

Jonathan Freedland: ‘Can a Newspaper Make Peace? The role of the press in ending conflict’

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Thank you very much, Philip, for that very extended introduction. It’s a happy contrast to the last time I did a public event of any kind, when the Chair got up and said, ‘Our speaker today needs no introduction,’ and promptly sat down. I was interested in the lineage of my predecessors as deliverers of the Hetherington Lecture. People always accuse the media of liberal bias. Looking at the predecessors and seeing that the list includes Peter Preston of the *Guardian*, Alan Rusbridger of the *Guardian*, Jon Snow, from *Channel 4 News*, Sheena McDonald and now me, I am glad to see there is still some truth in that slur against the media and there is some liberal bias of some kind.

It really is genuinely an honour for me to be here, partly because of that lineage, but also to be giving a lecture named in memory of Alastair Hetherington, who is not only a spiritual ancestor for everybody who works at the *Guardian* but who grappled with and indeed made his reputation on the paper’s proper role in tackling questions of war and peace. Famously he made his name as a very new editor in 1956 delivering and writing an extremely bold leader/editorial against the war over the Suez Canal, an unpopular Middle East war, if that strikes any chords — though it was not unpopular at the time. There was a consensus in support of it in Fleet Street and Alastair Hetherington took the *Guardian* very much out on a limb. He showed tremendous courage and he was subsequently vindicated. So it’s an honour to stand in memory of him today and to be joined by members of his family.

The question is: ‘Can A Newspaper Make Peace?’ My focus today is not going to be directly on familiar debates that, I think, people have probably heard in this Department — and in this lecture theatre, for all I know — on the ethics of war reporting. That’s an extremely hard-fought and contested debate. It came to prominence particularly in the Balkans conflict in the 1990s. Martin Bell became a sort of poster boy for the position advocating the “journalism of attachment,” arguing that it was morally incumbent upon journalists or correspondents to in effect take sides, to distinguish right from wrong. There have been debates about what television cameras should show, what they shouldn’t show, the degree of horror and gore that should be displayed after an atrocity. Those debates are extremely significant and very intense, but I think they have happened and do happen elsewhere.

I am not and have not been a war correspondent and so I am not going to presume to engage in that territory, much as I have huge respect for people who have done that work. Instead, and you have heard about it slightly there from Philip’s very kind introduction, I have been a kind of “peace process correspondent.” This wasn’t deliberate; it happened partly because of this posting I had in Washington in the mid-1990s. And though that seems a fluke really, a quirk, now in retrospect, I think we can see it was more choice than chance. Two crucial peace processes ran through Washington in that period. If you were interested in the Northern Ireland peace process, Washington as much as Belfast or London was the place to be. President Clinton took such a hands-on, direct role in that process that you would more or less bump into, in the street, members of even the most minor Northern Irish parties. They were in and out of the White House so often they used to joke that they had a season ticket. I remember one columnist on the *New York Times* saying, ‘On a clear day in Washington you can see Gerry Adams for ever’. He did just seem to be in and

out but at exactly the same time, that mid-1990s period, the Middle East peace process, between Israelis and Palestinians, was also running right through Washington. Again Clinton was personally involved; the late Yitzhak Rabin was there all the time. Yasser Arafat - it seems amazing to reflect on this now - but he was in and out of Washington all the time, too. It became very fashionable for people to have photographs of themselves with Rabin and Arafat. If you were anybody important you had to have a handshake picture. I always imagine that those pictures are neatly tucked away now in most Washington offices. But at the time this was really a place where peace was the business at hand, and so I gained a sort of front-row seat as a correspondent there, following the Northern Ireland process in its inception really, and the Oslo process in what we now realise was its first but also final years. And I then ended up following both those after I returned to London, travelling to both places as much as I can and staying involved with all the people on both sides. That's in the writing side of my job, and the distinction that I am about to draw is going to be a part of what we are going to talk about today.

But I have also - and you have heard this from Philip - been involved in these two ventures from the *Guardian*, which actually link together these two peace processes. The first was in May 2002, when the *Guardian* hosted an event called the Guardian Middle East Dialogue: three days in Weston Park, a very wonderful country retreat in Staffordshire, which had ironically hosted crucial Northern Ireland peace talks about a year earlier. In that place we brought together half a dozen senior Israeli politicians and half a dozen senior Palestinian politicians. The Israeli ones were all drawn, regrettably, from the Opposition, but the Palestinians - two or three of them - were serving in the Palestinian Authority as ministers. We brought them together face-to-face in a period when they could hardly get anywhere to meet to see each other to talk. We brought them

together - and this was the twist - with the four lead negotiators of the Good Friday Agreement.

