CHAPTER 11

Non-embedded Reporting from Iraq

By Dahr Jamail

“Any dictator would admire the uniformity and obedience of the U.S. media.”—Noam Chomsky

“In a time of universal deceit—telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”—George Orwell

The struggle to maintain personal safety while working in Iraq as an independent, non-embedded journalist nearly matches the struggle to combat the corporate media “coverage” of the horrific situation on the ground. Growing a beard, dressing local, using different cars, exiting the hotel at different times to avoid kidnapping are all part of the deal; yet the risk of working independently in occupied Iraq is necessary if we are to get the real story. Yet by assuming these risks, trust is immediately earned from people I wish to interview; and in this way, an independent journalist is able to report stories that a reporter accompanied by U.S. soldiers never could.

One of the myriad of stories failing to be reported by corporate media is the strength, dignity and generosity of the Iraqi people. When I am working on a story, inevitably I am asked by Iraqis to join them for lunch, or even to spend the night at their home inside embattled Fallujah. If time doesn’t allow for a meal, then to not at least share tea with someone would be an insult. The constant outpouring of warmth and generosity from a people who have
suffered through two wars, decades of dictatorship, 13 years of brutal economic sanctions, and now a bloody occupation dragging on with no end in sight is overwhelming.

My hope is that the spirit of the Iraqi people as well as the horrific circumstances they are enduring under the illegal, U.S.-led occupation of their country are brought forth to the reader in the following web logs.

Media Held Guilty of Deception
BY DAHR JAMAIL, INTER PRESS SERVICE

ROME, Feb 14/05 (IPS)—A people’s tribunal has held much of Western media guilty of inciting violence and deceiving people in its reporting of Iraq. The World Tribunal on Iraq (WTI), an international peoples initiative seeking the truth about the war and occupation in Iraq made its pronouncement Sunday after a three-day meeting. The tribunal heard testimony from independent journalists, media professors, activists, and member of the European Parliament, Michele Santoro.

The Rome session of the WTI followed others in Brussels, London, Mumbai, New York, Hiroshima-Tokyo, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Lisbon. The Rome meeting focused on the media role.

The informal panel of WTI judges accused the governments of the United States and Britian of impeding journalists in performing their task, and intentionally producing lies and misinformation.

The panel accused western corporate media of filtering and suppressing information, and of marginalizing and endangering independent journalists. More journalists were killed in a 14-month period in Iraq than in the entire Vietnam War.

The tribunal said mainstream media reportage on Iraq also violated article six of the Nuremberg Tribunal (set up to try Nazi crimes) which states: “Leaders, organizers, instigators, and accomplices participating in the formulation or execution of a common plan or conspiracy to commit any of the foregoing crimes (crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity) are
responsible for all acts performed by any persons in execution of such a plan.”

The panel that heard testimonies included Francois Houtart, director of the Tricontinental Centre in Belgium that has backed several peoples’ movements in Latin America, and Dr. Samir Amin, director of the Third World Forum in Dakar, Senegal. Dr. Haleh Afshar, who teaches politics and women’s studies at the University of York in Britain, and Italian author and newspaper editor Ernesto Pallotta witnessed the proceedings.

“This is not simply an exercise to denounce the mainstream media for their bias and incompetence,” said Dr. Tony Alessandrini, a human rights activist who has published several articles on the U.S. colonization of Iraq. “These denunciations have been going on for months. Here in Rome, we must go further.”

Alessandrini, who helped organize the WTI added, “What we are being asked to consider is not simply media bias, but rather the active complicity of media in crimes that have been committed, and are being committed, on a daily basis against the people in Iraq.”

Several experts gave strong testimony. Dr. Peter Phillips, director of Project Censored at Sonoma State University in California where he teaches media censorship, provided taped testimony. He said that at no time since the 1930s has the United States been so close to “institutionalized totalitarianism,” and added, “U.S. society has become the least informed, best entertained society in the world.”

