



with Saferworld, BASIC and ISIS

REPORTING IRAQ – WHAT WENT RIGHT, WHAT WENT WRONG?

Transcript & Commentary

***July 15, 2003, the Scott Room,
Guardian/Observer Archive & Visitor Centre, London, UK***

A Reporting the World commentary

Preamble

Since the war on Iraq there has been an active debate, unique in recent times, among media professionals about how it was reported, the problems and challenges, and lessons learned for covering future conflicts.

Reporting the World convened, on Tuesday July 15, probably the most senior of several gatherings over the past few weeks. We were joined by the Editor of the Guardian; Heads of News from both the BBC and CNN International; Foreign Editors of the Times and Guardian, Group Political Editor of the Mirror and several distinguished correspondents who followed events either in Baghdad or in embedded positions with forward units.

What follows is a Reporting the World commentary on the issues raised during this discussion, and some important problems, but it should be prefaced by a recognition that much coverage of the Iraq war story has been of a noticeably higher standard than that seen in previous wars.

The justification for war - with its attendant misrepresentations - has been scrutinised, and kept alive as a matter of vital public interest, perhaps more fully than ever before. Think back to the first Gulf War, when the US Congress, along with the rest of us, were duped into believing that Iraqi soldiers had been switching off incubators in the premature baby unit of Kuwait City hospital.

The accuser – presented, by a PR agency, as a nurse recently smuggled out of the occupied capital - turned out to be the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to Washington, who had not been to her own country in years; the story itself, a pack of lies.

Back then, the case for war acquired fresh urgency both from this fraudulent tale and also when Iraqi troops were reported to be massing on the border with Saudi Arabia – another lie, as it turned out. Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait took place, it eventually proved, only after he’d been briefed by April Glaspie, the US ambassador to Baghdad, that Washington would not really mind.

The difference is that, in 1991, pursuing these angles was very much a minority media pursuit; the truth took a long time to emerge and made all the impression, on most people’s view of the conflict, of a toothpick on a block of granite.

There have been other significant changes, too. Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger drew attention to new difficulties with the “dehumanisation and demonisation” of the Other, essential to warmaking for reasons explored in the Conflict Analysis section of Reporting the World – the book.

That became much harder to do, he said, because of distinguished reporting on the people of Baghdad, their hopes and fears, by correspondents such as the Guardian’s own Suzanne Goldenberg and three of our participants – Lindsey Hilsum of Channel Four News, Anton Antonowicz of the Mirror and David Chater of Sky News.

Reporting the World’s partners in offering this event were the security think-tanks, Saferworld, BASIC and ISIS. They also teamed up to offer a web-based information service, www.iraqconflict.org to journalists, NGOs and government officials.

Ian Davis of BASIC explained, during the discussion, that their initial intention had been to offer an alternative news service, expecting that mainstream coverage would turn out, as in 1991, to be biased and misleading. Actually, he said, there was enough good and challenging reporting to make this unnecessary, and they altered the focus of the site accordingly.

Commentary on the discussion of July 15

Here, we identify, from a Reporting the World point of view, the outstanding issues to emerge from this discussion, as problems requiring solutions if we are to offer a better service in covering any future conflict. Devising workable solutions will be a complex process and different in different media, but we make a series of recommendations as to how such a process might start.

Summary of recommendations:

- 1 Do not report a ‘line’ from an official source without obtaining independent evidence as to its likely reliability. If, once evidence has been obtained, the reliability seems questionable, stop repeating the line
- 2 Arguments are best tested by being juxtaposed with, and weighed against, alternative, countervailing arguments. If these do not issue from traditional sources, be on the lookout for opportunities to explore them by going to non-traditional sources.

- 3 Think long and hard about 'conduit' journalism. Things politicians say are not necessarily news; what they do not say may be more newsworthy. Prepare to point out omissions from what is being said, or elisions of key questions.

The problems

THE IRAQI THREAT – were readers and audiences misled? How?

The main concern of many participants was the glaring discrepancy between the impression given, of the threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, in coverage before the war; and the evidence available afterwards.

Ed Pilkington, Home News Editor of the Guardian, and the paper's Foreign Editor during the war, demanded: "how did we allow Tony Blair to get away with telling us that he had his own special intelligence, and we must trust him and he knew the truth? And we now know that he didn't have his own special intelligence, and in fact virtually the entire lot of it was at least four years old and pre-1998, and we let him get away with that."

Richard Sambrook, Director of News at the BBC, said: "we've been through the developments of the last few weeks wishing perhaps we had raised some of these questions last autumn or in the early part of this year and tried to sort them out then, but we didn't."

And Lindsey Hilsum, Diplomatic Correspondent for Channel Four News, recalled being taken by the Iraqis to sites around Baghdad which, according to the American and British authorities, had some connection with chemical or biological weapons programmes: "because I do not have the technical knowledge I cannot get up and say, 'what a load of old toss, this obviously isn't evidence'. I can say 'well it doesn't look like it to me'. We only really understood the extent to which we were being sold a pup a few days before the war when the Americans suddenly got very excited about a drone, which they said the weapons inspectors had hidden in their report but this drone was a terrible threat to the future of the world.

Now, the drone was like something out of *Aeromodellers Monthly*, it was made out of the fuselage of an aircraft, it was done up with duct tape... it was only when we got to that point that we felt bold enough to say, 'hang on – I don't think so'."

COMMENTARY - There was some media discussion about the claims over Iraq's weapons, and their validity, before the war, but this was one of those occasions when the effectiveness of a message may have relied on repetition.

To take just one of these claims - once the demand had been raised by the Foreign Office, that Iraq account for 10,000 litres of anthrax from 1991 to prove it was cooperating with UN weapons inspectors, it was then repeated far more often than it was examined. (It found its way into lots of television graphics, for instance).

This was one of the less credible claims because if, as 'litres' implies, the allegation was that Iraq had kept anthrax in liquid form, then, as any biochemist could have said, it would have had a shelf life of a couple of years at the most, ie it could not still be a threat 12 years later.

The drone, in particular, should have rung alarm bells because of the steady dripfeed of 'germ weapon threat' stories over the years, almost always attributed to nameless intelligence sources, which centred on drone aircraft.

Any of these stories could have been knocked down with one simple fact – the range of the aircraft in question. In the mid-1990s, it was a slightly more sophisticated version, an M-18 Dromeda, capable of flying some 250 miles or so. It means that if, for instance, stories about threats to New York or Sydney were to stand up, it would have to be refuelled around 20 times en route from Iraq.

RECOMMENDATION – Do not report a 'line' from an official source without obtaining independent evidence as to its likely reliability. If, once evidence has been obtained, the reliability seems questionable, stop repeating the line, or, if you do repeat it, always remind readers or audiences that independent evidence casts doubt on it.

It might have been as well, in this case, to remind readers and audiences from time to time about the history of dubious claims of an imminent threat from Iraqi chemical or biological weapons; and to make provision to hear from experts on the question of whether Iraq could have projected them, in this way, beyond its own borders.

ENABLING DEBATE - Did we do a good job of equipping readers and audiences to form their own views on the merits - or otherwise - of attacking Iraq?

This is where the coverage could have benefited from a much more innovative and creative approach, particularly during the period – bracketed, roughly, by the big demonstrations of February 15, and the invasion itself – when the debate was arguably at its most relevant.

The BBC's War Guidelines, issued in January, describe concisely a task many journalists who've attended Reporting the World discussions – both from the corporation and elsewhere – would recognise as a core function. We should "enable the national and international debate", they say, by "allow[ing] the arguments to be heard and tested". They continue: "all views should be reflected to mirror the depth and spread of opinion."

Key arguments in favour of war on Iraq boiled down to four essential propositions:

1. The crisis – later, the war – is really 'about' WMD and the threat to world security
2. The only way to rid the world of this threat is regime change
3. Regime change is the only way to alleviate the grim humanitarian situation in Iraq
4. The only way to bring about regime change is war

Of these, the one most effectively tested was the second. Crucially, the Franco-German call for the inspectors to be given more time offered an alternative, allowing readers and audiences to juxtapose what they were hearing from the US and UK governments with a countervailing proposition, and weigh them in the balance.

In all the other areas, countervailing propositions attracted little or no coverage. In the first, a large cross-section of the public believed all along that the crisis was not, or not primarily, 'about' WMD at all, but about a US agenda to install and maintain compliant governments in the world's main oil-producing region.

In a survey for Channel Four, which presented respondents with a menu of possible explanations, the 'security threat' topped the poll, with 22%; but only by a narrow margin from the most popular alternative view. Fully 21% told pollsters they thought it was really all about oil.

A second poll, for the Pew Research Center, setting up the question in a different way, found the oil theory was shared by fully 44% of the British, and much bigger majorities in many other countries.

Far from being "reflected to mirror the depth and spread of opinion" this was almost entirely absent as an analytical factor in coverage of the build-up to war.

Likewise, with propositions three and four, there were plenty of ideas circulating, for bringing about regime change without war (learning from the process which eventually brought down the iron curtain) and for improving the human rights situation of Iraqi people – but these, too were largely excluded.

Why were these perspectives, on three out of the four key arguments for war, so conspicuously missing from most coverage? At least partly because countervailing propositions, in these areas, were being put forward by what one participant, BBC World Service Europe region editor Bill Hayton, called "non-traditional sources."

RECOMMENDATION – Acknowledge that the important job of testing arguments is best done if they are juxtaposed with, and weighed against, alternative, countervailing arguments. If these do not issue from traditional sources, be on the lookout for opportunities to explore them by going to non-traditional sources.

THE LOBBY – A fascinating input from Mary Dejevsky, diplomatic correspondent and foreign leader-writer on the Independent, highlighted the use of the Parliamentary Lobby in news management.

Key security stories, including the September dossier on Iraq's weapons, were handed out to Political Correspondents – bypassing specialist reporters who might have polluted the message by raising, at the outset, some difficult questions.