It turned out that the peacemakers of Israel/Palestine had been exposed to conflicts around the world, for example as guests of Thabo Mbeki in South Africa earlier that year. They had all been flown over and met all the different sides of that conflict and sat with them for days learning from them. They had even done something similar in the Balkans. They had never been exposed to the story of Northern Ireland — and yet for its all imperfections it was in some ways one of the world's most successful peace processes. We at the *Guardian*, knew that they had never been exposed to it. We had initially gently suggested this to ministers of the British government — but we soon realised they weren't going to do it. And the idea took hold that if the *Guardian* wanted this to happen, the *Guardian* itself would have to do it.

So you had this surreal and yet wonderfully surreal scene where five Israelis and five Palestinians were facing each other and at the head of the table sat Martin McGuinness from Sinn Féin, David Ervine, leader of one of the Loyalist parties and a former Loyalist paramilitary who served jail time for having a bomb in the back of his car, Sir Reg Empey from the Ulster Unionist Party, and Mark Durkan, the leader of the SDLP. Some of these names are not household names. We deliberately wanted the four people who had actually done the heavy lifting of negotiating the Good Friday Agreement and those were the four key people.

The sight of those people walking in the room was almost the most important thing that happened, many of our participants told us later. Just the idea of them: they walked in, they were talking to each other, there was bonhomie between Ervine and McGuinness, some humour between them. At one point,

Irvine said, gesturing to McGuinness, ‘Ten years ago he and I were trying to kill each other’. And now there they were, talking peace to a group of politicians from the Middle East. It was extremely powerful. Doing the table plan for that dinner, I have to tell you, was one of the more stretching tasks I have ever had.

Not through design, but at one point we realised that there was a wonderful little huddle going. You know how it is at dinner parties: three people are locked in conversation and everyone else is kind of jealous. ‘What are they talking about?’ It was Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, who was a former head of the Israeli military, Yasser Abed Rabbo, a senior figure in the Palestinian Authority, and Martin McGuinness from Sinn Féin, locked in conversation. At one point one of the other Israelis tapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘Do you see what you’ve got there? It’s three chiefs of staff talking to each other.’

And it turned out that all three of those people had at one time in their career been, respectively, Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army, the reputed Chief of Staff of the IRA and Chief of Staff of a Palestinian splinter paramilitary group. The three of them were talking to each other and they even allowed us to joke afterwards: What were they talking about? Fuse lengths? But they were talking and talking hard about peace. So I am going to tell you more about that, but that’s just some of the background of how I’ve come to this question: ‘Can A Newspaper Make Peace?’

Some of the focus of what I’m going to be talking about is not really about the media and not institutions like the *Guardian* that are, when they are covering conflicts, with the exception of Northern Ireland, covering them as foreign correspondents. Often what I’m going to be talking about will relate to - for want of a better phrase - local media, meaning the media on the ground in that

conflict. So if we’re talking about Israel and Palestine, then the Israeli and Palestinian media, if we’re talking about Northern Ireland yes, the British press but also the Northern Irish press. Much of what I’ll be talking about will relate not to journalists as overt outsiders, foreign correspondents, but as *members*, *citizens* of the society caught in conflict. But I’ll make that distinction clear as we proceed.

So the question is: ‘Can a Newspaper Make Peace?’ I think most people’s instinctive knee-jerk response to that would be ‘absolutely not’. The last people that you’d think would be able to help and make peace would be a newspaper. If you think about it, the logic of journalism is so opposed to the logic of peace making that the two seem anathema to each other. Journalism is interested in conflict, that is, as anybody who has been on a basic journalism course will tell you, one of the first things you learn. Journalism is interested in conflict. This isn’t just about foreign conflict; it is true even of its coverage of domestic politics.