The WTI Rome session also heard testimony from Dr. David Miller from Scotland, author of *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*. “This is about condemning journalistic complicity of war crimes,” said Dr. Miller who is also co-editor of Spinwatch, a group that monitors public relations and propaganda. Miller said the Pentagon “does not recognize the concept of independent journalists, who are seen as providers of unfriendly information.” He further notes that mainstream media in the United States and in Britain are “complicit in the selling of the invasion and ongoing occupation. All studies conducted on mainstream media show dominance by government policies, and
wartime coverage by TV news in the UK is generally sympathetic to the government’s case.”

Fernando Suarez, who lost his son Jesus Suarez during the invasion of Iraq when he is said to have stepped on an illegal U.S. cluster bomb, also testified at the tribunal. Suarez testified that he was first told by the Pentagon that his son died from a gunshot to the head, then that he died in an accident, and then that he had died in ‘friendly fire.’ On inspecting his son’s body Suarez said he discovered that his son had died from stepping on a cluster bomb. “I never had the truth from them,” Suarez added. “I found the truth, and the truth was very simple. On March 26 the Army dropped 20,000 cluster bombs in Iraq, but only about 20 percent exploded. The other 80 percent are in the cities and the schools and acting as mines.” Suarez said: “Bush said he sent my son because Iraq had illegal weapons, and my son died from an illegal American weapon, and nobody has spoken about this. The media will not talk about the illegal American weapons.”

Several witnesses testified about media disinformation regarding the siege of Fallujah. They were presented copies of the award winning documentary Weapons of Mass Deception by journalist and filmmaker Danny Schechter, who is also executive editor of Mediachannel.org, an online media issues network.

Alessandrini said evidence of active complicity of the mainstream media in wrongs committed against the people of Iraq, and the wrongs of deception and incitement, was now overwhelming. “We work from the understanding that history will recall the crimes committed against the people of Iraq by the U.S.,” he said. “It is our responsibility to record these crimes in order to ensure these crimes are never again repeated.”

**Iraqi Women Paying the Price**
BY DAHR JAMAIL, ISLAM ONLINE January 24, 2005

Kidnapping has become the crime of choice amongst Iraqi criminal gangs. With 70 percent unemployment in “liberated” Iraq, crime is
running rampant, with organized crime enjoying a free hand amidst the terrible security situation.

The families of the kidnapped are at times forced to pay up to several million dollars ransom unless they want to receive pieces of their loved ones, or even their dead bodies. While media attention has focused heavily on the kidnapping of Westerners, the kidnapping of Iraqis, in particular Iraqi women, is much more common. As far back as July 2003, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that “the poor security situation in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities is causing women and girls to severely restrict their movements for fear of rape and abduction.” HRW blames the huge increase in kidnappings and sexual assaults on the collapse of the security forces of ex-dictator Saddam Hussein and the U.S. occupation’s slow reorganization of Iraq’s police force. Within three months of the fall of Baghdad, HRW had documented 70 cases of rape and abduction of Iraqi women. As brutal as the regime of Saddam Hussein was, violent crime against women averaged only one case every three months under Hussein’s rule, whereas in July 2003, there were several per week. And the situation is far, far worse today.

On December 4, 2004, Inji, a 29-year-old veterinarian, was in her clinic near Kirkuk. She and Mohamed, her assistant, were asked to accompany a man who needed help inoculating some cattle. They drove down a small dirt road to where the man said the cattle would be located. “I didn’t expect anything bad to happen,” she says wearily. “The roads to the nearby villages are all unpaved and deserted. Then another car stopped. It had three passengers, people I presumed to be his relatives or friends, but that wasn’t the case. One of the passengers walked up and hit me on the head with his gun,” she said, still processing the horrible events, “I saw them hit Mohamed when they pulled me into the car. After 15 minutes I tried to speak and they hit me again.” They drove along dirt roads for two hours. Then Inji was dragged out of the car, while other men pulled Mohamed from a second car. “The men ordered me to take off my jewelry, then beat me so much I could no longer feel pain,” she says quietly. The kidnappers then used her mobile phone to call
her husband, Turhan. He was told that his wife was kidnapped, and that he had 24 hours to pay $20,000 in ransom. Otherwise, he was told, she would be sold. “I was kept in a dark room on a bare floor with a dirty blanket,” she explained. “They made me call my husband and tell him to prepare the money, and I swore to them that my family could not afford this money.” One of the kidnappers responded, “Let the democracy that you call for collect the money for you.” “I called my husband and begged him to save me,” she said, “but then the man grabbed my phone and told my husband not to call the police or they would kill me.” “I thought the only people being kidnapped were those who were dealing with the Americans or were rich,” she explained, her hands held up in confusion. Inji has no affiliation with the occupiers or with any political party, nor does she work for the government. Miraculously, her husband managed to raise the money and ransom Inji. But it does not always end well for the victims and their families.