Dejevsky drew rueful chuckles of recognition from participants when she described herself as "the proud possessor of a denunciation email from John Williams at the Foreign Office who accused me of 'consistent negative coverage' and how I need to call up more frequently to 'check the line' with the Foreign Office, as a lot of my

colleagues do.”

This well-known technique of news management rests on a symbiotic relationship within the Westminster village. Compliant reporters get a steady dripfeed of exclusive stories from official sources; spin-doctors get a reliable conduit for their message to enter the public realm on favourable terms. But it proved, in this story, a major obstacle in the task of conveying a proper understanding to readers and audiences.

The effect is exacerbated by television news – particularly 24-hour news - in which a set-piece speech, statement or press conference by a senior politician is automatically treated as ‘news’ – regardless of whether what is being said addresses, or evades, the important questions.

RECOMMENDATION – All newsrooms genuinely interested in offering a service to the public must think long and hard about ‘conduit’ journalism. Television news, including, of course, 24-hour news, is actually bound by public service requirements. Precautions should be taken in advance to have reporters and commentators ready to point out omissions from what is being said, or elisions of key questions.

Full transcript

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Good evening and welcome to the Guardian/Observer archive & visitor centre.

Tonight we're discussing REPORTING IRAQ – what went right, what went wrong.

This is the 9th Reporting the World discussion.

As with our pre-war gathering in February we are working in partnership with the security think-tanks, Saferworld, BASIC and ISIS.

They set up an online discussion during Gulf War 2 – which is still going a www.iraqconflict.org

I am going to call on a few people to make opening remarks to kick us off, then I am encouraging everyone to contribute...but can I just ask you to keep your remarks as concise as possible...so we can bring more people in.

Some of the ISSUES we'll focus on tonight are:

ENABLING DEBATE - Did we do a good job of equipping readers and audiences to form their own views on the merits - or otherwise - of attacking Iraq?

MISSING PERSPECTIVES – What about the alternatives to war – non-violent ways of bringing about regime change? What other evidence was there about Iraq's weapons programmes?

WHY - Why did we go to war? Was it over weapons of mass destruction?

Removing Saddam? Oil? To help establish a 'New American Century' by force of arms?

CONTEXT - How effective were the embeds? Did we risk losing sight of the bigger picture? Did they distract us from real fighting and real casualties, such as the bombardment of the Republican Guard positions around Baghdad?

MISINFORMATION - Were facts 'created' in order to be reported? What really happened to Private Jessica Lynch; how many times did we hear that Umm Qasr had fallen or that there was an uprising in Basra? And was there anything staged about the fall of the Saddam statue in Baghdad?

SECURITY - Is the world now a safer or more dangerous place? Is Iraq now becoming a quagmire? Was Iraq liberated or did the war leave it as a chaotic, seething hotbed of resentment? How is it affecting the war on terrorism?

We are RECORDING this evening's discussion so that we can circulate a transcript to people who couldn't make it. It will be posted on both our website, reportingtheworld.org and iraqconflict.org

Now we're sitting here after the war, so we can look back in a slightly different light on the coverage both before and during the war. I suppose the real question is, given what we now know, would we – and should we - have done anything differently?

JOHN KAMPFNER – Political Editor of the New Statesman and the man behind the BBC Correspondent programme, War Spin – what do you think?

JOHN KAMPFNER

Just a couple of anecdotes that might set us off. When I see Richard Sambrook I begin to get to understand the predicament that he and his colleagues were in, when, in my much smaller way, in our BBC film War Spin, we were denounced all over the shop. Not, it must be said, in London, but in Washington, and I think I wear it as a moderate badge of pride to have been called 'ridiculous' by Donald Rumsfeld.

That's certainly what he called the film, but ever since then it's been quite an interesting exercise in how you get your bad news out. Barely a day has passed over the last month without the Pentagon basically admitting each and every assertion made to us – not by us – but made to us in our film by the Iraqis who we interviewed.

To those who have not seen it, our film was supposed to be a broad look at how the conduct of the war – not the road to war but the conduct of the war – was spun, to what extent was it different to previous wars, such as Desert Storm or such as any previous war; to what extent did the embeds and other factors that were predominantly the result of hi tech advances, to what extent did that change things?

But we focussed mostly on the Jessica Lynch story. And it wasn't that the actions of the American forces were particularly controversial – and again, we were wilfully misinterpreted by the Pentagon. They suggested that we were saying that the Americans should not have gone in heavily armed, with reinforcements, into Nasiriyah, into the hospital to seize her. After, all the idea that the Fedayeen had gone, they'd been told it, they were right not necessarily to trust it.

No, the issue - as the Iraqi doctors told us in our film - was the way it was spun by the Americans afterwards, turning what was a pretty professional and heavy operation into a heroic operation. What they needed to have said afterwards was, yes, we went into there all guns blazing, we were right to do that, however, we could have simply opened the door of the hospital and walked in, and the doctors were there, there was no military there, ready to hand her over, in fact they wanted to hand her over a couple of days earlier in an ambulance, but the Americans started firing at the ambulance, so they had to go back.

So it's interesting to see the Americans basically resiling from all their criticism. I am going to NY next week partly on behalf of a Guardian conference and also with New York magazine, where we'll be in debate with Tory Clark, about Jessica Lynch. I understand the Hollywood blockbuster film and book is still going ahead, so 'faction' is becoming more like fiction. I'm sure it will still sell well.

And just one final postscript – in defence of this government. They were surprisingly, in fact startlingly robust, in our film, on the record, on camera, in denouncing the American spin tactics in Doha. Group Captain Al Lockwood – it was one of those classic cases when you've got a microphone in front of someone and they say one interesting and controversial thing, you think to yourself, should I continue, because if I press him, he might go back on what he's said and deny it and then I haven't got much of a story and I've only got the one quote.

But I thought I would take the risk, and he just got more and more and more vehement in denouncing the whole American military strategy, and then Simon Wren, who was Alastair Campbell's right hand man who was there, off the record, revealed that he'd sent Campbell a five-page letter setting out just how awful and unprofessional the American press operation was.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Tony Maddox, senior Vice President of CNNI – is there anything you wish you'd done differently?

TONY MADDOX – Senior vice president of CNN International

God! Never should have left the BBC! No, seriously, I think what CNN took a decision to do during this Gulf War as opposed to the previous Gulf War was that CNN International was a rather new concept back in 1991. Actually what it was, was an international distribution of the CNN USA service.

This time it was clear that there was a war being fought involving American troops, which CNN USA would have to reflect, as our boys in action – it's entirely consistent and proper that they would want to reflect that story.

The international audience, of CNN International, which I work for, which has twice the availability of the domestic audience, that's clearly very different. Apart from the UK, none of the people to whom we broadcast had troops involved in this war and indeed many of them had governments who opposed the war, and also what popular opinion there was showed substantial levels of discontent about the war as well.

So we were broadcasting to a very different constituency, and, for 24 hours a day, broadcast a completely separate service. I think the technology issues we were concerned about, I mean it's very easy to be wise in retrospect, we spent a lot of money and a lot of time preparing our staff to be safe against nuclear, chemical and biological weapons for example. We spent a fortune on that – I don't know if we'll be able to get our money back!

But we invested heavily in that and I know that you (nods towards BBC counterpart Richard Sambrook) did as well, trawling the world for stocks of atropine. So we were right to prepare for it, like you say John, with the US troops, at the time, with the information we had, we had to prepare for the worst possible contingency to protect our staff.

And we were certainly right to spend all the money we did on safety training, because all the predictions that were made about this war, about how dangerous it would be for journalists, were proved and then some. The death toll amongst the journalistic community was, and continues to be, quite disgraceful. It's appalling, the amount of casualties, I mean the group that went out there, we probably, as a battalion of journalists suffered as many losses as anybody. And I think as editors that is still something that we are coming to terms with.

We meet as a new safety group in London, basically we are news editors, we are not used to talking about deployments of staff in which people get killed. We now meet as a group who have actually lost colleagues in this conflict so the safety provision and safety awareness is something we need to think about.

I think what was difficult, for 24 hour news specifically, was that this was one of those stories where there were lots of sources of information that were very difficult to check and you were in the process of having to say, well do we sit on this until we check it out, in which case others are going to run with it and we'll get the blame if it proves to be true or alternatively we pump it out there and we reserve the right to pull it back afterwards. So there was quite a bit of that balancing act going on and no-one got away clean on that, we were all caught up in this.

You made the point about Basra and Umm Qasr and the different reports which were based on reasonable sourcing at the time but as the conflict went on we became, all of us, more savvy about what we were broadcasting and I think it is certainly true to say that if I had my time over again there are certain stories we would have sat on and certain stories we would have gone to air with more quickly. But I do think that the decision to split the service was a good one, was the right one for CNN to do.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK

Do you think you managed to get the context and big picture?

TONY MADDOX

Yes. The practical difficulties that hit us at CNN - we did not decide to pull out of Baghdad, we decided to stay, but after three days we got kicked out of Baghdad and there's no two ways about it, that not being in Baghdad was not good for us. We wanted to be there. But we worked around it as effectively as we could through affiliates and through the substantial presence that we had elsewhere within the country.

When we look back now – one of the things we did early on was – we decided on the first day, I have got the day time watch for Europe & Asia and my boss Chris Cramer watched out in the US, across a 24 hour cycle we were filing these informal reports, that turned out to be rather detailed reports of our own air.

So - how does this feel today, did we have enough of this, did we go too long on that, did we go too hard on this? And we got into the rotation of doing this and it wasn't the original intention but what it turned out to be was a very useful log for us to look back on now – and particularly when people say, well you didn't do enough on this, that and the other – we can look back and point to any day and have a detailed look at what we did do on any given day.

So people always say, well you know on balance we feel got it about right, well given the obstacles we were faced with, we thought we did a decent job.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK

Lindsey Hilsum – Diplomatic correspondent, Channel Four News based in Baghdad during the war. What went right and what went wrong from your point of view in Baghdad?

