a "Somalia effect" among the public or the military, even if that had been the aim of the Iraqi regime. "Certainly, I don't think that these pictures will damage either the psychology of our soldiers, morale of our soldiers, or the steadfastness of our government, or the resolve of our people," Gen Abizaid said. "We're a pretty tough people."

Lawrence Korb, an assistant secretary of defence in the Reagan administration, said a Somalia-style alienation of US public opinion was probably Iraq's propaganda aim. "I think in his own mind, Saddam Hussein thinks it will be another Somalia, where, when you saw the Americans being dragged through the streets, people said: 'What the hell are we doing there? This is not our fight. How did this happen?'"

AFP adds: Just minutes after Al-Jazeera first broadcast the pictures worldwide, the Pentagon admitted that around 10 US soldiers had been taken prisoner. US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called it "part of Iraqi propaganda."

Iraq said the troops had been

killed in fierce fighting in the southern city of Nasiriyah, where it claimed 25 US and British soldiers were dead and an unspecified number wounded in the worst known coalition setback so far.

Britain said none of its troops had been taken prisoner in Iraq but that two British airmen were killed by friendly fire from a US Patriot missile.

Throughout day four of the US-led war, Iraqi officials vowed coalition troops were headed to their doom even as reporters travelling with ground forces reported they were speeding over the desert and now just 100 km (60 miles) from Baghdad.

"We let them go for a walk in the desert, but all our towns will resist," Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan said. The area of Ramadan's Baghdad office was pounded in the night-time raid.

US President George W. Bush vowed that anyone who did not treat POWs under the Geneva conventions would be later dealt with as war criminals. Iraq said it would respect the conventions.

The International Committee for the Red Cross said the broadcast of the soldiers was a violation of the international rules of war.

But the images of US prisoners will have renewed the spirit of Saddam's true believers in Baghdad, where US officials said more than 300 cruise missiles fell in Friday night's "shock and awe" assault alone.



This US Navy handout photo released March 23 shows a US Navy Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) being launched from the guided missile cruiser USS Cape St. George, in the Mediterranean Sea. Cape St. George is operating in the eastern Mediterranean Sea conducting missions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

## The terror of bombs

NEW YORK TIMES, Baghdad

Safely confined to an antiseptic television screen, a display of aerial bombardment can be impressive -- the red, pink and orange tints creating a maelstrom of colour and power as the night sky is lit up for miles around the target. Even the crumps and the noises-off lose their element of danger. It can almost look like a big firework display -- noisy, exciting and impressive, with each new blast prompting the desire for something bigger and better. Giant plumes of smoke and fire become spectacles. There's a frisson of danger and the pyrotechnics are breathtaking. The blitz of Baghdad has been a bit like that.

But for those on the receiving end, the effect is somewhat different. The sound from the exploding munitions is deafening, for many people literally so. The shockwaves shake buildings to their foundations and shards of glass and shrapnel slice through the air, shredding trees and cutting down

anything and anyone in their path. Buildings collapse with such power that it is impossible for any of the occupants to survive. Firestorms caused by the explosions are hugely destructive. The air raids might look awe-inspiring from a distance, but for the victims the experience is awful.

As one war correspondent noted as he observed the use of air power for the first time: 'Aeroplanes are most effective against morale. They frighten; they exhaust; they break nerves.' The writer was Tom Wintringham and he was describing the use of German bombers during the Spanish civil war in the 1930s, when aerial bombardment was still in its infancy. Nothing he witnessed could have rivalled the intensity of the raids on Baghdad, but some aspects of war do not change.

It is likely that most Iraqis would have recognised the sense of fear felt by the inhabitants of those Spanish cities. Although many Iraqis had already experienced

Allied air attacks on their city in the 1990s, nothing could have prepared them for the weight and intensity of last week's 'big bang' raids. Even US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld admitted that there had been nothing like it before in the history of modern warfare.

Allied to the fear generated by bombing raids is a sense of powerlessness -- a perception that those on the receiving end can do nothing about their fate. On the battlefield, gunfire is regarded as an essential feature of combat and part of the soldier's contract.

But the civilian covering in a shelter feels impotent and alone. Continuous bombardments compound that fear and the uncertainty. The longer a raid lasts, the greater the terror; the greater the frequency of the bombing, the more morale is damaged. Resilience is easily exhausted.

In a bombing raid, death comes horribly. Fire is the worst fear, vapourising bodies so that nothing remains. Being injured, trapped or

lost is also a frightening prospect, not least when the rescue services are ill-equipped to cope with a large-scale emergency -- as is clearly the case in Baghdad.

There are other psychological aspects of bombing: the fear that precedes them and the reserves of courage which are used up during each successive raid. For the victims of the blitz of Baghdad the alarm is raised by a device which in other circumstances would seem homely and familiar: the domestic television set, normally the bringer of entertainment and information.

Even before the 'big bang' air raids were mounted on Baghdad, the city's inhabitants could witness the approach of death and destruction. Those citizens with access to global satellite television could watch the big B52 bombers being loaded with their deadly cargoes long before they arrived over Iraqi skies to disgorge their bombs and missiles. It was must have seemed very much like watching a firing squad loading its guns for execution.



An Iraqi boy listens to a speech by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein yesterday. Saddam promised Iraqis a swift victory in a speech to the nation, a day after the US-led coalition suffered its worst losses so far in the war against his regime.