You know, ‘Tories At War’ is a story. Admittedly an ongoing one, a perennial one. But it is a story. ‘IDS agrees with Oliver Letwin’: it’s not really going to sell itself onto page one. But ‘Letwin caught in IDS Plot’: That’s going to be a story. Conflict is interesting in our coverage of domestic politics. You only have to pick up a copy of *heat* magazine to know that even in celebrity journalism conflict is interesting, ‘Posh and Becks Celebrate Wedding Anniversary’ - not a story. ‘Posh and Becks’ Marriage Fears’ (which I think has been on the cover of *heat* for every one of the last five weeks) - that is a story. We’re interested in conflict. People complain about it. People might remember the Martyn Lewis syndrome, when the TV newscaster complained that all we ever get is bad news and ‘Why can’t we have more happy stories about cats being rescued from trees etcetera.’ He was slapped down and was told, ‘That’s not journalism’.

Journalism is about the rub and friction of human life, whether it is politics, celebrity or anything else. Now, if that is true of domestic matters - the home news pages, the features pages, the TV pages - obviously that is going to be true of real conflict, of conflict in war zones. It is not a coincidence that the motto above the door in every American newsroom is, 'If it bleeds it leads'. They know that conflict and bombs and death are going to be stories. You only have to look at the press corps voting with its feet. In a war zone the press are there. The moment the war is over they leave, they pull out. War is the story; peace and reconstruction are not that interesting. Big press corps in Afghanistan for the overt shooting war - smaller one later. In the case of the Iraq war this year I think the press pulled out, then quickly went back in again when they realised the war was not over despite George Bush's announcement that it was, on 1 May.

So the press in its own conduct suggests that it is the last force to be a force for good, if you like, or a force for peace making. There is instead a basic human interest in conflict and the drama of conflict. There is more to it too. There is more to this clash of journalism and peacemaking than just that straightforward interest in conflict. Very practically, journalism and the business of journalism can collide with the business of peace making.

This was a very real issue in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. The act of sending a camera crew to a street corner where there had been trouble was itself going to inflame the trouble. You would have reports of a small riot that became a big riot the moment the camera crews arrived. The very presence of a camera had an inflammatory effect. BBC Northern Ireland made a fascinating decision during the Troubles, which was that - even when they knew there was

trouble - they would sometimes stay away, not send a crew, knowing the effect it would have. It would have to reach a certain threshold where they realised 'this is going to be big,' whether they stayed away or not before they would decide to go there. It was something that caused a lot of agonising inside BBC Northern Ireland, but that was the operational policy.

I admit that this logic cuts both ways, and there was much evidence from the United Nations, in Bosnia specifically, that the presence of camera crews had a positive effect, that it could sometimes deter a massacre. There was the famous episode of a UN Commander urging and inviting the British press, I think it was Bob Stewart, the British colonel who urged and encouraged cameras to come because he thought the moment the cameras were trained, in that case on the Serbs, there would not be a massacre that day. In the end it could not deter massacre forever, but he ruefully admitted it did postpone it. Nevertheless, there are cases in South Africa, Northern Ireland and elsewhere, where just the mere presence of the camera crew on the street can inflame.

There is, though, a deeper incompatibility and here I am indebted to some very good new work by a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Gadi Wolfsfeld, who's written a new book that I've only taken a glance at called *Media and the Path to Peace*. He just breaks down very nicely the set of incompatibilities. The first one, he says, is that journalism is very interested, inevitably, in immediacy. You know it's called news because it's new, like things that are now and today. Peace making is actually about time. It takes a long time and it's a process of patience. The Northern Ireland peace process drives everyone mad. It's glacial. It's like watching paint dry, how slowly it moves. And even when you think there is going to be a breakthrough like yesterday, there isn't. People who had written one whole piece saying what a great day this

was then had to throw it in the bin at ten to six last night and rewrite a whole new piece. I don't think I'm talking only about myself. It can be very frustrating. But journalism is about immediacy, peace making is about time.

Journalism is also about drama, in the same way we have been discussing conflict. It is about what you see on the stage of life. It's about drama. Peace making is often boring. It's tedious. It's about papers and drafts, traded back and forth. There is no colour on the screen — no explosions, bombs, bullets and whizzy planes that get the *Newsnight* boys excited, no sandpits and all that. There is none of that. It's just people. Usually men, going in and out of closed rooms. And the closed rooms are significant because journalism likes the drama onstage and peacemaking happens behind the scenes and off stage. It's at odds with journalism.