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic correspondent, Channel Four News

When I look back on it of course I wish that I had been bolder, but that's because I survived and I was not imprisoned by Saddam Hussein and so on. So with hindsight, I think, gosh I wish I had gone for it more and done more stories about repression under Saddam Hussein and so on but I suspect if I had my time again I probably wouldn't because it is no secret that Saddam Hussein's regime was repressive, it had been well reported and it was consistently reported from outside, so while we inside Baghdad would have wanted to do it, frankly we couldn't do it because our job was to remain there and cover the war.

There were complicated decisions every day on how far to push it. You are not supposed to go out by yourself, you're supposed to only go out on the Saga tours holiday bus which takes you on a rubble tour. Now at what point do you not do that and say 'bugger it' I need to go out and talk to people and we all made different decisions, crept out and talked to people with or without camera and so on. Looking back I wish I had done more than that but in the end we survived and we got out as accurate a picture as we could.

I think one of the important things that we did which we could do was to reflect to some extent what Iraqi people thought and felt. We could not obviously report a lot of what Iraqi people said to us. Some Iraqis talked to me about what they felt about Saddam Hussein, about the regime. I remember one student who came up to me and said, "we want this war, we want change." Nothing in the world would have made me report that because that young man could be dead now if I had done. We have all been criticised for censoring ourselves, but I am glad I don't have the death of this young man on my conscience, what can you do?

But I think other Iraqis were able to be honest to us about what it felt like to be under bombing and missile attacks and the insecurity they felt and I think that as the war progressed and it was clear that Iraqi Government was losing, we were able to report more and more what people really said to us we did the best we could, it probably wasn't good enough. I know Kim or David and Anton could add to that.

KIM SENGUPTA – the Independent

There was self-censorship for pretty laudable reasons. I've also got to say before the war there was also self-censorship for purely selfish reasons. We wanted that all-important golden visa, we wanted to not upset people too much, and to that extent self-censorship went on and I am pretty much as guilty as anyone else on that.

As far as the war itself is concerned, the story has moved on, if you look on the ground in Iraq and what is going on there, and if we look at what is going on here, some of the nonsense that Richard and his colleagues at the BBC are having to endure from this government. I think to a certain extent, to understand what's going on now, if we reflect back at what was happening in September, when the dossier came out, consequently when Blix and el Baradei came to Iraq in November, my

personal view is that we in the media were not critical enough at the time and when we got hold of the dossier, there wasn't really a critical examination of the dossier to establish what was good stuff and what wasn't good stuff, what was not supported by credible evidence.

I think there was a view that anything the Iraqis said or did was not to be believed and that the US and Britain basically told the truth. I remember being in Baghdad and watching a Pentagon press conference on television, when Donald Rumsfeld talked about how the Iraqis were flouting the UN by firing at American and British aircraft in the no fly zone.

Now, we all know the no fly zones were not set up by the UN, they were set up by the US and Britain and France, they were nothing to do with the UN in that sense. But not one single reporter in that Pentagon press conference raised that question. Now, with huge apologies to our American friends here, someone said ah, well, that's the American press for you.

Then, when I got back to London in November, I remember Jack Straw said the same thing, and again, no one actually said no, it's nothing to do with the UN, it is an illegal no fly zone set up by America, so the Iraqis under international law had the right to fire back. I think to a certain extent what is happening now is because we were intrinsically less than critical enough at the time and this story is not going to go away.

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic correspondent, Channel Four News

Kim was with a group, as I was, when the September dossier came out, we were in Baghdad and a group of British journalists – I was impostor in this group, Kim was an invited member - we said to the Iraqis, we want to go to three of the places mentioned in the dossier and we're going to choose them when the dossier comes out.

After some grumbling the Iraqis said, "alright". So we chose three places and went and it was our choice. I can't say the Iraqis did this willingly, but it did happen. One of the problems with the story was that we were led places and there was nothing to indicate that there were weapons of mass destruction being produced in these places. The place where the British dossier said they were producing phosgene as a precursor for chemical weapons - yes they were producing phosgene, but that was because it was a by-product of propellants for explosives.

But because I do not have the technical knowledge I cannot get up and say, "what a load of old toss, this obviously isn't evidence." I can say "well it doesn't look like it to me". We only really understood the extent to which we were being sold a pup a few days before the war when the Americans suddenly got very excited about a drone, which they said the weapons inspectors had hidden in their report but this drone was a terrible threat to the future of the world.

Now, the drone was like something out of Aeromodellers Monthly, it was made out of the fuselage of an aircraft, it was done up with duct tape and it had an engine which, as one American reporter put it, "was smaller than a weed-whacker", which I

gather is even smaller than a lawn mower, and we were told the Iraqis had hidden this programme.

We actually had pictures from the November trade fair where they were trying to sell these drones to other Arab countries and they were painted fluorescent pink, so that people would notice them. Now the Americans were telling us that this drone was a threat to the security of the world and it was only when we got to that point that we felt bold enough to say, “hang on – I don’t think so.”

ANNABEL McGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Perhaps if I can use that as a point to move on to Richard Sambrook, head of news at the BBC, now, thanks partly to BBC journalists, some scrutiny has been put on the case for war and the reality of the threat from Iraqi weapons – but with the benefit of hindsight do you think there was enough scrutiny at the time?

RICHARD SAMBROOK – BBC Head of News

Well I think that hindsight is a fantastic thing, and clearly we've been through the developments of the last few weeks wishing perhaps we had raised some of these questions last autumn or in the early part of this year and tried to sort them out then, but we didn't. On the threat, we probably didn't for the reason that we were not able to pursue it at that stage, and I'm glad that we haven't let it go and that we're still pursuing it.

I think the period before the war was very peculiar. In a sense you have two discussions, one about the pre-conflict period and then about the conflict itself, and for the BBC the pre-conflict period was very difficult for us because it was the first time, certainly in my professional life, that Britain has gone to war with the country so deeply divided, so how do you achieve some impartiality and some fairness?

I think, rather counter-intuitively perhaps, there was a case for going to war but it was not the one the government and others chose to make, but how you are fair to that range of arguments in that kind of environment is fantastically difficult, and I am sure going back over it we can see how we could have done it better. But in that climate it was very difficult.

In terms of the conflict itself I have a framework of four areas. One is, clearly, in any conflict you want to be alongside your own or coalition military and the form that took was embedding. It's not a new phenomenon but a new word for something that's gone on for many years - what changed was the number of journalists and the technology, and I think that raised a huge challenge for us which we're still trying to come to terms with.

Basically live broadcasting from the front line is a fantastically adrenalised form of coverage, which was new, and is probably a good thing, but it doesn't inform, you don't know that much more about what is happening.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK - Reporting the World

Well it's the same question I asked Tony - how do you achieve context?

RICHARD SAMBROOK - BBC Head of News

You get a better flavour but you are now further up the information chain in the field, so that is why you get the news like Umm Qasr has fallen and there's an uprising in Basra, because you are hearing from the military before they have worked out what is happening and you are live on air telling the world about it before they really know what is going on.

That's compounded by the nature of 24 hour broadcasting, where the audience are alongside you trying to work out what is happening, and even if we think we can understand the issues it raises I am quite sure the audience doesn't, which is why you got people saying, "the BBC says this and it turns out to be wrong". Well, what we said was what we thought we'd been told at the time, and if it then turned out to be wrong we had to go back and correct it.

From our point of view it's about being open and transparent when there is a process going on, and I think for all of us that is quite a big issue that we are still struggling to coming to terms with.

So big issues around the embedding, I am sure it is one for the future and it is not going to go away. The technology is there, the genie is out of the bottle and we have only just begun to come to terms with the issues it raises, that is the first thing.

Secondly, you have to operate unilaterally as well, and I think that was more difficult than in any conflict in the last few years, certainly on safety grounds. We could talk more about it but the fact is that we were inhibited from being able to work independently to the extent that we would have liked, and that definitely had an impact on the journalism on the overview we were able to present.

Thirdly, we wanted to be behind the lines and in Baghdad and I think it is a tribute to all British broadcasters and CNN that they stayed on when many others pulled out. The usual criticism we get of that is one of moral equivalence, that you are somehow equating some sort of despotic regime with a democratically elected politician. I don't buy that, I think it is a really important part of our role to bear witness, it is essential that we are there.

I think people who criticise us and raise the moral equivalence argument a) are incredibly dismissive of the public who absolutely understand what is going on here, and they want some information from that side as well; and I think it also shows a lack of confidence in their own case if they think it's so easily undermined - so I don't buy moral equivalence and it was essential to be in Baghdad in this case. It would have been nice to have been embedded with the other side to a greater extent; there are issues around the Arab TV stations with Al Jazeera and with in Abu Dhabi and so on.

We did use their pictures but we didn't feel able to use their journalism so that is something to think about and to work on our relationship with them, because it's not clear cut at all.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK - Reporting the World

Did their presence mean that you will have to rethink what kind of pictures you will show?

RICHARD SAMBROOK - BBC Head of News

The pictures issue is a narrow one, it is easy to say we need to show the horror of war for people to understand it, I think that is too easy and cheap an argument, we have responsibility as broadcaster for what we are putting into peoples living rooms with families watching. Having said that I think we got it wrong this time. You have to decide where you draw the line, we were probably too conservative this time. We need to look very hard at that, but it's wrong to think you can just pump out pictures of carnage.

The fourth area is the overview. We've heard from John Kampfner about the problems in Doha and I think that didn't work, despite best effort of our reporters, and Simon Wren and so on. And I think in London you're thrown back trying to put together this jigsaw. We did OK but we could have done better in getting an overview, we weren't very happy, in the BBC terms.

Of course we were accused by a range of people of being too anti-war. I don't think we were, but we were trying to raise questions that I think the audience would have asked, plus some of the issues raised in the field by the military, and to some extent reflecting some of the anxieties in the country about what was happening.

Did we get the balance always right? No.

Were we wildly biased and partial? No.

Was it broadly OK? Yes

Could we have done better? Probably.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Alan Rusbridger, Editor of The Guardian, that same question to you, in hindsight, did you scrutinize enough the threat the Government said Iraq posed and that this was the time to go to war?

