

War Correspondents, the Military, and Propaganda: Some Critical Reflections¹

Douglas Kellner
University of California, Los Angeles

When a nation goes to war, it is a great challenge for the media to provide accurate and fair coverage in the face of pressures from the state and military to advance the war aims of the nation. War correspondents must mediate between the conflicting ideals of journalism, an often pro-military and pro-war public, pressures from their corporate managers, and the frequently propagandistic and censoring efforts of the state and military. There have indeed been sharp debates over the appropriate relations between the military and the media over the last decades in the United States. After relatively free press access to the battlefield in the Vietnam war, during the invasion of Panama and the first U.S.-Iraq war (1990-1991), a "pool" system was instituted, discussed below, while in the second Iraq war, from 2003 up until the present, a system of "embedding" reporters with troops has been utilized.

In this study, I discuss how war correspondents have served in coverage of the interventions into Iraq of two Bush administrations. I begin with some general observations on war correspondents and their relation to the military, state, media corporations, and journalistic standards, and discuss a range of issues concerning war correspondents in recent U.S.-Iraq wars. I offer a typology of types of war correspondents and a normative ideal of the proper role of war correspondents and the media in democratic societies. In a concluding section, I discuss how emergent digital technologies and new media expand the possibilities of critical war coverage and destabilize the position of war correspondents within traditional journalism. At stake is assessing the role of war correspondents in the contemporary moment and analyzing their performance during recent wars in an era of emergent media and forms of journalism.

¹ This paper was first presented at a conference on "Kriegskorrespondenten als Deutungsinstanzen in der Mediengesellschaft" held in Freudenstadt, Germany, June 15-18, 2006. I would like to thank the organizers Barbara Korte and Horst Tonne, as well as the participants in the conference, for stimulating papers and discussion that helped me develop some of the ideas on the topic presented here, since published in Korte/Tonn 2007. I would also like to thank the reviewers of the *IJoC* for useful comments and help with revising the paper, as well as Larry Gross for sustained admonitions to revise and submit.

Douglas Kellner: kellner@ucla.edu

Date submitted: 2008-01-04

Copyright © 2008 (Douglas Kellner). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

War Correspondents: Propaganda, Witnessing, and Truth-Telling

In his magisterial historical overview, *The First Casualty. From the Crimea to Vietnam and Kosovo: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*, (2002 [1975]), Phillip Knightley has documented how war correspondents from the Crimean war through Vietnam and Kosovo have served as propagandists and mythmakers, as well as critical and objective reporters. For Knightley, war correspondents were historically a subcategory of journalists, and he analyzes relations between various war correspondents and other reporters, editors, publishers, and the state and military, focusing most of his studies on the role of the press war correspondents in the field. In our day, however, in which broadcasting has become central to the reporting of modern wars, we must also be aware of the relations between broadcasting war correspondents, network anchors, military and political commentators, and corporate broadcasting managers and executives.²

In times of war, the military has traditionally attempted to use the media and, at times, control them through censorship laws to induce them to present reports favorable to military and state interests. Additionally, as Knightley (2002) documents well, often war correspondents are outright propagandists for the state and military. Or, if they are too critical, they could be forcefully evicted from the field of battle and unable to report. During the era of broadcasting, it is much the same with the twist that, just as the military use media to mobilize support for their war aims and policies, the media use the military to get ratings and make money in a highly competitive multimedia market. Hence, there is a mutuality of interests between media and military in popular wars like the U.S.-Iraq war of 1991, the 2001 Afghanistan incursion, and the beginning of the U.S.-Iraq war in 2003. During these episodes, the corporate broadcasting media and the press in the U.S. were largely amplifiers for messages of the state and the military and were relatively uncritical.

In wartime, there are always complex relations between journalism and patriotism in which "objectivity" and conventional journalist standards are often strained to serve partisan ends. In recent years, in an era of highly polarized new media and media saturation from multiple sources, including the Internet and new digital media, coverage of war has become highly politicized. On the right, there is the suspicion that mainstream media are liberal and anti-war, and need to be pressured to be patriotic and support recent wars — a false conception that I shall contest in this paper. As one conservative blogger put it: "Most of the American correspondents in Iraq who report for the major news organizations believe in the journalistic principle, most infamously expressed by Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes, that you do not

² For a bibliography of books on war correspondents, see http://www.poynter.org/dg.lts/id.27695/content.content_view.htm (accessed January 4, 2008). For a useful recent book on war correspondents, see McLaughlin, 2002, whose book appeared, however, before Iraq and the emergence of some new digital media that I discuss in the concluding section. On current discussions of war correspondents in a variety of wars and countries, see the studies collected in Korte & Tonn, 2007.

take sides in reporting on the war. You are a 'citizen of the world,' as CNN's Bob Franken put it just before the invasion of Iraq, and you check your patriotism when you put on your reporter's hat."³

Note that some U.S. conservatives want journalists to be patriotic and are contemptuous of correspondents who adhere to traditional journalistic standards of objectivity and neutrality. Generally, there is a "consensual patriotism" at least at the start of wars and during popular or seemingly successful wars, although this can change, as we are seeing in the case of the current Iraq debacle. Crucially, there are powerful institutional pressures on journalists to not be critical during wartime, especially if it is a popular war. In the quest for ratings and reputation, proclivities toward pack journalism, conformity of often high-paid journalists in a competitive field, and other structural-institutional constraints from the military, state, and — in some cases — media corporations, there are strong pressures for journalists to go with the consensus if a war appears popular.