Abdulla Hamid, a 50-year-old Baghdad resident, related how his neighbor’s son was kidnapped. The family managed to raise and pay the $15,000 ransom. They were then contacted by the kidnappers, who told them to pick their son up at the morgue.

Or, take for example Seif, a student at the Baghdad Medical School. After he was abducted, his family, incapable of producing the $40,000 demanded by his captors, made the mistake of contacting the police, who tracked down the kidnappers. Seif was killed during the exchange of gunfire between the police and his captors.

While Iraqi government officials continue to blame the kidnappings on various Iraqi resistance groups, the groups themselves deny any involvement. With Iraq’s borders left virtually wide open during the first 6 months of the occupation, terrorist groups and criminal gangs alike flowed into the lawless country. Not all criminal gangs were satisfied with ransom money. Twenty-three-year-old Sajidah and her 17-year-old sister-in-law Hanan were kidnapped just weeks after Sajidah’s wedding. The two women were taken to Yemen, where they found 130 other Iraqi women who had been kidnapped and forced into prostitution by their captors.
Miraculously, they were able to contact family members who managed to make their way to Yemen and free the two women.

Fakhriyah is around 20 years old, but she doesn’t know for sure. In fact, she can no longer recall her father’s name, as she is now a drug addict. “I was living in an orphanage and was kidnapped the day Baghdad fell,” said Fakhriyah. She described how an American tank was stationed near the orphanage due to its proximity to an airport, and how the U.S. troops allowed the orphanage to be looted. “The kidnappers took turns raping me, and I don’t remember how long they kept me until they threw me out on the street,” she said, dazed and high on glue, trying to blot out her miserable existence. She uses any drug she can get her hands on, “so I don’t feel what’s going on around me or who is raping me again.”

As horrific as the regime of former dictator Saddam Hussein was Iraqis now long for the security it provided. Rape was uncommon then. Now, kidnapping and rape are everyday occurrences. Just three weeks ago the Al-Zaman newspaper reported that 11 children had been abducted in Baghdad in a single day. These stories are commonplace, and they have caused widespread fear in Baghdad and other cities, scaring many women and girls off the streets. Women now go out only when necessary, and are generally accompanied by male relatives.

“I don’t go anywhere at night, and only go to school and places close to my home,” said Intisar, a 21-year-old physics student at Baghdad University, citing her fear of being kidnapped.

Layla, a 52-year-old pharmacist in the al-Adhamiya district of Baghdad said that she lives in constant fear of being kidnapped, or having one of her children kidnapped. “We are all afraid and I cannot go alone anywhere,” she said. “Even my older daughters, I fear for them. This is not a normal life we are living anymore.”

Who bears the responsibility for this state of affairs? Aside from those directly committing these crimes, the responsibility lies with the occupiers. According to international humanitarian law, the occupying power has the duty to restore and maintain public order and safety, and to respect the fundamental rights of the occupied territory’s inhabitants. Despite the facade of an independent
“interim Iraqi government,” the U.S. occupation effectively controls Iraq to this day. The occupiers set up the “laws” which are currently in effect in Iraq, and thus are primarily responsible for the atrocious security situation that has allowed crimes of this kind to become commonplace in Iraq today.

Additionally, the Fourth Geneva Convention states that “women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honor, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.” This is yet another example of the occupation forces violating international law. As usual, it is the people of Iraq, and particularly women, in this case, who are paying the heaviest price.

U.S. Military Resorting To Collective Punishment
BY DAHR JAMAIL, INTER PRESS SERVICE

BAGHDAD, Jan 18/05 (IPS)—The U.S. military is resorting to collective punishment tactics in Iraq similar to those used by Israeli troops in the occupied territories of Palestine, residents say. Military bulldozers have mown down palm groves in the rural al-Dora farming area on the outskirts of Baghdad, residents say. Electricity has been cut, the local fuel station destroyed and the access road blocked.