## Saddam promises quick victory

AFP, Baghdad

President Saddam Hussein on Monday promised a quick Iraqi victory over British and US forces, after the country came under a fearsome battering in more air raids.

"Victory is near," Saddam said in an address to the nation broadcast on state television.

"Hit your enemy with force and precision," said the Iraqi strongman, dressed in an olive green military uniform.

Saddam said US and British forces were advancing into "a dead end", following reports they were just 150 km from the capital.

"The more they advance into Iraqi territory, the more they head into a dead end," he said in his second speech since the US-led war to topple his regime began with an attempt to "decapitate" him by aerial bombing Thursday.

The address offered evidence that he had survived the bid as it made reference to ongoing battles with coalition forces in the southern Iraqi town of Umm Qasr.

However, the Iraqi president is known to have doubles and it was not clear whether the speech was live or recorded, as is always the case in Baghdad.

Baghdad was rocked late Sunday and early Monday by the most intense bombardment of the

capital in 48 hours and huge clouds of smoke rose over the city in the morning.

Air sirens sounded in the Iraqi capital again at 9:40 a.m. (0640 GMT), AFP correspondents reported.

There were no immediate explosions or bursts of anti-aircraft activity around Baghdad.

The Arabic news channel Al-Jazeera also reported that the main northern Iraqi city of Mosul was rocked by three fresh US-led air raids on Monday, the last of which hit at about 7:20 a.m. (0420 GMT).

Iraqi anti-aircraft batteries opened up during the first two raids, the network's correspondent said, without being able to give specific information on the targets.

And US warplanes struck Iraqi frontlines between the northern oil capital of Kirkuk and the Kurdish-held town of Chamchamal for the first time early Monday in a sign that a key second front against Baghdad was about to kick into action, an AFP correspondent witnessed.

The strikes came as US forces were reported to be closing in on Baghdad in their bid to topple Saddam after moving past stiff resistance in southern Iraq and suffering their first significant losses in the Euphrates river town of Nasiriyah.

## The toughest day

BBC NEWS ONLINE, Central Command HQ in Qatar

The battle around Nasiriyah may be a turning point in public perceptions of this war.

It is going to involve some real fighting and there will be casualties and setbacks for both sides.

But the real question is what the Iraqi resistance at Nasiriyah implies for the future course of this conflict.

There is no doubting the pace of the US advance into southern Iraq. But that pace itself poses the age-old military problem of securing lines of communication.

It is no surprise then that the US servicemen and one woman captured by the Iraqis came from a maintenance battalion, not a combat unit, moving up to support the advance.

All the evidence suggests that small units loyal to Saddam Hussein's regime have been dispersed in a number of locations in

southern Iraq to attack and possibly delay US forces following up this rapid advance.

Saddam Hussein's only real strategic options are to sit tight in Baghdad and hope that his military can inflict casualties on the US and British forces and slow their progress.

But the decisive engagement in this war could be close at hand.

US and British spokesmen say that air attacks have already begun on the Republican Guard units that stand between the advancing coalition forces and Baghdad.

But this is a war of many battles. Defeating Iraqi units loyal to Saddam Hussein is only one part of the US war plan.

The direct attack upon the Iraqi regime's nervous system in and around Baghdad is equally important.

The US and Britain need Saddam Hussein's regime to collapse and will not want a long standoff at the gates of the city.

## More warplanes than targets

AFP, Aboard The USS Kitty Hawk

The United States may have more warplanes over Iraq than there are targets on the ground, the commander of this aircraft carrier's battle group said Sunday.

"You always want to make sure that you have more capability than you need and it's one of the basic premises of war -- that is, mass," Rear Admiral Matthew Moffitt told reporters.

Since Friday, the Kitty Hawk's F/A-18 Hornet attack fighters and F-14 Tomcat fighters have been supporting US marines and army troops in Iraq but very few of the planes have bombed targets, according to data from navy spokesmen.

Asked whether there were more aircraft than targets, Moffitt said, "Yes, I would suspect there might be some of that."

Along with the Kitty Hawk's

strike fighters, two other US carriers in the Gulf as well as air force and marine planes are also flying missions over Iraq.

"We want to make sure that we have an appropriate level of mass to handle whatever might come relative to those troops on the ground," Moffitt said.

"It is not necessarily a count of how much you deliver but it's really what targets you take out with it," he said.

By early Sunday evening two Hornets from Kitty Hawk's Royal Maces squadron had dropped four 500-pound bombs on Republican Guard artillery positions south of Baghdad, Lieutenant Junior Grade Nicole Kratzer said.

She could not specify the exact location of the attack.

Of 70 strike missions over Iraq on Saturday, seven aircraft

dropped a total of 13 bombs, Kratzer said.

No bombs were dropped Friday when Kitty Hawk's aircraft began flying close air support missions for troops in the war zone.

Moffitt said the carrier's aircraft were going "as far forward as the troops are."

Moffitt said the number of sorties from the carrier had decreased, partly to allow more time for co-ordination and target identification and partly because the pilots now have a longer way to travel.

"The further they are away from us, the more fuel it takes for the aircraft to get there, to remain on station, deliver ordnance and then come back," Moffitt said.



A protester from Pakistan's six-party religious Islamic alliance of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) shouts anti-US slogans during a massive protest rally in the eastern city of Lahore. Some 200,000 angry Pakistanis at the biggest anti-US rally in Lahore called for an immediate halt of US bombings in Iraq.