Moreover, there is a long (and dishonorable!) history of war correspondents' complicity in outright propaganda and lies. Knightley (2002) deflates the "war journalist as hero" myth by documenting shoddy reporting, complicity with the military and state, and compromises made by war correspondents from the Crimean war, U.S. Civil War, and Boer War through World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, and Kosovo. Knightley's well-documented account deflates myth after national myth concerning the past century-and-a-half of war, demonstrating how war correspondents contributed to highly misleading and sometimes blatantly false accounts of military events crystallized into dominant myths within a score of wars. Yet, as Knightley also documents, there is a tradition of honorable war correspondents who have made their careers through reporting critical of the military and providing accurate and insightful coverage.

The honorable and heroic side of war correspondents over the last century was the topic of Michael Samstag and Debbie Etchison's film *War and Truth* (2005). The compilation documentary uses the topic of war correspondents and truth to critique the mainstream corporate media's performance in Iraq. After an idealized presentation of the heroics of war correspondents in World War II and Vietnam, featuring extended interviews with Norm Hatch and Joe Galloway and excellent footage and photos, the film switched to Iraq, where inevitable criticisms of the U.S. corporate media's devolution from a truth-telling to a propaganda apparatus emerged, especially in the full interviews with Joe Galloway and Helen Thomas on the DVD of the film.⁴

This topic was the focus of Danny Schechter's documentary *WMD: Weapons of Mass Deception* (2004), itself based on Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber's book with that title (2004).⁵ The book and

³ Stephen Spruiell, Mediablog, National review online at <http://media.nationalreview.com/post/?q=MTlhMTYwZjY2NGFhMTImNTVhNDJhNDhhZjEwMGFiMDU=> (accessed December 14, 2006).

⁴ For information on *War and Truth*, see the Web site <http://www.warandtruththemovie.com/> (accessed December 31, 2007).

⁵ For information on Schechter's documentary *WMD*, see the Web site <http://www.wmdthefilm.com/mambo/index.php> (accessed December 31, 2007). See also Loretta Alpert

film demonstrate how the U.S. corporate media failed to carry out their democratic responsibilities and were used as instruments of manipulation and propaganda by the Bush-Cheney administration in selling and promoting the Iraq war. Investigative journalist and self-described “news dissector” Schechter combines Michael Moore-like personal intervention in his confrontation with representatives of U.S. media with copious collage of media images that demonstrate a pro-war and propagandistic bias. The film suggests that embedding war correspondents with troops is unlikely to produce critical reporting.

MSNBC's Ashleigh Banfield makes a useful distinction in the documentary between war journalism and war coverage, admitting the U.S. corporate networks did more of the latter, providing Pentagon spin from the point of view of the U.S. military. In general, war correspondents can either describe actions or briefings, serving as relatively objective conduits; they can debunk official accounts and do independent investigative reporting, serving as critical correspondents; or in some cases they can transmit propaganda or lies, and serve as part of a war propaganda apparatus.⁶ Of course, a given war correspondent can be all three at different times — objective, critical, or propagandistic — and even combine these categories in a given report, although many war correspondents, or specific reports, often embodying one of those types. Indeed, some war correspondents have been downright propagandist and militarist, and I will discuss how embedding during the recent Iraq war increased pro-military reporting of U.S. war correspondents.

and Jeremy Earp's documentary *War Made Easy. How Presidents & Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* (2007). The documentary, based on Norman Solomon's analysis of war and media and narrated by Sean Penn, contains an astonishing montage of U.S. corporate media broadcast journalists parroting Bush-Cheney administration propaganda of the day concerning the Iraq war. It includes a bevy of erroneous claims about Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction,” Iraq and Al Qaeda connections, as well as other assertions that have been revealed to be utterly mendacious. The film also puts on display members of the corporate media sharply attacking critics of the Iraq war and specific claims made by the Bush-Cheney administration. It is produced and distributed by the Media Education Foundation and is available at <http://www.mediaed.org/videos/CommercialismPoliticsAndMedia/WarMadeEasy> (accessed December 31, 2007).