And the last of these three categories that Professor Wolfsfeld defines is that journalism – provocatively, he says – is ethnocentric, whereas peacemaking is all about seeing the other. What does he mean by ethnocentric? Again, think perhaps less of our own media because it can be hard for us to see this about ourselves. But you imagine in a situation like Northern Ireland. There are Unionist papers and there are nationalist papers. They speak to their own constituency and develop a rapport with their readership by saying, 'We're of you, we know your concerns, we're going to speak to you'. This is true, though, of the wider media. People know that there is a kind of death hierarchy. If you are the editor of, I don't know, the *Leamington Gazette* and there's been a bomb somewhere abroad and you hear that someone from Leamington is involved, that's going to lead your paper because it's speaking to your readership.

There is a great scene in the movie *The Paper*, where they are going through the

news list, going through various appalling atrocities. These are a team on the *New York Post* or something, and they're going through a list of atrocities around the world and the foreign editors are repeatedly saying, 'This is happening in Chile. 25 dead, none from New York. This has happened in Iraq, 26 dead. None from New York.' And if, in going through the list, there is no-one from New York, it's not news. There is a kind of ethnocentrism about journalism. Inevitably we talk to our own, and yet peacemaking requires you to see the other.

As a follow-up to the dialogue I mentioned from May last year, the *Guardian* organised a second meeting in September this year, this time bringing together not politicians, but editors: five Palestinian editors, five Israeli editors of the leading national papers and TV outlets, for two days of face-to-face dialogue. And again, with some input from Northern Ireland this discussion suddenly came off the level of the abstract and the academic and became very real. There the speakers on both sides did not speak about ethnocentrism or any other media studies jargon, but instead spoke of their 'patriotic obligation.'

One editor of an Israeli paper said, 'I am a Zionist, I am an Israeli and if this conflict has to have a winner, I want Israel to win. I am not going to pretend that this paper is neutral.' Another said 'We are not neutral in this conflict, we live here, this is our life.' Another Israeli editor said that he does want to see the other, it was important for his readers to know what daily life was like for Palestinians. And he said he did send out correspondents to report the daily brutalities of life under the Israeli occupation. But he said, 'Do you think that I am going to run a page four and five spread saying how awful it is for Palestinians the day after there has been a suicide bombing killing 20 Israelis? I am not going to do that. I'm not going to do it. My readers wouldn't take it.

There are patriotic obligations. That day is to reflect where our readers are.’ Now he said that because he felt it. It was a very heartfelt emotion, but also I don’t think it’s being cynical to say there was a very direct commercial reason for him to say that. He could not afford to alienate his readers; he could not afford to be so out of step with them. They would stop buying his paper.

And commercial pressures are a reality for every paper, with the sole exception of the one that Alastair Hetherington edited and that I work for, which is owned by a trust and doesn’t feel these daily pressures. We need readers, of course, but we don’t have a proprietor leaning over us saying, ‘you’ve got to increase sales, you can’t say this.’ A good example of how hard that reality is and how the patriotic obligation operates even in our own country happened this year with the *Daily Mirror*, which became an overtly anti-war paper. It did very well in the run-up to war. Lots of students were buying it who hadn’t bought it before. The moment the war began more than a hundred thousand of its sales were wiped off. In garrison towns, the Aldershots and Salisburys, places like that around the country the sales just went through the floor. There were stories of pubs throwing people out because they came in with a copy of the *Mirror*: ‘I won’t have that rag in here.’ There was a real world effect to having had an anti-war position. So it’s very, very, very difficult to cut against that consensus and yet peace making often *requires* you to do that, to take a stance against the consensus. So there are hard-headed commercial reasons why newspapers of all institutions are going to be the last people to try to do that. To illustrate that again, we’ll add the *Mirror* example. A paper like the *Guardian* did go out on a limb - I don’t think to the same extent - in the 1990s in Northern Ireland. It was different because at least there was a peace process underway. The *Guardian* gave a platform to Sinn Féin: the editor and I went to interview Martin McGuinness and the result, the reward for that, was an article in the *Spectator*

claiming that there was a republican cell at the *Guardian*. Using the word cell, with all its connotations, linking us indirectly through various personal connections to people who had convictions for terrorism. That was the upshot of an interview with Martin McGuinness and that was at a pretty mild time in the conflict — so it can be very tough to defy the consensus.