ALAN RUSBRIDGER – Editor, The Guardian

Probably not, we had the same difficulty as the BBC over sources. We were hearing a lot of the same stuff as Richard was but it was coming out through necessarily anonymous sources and that makes the whole business of securing stuff precisely very difficult. So I think that process will go on and on and on and take many months, if not years to peel back.

I wasn't too worried about the notion of embeds, I think we got valuable stuff from the embeds and I think it was churlish after years of complaining about not having access that we had too much access. We were fortunate in having James Meek who was a unilateral who had the best of both worlds because he was sleeping with the troops at night and getting his petrol and food off them and certainly couldn't operate without them and he had the freedom to move and we had somebody in Baghdad and I think that was almost the most interesting thing.

In every war you try and depersonalise the enemy and dehumanise them but I think having someone like Suzanne Goldenberg's quality inside Baghdad talking to ordinary Iraqis and making them terribly human I think is a new element in war, and you can see why politicians don't like it but it also makes it extremely difficult to go

to war on a nation when you are getting that kind of image and I think the humanity of her reporting and Lindsey's (Hilsum, Channel 4 News) was just of a different calibre and texture from the reporting we'd seen before and I think that will in some way made fundamental changes in how war is seen.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Also the Guardian made some attempts to raise a discussion about alternatives to war to bring about regime change. How successful were you in that?

ALAN RUSBRIDGER – Editor, The Guardian

Well one of the reasons the Guardian's website went off the scale especially in America because – and I didn't read the American press widely enough to know – but the Americans who were reading us said this was a debate they were being denied in their own country. And I think that diversity of voice, range of opinions and challenging agenda, in comment terms - I've already said it was difficult in factual terms - but in comment terms was something that was being lapped up massively through our website and I am sure through the BBC website as well.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Danny Schechter, from the Media Channel, one of the few Americans around the table - were Americans turning to British sources of news because they weren't getting much from their own media?

DANNY SCHECHTER – Executive Editor, the MediaChannel.org

Speaking for the United States....(laughter).

We've had a divided country at least since November 2000 probably before, the red states and the blue states, the Gore versus Bush people, the large unprecedented anti-war movement which materialised in the US and grew alongside movements in other parts of the world, led to the feeling on the part of a lot of people who were active, that they were electronically disenfranchised, that their voice was not showing up on American television, that their voices were not being included for the most part in the American media and there are studies analysing the guests on television shows, how many took what positions, and you see a process of marginalisation of voices who are critical of the administration.

We also have the Fox effect, which is a very significant effect of a news channel that was taking a political stance and packaging it as fair and balanced journalism, real journalism even, and aggressively going after journalists it didn't like, who were critical in any way or perceived to be critical. Peter Arnett for example was targeted by Fox news which was one of the reasons that MSNBC responded.

MSNBC set out to transform its programme schedule to out-Fox Fox as they put it, and the head of the channel said they were up against the 'patriotism police' - people who were actually monitoring MSNBC coverage and so they moved to the position of putting promos on the air that said, 'God bless America'; 'let freedom reign' and the rest of it. So we had a wave of patriotic correctness.

Basically the television stations were taken over by a military, it looked like Chilean TV after the coup. There was one armchair general after another, so that they would go from the studio to the Pentagon to the White House correspondent, back to the

studio, to graphics that lovingly described the weapons systems. It was essentially presented, I believe, as a sports programme. I have done a book about this day by day, about the media coverage in America and I've tried to argue that essentially that there were three media wars going on.

The war that you saw in Europe, the war that people saw in the Middle East and the war that we saw in America and the different wars with different focus and a different emphasis. And I believe that CNN's decision to offer two distinct newsgathering services, and I speak as a former CNN producer by the way, I believe that was because Chris Cramer and A Golden and his people knew that the rest of the world would not accept the jingoistic news coverage that was being fed to people in the United States and they were right to take pride in what they did. But I challenge this notion that was very common in the media heads of power, that we can't get ahead of our audience, the audience was gung-ho for the war, therefore we have to give the audience what it wants and I think in doing so there was an abdication of journalistic responsibility.

DAVID SEYMOUR – Group Political Editor for the Mirror

Can I add something to the American experience, because the same thing happened here to an extent, the wonders of the internet is that we would be hit – our email system jammed up day after day after day by being hit by thousands and thousands of emails because apparently something was going out on a website saying this is an email address, do this, protest, and if you opened them they all said exactly the same thing.

But this idea of the patriotic targeting of the anti-war happened to the Mirror. I don't think enough has been made of it. During the war the Sun handed out letters to all the areas in this country where there were concentrations around army bases, and airforce bases, I should have brought a copy with me because readers sent them in, saying if you are a Daily Mirror reader you should know that this is a paper that isn't patriotic which doesn't support our boys out there and you shouldn't be reading it and the Sun does support our boys.

DANNY SCHECHTER – Executive Editor, the MediaChannel.org

You may not know this but the New York Post by the way carried full page articles attacking the Mirror and predicting that the ownership of the Mirror would be sold to more sensible owners, because they were taking this pro-Saddam Hussein position.

DAVID SEYMOUR – Group Political Editor for the Mirror

And that was repeated in some papers in this country.

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic correspondent, Channel Four News

I'm going to stick up for some of the American print media because in Baghdad there was a real contrast because when the America broadcasters and TV all pulled out ostensibly on safety grounds I suspect also on grounds that they had been pressured and partly the Pentagon told them they would be killed because it wasn't safe and the MOD told British broadcasters the same, but British broadcasters stood firm and the America newspapers were all there.

The New York Times was there, the Washington Post had two correspondents - even a paper as small as the Atlanta Constitution had two correspondents there, the Sacramento Bee was there so I do think that American newspapers did extremely well in staying in Baghdad and reporting daily.

The other thing that I think is interesting is, partly due to the Al Jazeera effect and the Arab TV thing, but also in terms of the rest of the world. I mean when I was young we used to bang on about this thing called, 'the New World Information Order' which was going to be imposed by UNESCO, it has in fact been created by technology. There were two Indian TV stations there, there was a Bangladeshi reporter for a newspaper, Philippines television was there, everybody was in Baghdad. The rest of the world was not depending on European and American broadcasters and newspapers anymore, so that is a real change, something new and very important.

KIM SENGUPTA – the Independent

Just to echo Lindsey again the American journalists I thought were very brave and did some fantastic stuff. Journalists like Johnny Burns for example, who was under constant threat of arrest because he wasn't supposed to be there, stayed there, came out at night, for the New York Times and I felt their reporting was balanced, fair and accurate.

TONY MADDOX – Senior vice president of CNN International

Always nice to represent an American news network at a Guardian get together I think. (laughter)

The point you make Danny is a very fair one, many people who have seen CNN-USA saw it criticise the robustness of the challenges that were being made to the US government. The fact is CNN-USA went a lot further than most of the other US networks in what it did and still finds itself now being derided as unpatriotic, leftwing, too Democratic, because there is a spirit of intolerance which I perceive as a Brit when I visit the US and talk to my American colleagues, a spirit of intolerance which seems to have got inculcated across beyond Fox.

People talk about Fox a lot, Fox are a cable channel like we are, on a day to day basis they only have a limited amount of appeal but its effect seems to me to have run much wider and certainly don't discount the effect of talk radio which is enormously well listened to and has quite a right-wing agenda so this idea that anyone who is not for us is against us, and they created this zero-sum game is actually quite widespread.

Now if you watch NBC, CBS, ABC or CNN. I suspect I probably saw more of that than most people in this room. The fact is, there was some very good reporting took place by some very talented journalists who were asking quite probing questions. It might not have been at the sustained level of analysis you might have found elsewhere, it might not have been quite as provocative as people here felt was appropriate in the circumstances but I don't think it is fair to just write it all off as some sort of acquiescent, vaguely right-wing, seeking-to-be-patriotic service, that's not fair.

ADEL DARWISH – Editor, MidEast News

I'm getting uncomfortable the way the discussion is going because it's one thing to look at the way we reported. I am going to repeat what I said at the very first meeting that Reporting the World held, going back two years now. Which is – is it actually our job as reporters, as hacks, to set agendas, question governments?

I am an old fashioned hack and it is not really our job to do that, perhaps Richard (Sambrook) or Alan (Rusbridger) as Editors can find some people who have different points of view but in general it should not be the media organ, whether it is print, radio or television to play the role of a political party. This is something that I find a little bit disturbing.

Commenting on what Lindsey (Hilsum) and Kim (Sengupta) said, I have personal experience of being blacklisted in Iraq and banned since 1995 because I slipped the minders and went on my own and they didn't like it. Seventeen times I write a piece. That is one of the things you have to balance as a reporter on the ground but that does not actually extend to the way you try to set an agenda.

Even perhaps the BBC finds itself now in conflict with the government and I will tell you two observations I made, one was the last few weeks and one was during the war. The last one was when that tape was released by Al Jazeera and by the arab channels, of Saddam Hussein and the BBC 24 hour interviewed the editor of the Arab newspaper Al Quds – the paper which has an agenda and there are question marks over it – he was asked by the presenter, “was that Saddam on the tape?” And he said, “yes indeed,” and then the presenter did not challenge him, “what proof do you have?”. And I know for certain that this chap has never met Saddam – I am the only person in this room who has met Saddam, several times in 1972. So he has not met Saddam, I know that for certain – yet he was not challenged. Again later in the day he was interviewed on Sky to prove it was Saddam and there was resistance in Iraq and he was not challenged.

I am not suggesting that the BBC had an agenda or anything like that but it is one of those little things which again – forget about the big debate, the big political position, whether we are for or against the war – these are tiny little professional details which make a story either credible or not credible. During the war itself we were extremely busy – I had my time wasted on three occasions by Newsnight – interviewed for half an hour - and it was evident that the producer wanted to say that the British Embassy in Cairo will burn down tomorrow with these angry demonstrations because we were supporting America, but that was not the evidence we had.

