

Watching al-Jazeera: The war in real time

by [Gregg Reynolds](#) in the [April 19, 2003](#) issue

Viewers watching the fourth day of the war on al-Jazeera television would have seen these items:

- When coalition sources were announcing the surrender of Iraq's 51st Division and its commander, General Khalid al-Hashimi, al-Jazeera's Basra correspondent was interviewing al-Hashimi, who said his troops were in Basra, defending the city.
- A group of Iraqi fighters and citizens were shown in Mosul, and one of them said into the camera: "At the urging of Saddam, we will kill the Americans, and we will kill anybody who does not fight the Americans!"
- A prepared piece on misinformation included Vietnam-era footage of Lyndon Johnson and a U.S. protest march. The voice-over said: "It's understood that the official American and British [military] apparatus would disseminate false information in order to fragment the Iraqis' zeal for resistance. It is one of the understood methods of psychological warfare. But what cannot be understood or accepted is that Western media should participate in the same campaign."
- Expert commentary was offered by Muhammad Saeed Idris, of the al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies in Cairo. He said neither the American nor the Iraqi media should be expected to be neutral. Most of the interview discussed the recent history of American misinformation and retractions, focusing on the Bush administration's abortive attempt to establish an official disinformation unit. His only comment on Iraq was a warning that if it follows the American example, it too would lose credibility.
- On the Geneva conventions, a Doha-based anchor interviewed the network's Washington correspondent, Thabit al-Bartisi, regarding American coverage of the war. The anchor asked: "Does Washington have any basis, moral or legal, that it should talk about POWs held by others and give them lessons in legal and moral

treatment of POWs [given America's own treatment of POWs at Guantánamo]?"

Al-Bartisi replied: "I can see the logic behind the question, but let me draw your attention to something that should be taken into consideration, and that is that the Iraqi forces, er, government, has achieved a great success to this point in rallying world public opinion against this war, which many may describe, naturally, as illegitimate, since it did not obtain a Security Council decision. And therefore, if I may, the goodwill of the peoples of the whole world should not be squandered, in my opinion."