Amira Hass and Gideon Levy two very unusual reporters for Ha’aretz, a very liberal Israeli paper both extensively report life in the occupied territories. Both are subject to daily death threats from people who just do not want to hear what they have to say. So it is very, very hard to cut against that. And just to throw into the mix another factor, in conflicts like the Middle East the Israeli and Palestinian media literally speak different languages, so it makes it harder to see the other. There are daily, practical obstacles to this business that you need to overcome if you are going to be able to make peace. At our Middle East dialogue one Palestinian editor talked about the daily reality of a newspaper editor under occupation: how there can be a curfew and nobody can leave the building they are in, how he and his team had to work for a week in their office sleeping under their desks. You can imagine how hard it would be. And then when it came to distribute the paper, all the roads were blocked, there were checkpoints. In the end they resorted to two methods and I don’t know which one is the more extraordinary really. One of them was to put loads of newspapers on the backs of donkeys and send them on their way and the other was to pay Jewish settlers to carry copies of the newspapers on the roads that Palestinians were not allowed to travel. As I say, I can’t decide which of those two images is the more surreal, but the combination of all those things, the practical difficulties, the difficulties of language, the bravery and commercial risk involved in going against the consensus to say nothing of journalism’s inbuilt biases against boring, time-consuming undramatic peace making — all of these

things militate against a newspaper playing a role as peacemaker.

‘So what?’ people might say, ‘So what? Okay, we just report conflicts. All these well-meaning NGOs around the world and governments - they can do peace making, You know I’ve heard what you’ve said and you’ve explained why journalists and newspapers can’t do peacemaking. Well that’s fine, that’s just not our role.’ I don’t think that’s good enough. I don’t think journalists can accept their disqualification from that role. I think first they have to acknowledge, as we have said, that journalism can inflame situations. It’s not as if journalism does nothing. I think a lot of people who would say, ‘Okay, fine, we’re not peace makers’, would think as a result we do nothing, we just sit on the sidelines and report neutrally and that’s fine. I don’t think that’s true, partly because it can inflame in the way we’ve mentioned — inadvertently inflaming the rioting, for example in Northern Ireland. News coverage does have a genuine effect on war and peace. It cuts both ways.

The war coverage of the Vietnam war: it is an absolute truism now to say that coverage beamed into the living rooms of America turned American public opinion off that war. It eroded the domestic consensus for that war. On the other side the coverage of the first Gulf war in which it was made to look very distant — arms length, sanitised and in the fashion of a video game — managed to shore up domestic American support for that war because no-one saw any awful killing and suffering. And again, I would argue that the embedding notion, journalists embedded with the military in the recent Gulf war had a similar effect: the opinion polls, which had been so hostile to the war before it (and since incidentally), changed during the embedded period when the actual shooting war was going on and people could see ‘our boys’. So coverage does have an effect.

Some might say that effect was inadvertent, it wasn’t what was intended. But there are other cases where the media deliberately has an effect. I’m thinking of propagandistic radio stations, hate-filled broadcasts in Serbia, stirring up hatred against Kosovars and then again in the most egregious case of recent times, Rwanda, where the genocide there was in huge part stoked up by incendiary radio broadcasts whipping people up into hatred. So journalism has an effect. Whether deliberate, as in the Rwanda case, or unplanned in some of these other cases, it does have an effect. Neutrality itself - and there are a million seminars you could have about whether the concept even exists — even if you attempt it, that has a moral status too. One academic has called it ‘institutional by-standing.’ ‘If something awful happens it isn’t a morally defensible position for an individual to say, ‘I just watched it and did nothing’. How then can it be defensible for institutions to elevate that into almost a code, to make a moral code of institutionalised by-standing, doing nothing in the face of evil? You know the old line: evil happens when good people do nothing. That is almost enshrined in the notion that journalists must always stand on the sidelines. And that point I think is underscored by an arresting quote from the man who runs the Center for War, Peace and the News Media at New York University, Robert Karl Manoff, who asked, “Does anyone really believe that the professional norms of journalism, all the stuff about neutrality and impartiality, rate higher than fundamental human moral obligations to end conflict?” So those really would be my arguments as to why we can’t just shrug our shoulders and say “well you’re right, journalism is incompatible fundamentally and in principle with peace making - not our bag.” I think these other arguments prove that’s not good enough. We have at least to have an answer to that.