I am in daily contact with the Middle East every day but that was not the case. But not yet a single sound bite from three interviews were broadcast then they got someone to tell them this stuff which actually did not happen. I don't know whether the BBC felt guilty because they had embedded journalists and they wanted to balance it by taking a number of positions against the war, maybe Richard (Sambrook) can come back on that, I honestly don't know. What I am saying is as an old fashioned hack I do not actually believe in balanced journalism,

that means you have two arguments and are you really be better informed at the end of the argument? But you can be neutral, unbiased and professional perhaps actually try to seek evidence, try to seek the truth rather than be obsessed with being balanced.

RICHARD SAMBROOK – BBC Head of News

I don't disagree with you really, I don't know about the pieces that you mentioned but I certainly hope – if we didn't then we should have done – I certainly hope we asked how do you know, it seems to be first-base journalism really. In terms of Newsnight, we don't say, well if this is happening over there then we need to balance it somewhere else, that's not the way the BBC works.

Again one of the things we talked about a lot was how we avoided the notion of narrowing the agenda. I know some people think we did have an agenda and where you come from would make it one side or the other but we did think about it very hard and talk about it a lot, work on it very hard, didn't mean to say that we do it perfectly.

Part of doing television programming, in particular television current affairs, is not simply going out and seeing what people are saying and somehow sticking together all their words, but you do start off with hopefully proper research and an idea of what kind of report you're trying to put together, and it sounds like maybe you got on the wrong end of that, for which I apologise. But there is a line between that and saying you have a pre-ordained agenda that you're trying to make the facts fit. The question, where does this come from, where does this stem from, how well researched it is.

I absolutely agree with you in that I don't think it's about balance, it's about neutrality and impartiality, and the notion of balance that means six of one and half a dozen of the other is not right, it's nonsense. It's actually about your attitude of mind going into the enquiry. So I don't disagree with you, and if you had a bad experience I apologise.

AIR MARSHAL SIR TIM GARDEN – Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, London and former assistant chief of defence staff

Speaking for the armchair generals, I think you are flagellating yourselves a bit too much I think the British media did remarkably well in the pre-war phase in the range of opinions. Somebody said, and we've got to remember, this really was an extraordinary event that we were going to war with a million people or more on the street saying this is not a good idea, with most of Europe against it, the UN not agreeing to it, we are in new territory. So there was bound to be a wide range of opinions and my impression was those opinions got a voice somewhere in different bits of the media at different times and the debate was really fierce - and I still think that most of the lessons that we can now see emerging, you could find in some bits of the media before the war because we all did respond. It's great, hindsight, that you can actually look through and see who was saying this beforehand. It might not work out that way but that was the way it did work out.

In the war - and I did plenty with the BBC with most of the independents and with newspapers – I was incredibly impressed by how presenters who don't spend most of their time discussing the nuts and bolts of killing people, and are often more interested in what David Beckham's latest hairstyle is, were able to make that transfer.

And some of the programmes are pretty fluffy most of time turned over to be complete war programmes for several hours at a go. And it worked well. The embedded journalists were pretty variable in terms of content because sometimes things didn't happen to them. And John Simpson isn't here tonight but we did have a laugh every morning as he stood on his hill saying not much has happened overnight but I heard some aeroplanes going overhead towards Baghdad, sadly he got his action in the end.

The embedded bit seemed to me to be done pretty well by those who were there, but you have to remember that that actually determines what the news agenda is and actually there were lot of important things that were not covered by embedded journalists - special forces operations, what was going on in the western desert and what is probably when you look at the endgame of all of this, the thing that determined the way the war was shaped - that was the full air task order activity which isn't sort of the embedded bit, and the failure from my point of view, was not the journalists' failure but was an extraordinary failure in the Centcom Headquarters which was appalling.

If the war had lasted longer or had been more difficult I think there would have had to have been a complete turning over of the way Centcom operated. I was getting phone calls in London from journalists in Qatar saying could you tell us what is going on because we are not getting any briefings. And actually the journalists there should have been harder on Centcom to try and get more stuff out.

So it seems to me that we've got to be able to produce this full range of information it was an unusual circumstance. You managed to keep the public informed and interested so you ought to feel content about that but it hasn't finished yet. So the key thing is how are you going to keep the public engaged in this long next phase of the operation?

BILL HAYTON – BBC Reporter

I spent the war in the World Service in Bush House in London, so I wasn't actually there, but from here I want to make two points, one about coverage of the war and one about coverage of dissent.

My feeling is that on the macro level and the micro level most BBC coverage was kind of OK, in how the campaign was going militarily and on the micro level from the embeds, it was like a view through a periscope. It was vivid, it was, as far as one could tell accurate, it told us some good stories but there real problem at the meso level, where the forward transmission unit, in BBC terms, was based.

I don't know if anybody has been watching the BBC 2 programmes following the spin doctors tell the truth in their tents then going outside to lie to the journalists. The story that the Iraqis had fired Scuds, if they had fired Scuds that is a prima facie

case that they were in breach of UN resolutions. Now it may have been a military spokesman that said it but I'm afraid we repeated it unchallenged, we didn't say missiles, we said Scuds, it went round too long in my view.

The uprising – we know about that, what I didn't know was about shooting the Iraqi civilians on the bridge until last Sunday's programme or the Sunday's before. This I guess was MOD footage? It was selectively edited and we didn't know that they didn't start shooting until most of the civilians were off the bridge and sadly our reporter, was, quotes: "south of Basra". Well actually he was in Umm Qasr and not anywhere near Basra so we were relying on MoD footage for that so it was a disservice.

In terms of the protest and dissent, the BBC had war guidelines, which were eight pages long and developed through an open process of discussion. But there was one single paragraph about covering dissent and protest which I think is quite inadequate. We obviously covered the big demonstration in a fair and proper way but we should have reached out more to dig out these voices of dissent.

The stuff that was going on in Fairford was staggering. The bombs were on one side of the road and they had to be taken across a public highway into the airfield and they were being driven along at five miles an hour and people would chain themselves on and bomb vehicles kept moving with people chained to them, this is a fantastic story but we didn't cover it.

There was a protest where people went out in buses from London, they were held at a road block several miles from Fairford, for a couple of hours, then turned around and bundled off, they would have been arrested if they didn't, there was a police escort on all four sides of the coaches. People on the buses rang the BBC newsroom and were told they were lying this couldn't possibly be happening. These stories were not getting on because we weren't reaching out to these protestors and these non-traditional voices to get them in.

TONY MADDOX – Senior vice president of CNN International

Are you saying you don't think the BBC didn't reflect properly the anti-war protests?

BILL HAYTON – BBC Reporter

Yes. We did a big job on the big one million demonstration but on the day to day stuff once the war started it wasn't there.

RICHARD SAMBROOK – BBC Head of News

I want to throw out two other things really.

One of them is the whole question about the policy behind the embedded. After Kosovo Jamie Shea did a speech in Bosnia where he basically said their frustration had been it didn't matter whatever happened if there were pictures of a civilian tractor being hit that became the narrative of the day. And I think the embedded policy came out of that because he said they would have to grab the pictures of the day to grab the narrative. I wonder whether we reflected on that when actually we had no pictures of the Republican Guard, we had no pictures of the

western desert and was embedding simply a means of capturing the narrative of the day in a controlled way.

I have forgotten what the second one was so you will have to come back to me.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Well there was the point from Bill Hayton about covering dissent.

RICHARD SAMBROOK – BBC Head of News

Look, we could spend all of our time doing the arguments for war, we could spend all our time doing the arguments against war. You have to make a balance if people were chaining themselves to bombs it should have been somewhere.

Overall, I don't think, despite the Cardiff University study, the BBC was unduly pro-war in its coverage.

AUDREY GILLAN – Reporter, The Guardian (embedded with the Household Cavalry)

Tim Garden said there were a lot of things not covered by the embedded journalists and I have to laugh when he said especially Special Forces. There were quite a few of us who appeared for the Defence Select Committee the other week at which we were all asked if we had even seen any Special Forces at which we all had to say "no".

The thing about being embedded and the 100-odd people who were embedded is that we had completely different individual experiences and everything that we saw was completely different. But the thing that we had in common was it was a microcosm of the war. My view of the war was out of back of a very small window that size (hands mark a small rectangle in the air) in an armed reconnaissance vehicle or in the middle of the desert.

Other people's were further back down the line, if you've been watching the programme that my colleague up there (Bill Hayton) was talking about, with those very frustrated correspondents in the FPIC (Forward Press Information Centre – a British military facility set up in Northern Kuwait), they were also embedded with a completely different experience than me. They were told that they were senior correspondents, that therefore they would be kept in this area and told exactly what was going on in the war. But we were further up at the front line, we maybe saw more stuff but it lacked context.

We certainly lacked context in the sense that we did not know what was going on in the war and that's one of the things that we have to acknowledge about being embedded. We cannot pretend that it is anything other than the view of where that correspondent is. As a print journalist I think it works well. Television – I didn't see any television but criticisms have been made to me of embedded television correspondents standing up and saying, "this is the view from where I am but what I know", and then going on and giving a greater context of what was going on in the war. And I don't think we should believe that embedded journalists can give that kind of analysis from the situation that they are in because the information that they have is in fact incredibly limited.

We have to acknowledge that being embedded has its limitations because you do not have very much freedom of movement, ability to go off and interview who you like. We have no translators with us, basically no control, we're seeing what they want us to see, although in my experience it wasn't that they could control what I saw because I was there with them, a frontline fighting unit, so they couldn't say you can't come here or there because I was actually with them.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

But they did read and censor your stories?

AUDREY GILLAN – Reporter, The Guardian

Censorship was an issue, for some of these discussions I have been involved in it has not been so much of an issue for other people but certainly I know a lot of journalists who were censored; I was censored, sometimes quite rightly where I was in breach of security and could have brought us into great danger. Other issues were simply stylistic, things like “running for cover” was changed to “dashing for cover” because running for cover implies cowardice.