The U.S. action comes after resistance fighters attacked soldiers from this area several weeks back. “The Americans were attacked from this field, then they returned and started cutting down all the trees,” says Kareem, a local mechanic, pointing to a pile of burnt date palms in a bulldozed field. “None of us knows any fighters. We all know they are coming here from other areas to attack the Americans, but we are the people who suffer from this.”

Military action followed a similar round of attacks and retaliation earlier this month when U.S. Army Brigadier-General Mark Kimmit told reporters that the military had launched Operation Iron Grip in the area to send “a very clear message to anybody who thinks that they can run around Baghdad without worrying about the
consequences of firing rocket propelled grenades (RPGs).” Gen. Kimmit said, “There is a capability in the air that can quickly respond against anybody who would want to harm Iraqi citizens or coalition forces.”

Then as now, local people denied any knowledge of harboring resistance fighters. And now, as then, they say they have to pay the price. “They destroyed our fences, and now there are wolves attacking our animals,” said Mohammed, a schoolboy. “They destroyed much of our farming equipment, and the worst is they cut our electricity. They come by here every night and fire their weapons to frighten us.” People need electricity to run pumps to irrigate the farms, he said. “Now we are carrying water in buckets from the river, and this is very difficult for us,” Mohammed said. “They say they are going to make things better for us, but they are worse.”

Going into fields after U.S. retaliation has become hazardous, as they are littered with unexploded mortar shells. A farmer who called himself Sharkr said, “We asked them the first time and they said, ‘Okay, we’ll come and take care of it.’ But they never came.”

Other residents say soldiers beat them up during random home raids. “I was beaten by the Americans,” said Ihsan, a 17-year-old secondary school student. “They asked me who attacked them, but I do not know. My home was raided, our furniture destroyed, and one of my uncles was arrested.”

People in Abu Hishma, a village in the area, spoke of similar experiences. After U.S. soldiers were attacked, the entire village was encircled with razor wire. Residents were forced to acquire identity badges and enter through a military controlled checkpoint. The main farm road was blocked by four large concrete slabs after attacks several weeks ago. Residents used tractors to remove the blocks, but last week they say the military installed four larger blocks. “They humiliate us when we talk to them,” said Hamoud Abid, a 50-year-old farmer. “They would not tell us when they will remove these blocks, so we are all walking now.”

A military spokesperson in Baghdad declined to comment on the statements by the people in al-Dora, and declined a request for his
name. But he said there were ongoing security operations in al-Dora.

Fallujah Refugees Tell of Life and Death in the Kill zone
BY DAHR JAMAIL, THE NEW STANDARD

December 03, 2004—Men now seeking refuge in the Baghdad area are telling horrific stories of indiscriminate killings by U.S. forces during the peak of fighting last month in the largely annihilated city of Fallujah.

In an interview with The New Standard, Burhan Fasaía, an Iraqi journalist who works for the popular Lebanese satellite TV station, LBC, said he witnessed U.S. crimes up close. Fasaía, who was in Fallujah for nine days during the most intense combat, said Americans grew easily frustrated with Iraqis who could not speak English. “Americans did not have interpreters with them,” Fasaía said, “so they entered houses and killed people because they didn’t speak English. They entered the house where I was with 26 people, and [they] shot people because [the people] didn’t obey [the soldiers’] orders, even just because the people couldn’t understand a word of English.”

A man named Khalil, who asked The New Standard not to use his last name for fear of reprisals, said he had witnessed the shooting of civilians who were waving white flags while they tried to escape the city. Fasaía further speculated, “Soldiers thought the people were rejecting their orders, so they shot them. But the people just couldn’t understand them.” Fasaía says American troops detained him. They interrogated him specifically about working for the Arab media, he said, and held him for three days. Fasaía and other prisoners slept on the ground with no blankets. He said prisoners were made to go to the bathroom in handcuffs, using one toilet in the middle of the camp. “During the nine days I was in Fallujah, all of the wounded women, kids and old people, none of them were evacuated,” Fasaía said. “They either suffered to death, or somehow survived.”
Many refugees tell stories of having witnessed U.S. troops killing already injured people, former fighters and noncombatants alike. “I watched them roll over wounded people in the street with tanks,” said Kassem Mohammed Ahmed, a resident of Fallujah. “This happened so many times.”