I believe there can be an answer and that despite all that weight of journalistic

inclination against and at odds with peace making, newspapers can help make peace. The first reason is something which is not an original point of my own. If you talk to people who are involved full-time in conflict resolution they will set out for you what the tools of conflict resolution involve. They will say that first it means really skilful analysis of conflict, you've really got to get to grips with what this conflict is about, you've got to understand the motives of the parties, really work out why they are doing what they are doing. You then have to understand the root causes, those things which even the parties themselves may not articulate but are prompting them to believe the things they believe. You've got to master the historical context, if you are mediating between two sides. You've got to know as much history as they do because they will constantly and always do refer back to their roots and to their history. They will then say - somebody who is an expert in conflict resolution - that what you need to do is provide a forum of exchange of views. You've got to create a space, to use Philip's phrase, where you can actually meet each other and hear each other and listen to each other's experience. That is essential. Then they would say, as a mediator, after you have listened and listened and listened, you need to gently, subtly and diplomatically ask some questions that tease out even deeper concerns than the ones that are being said, and through that exercise maybe point to areas of potential agreement that the parties themselves have not seen. And finally, if you are lucky enough to get some kind of agreement, your role as a mediator is to hold the parties to it, to be a kind of referee and to monitor compliance with the terms of the agreement.

But you know what? That set of skills or tasks are entirely the jobs and the role of journalists. That's exactly what good journalists do. Just go through the list. To analyse conflict. If you're a good journalist you'll do a good analysis piece about where this conflict comes from. You won't just say ten people died

yesterday, the bomb went off at six o'clock, full stop, end. You'll explain the motives of the parties, and of course you'll want to interview leaders from both sides and explain. A root cause? Absolutely. We in the *Guardian* would want a background piece with as much historical context as we can get.

Providing a forum for exchange. That's the second rule in the mediator's guide book, the second task. What else does an opinion page of a good paper do except provide a forum for exchange? What does a very good television programme - *Newsnight* or *Channel 4 News* - what do they try to do except provide a forum for debate?

There is one cherished example, which was in 1977. Walter Cronkite, on CBS, had two guests. One was Anwar Sadat of Egypt, the other was Menachem Begin of Israel. And Cronkite said to Sadat, 'If you were invited, would you go to Jerusalem?' and he said 'Yes'. And Cronkite turned to Begin and said, 'Why don't you invite him?' and Begin said, 'Okay, I'll invite him'. And he turned back to Sadat and said, 'Would you come?' and within five days they had met in Jerusalem. Now, every journalistic fantasy involves a moment like that. Ideally with a Nobel Peace Prize as well as a *What the Papers Say* Award to go with it.

It doesn't usually work like that but providing a forum for exchange absolutely does work like that. Northern Irish papers, the *Belfast Newsletter* for example, a Unionist paper, mainly speaking to Protestants, had a platform right through the Troubles where it did have pieces from the other side, including one from Martin McGuinness at a very sensitive time. They took a huge amount of flak for it but they provided that forum. Not thinking 'Oh, we're being peace makers now', but just doing their job: "That'll be good. That'll get us a lot of attention, Martin McGuinness on the opinion page tomorrow." They were just doing their basic

job, following their normal journalistic instincts.

Asking questions that tease out the deeper issues. Good interviewers will do that, not just looking for a bite for the evening news but actually engaging in a longer dialogue. Admittedly, you're not going to get that on the news pages, but opinion pages and columnists should be doing exactly that. And they are all the time, floating new ideas that people don't like and which they shoot down, debating them on the letters page — all that happens.

And finally, monitoring compliance. This is where journalism often falls down because it normally loses interest and walks away. But plenty of papers including my own, did watch to see who was living up to their side of the Good Friday agreement, for example. Holding the parties to account.

So the good news is: this should be no conflict of interest with journalism. This is not saying to journalism, 'I want you to get into some sort of touchy feely, Oxfam version of journalism'. This is what we do anyway, but we should do it more deeply and with more thought.

I would suggest in the last few minutes that there are other things that journalism can do besides just carry on as heretofore — in the famous language of the *Guardian*. I think there's more it can do. Besides just doing what — as I set out — is naturally our job and which fits with, meshes with, conflict resolution. I think there is more that we can do. First, we can do our journalistic jobs slightly differently. The professor quoted before, Professor Wolfsfeld from the Hebrew University, makes a rather nice point in his book. He says that newspapers have health pages in their features sections. They wouldn't have and don't have disease pages. You don't turn to the disease section of the paper in the morning;

you read the health section. Of course we could not — in some kind of Martyn Lewis way — make the whole of the foreign pages the peace pages. But we could have a *section* in amongst the three or four pages of foreign news. It could start out pretty small, a section of peace news. In other words, moments of breakthrough in dialogue and discussion, people on opposite sides who have met around the world. That stuff is going on all the time in the thirty or so conflicts raging in the world at any given time — and yet it often doesn't make it into mainstream coverage. I don't know whether it needs to be a formal section but the idea of seeing peace as news — because it often meets the standard of news in that it is unexpected, surprising and often has the beginnings or the possibility of drama - we as journalists should make room for that.