Certain elements of what was perceived to be anti-Americanism was removed and Ed (Pilkington) who was the Foreign Editor of the Guardian at the time, had asked me to do this piece about the situation we were talking about, about boredom. We were in the desert for a couple of days, not knowing what the hell was going on and what we were going to do. I went out and spoke to all the guys and they were like, “well this is just rubbish”. And basically I had to cut back lots of it, because they said, “we'll all get sent home if you run that. We can't say that the whole unit is really fucked off.”

Yeah we were censored but not to a degree that interfered with the copy. I'm still quite proud of the stuff that I did but I will certainly be the first person to acknowledge that it wasn't the grand sort of thing of a war correspondent, it wasn't the same as James Meek would do as a unilateral. It was a colour portrait of a soldier on the front line but worth doing.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Andrew North, you were embedded with the Marines – how was it for you?

ANDREW NORTH – BBC Radio Reporter

I was with the US Marines, which was very different because there was no censorship for me at all. I was live on air, sometimes up to forty times a day, and no-one was checking what I was doing once we crossed over. I had to get permission before we crossed over the line, to go live, but after that I just reported whatever was happening.

One thing is worth mentioning was in the first three days nothing was happening. People were sort of down the line from London saying we have got Gavin Hewitt on the way up to Baghdad. I was with these marines who were heading towards Nasariyah in the desert and all I'd see was a couple of Iraqi goatherds! So there were times when there really was nothing happening; and then it was all happening around you and the spotlight really shone on you and it was the position to be.

One thing I want to say is what Richard (Sambrook) was saying, and I think this is quite interesting, and I think that is possibly what motivated the whole embedded thing. What the Americans saw they would get out of it was that by having so many journalists out there they knew that everyone would be desperate to get on air to get their particular bit of action, it did generate a lot of drama and then as a result of that you did forget about the big picture, there was so much of this stuff coming through.

Yet at the same time we did get information. Given what was going on at Centcom – Centcom were not giving anything. The embeds, and I've heard this from so many different editors, saying that the stuff we were providing on the ground was the only information they were getting. We were the first to get a lot of stuff back most of the time and so it was the place to be for actually reporting the war. I think that is something that has been forgotten and some of the criticism sometimes has been of the embedded but we were able to actually report what was happening even if in some cases there was some censorship. In my case there wasn't I could report what I saw.

AIR MARSHAL SIR TIM GARDEN – Centre for Defence Studies, King's College, London and former assistant chief of defence staff

I think that was the trouble!

ANDREW NORTH – BBC Radio Reporter

Absolutely, it was a total snap shot, as long as you understood it was a snap shot. I was not allowed to say my location exactly, I wasn't allowed to say what the plans were I think it was worth being there.

DAVID SEYMOUR – Group Political Editor for the Mirror

I wanted to move to an area that we have not really touched on - because there are so many people here who were actually out there doing the hard job of reporting - which was about the selection of the news and the way we put the newspapers together. It's probably how the whole evening started, with the discussion of the impression people had, and Annabel (McGoldrick) said to me before, 'I am going to ask you - did the Mirror get the wobbles in the middle of the war about being anti-war?' What in fact happened, was that it was partly a feeling in the office, and partly getting some sort of feedback, it wasn't that we were particularly pro or anti – although obviously we were anti – but that the paper was unremittingly negative and the sort of stories like the rescue of (Private) Lynch were the odd - untrue as it may be - were the odd positive thing to come through.

If you remember, I think by the second week, all the papers, even the pro-war papers, we were all consistent in saying the thing is going completely wrong. Rumsfeld has only sent a half or a quarter of the number of troops he should have sent in there and it is all going wrong. We looked at the paper, and you would have had one of Anton's great reports in there but it would be, from a British perspective, negative - we were killing civilians, Americans were killing civilians and then you see somebody else killed, and then you see something going wrong somewhere else and that was at the stage where you were trying to say well do you really want to do that? Is what you are doing to your readers so depressing them?

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic Correspondent, Channel Four News

Well it is a war!

DAVID SEYMOUR – Group Political Editor for the Mirror

Yeah, but are they going to keep on buying the paper? I think I'm right in saying that all the papers, even the broadsheets started to drop in sales, I don't think that is true in the way that broadcasters report the war. Obviously because you've got pictures and guys standing up there saying things it comes over in a slightly different way and when Alan (Rusbridger) talked earlier and I think you asked him the question...

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic Correspondent, Channel Four News

Was it true what you were reporting?

DAVID SEYMOUR – Group Political Editor for the Mirror

Of course it was all true.

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic Correspondent, Channel Four News

Well there you are then!

DAVID SEYMOUR – Group Political Editor for the Mirror

There aren't actually that many wars that we have to deal with that British Forces are involved in this sort of way. (INTERRUPTION FROM SEVERAL PARTICIPANTS)

I know Bush is working on this!

But we were talking about Suez and the effect on the Observer, well it had a similar effect on the Mirror which people don't know about. The Falklands war had an effect on the Mirror and on public opinion, and we were talking about those things but virtually everybody in the Mirror office - and I was probably the only exception - hadn't been anywhere near there when the Falklands war was on.

Anton was there but [by the time of the discussion] he was over in Baghdad. So unless we are going to get lots more wars the sort of lessons we have learned, that people have learned either as reporters when they're out reporting the war, or more particularly the editors and the executives in the offices, how they deal with the war and present the war - and I am talking about newspapers now not broadcasting - will, to a great extent, be lost by the time there is next a major conflict.

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic Correspondent, Channel Four News

I just want to say something about embedding, which is that people were embedded in a war where the enemy did not fight back. The Iraqis did not shoot very often at any British or Americans.

ANDREW NORTH – BBC Radio Reporter

I disagree with that slightly.

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic Correspondent, Channel Four News

Well you may have had that experience but the fact is that the Iraqis ran away and lost the war very quickly. There were some guerrilla attempts from the beginning, they adopted a guerrilla approach immediately, the Republican Guard collapsed, they were useless - they were a sham.

ANDREW NORTH – BBC Radio Reporter

There was that point at the beginning when there was that resistance and Nasariyah was certainly pretty tough.

LINDSEY HILSUM – Diplomatic Correspondent, Channel Four News

Listen - none of us saw a real war!

None of us experienced a real war. I lived in Baghdad and I did not experience a real war; I was never in complete danger. Yes the Americans did shoot at the Palestine Hotel but most of that was the Americans shooting at us, apparently by accident.

But the point is, I am not sure how many lessons there are to be learned because I think that if there is a real war, and there is an enemy who is properly armed and really fights back, none of us will want to be embedded. And you (Richard Sambrook) talked about being embedding on the other side, nothing in the world would have made me embed with the Republican Guard! (Laughter) The point of embedding is utterly dependent on a highly superior force and being basically safe. It can go wrong but basically being safe. It may be very different if they take on another enemy.

MARY DEJEVSKY – Diplomatic Correspondent, the Independent

I was on the home front, covering, supposedly, the Foreign Office - and I say supposedly because I think it is quite instructive to look at what happened, because the two dossiers which have now become so much the topic of debate were not presented to us, the diplomatic correspondents who might have been expected to be given the dossiers for perusal first.

The first one was released to the lobby, which became a practice, and the second one was released I gather at 7am in the morning to correspondents for the Sunday newspapers covering a trip to the US. So we were basically cut out of the loop. And there was that feeling the whole time that anybody who had sort of specialist expertise or experience in London in the Whitehall operation was deliberately given sort of second class treatment.

The second problem with covering the Foreign Office was that you were continually trumped by the Lobby, that the briefings that the Foreign Office conducted basically duplicated what the Lobby had been given and you had to compare notes to pick up what was going on.

I now think, with the benefit of hindsight that a lot of people at the Foreign Office were very unhappy at the sort of stuff that they were feeding us. I was certainly extremely unhappy with the stuff the Foreign Office was feeding us, including the two dossiers, and the spin that the Foreign Office was putting on it, to the point where I am the proud possessor of a denunciation email from John Williams at the Foreign Office who accused me of 'consistent negative coverage' and how I need to

call up more frequently to 'check the line' with the Foreign Office (laughter from participants) as a lot of my colleagues do.

Now, the upshot of this was that I pretty much gave up reporting from the Foreign Office and handed it all over to the Lobby, and I was fortunate because my particular brief at the Independent is not just reporting on the Foreign Office but is also attached to the comment desk and I write most of the foreign policy editorials, so I had a sort of outlet for the scepticism which a lot of the reporters covering the dossiers and related things did not have.

I would just like to make two points about the dossiers. I think we probably all do a lot of breastbeating in retrospect as to why didn't we challenge them, well from somebody who did challenge them to the Foreign Office, the context was very different because then there was always the risk that, the very next day, they were going to find piles of the stuff all over Iraq in the very places where they said would do, so you were at a great disadvantage expressing the scepticism that I was doing. It was a high-risk thing to do and it was also very difficult for editors, because they were very reluctant to pursue that line as a reporting line. They were happy to pursue it in editorials, columns - fine. But reporting - you basically had to report what you were told and what I think I wish that I had done at the Foreign Office was, when you are presented with all this stuff about a million litres of anthrax and tonnes of this that and the other, if we had actually asked them for a quantifiable, visualisable figure to present it we might then have got to the fact that actually all this anthrax could have been accommodated in one tanker, which we are now told would be incredibly difficult to track down across the whole of Iraq, so maybe we could have gone that but further. But otherwise it was extremely difficult because of the strength of the spin and the degree to which the Lobby and the Foreign Office were being played off against each other.

JAKE LYNCH – Reporting the World

It is very interesting and I think there is a history of propaganda being fed through the lobby specifically to by-pass correspondents who might endanger or pollute the story with specialist knowledge. For example, some exhibits in our collection from over the years on this story have concerned this drone - I don't know if it is the same drone - and we have newspapers from the US and from Australia and from here in the UK and the story is the same in every case: "Saddam's germ weapons could wipe out..." and then insert the name of your city. We've got New York, London and Sydney in different stories and in each case this was attributable to this drone.

