

"A rapacious colonial war": Interview with Arab journalist Said Dudin on US bombing of Al Jazeera

Stefan Steinberg
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A WSWWS team spoke with Arab journalist and writer Said Dudin last week on the Iraq war and the intimidation of Arab journalists, which culminated in the US bombing of the Al Jazeera media centre in Baghdad on April 8.

Dudin has been an active journalist since 1971 and has travelled widely throughout the Middle East. He is personally acquainted with a number of Al Jazeera journalists working in Iraq and his own company, One World Media, has produced a number of reports for Arab-based media outlets, including Al Jazeera, Abu Dhabi and ANN.

Based in Berlin, he is the author of the book *Die Moral von der Geschichte (The Morality of History)*, an analysis of Germany's political relations with Palestine and Israel dating from 1883 to the present day. The book is due to be published this autumn.

Dudin emphasised there could be no doubt that the aim of the US bombing of Al Jazeera was the decapitation of its work in Iraq.

"The American military high command was officially informed by foreign ministry sources in Qatar of the presence of Al Jazeera in Baghdad weeks before the attack took place. The US military knew how many journalists and technicians were working in the building and knew their identities—for example, veteran journalist Taisir Aluni, who was the only reporter to remain in Kabul before the occupation of Afghanistan by American troops.

"The Americans were very concerned about the work of the Al Jazeera journalists and, in particular, their ability to very quickly expose the propaganda lies of the American government and media. There are a number of very capable people working for Al Jazeera who have considerable knowledge of the local situation and local conditions. The station also has a number of Iraqi journalists who know Baghdad like the back of their hand.

"Let me give you a few examples of their work. On the first day of bombing in Baghdad the US military reported

that their planes had hit two of Hussein's palaces. Al Jazeera conducted their own investigations. The truth is that the first 'palace' was, in fact, the official guest house of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry. The second palace was a museum. The Al Jazeera journalists were very often able to expose these sorts of lies by the American government.

"Another example was an American report that Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz had been badly injured and had fled to the north of the country. Colleagues from Al Jazeera went straight to the Foreign Ministry, contacted Aziz, found him in good health. Less than an hour later Tariq Aziz was able to give his own press conference denying the US lies.

"In addition, I know that Al Jazeera was preparing to investigate claims of massacres carried out by the American Air Force in the south of the country. There have been reports that the US 101st Airborne unit had conducted a massacre of hundreds of nomadic civilians in the south of Iraq at the start of last week. They swept in with planes and dropped cluster bombs on the villages of ordinary nomadic peoples.

"The tribesman in the region carry weapons—that is the practice for nomadic tribes in the south—but none of them were in uniform. There are alleged to be hundreds of victims and the devastation was so great that British troops complained about the actions of US forces involved in these assaults. The story has been confirmed by Jordanian news sources. Al Jazeera had announced that they wanted to run their own investigation into the claims only hours before they were bombed on April 8.

"The exposure of such war crimes is completely unacceptable to the American military, and they reacted by doing exactly what they did in Afghanistan. Twenty-two hours before marching into Kabul the US military destroyed the headquarters of Al Jazeera in Kabul, and within almost the same time scale they carried out their latest premeditated attack on Al Jazeera.

"To my knowledge, as a result of the attack on Al Jazeera

one man is dead. He is a young Palestinian with a Jordanian passport. Another is missing under the rubble of the building and presumed dead. Six others were injured and forced to flee to the nearby building of the Abu Dhabi media station. Since the attack, the executive of Al Jazeera has decided to pull its journalists out of Baghdad.

“It would be very wrong to portray Al Jazeera as a pro-Saddam station, but it was so disliked by the Americans because the Bush administration pursues a bestial and medieval course of politics, which says whoever is not with us is against us. That means that even the allies of the US government can have problems if they are not prepared to accept slave-like domination from Washington.

“Other journalists were attacked almost at the same time at the Hotel Palestine in what was an obvious attempt at intimidation. The people who were killed were a man from Reuters and another from Spanish television, i.e., newsmen from countries whose governments are allied with Bush. On the other hand, the attack on Al Jazeera was very deliberate.”

Dudin added that professional computer hackers had also sabotaged the Al Jazeera’s web site. He called up the web address of Al Jazeera on his computer and the screen was filled with a large American flag and the underline “God Bless Our Troops.”

The WWSW asked Dudin his opinion on the current state of the war.

“There are many reports now about the end of the war, but in my opinion what is taking place is just the first stage of hostilities. What has taken place up to now is a massacre of the Iraqi people and army by the US, which is using rockets and planes against a population that has no such weapons. It was a completely unequal fight.

“Perhaps the US military think they are now safe in the saddle, but they should pay attention to history. During the First World War the British army invaded the territory and posed as allies of the Iraqi people. What followed was a long and bloody civil war. Two years after the end of the war, in 1920, the British hanged 800 Iraqis on a single day.

“In my opinion, resistance in Iraq and elsewhere in the region will intensify as it becomes ever more clear that the whole operation has absolutely nothing to do with democracy or freedom. The Americans will have big problems controlling any of the Iraqi provinces.

“The US will also have big problems finding a suitable puppet government of Iraqis. Just look at the main opposition candidate, Chalabi—a man who is being sought as a criminal after he ruined a bank in Jordan and bankrupted its depositors.

“The Americans have to be careful about their ‘friends’ in the region. It was predicted before the war that the Shiite

minority in the south would rise up and greet the US invaders with flowers and rice, but that did not happen. The Shiites live mainly in the south of the country and were hardest hit by the decade of continuous bombardment in the southern no fly zone.

“At the moment the Kurds are collaborating with the US military in the north, but they also have their own painful memories of allied bombardment in the northern no-fly zone. There is a widespread saying in Afghanistan that at the moment is also popular in Iraq. When an American promising democracy and freedom shakes your hand, count your fingers afterwards.

“The Bush administration justify their actions as preemptive war, but it is necessary to call things by their right names. It is Hitlerism—a repressive and rapacious war aimed at plundering the region.

“We should not be intimidated by those who try to silence our criticisms. It takes absurd forms: if you oppose what Sharon is doing in Israel, then you are called an anti-Semite, and if you oppose what Bush is doing in Iraq, then you are anti-American. I draw the parallel with Germany. It is like accusing someone of who opposed Hitler of being anti-German.

“By the same token, it is clear that the French and German governments are complicit in what has taken place. France and Germany are agreed on the principle of theft. They have differences with the US, however, on how the booty should be divided up. I never saw a difference between murder and allowing murder to take place, and on this basis I continue to criticise the hypocritical stand taken by the governments of old Europe.

“The Iraq war will further destabilise the entire Arab region. It raises the necessity of a progressive alternative aimed at overcoming the completely artificial borders and boundaries created in the last century by the main imperialist powers. The US colonialists will be forced to go further, and this will stimulate domestic opposition in those completely supine states supporting the war—Jordan, Egypt, the Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which all collaborate with the US for various reasons. Their dependence on the US is the dependence of the hanged man on his rope. They are completely unable to develop any independent political policy.”



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