That's one thing we can do: we can do our journalistic jobs slightly differently, then we can think of initiatives which are, yes, still journalistic but thinking more laterally, more creatively. The moment light bulbs went off above heads when we had this *Guardian* dialogue of Middle East editors last month was when the editor of the *Irish News*, a nationalist paper and the political editor of the Belfast *News Letter*, a Unionist paper, sat together and explained an initiative that they had put together in the 1990s before the Good Friday Agreement. They did 'You The Jury' telephone polls, like the ones tabloid papers do: 'Should Posh and Becks split? phone 0808..... for yes and 0808.....'. You get the idea. They decided to do an incredibly simple one, which was 'Call this number if you say yes to peace'. It was in the early '90s before there was an agreement. It's maybe not so important in its own right; the important thing was they did it in both papers. Two papers on opposite sides of the divide ran the same text, the same half-page notice: 'Call this number if you say yes to peace'. 145,000 people, or rather calls, were made. This being Northern Ireland, as they joked, more than several people voted more than once. At the very least 150,000 or so phone calls were

made saying yes for peace. If you think that the adult population of Northern Ireland is, I think, around 1.1 million, this was really one in ten, a tenth of the population bothering to pick up the phone. And to make that very small — some would say very simplistic — but very basic statement. It had an effect.

Built on that they then decided to do another initiative, still within conventional newspapering but with a very neat twist. Each editor wrote an editorial in favour of peace, but before they published it, they sent it to each other. They worked on each other's drafts until eventually they had a single editorial calling for peace. The same words, word for word. And on the same day this nationalist paper speaking mainly to Catholics, and the Unionist paper speaking mainly to Protestants ran the exact same editorial. It was a hugely profound moment. Everyone understood how big this was. It was almost like a peace deal before the peace deal because if these two could get together, then why couldn't the politicians? Still an editorial, still a telephone poll — normal newspaper devices — but peacemaking in their consequences.

So I think that peacemaking is something we can do. I think we can do our own jobs better, I think we can think out-of-the-box and finally we can step outside the pages of our own papers and do something completely different. And that is what the *Guardian* did do last year and again this year with its Middle East dialogues. They weren't just straightforward newspapering. We were convening meetings - that's not what newspapers do, and you heard Philip raise one of the potential problems with that. In order for these to work the participants were absolutely adamant that they had to be off the record. It's a press conference if it's on the record, they said. We will just say what we say in public. If we're going to really negotiate and say things that could be political suicide back home, we have to be able to know this is off the record. That's a

very odd position for a newspaper to be in. And we went into a negotiation of our own with them and said that is fair, but in return we have to be able to report this fully. And so we worked out a system whereby they gave interviews after the event to reporters who had not been in the room. We worked out what we could say and what we couldn't, but it was a dilemma and it was new territory for us. In the end I felt we gave the readers a very, very full account of what had actually happened there and we did the same again with our editors' dialogue. And that was even stranger, because it was editors talking to journalists and yet the whole thing again was off the record. And the feeling was, especially, frankly, on the Palestinian side, where dissent can be tricky, that true openness would only happen if we were off the record. So that was the arrangement. But this was new ground for a newspaper.

American journalists, when they heard about this, threw up their arms in horror. They were aghast. My God, how can newspaper do this? This is the job of governments or non-governmental organisations. This is some kind of heresy, they thought. American journalism has a whole other ethos about this, in which it really does believe that outside the opinion pages everything is pure and objective. Maybe some of you have studied this. There is genuine faith in absolute impartiality and neutrality. There's a wonderful example relayed to me by my editor, Alan Rusbridger, who was recently a keynote speaker at a conference in Istanbul of ombudsmen, as was David Ignatius, a senior columnist on the *Washington Post*. And several of the journalists there said to Ignatius of the *Post*, 'How come there was no discussion in your paper about the rights and wrongs of the Iraq war? All the European papers were full of debate for and against the war in Iraq. And we really didn't see it in the American press.' And Ignatius said, 'Well, there wasn't a debate going on in the country, so therefore we couldn't have one in the paper'. And Alan Rusbridger almost fell off his chair

at the idea that, because politicians were not talking about this in the chambers of Congress, and since a newspaper could only cover what was happening in Congress, therefore they couldn't have a debate. The *Guardian* would just never even conceive of that. If the debate is not going on in parliament, we'll do it anyway. We'll commission pieces, we'll ask MPs to write pieces, we'll ask non-MPs to write pieces and stage the debate on our own pages.