Other refugees recount similar stories. “I saw so many civilians killed there, and I saw several tanks roll over the wounded in the streets,” said 27-year-old Aziz Abdulla, who fled the fighting last month.

Another resident, Abu Aziz, said he also witnessed American armored vehicles crushing people he believes were alive. Abdul Razaq Ismail, another resident who fled Fallujah, said, “I saw dead bodies on the ground and nobody could bury them because of the American snipers. The Americans were dropping some of the bodies into the Euphrates near Fallujah.”

A man called Abu Hammad said he witnessed U.S. troops throwing Iraqi bodies into the Euphrates River. Others nodded in agreement. Abu Hammed and others also said they saw Americans shooting unarmed Iraqis who waved white flags. Believing that American and Iraqi forces were bent on killing anyone who stayed in Fallujah, Hammad said he watched people attempt to swim across the Euphrates to escape the siege. “Even then, the Americans shot them with rifles from the shore,” he said. “Even if some of them were holding a white flag or white clothes over their heads to show they are not fighters, they were all shot.”

Associated Press photographer Bilal Hussein reported witnessing similar events. After running out of basic necessities and deciding to flee the city at the height of the U.S.-led assault, Hussein ran to the Euphrates. “I decided to swim,” Hussein told colleagues at the AP, who wrote up the photographer’s harrowing story, “but I changed my mind after seeing U.S. helicopters firing on and killing people who tried to cross the river.” Hussein said he saw soldiers kill a family of five as they tried to traverse the Euphrates, before he buried a man by the riverbank with his bare hands. “I kept walking along the river for two hours and I could still see some U.S. snipers ready to shoot anyone who might swim,” Hussein recounted. “I quit
the idea of crossing the river and walked for about five hours through orchards.”

U.S. military commanders reported at least two incidents during which they said Iraqi resistance fighters used white flags to lure Marines into dangerous situations, including a well-orchestrated ambush. Proponents of relaxed rules of engagement for U.S. troops engaged in “counter-insurgency” warfare have cited such incidents from last month’s experience in Fallujah as arguments for more permissive combat regulations. Some have said U.S. forces should establish what used to be called “free-fire zones,” wherein any human being encountered is assumed to be hostile, and thus a legitimate target, relieving American infantrymen of their obligation to distinguish and protect civilians. But if the stories Fallujan witnesses have shared with TNS are accurate, it appears the policy might have preceded the argument in this case.

U.S. and Iraqi officials have called the “pacification” of Fallujah a success and said that the action was necessary to stabilize Iraq in preparation for the country’s planned “transition to democracy.” The military continues to deny U.S.-led forces killed significant numbers of civilians during November’s nearly constant fighting and bombardment.

**Weapons Used in Fallujah**

**BY DAHR JAMAIL**

BAGHDAD, Nov 26/04 (IPS)—The U.S. military has used poison gas and other non-conventional weapons against civilians in Fallujah, eyewitnesses report. “Poisonous gases have been used in Fallujah,” 35-year-old trader from Fallujah Abu Hammad told IPS. “They used everything—tanks, artillery, infantry, poison gas. Fallujah has been bombed to the ground.” Hammad is from the Julan district of Fallujah, where some of the heaviest fighting occurred.

Other residents of that area also report the use of illegal weapons. “They used these weird bombs that put up smoke like a mushroom cloud,” Abu Sabah, another Fallujah refugee from the Julan area,
told IPS. “Then small pieces fall from the air with long tails of smoke behind them.” He said pieces of these bombs exploded into large fires that burnt the skin even when water was thrown on the burns. Phosphorous weapons as well as napalm are known to cause such effects. “People suffered so much from these,” he said.

Macabre accounts of killing of civilians are emerging through the cordon U.S. forces are still maintaining around Fallujah. “Doctors in Fallujah are reporting to me that there are patients in the hospital there who were forced out by the Americans,” said Mehdi Abdulla, a 33-year-old ambulance driver at a hospital in Baghdad. “Some doctors there told me they had a major operation going, but the soldiers took the doctors away and left the patient to die.”