At one point I did a little bit of investigation on this and in the middle 1990's the aircraft in question was alleged to be an M18 Dromeda, which was originally a crop spraying aircraft. Somebody from Jane's (Defence Weekly magazine) helpfully informed me that its range was about 250 miles, so provided it could stop for refuelling about 20 times between Baghdad and Sydney the story would stack up, but apart from that, no. So that does have a long history.

And coming back to David Seymour's point, I think that is well understood by a lot of journalists, and I think these episodes are coming relatively thick and fast for better or worse in recent years - Kosovo rapidly gave way to Afghanistan, Afghanistan quickly gave way to Iraq. And I think the lesson that what we are being told may be

propaganda has been well absorbed. One thing I noticed from this conflict was that the word, 'propaganda' cropped up in the reporting and discussion to a much greater extent than in previous conflicts. In particular, Nik Gowing makes this point at BBC World sitting with studio guests watching proceedings at Centcom and turning to the studio guest and said, "well can we really believe that, or could it have been propaganda?" That meta-discussion was actually a much bigger factor, I think, in the media reaching most people in this conflict than it has previously been.

Having said that I think it is true to say that, as we're in the Guardian we should remember the old CP Scott dictum that comment is cheap and facts are sacred and it is through reporting that the real problem lies I believe. Unlike Bill Hayton I do have a lot of time for the BBC's War Guidelines.

BILL HAYTON – BBC TV News Reporter

I didn't say that I don't support them.

JAKE LYNCH – Reporting the World

Just to tell you some of the things they do say, they do say, in that time-honoured phrase, "all views should be reflected to mirror the depth and spread of opinion", which is a very useful phrase and honoured perhaps in some cases more in the breach than the observance. They also call for the arguments to be "heard and tested".

Just briefly to review the main arguments in favour of the war: firstly the crisis, later the war is really about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and threat they pose to global security; secondly, the only way to remove or neutralise that threat is by regime change; the third was the only way to achieve regime change is war and fourth which was kind of made up along the way was that war would therefore do most to improve the humanitarian situation for the Iraqi people.

Now, I would suggest that of those four the only one that was really tested was the second, because it could be juxtaposed with an alternative proposition, the French, German and later Russian position that no, the only way to neutralise that threat is not by regime change but also by letting the inspectors continue their work.

So personally, I think the lesson from the reporting of this conflict might be that we need to look harder and cast our net wider for alternative propositions to set alongside the propositions being given to us in the grid, the Downing Street grid, the White House grid or the Pentagon grid of daily developments, because otherwise they will be lost beneath the daily deluge of troop deployments, dossiers, press briefings, diplomatic shuttles, etc, etc, which can obscure questions that we started with.

I have noticed that there is a hunger among many news organisations for ways of doing that, for ways of saying, ok the reporting conventions we work with make it very difficult to keep hold of questions that we started with, within those reporting conventions, so let's set aside reporting conventions where necessary. The Independent's front pages since the war, for example - don't wait till someone like the Foreign Affairs Select Committee says ah, what has happened to these

weapons, otherwise you might wait forever, actually ask what has happened to these weapons.

Similarly, with the Mirror's front page which I show to my students, of the montage of the oil company names, with George Bush saying, "Amoco-ming to get you Saddam", it was a very good way of bringing it to people's attention that there may be another explanation for why we are going to war in the first place. That needed to be kept alive as an open question, not to take a position on it, but to explore it, and to enable the argument to be heard and tested and equip readers and audiences to reach their own informed views.

I think the lesson from this is that we need to see a lot more both formal and editorial innovations to cast the net wider to get the alternative views to put them before readers and audiences.

ANTON ANTONOWICZ – Chief Feature Writer, the Daily Mirror

Just briefly back to Baghdad and embeds I can't help but think that all of us in Baghdad were in fact embedded, in fact we were being held in a kind of custody by fairly horrible people who wanted to show us very horrible things for their own even more ghastly motives but actually it was quite easy in Baghdad, because you would just follow the script. The opportunities for being analytical on the ground were very very few. What one could do in the end was come out with little more, I suspect than the Christmas cracker platitude that war is a horrible thing and innocent people get killed. But in its own way, if you take the stance of the Daily Mirror for example - and I was asked often at the beginning of all this, with the hanging around waiting to get bombed, people were saying how are you going to report this war for the Daily Mirror? How anti are you going to be?

The answer is very easy, you just report what you are going to get that day, it was as simple as that, you were fed your daily fare and you did the best you possibly could with it and I think the point is, that ok we have the embeds, we had the Baghdadbeds, we have various people back in London having to quantify all of this information and qualify all of this information but frankly in end I think it's all an academic question rather than a journalistic question and I don't think a set of rules that might be subsequently published as to how to cover wars in the future will ever actually be read.

DARIUS BAZARGAN – Producer, BBC Current Affairs

I have a question for Andrew North and Audrey Gillan, it is a technical question about embedding and whether it changed.

Were you literally stuck with not just the 7th Cavalry or whatever, but actually with that tank with these five guys and there is no movement within the bigger military body that you with so it is not just a snap shot of what the 7th Cavalry or 7th Armoured Brigade is up to but where that tank is so you are very much in hock with those personalities and can't help getting increasingly annoyed with a jokes that so and so is making or something like that, you have to say with this guy because he is going to defend you.

ANDREW NORTH – BBC Radio Reporter

I think was probably quite lucky in some ways in that my position turned out to be a lot more flexible than I thought. I am not saying, I am sure they were probably monitoring stuff I was doing in different ways but particularly when the Marines I was with got to Nasariyah I was actually able to move around I would hitch lifts and go to different places so I found there was more flexibility than I expected.

AUDREY GILLAN – Reporter, The Guardian

Well I was in a little tank that was the transportation of the squadron leader of the regiment which actually meant I was limited to that tank but I was out of that tank a lot obviously and able to see everybody else but in terms of where they were moving to that is how I would move on. That was ideal for me because he would be in the good situation.

The photographer I was with was from the Daily Mail and he was with the REME, he was much further behind me so he didn't get as much access as me and he couldn't move out of that situation either. So again it all depends on individual situations but I was limited to that one vehicle but not in terms of, I wasn't only able to write about five people, I was with 105 men and I did see every single day different aspects of what those 105 men did do. Thank God I wasn't just limited to five men in that tank!

DARIUS BAZARGAN – Producer, BBC Current Affairs

Did the rules of embedding mean, I know that you could not leave the military body, but that if you saw some smoke five kilometres away you could say, "I am going over there"

ANDREW NORTH – BBC Radio Reporter

Most of the time, yeah, that is definitely the issue, that you couldn't always go, you might sometimes see something but there were times when I could do that and sometimes I would squeeze my way onto a convoy that happened to be going in a particular direction and I found I could do that. I got a helicopter trip over the city and I found that was possible but it just depended there was no guarantee.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Ed Pilkington, are you still the Foreign Editor of the Guardian?

ED PILKINGTON – Home News Editor, the Guardian (Foreign Editor during the war)

No I have moved on. Domestic news, shock horror! But because I have moved on that sort of informs what I think now. The further I get away from the story the more my sense of self-unease about what we do grows. We talked about balance versus the truth. I am very much on the side of the truth, and we can push balance to one side and the real challenge for us all is can we find the truth? And I look back and I increasingly wonder about why we failed to.

And the other weird thing about this war, and uniquely in my experience is that the war itself is becoming increasingly a side show. The talk about embedding and talk about Basra talk about Umm Qasr and all that - it is becoming increasingly marginal to the main question of how did we allow Tony Blair to get away with telling us that he had his own special intelligence and we must trust him? And he knew the truth? And we now know that he didn't have his own special intelligence

and in fact virtually the entire lot of it was at least four years old and pre-1998, and we let him get away with that.

And at the Guardian, and I am sure it is the case with many other news outlets, we tried what we thought at the time was our very hardest to get to that truth. Whenever a dossier came out we put it under the microscope, we talked to every expert we could find, we gave it forensic treatment, there were flashes of truth, there was a flash of the dodgy dossier and we had this incredible story about the thing coming off the internet which gave us flashes of truth, but for a wide remit of it, for weeks if not months, we weren't getting to that truth and it's not for want of trying.

My unease is why didn't we get that and that is the big question for us and obviously there are questions about embedding, about propaganda on both sides and how you report from Baghdad, I am not marginalising those issues, I think they are all incredibly important and I think they are going to be very important as we face other wars, which will almost certainly be upon us before we know it, but they are small beer compared with the big one which is why didn't we get that?

IAN DAVIS – Director, BASIC (British and American Security and Information Council, www.basicint.org)

I agree with what Ed (Pilkington) was just saying that it is important to be asking the difficult questions. Previous speakers asked, are there real lessons to be learnt here and how will they impact on future conflicts? But there are loads of conflicts going on at the moment, there must be over 40 serious conflicts going on around the world, there is going to be no shortage of opportunities to report on conflicts. The US have bases or special forces in over 100 countries, the UK is involved in peacekeeping in other conflict situations around the world. So I think it is important to draw lessons from this.

I was in our Washington office for the first three weeks of the war and I have to endorse what Danny (Schechter) was saying about the US coverage. This wasn't just the Fox effect, it was the main TV channels - CBS, NBC and ABC were appalling, it was just negative propaganda day after day on television. There were a few rays of light occasionally as Tony (Maddox) pointed out but not very many. And even in the print media, again there were some very good embedded journalists reporting but there was some really poor reporting and some censored reporting which came across as factual stuff.

Just drawing on one example, Judith Miller's reporting of the biological weapons finds when she was out there, in the Washington Post, failed to acknowledge censorship - it was portrayed as fact and the American public had no opportunity to get alternative views on this. I certainly got a sense that the BBC and the Guardian's websites were heavily used by American citizens.

I have a question about the role of getting external experts and drawing on the views of groups like Saferworld, BASIC and ISIS and how useful some of those have been.

Initially we set up this iraqconflict.org project to provide, what we thought at the time would be an alternative media digest because we were expecting the coverage of the war to be rather like it was in the first Gulf War which was not balanced at all. But I think as a project we were quite impressed by the media coverage so we changed the focus some what.