And this happens, not just in the *Guardian*. The *Telegraph*, with its libertarian campaign, Free Country — that wasn't on the agenda of British politics. They decided to do it anyway. The *Independent on Sunday* with its cannabis campaign, that wasn't on the agenda when it started - they did it anyway. The *Guardian* is doing some work on prisons and prison reform. It's not particularly high on the agenda but we're going to do it anyway. That's not the American approach, where they instead insist on this position whereby they are purely monitors of their society and if it's not going on in society then they can't possibly make it happen. I don't believe in that. I don't believe that we are somehow these invisible, ethereal presences hovering over the rest of our society on the outside. I think we are all made of flesh and blood, we are citizens, we live here, we have our own biases and instincts, we are part of the society and we are players in the society. We are involved if only because of some kind of version of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle: the very act of monitoring and observing society does change it. And so we can't have this illusion that somehow we exist outside our own society. I just don't believe it. I think, therefore, that we have every right to have some kind of role, holding the ring.

There is this contrary movement in American journalism paradoxically called 'civic journalism', which believes that journalists and newspapers are now institutions in their own communities, particularly local communities, and

therefore they should absolutely create a forum, create a kind of public square, the village square, where people can meet. Not to declare any view one way or the other, mind, but holding a forum, because they are part of the society. I believe that's a pretty good conception and fits with our hosting of that dialogue — not a local dialogue but of Middle Easterners. I think that was worthwhile.

To conclude then. The default position, if you like, of journalism and newspapers is probably to stand in the way of peace for all the reasons I laid out. In this sense journalism is at odds with peace making. It's very difficult to break out of those journalistic habits, not to find drama interesting, not to find immediacy interesting. We can't break out of these habits, so my advice is, don't try. Let's not try to break out of those habits. That is what we are as journalists. Instead let's roll with it, roll with our journalistic habits and realise that those things we do instinctively — analysing, challenging and, as commentators, proposing new ideas — they are actually the very skills of mediation and peacemaking. I think that we should do that regular job of journalism but I think we need to do it better — more history, more context, more holding to account, not walking away as soon as the conflict is over. Afghanistan would be a very good example.

I think we need not just to keep doing it and doing it better but to expand it and to think of initiatives like maybe a peace news section or some of those out-of-the-box ideas like the telephone poll or the joint editorial in Northern Ireland. And, I think, sometimes we need not just to think out-of-the-box but to move out of it and move beyond it — and I would hold up the *Guardian's* Middle East dialogue as an example. I am aware that that last thought is the most controversial, certainly among journalists: the idea of moving beyond what we actually publish in the paper or put on television or radio. Why do I say it? Well, I'll give you an anecdotal answer.

Last week in Amman, Jordan, a team of Israeli and a team of Palestinian senior politicians came out and said they have somehow managed to strike an agreement, not just in an 'in principle' vague text, but a line-by-line detailed final status agreement dealing with every one of the outstanding issues between them. From Jerusalem to refugees to territory to the settlements — the whole lot, a huge long text they put out. It's now known as the Geneva Accord because that final stage of the process was sponsored by the Swiss government. Well, I am very proud to let you in on a secret which has not yet been published. Which is that one of the steps on the way to the Geneva Accord was that meeting that the *Guardian* hosted at Weston Park. The people we hosted there - I mentioned some of the names, Yossi Beilin, Yasser Abed Rabbo — were the very same people who came out on the steps at Amman, Jordan with the Geneva Accord. The same group that we had hosted stuck with it for another 18 months and have come up with an agreement.

And do you know what they're going to do? They are going to send a text of their agreement to every Israeli and Palestinian household. Where did they get that idea from? Because that's what happened in Northern Ireland with the Good Friday Agreement: the government sent a copy to every Unionist and Nationalist household. I spoke to one of the two people who drafted the Geneva Accord and I said, 'Where did you get that idea from?' And he said, 'We got it sitting around a table with Martin McGuinness, David Ervine and the others at Weston Park, in that *Guardian* Middle East Dialogue last year.'

That tells me that something good came out of that. It was worth it. And you know what? Journalistically, it's a pretty good story. Many thanks.