Kassem Mohammed Ahmed, who escaped from Fallujah a little over a week ago, told IPS he witnessed many atrocities committed by U.S. soldiers in the city. “I watched them roll over wounded people in the street with tanks,” he said. “This happened so many times.”

Abdul Razaq Ismail, who escaped from Fallujah two weeks back, said soldiers had used tanks to pull bodies to the soccer stadium to be buried. “I saw dead bodies on the ground and nobody could bury them because of the American snipers,” he said. “The Americans were dropping some of the bodies into the Euphrates near Fallujah.”

Abu Hammad said he saw people attempt to swim across the Euphrates to escape the siege. “The Americans shot them with rifles from the shore,” he said. “Even if some of them were holding a white flag or white clothes over their heads to show they are not fighters, they were all shot.” Hammad said he had seen elderly women carrying white flags shot by U.S. soldiers. “Even the wounded people were killed. The Americans made announcements for people to come to one mosque if they wanted to leave Fallujah, and even the people who went there carrying white flags were killed.”

Another Fallujah resident, Khalil, 40, told IPS he saw civilians shot as they held up makeshift white flags. “They shot women and old men in the streets,” he said. “Then they shot anyone who tried to get their bodies … Fallujah is suffering too much, it is almost
Refugees have moved to another kind of misery now, he said. “It’s a disaster living here at this camp,” Khalil said. “We are living like dogs and the kids do not have enough clothes.”

Spokesman for the Iraqi Red Crescent in Baghdad Abdel Hamid Salim told IPS that none of their relief teams had been allowed into Fallujah, and that the military had said it would be at least two more weeks before any refugees would be allowed back into the city. “There is still heavy fighting in Fallujah,” said Salim. “And the Americans won’t let us in so we can help people.” In many camps around Fallujah and throughout Baghdad, refugees are living without enough food, clothing and shelter. Relief groups estimate there are at least 15,000 refugee families in temporary shelters outside Fallujah.

As U.S. Forces Raided a Mosque
BY DAHR JAMAIL

BAGHDAD, Nov 19/04 (IPS)—An eyewitness commentary to IPS through a U.S. raid on a Baghdad mosque Friday gives a vivid picture of what a ‘successful raid’ can be like. U.S. soldiers raided the Abu Hanifa mosque in Baghdad during Friday prayers, killing at least four and wounding up to 20 worshippers. At 12:30 p.m. local time, just after Imam Shaikh Muayid al-Adhami concluded his talk, about 50 U.S. soldiers with 20 Iraqi National Guardsmen (ING) entered the mosque, a witness reported. “Everyone was there for Friday prayers, when five Humvees and several trucks carrying INGs entered,” Abu Talat told IPS on phone from within the mosque while the raid was in progress. “Everyone starting yelling ‘Allahu Akbar’ (God is the greatest) because they were frightened. Then the soldiers started shooting the people praying.” Talat said he was among a crowd of worshippers being held back at gunpoint by U.S. soldiers. Loud chanting of “Allahu Akbar” could be heard in the background during his call. Women and children were sobbing, he said. “They have just shot and killed at least four of the people praying,” he said in a panicked voice. “At least 10 other people are
wounded now. We are on our bellies and in a very bad situation.” Talat gave his account over short phone calls. He said he was witnessing a horrific scene. “We were here praying and now there are 50 here with their guns on us,” he said. “They are holding our heads to the ground, and everyone is in chaos. This is the worst situation possible. They cannot see me talking to you. They are roughing up a blind man now.” He then evidently could talk no further.

The soldiers later released women and children along with men who were related to them. Abu Talat was released because a boy told him to pretend to be his father. Other witnesses gave similar accounts outside the mosque. “People were praying and the Americans invaded the mosque,” Abdulla Ra’ad Aziz from the al-Adhamiya district of Baghdad told IPS. He had been released along with his wife and children. “Why are they killing people for praying?” He said that after the forces entered “they went to the back doors and we heard so many bullets of the guns—it was a gun bigger than a Kalashnikov. There were wounded and dead, I saw them myself.”