We tried to give a context to the conflict, to give a digest of alternative opinions. I would be interested in getting feedback from journalists here or anybody who used it and whether they found it useful because we are still churning it out. It goes out to about 4,000 people in NGOs, Government and media. When Mary (Dejevsky) was saying that it was difficult to get alternative views on the dossier, well she should have come to groups like BASIC and IISS, there were a whole range of experts providing information on the dossier and WMD issues.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

And providing a way of understand the chemicals involved.

IAN DAVIS – Director, BASIC

Exactly, there were people out there who could have given you that factual background or could have given you that assessment of the information the government was providing and I think it is probably up to us to get the information to you as well. We have a responsibility to do more to inform the media and we recognise that but the media also needs to broaden its network of experts and contacts.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

I am going to bring in Phillip Knightley, author of the First Casualty, Ed Pilkington has said can we find the truth, do you think journalists in this war did any better in finding the truth?

PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY – Journalist & Author of the First Casualty

I am heartened by the fact that we are all sitting round here tonight talking about it. I have always felt that one of the historical problems of war reporting is that military is an institution that learns from its mistakes and goes on forever. And journalists as we all know come and go. And there has never been an institution that provides a means for journalists to learn the lessons from the last war and prepare for the next.

What I hope is that some sort of indication about why the coalition adopted the procedure that it did in the last war and suggest what we might do to make certain that they don't succeed as brilliantly as they did in this one in manipulating and managing and incorporating the media.

The embedded idea rose partly out the fact that in the war against the former Yugoslavia NATO succeeded in winning that war without the loss of a single Nato military person for the first time in the history of war. And the military looked around and said wait a minute, if there was no military heroes talk about explains why all the journalists focussed on the human interest stories and the victims, bad for the military! We don't want them writing stories about people being bombed and shot and murdered, so this time we are going get over that by embedding the

correspondents with the military so that all they can write about is the activities of the troops that they are embedded with.

Then they thought, well that won't give the overall picture, we've got to have a day by day war picture hence the military briefings at Centcom headquarters. Then they said well wait a minute, there are a lot of unilaterals out there who want to go their own way. We've got to do everything possible to discourage them, we'll put pressure on them, and we'll remind them of the dangers by firing a few shots in their direction from time to time. It is an undisputed fact that 15 journalists died in this war, more than any other war with such duration in history. To put it in perspective, in the second World War BBC reporters covered the war in Europe from the time of the Normandy invasion until they surrender of Germany, and lost only two reporters. Fifteen lost in less than a month is a disgraceful state of affairs.

And we have to remind ourselves that the largest single group of those were killed by American fire. Accident? Design? I don't know but I think the American Government is now adopting the attitude towards unilaterals which is simply this, "we think it intolerable that any red-blooded American or any coalition journalist should want to report the war with the enemy side and if they do and they get in our way we will fire at them." I can't prove that but I think that is a very, very likely scenario.

What are we going to do with the next war? Are we going to go along with the embedded idea? The main danger I can see with that is not so much that you'll be limited to the group that you are with but the psychological identification that grows between the embedded correspondent and the soldiers he is with, the use of the "we", "we're doing this, and we're doing that." And frankly admitted by one BBC correspondent that he got involved in the action because the soldiers around him said, "what are you doing here? Help us!" so he helped them.

What are we going to do about the briefings? Are we going to turn up at the briefing centres and be part of the theatre that is played to an audience around the world but not intended to play for the correspondents, they are just extras in a theatre?

What are we going to do about unilaterals? Maybe it's too dangerous, I would have thought – we have to really think hard about whether it is worth risking 15 journalists' lives in order to be unilaterals or put up with the American idea of being embedded. Very major decisions have to be made very shortly.

And the last point, the ending of the western monopoly of television reporting, the arrival on the scene of Al Jazeera and Arab TV are going to change the nature of what the western reporters have to do.

And there'll be more gratuitous violence I am afraid because the whole point of Arab TV is going to be to show victims, they'll be victim correspondents, victim correspondents seen on the scene, gratuitous violence, the real face of battle is going to force western TV networks to consider whether they too can continue to ignore what war all about.

MARK BRAYNE – BBC Trauma Unit and Director, DART Centre Europe

I think those are exceptionally important points, particularly the intensity of the casualty rates, certainly as far as I can work out, never have so many people been killed in such a short space of time.

Two points I want to make, one is what Phillip was saying about the psychological side of the implications of embedding and so on, but let's widen that a little bit. Wearing my hat of the DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma I do think that journalists need to be given a much more explicit understanding of psychology and the psychological impact on themselves and their colleagues of what they are doing and the kind of emotional tides that they get pulled with. That is not just in the sense of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and turning it into a clinical problem but psychology plays an absolutely central role in what we do as any of us know - we get swept one way we get swept another way and it is incredibly difficult to hold your feet on the ground as a journalist.

I can remember covering Tiananmen Square or the Romanian revolution some time ago now, when I was still on the front line but those were very, very powerful emotional experiences that profoundly coloured my reporting of that. I am not saying that my reporting or my colleagues' reporting is bad as a result, quite the contrary - that can be the most powerfully driven reporting. But it is important that people understand that that's a dimension of what they are doing. And that is why I think in the newsrooms and in the relationships between journalists, editors and managers there needs to be this explicit awareness and pre-conflict training in self care and mutual support for when things go wrong.

The second point I just wanted to make very briefly is, Ed you asked why didn't we understand, why did these things happen? I am fascinated by the psychology again of what is happening with self-delusion. To explain it extremely briefly in the context of trauma, we each of us have what psychologists call a schema inside ourselves, which is a kind of roadmap of how the world works. When something challenges us that doesn't fit that schema, we can do one of two things. We can change our internal schema and adapt and say, "oh well I was wrong," and we move forward to the next level of understanding and awareness or we can say "I am right," how are we going to adjust the external schema and continue to search for evidence that I was right in the first place. I think we can draw conclusions from that what is going on at levels of manipulation of information.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

David Chater, from Sky News, you were a unilateral based in Baghdad and fired on by the Americans did that discourage you?

DAVID CHATER – Senior Correspondent, Sky News based in Baghdad

I actually agree with Anton, I don't think I was a unilateral, I think I was equally embedded - I had similar restrictions to the embedded correspondents. But I am very pleased that the whole embedded idea has been raised because I think there are two huge dangers as far as I am concerned. One is the embedding - I think that is a serious abdication of journalistic responsibility, I am not used to it as a war reporter, I am used to being unilateral and making my own decisions.

I am not trying to take away from those who are embedded but theirs was a very restricted view, but it was a very vivid view and the TV technology was there to put it across to people and that is one of main dangers I think - that there were 1,200 unilateral journalists operating outside that system, they had a very, very hard time.

The Americans especially gave them a very hard time. It was very dangerous for them, they took a lot of casualties, but on top of that we were using technology now which we are going to use increasingly in warfare to bring the very frontline straight into people's living rooms live and that is a very dangerous development for the journalist. Those two things really worry me.

DANNY SCHECHTER – Executive Editor, Mediachannel.org

I just want to say that I congratulate everybody here for doing this. I would really like to see an engagement between British media people and American media people because this conversation has not to my knowledge really taken place yet in the United States. There have been some panels but not really prominent editors willing to acknowledge invitations and I think that Reporting the World doing this is really making a major contribution.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

And Saferworld, BASIC and ISIS!

DANNY SCHECHTER – Executive Editor, Mediachannel.org

And I would like to say, about your website, about your bulletins that I drew on them frequently in my writing on Mediachannel.org and found it very valuable and what it pointed to me to was that there is a whole world of expertise beyond the generals, who are political specialists on Iraq, who are weapons experts beyond David Kay or Scott Ritter who are often used, who are very knowledgeable and have a lot to say and were really sought out by media operations as far as I can tell and there is a really important role to be played by NGOs and think tanks.

ANDY MCLEAN – Saferworld (www.saferworld.org.uk)

I think this has been a very interesting discussion for me listening in. If people think this idea of a British-US dialogue between journalists is a good idea then it certainly something, once we see the product, that we could try to facilitate - a British-US dialogue on these issues is something we could look into.

One of the things for us that is encouraging for us is that there is still a focus on Iraq because when we began to plan this as month or two ago, we were concerned that it would no longer be current. There is obviously a lot of very good stuff on WMD and Niger at the moment. One interesting question for me is why did Niger not make a bigger story earlier on? Because, before the war, the IAEA said these are forged documents and so on, and it got some coverage but didn't really get picked up. I remember wondering, why were more people not running with this? It now obviously has got the critical mass to tell the story and obviously the political context is slightly different with the White House admitting shouldn't have been in the State of the Union address, but it was still a big story and it wasn't really picked up at the time.

MARY DEJEVSKY – Diplomatic Correspondent, the Independent

It wasn't picked up because chemical and biological weapons trumped it and because the IAEA said we don't believe they have nuclear weapons – so nuclear weapons were basically off the agenda – what was on the agenda was chemical and biological. Now the chemical and biological weapons have gone, at least for the moment - that is why the nuclear thing has come back.

ANDY MCLEAN – Saferworld (www.saferworld.org.uk)

Obviously it is going to be a big challenge for everyone to keep Iraq on the agenda once the political story begins to fade and we begin to lose track of the security situation on the ground. There are two more things we would like to see more of firstly contrasting the post-conflict situation in Iraq with the post-conflict situation in many other countries which have had interventions in recent years. Some organisations have sent correspondents to Afghanistan to ask what has happened a year or so on, but not really very much I don't think, I think there are a lot of lessons that could be learnt there about post-conflict reconstruction. Also not much focus on what the UN are doing on the ground, Sergio Vieira de Mello is actually doing a pretty good job in working in quite difficult situations, and again there could be a bit more focus on that.

ANNABEL MCGOLDRICK – Reporting the World

Thank you everyone for such focussed attention and participation this evening, thank you to the Guardian/Observer archive & visitor centre for having us here and to our partners BASIC, ISIS and Saferworld. And by next week we should have a transcript on the web.