Some of the people who had been at prayer were ordered by soldiers to carry the dead and wounded out of the mosque, he said. “One Iraqi National Guardsmen held his gun on people and yelled, ‘I will kill you if you don’t shut up,’” said Rana Aziz, a mother who had been trapped in the mosque. “So they made everyone lie down, then people got quiet, and they took the women and children out.” She said someone asked the soldiers if they would be made hostages. A soldier used foul language and asked everyone to shut up, she said. Suddenly, she laughed amid her tears. “The Americans have learnt how to say shut up in Arabic, Inchev’.”

Soldiers denied Iraqi Red Crescent ambulances and medical teams access to the mosque. As doctors negotiated with U.S. soldiers outside, more gunfire was heard from inside. About 30 men were led out with hoods over their heads and their hands tied behind them. Soldiers loaded them into a military vehicle and took them away around 3.15 p.m.
A doctor with the Iraqi Red Crescent confirmed four dead and nine wounded worshippers. Pieces of brain were splattered on one of the walls inside the mosque while large bloodstains covered carpets at several places. A U.S. military spokesperson in Baghdad did not respond to requests for information on the raid.

**Media Repression in a ‘Liberated’ Land**

**BY DAHR JAMAIL**

BAGHDAD, Nov 18/04 (IPS)—Journalists are increasingly being detained and threatened by the U.S.-installed interim government in Iraq. Media have been stopped particularly from covering recent horrific events in Fallujah. The “100 Orders” penned by former U.S. administrator in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer, include Order 65, passed March 20, to establish an Iraqi communications and media commission. This commission has powers to control the media because it has complete control over licensing and regulating telecommunications, broadcasting, information services and all other media establishments.

On June 28, when the United States handed over power to a ‘sovereign’ Iraqi interim government, Bremer simply passed on the authority to Ayad Allawi, the U.S.-installed interim prime minister who has had longstanding ties with the British intelligence service MI6 and the CIA.

A glaring instance is the curbs placed on the Qatar-based TV channel al-Jazeera. Within days of the “handover” of power to an interim Iraqi government last summer, the Baghdad office of al-Jazeera was raided and closed by security forces from the interim government. The network was accused of inaccurate reporting and banned initially for one month from reporting out of Iraq. The ban was then extended “indefinitely.”

On Tuesday this week the interim government announced that any al-Jazeera journalist found reporting in Iraq would be detained. The al-Jazeera office in Baghdad was bombed by a U.S. warplane during the invasion of March last year. The TV channel had given its
exact coordinates to the Pentagon to avoid such an occurrence. One of their journalists was killed in the bombing. Al-Jazeera now broadcasts a daily apology “because we cannot cover Iraq news well since our offices have been closed for over three months by orders from the interim government.”

Other instances of political repression abound. The media commission sent out an order recently asking news organizations to “stick to the government line on the U.S.-led offensive in Fallujah or face legal action.” The warning was sent on the letterhead of Allawi. The letter also asked media to “set aside space in your news coverage to make the position of the Iraqi government, which expresses the aspirations of most Iraqis, clear.”

Last week a journalist for the al-Arabiya network was detained by U.S. forces outside Fallujah when he attempted to enter the besieged city. Citing another al-Arabiya correspondent as its source, the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said the Arabic satellite station had lost contact with Abdel Kader Saadi, a reporter and photographer living and working in the Sunni Muslim city, on Nov. 11.

French freelance photographer Corentin Fleury was detained by the U.S. military with his interpreter, 28-year-old Bahktiyar Abdulla Hadad when they were leaving Fallujah just before the siege of the city began. They had worked in the city for nine days leading up to the siege, and were held for five days in a military detention facility outside the city. “They were very nervous and they asked us what we saw, and looked over all my photos, asking me questions about them,” Fleury told IPS. “They asked where the weapons were, what the neighborhoods were like, all of this.” Fleury said he had photographed homes destroyed by U.S. warplanes, and life in the city leading up to the siege. “They wanted information from me regarding the situation in Fallujah, but they have yet to release my translator,” he said. “I made a silly photo of him holding a sniper rifle, and I think this is why they are holding him. I’ve been trying to get information for the last five days on him, and the French embassy has been trying to get him out, different journalists he’s worked with are sending letters, but there has been no luck so far.”
U.S. Military Obstructing Medical Care
BY DAHR JAMAIL, INTER PRESS SERVICE

BAGHDAD, Dec 13/04 (IPS)—The U.S. military has been preventing delivery of medical care in several instances, medical staff say. Iraqi doctors at many hospitals have reported raids by coalition forces. Some of the more recent raids have been in Amiriyat al-Fallujah, about 10 km to the east of Fallujah, the town to which U.S. forces have laid bloody siege.

Amiriyat al-Fallujah has been the source of several reported resistance attacks on U.S. forces. The main hospital in Amiriyat al-Fallujah was raided twice recently by U.S. soldiers and members of the Iraqi National Guard, doctors say. “The first time was November 29 at 5:40 a.m., and the second time was the following day,” said a doctor at the hospital who did not want to give his real name for fear of U.S. reprisals. In the first raid about 150 U.S. soldiers and at least 40 members of the Iraqi National Guard stormed the small hospital, he said. “They were yelling loudly at everyone, both doctors and patients alike,” the young doctor said. “They divided into groups and were all over the hospital. They broke the gates outside, they broke the doors of the garage, and they raided our supply room where our food and supplies are. They broke all the interior doors of the hospital, as well as every exterior door.” He was then interrogated about resistance fighters, he said. “The Americans threatened to do here what they did in Fallujah if I didn’t cooperate with them,” he said.

Another doctor, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that all of the doors of the clinics inside the hospital were kicked in. All of the doctors, along with the security guard, were handcuffed and interrogated for several hours, he said. The two doctors pointed to an ambulance with a shattered back window. “When the Americans raided our hospital again last Tuesday at 7 p.m., they smashed one of our ambulances,” the first doctor said. His colleague pointed to other bullet-riddled ambulances. “The Americans have snipers all along the road between here and Fallujah,” he said. “They are shooting our ambulances if they try to go to Fallujah.”
In nearby Saqlawiyah, Dr. Abdulla Aziz told IPS that occupation forces had blocked any medical supplies from entering or leaving the city. “They won’t let any of our ambulances go to help Fallujah,” he said. “We are out of supplies and they won’t let anyone bring us more.”

The pattern of military interference in medical work has apparently persisted for many months. During the April siege of Fallujah, doctors there reported similar difficulties. “The marines have said they didn’t close the hospital, but essentially they did,” said Dr. Abdul Jabbar, orthopedic surgeon at Fallujah General Hospital. “They closed the bridge which connects us to the city, and closed our road. The area in front of our hospital was full of their soldiers and vehicles.” This prevented medical care from reaching countless patients in desperate need, he said. “Who knows how many of them died that we could have saved.” He too said the military had fired on civilian ambulances. They also fired at the clinic he had been working in since April, he said. “Some days we couldn’t leave, or even go near the door because of the snipers. They were shooting at the front door of the clinic.” Dr. Jabbar said U.S. snipers shot and killed one of the ambulance drivers of the clinic where he worked during the fighting. “We were tied up and beaten despite being unarmed and having only our medical instruments.”

Asma Khamis al-Muhannadi, a doctor who was present during the U.S. and Iraqi National Guard raid on Fallujah General Hospital, told reporters that troops dragged patients from their beds and pushed them against the wall. “I was with a woman in labor, the umbilical cord had not yet been cut,” she said. “At that time, a U.S. soldier shouted at one of the (Iraqi) national guards to arrest me and tie my hands while I was helping the mother to deliver.”

Other doctors spoke of their experience of the raid. “The Americans shot out the lights in the front of our hospital, they prevented doctors from reaching the emergency unit at the hospital, and we quickly began to run out of supplies and much needed medication,” said Dr. Ahmed, who gave only a first name. U.S. troops prevented doctors from entering the hospital on several occasions, he said.
Targeting hospitals or ambulances is in direct contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which strictly forbids attacks on emergency vehicles and the impeding of medical operations during war. In several places doctors said U.S. troops had demanded information from medical staff about resistance fighters. “They are always coming here and asking us if we have injured fighters,” a doctor at a hospital said.

A U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad told IPS that routine searches of hospitals are carried out to look for insurgents. He said it has never been the policy of coalition forces to impede medical services in Iraq.

“During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.”—George Orwell