⁶ In the latter category, there have been reports of the increase of the U.S. and U.K. using intelligence services to function as journalists and to purposively transmit disinformation or spin to reporters, but I will ignore this category for this essay. Oliver Boyd-Barrett provides an overall history of the U.S. using intelligence agents as journalists during the Cold War and more recent wars in Allan & Zelizer, 2004, pp. 25-42, while Richard Keeble gives account of intelligence services in the U.K. infiltrating journalism in Allan & Zelizer, 2004, pp. 43-58.

Military commentators on most U.S. corporate broadcasting networks are mostly propagandists.⁷ On the whole, ex-U.S. military personnel with contacts with the administration and Pentagon who serve as broadcasting commentators are largely uncritical and parrot current U.S. military policy and the Pentagon spin of the day. In order to keep their lines of communication to the administration or Pentagon open, they need to transmit the official line of the moment. Most television commentators tend to uncritically support and legitimize U.S. military actions, with the almost single exception of General Wesley Clarke, who has occasionally been a military commentator for U.S. broadcasting networks like CNN and MSNBC. Unlike others, Clarke draws on multiple sources, some dissident or lower-level Pentagon sources at odds with the top brass, and provides some critical commentary on the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq during the Bush/Cheney administration.

Yet, in all wars, there is a potential adversarial relation for war correspondents who are expected to do *personal witnessing* and *truth-telling*.⁸ The function of witnessing is often dangerous, hence part of the romanticism of war correspondents is that some correspondents risk their life to witness military actions. Further, truth-telling is also difficult since there are a lot of lies, spin, and confusion in the fog of war, and it is often hard to discern the truth or to communicate truths when censorship is at play. Raymond Williams (1982, p. 14) suggests that, in a media age, the media produce a "culture of distance" through which we are distanced from the horrors of war. He used this concept to describe experience of the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas war, and certainly in the two U.S.-Iraq wars and Afghanistan war there were even more striking abstractions and distancing, with media sanitizing and idealizing the conflicts. Hence, in Williams' terms, one challenge would be for war correspondents to break down the culture of distance and provide witnessing and truth, however disturbing.

⁷ The documentary *War Made Easy* (see Note 5) catches CNN President Jordan Easton bragging about how he went to the Pentagon to clear potential CNN military commentators with Pentagon brass just before the 2003 war on Iraq. See also David Barstow, "Behind TV Analysts, Pentagon's Hidden Hand," *New York Times*, April 20, 2008 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/washington/20generals.html?em&ex=1209009600&en=3ee3387c020a7f71&ei=5087%0A> (accessed April 21, 2008). Barstow's story documents how the Bush-Cheney administration and Pentagon cultivated ex-military officials to become military commentators on the U.S. networks and how the commentators systematically parroted the official administration/Pentagon line of the day, becoming part of a Pentagon propaganda apparatus. Many of these same commentators had economic ties to defense contractors and used their connections with the Pentagon and the broadcasting networks to advance their economic interests, pressures that assured they would not depart from the Pentagon spin of the day. The report produced some outrage; see Glenn Greenwald, "Major revelation: U.S. media deceitfully disseminates government propaganda," *Salon*, April 20, 2008 at <http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2008/04/20/nyt/print.html> although a subsequent posting by Greenwald indicated that the mainstream corporate media has not followed up on the story; see <http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2008/04/22/analysts/print.html> (both accessed April 22, 2008).

⁸ These two ideals for war correspondents to follow are suggested in the editors' "Introduction" to Allan and Zelizer, 2004, p. 3f.) which provides an excellent historical analysis of the role of war correspondents.

War correspondents can become heroes if it is a popular war and they are seen as part of the war effort, as was the case with Ernie Pyle, Edward R. Murrow, and the CBS radio team in London in World War II. They can become heroes, or win popular acclaim in some circles, if the war is an unpopular one and they provide critical coverage, as did David Halberstam and Seymour Hersh in Vietnam and subsequent wars. In many wars, photojournalists also made their reputations with key images, as when Eddie Addams took a picture of a South Vietnamese soldier shooting a suspected Viet Cong prisoner point-blank in the head; Ron Haeberle documented the infamous Mai Lai incident; and Malcolm Browne took many famous pictures in Vietnam, including the one of the naked Vietnamese girl running from war, just one icon of the horrors of war and how it was impacting innocent civilians.⁹ These resonant images can generate critical views of specific military interventions that can help shape a society's picture of war and can help turn the public against a war, as the cumulative pictures and reports coming out of Vietnam by the mid-1970s may have done.

I would cite the decisive role of war correspondents and photojournalists in Vietnam in helping to create an anti-war consensus, forcing Lyndon Johnson not to run again, and then pressuring Richard Nixon to withdraw troops in a "Vietnamization" process that ended with the U.S. pulling out in the face of the collapse of the South Vietnamese government.¹⁰ Indeed, one of the reasons for the pool and then embedding system in the 1991 and 2003 U.S.-Iraq wars was to control images and reports that could help turn the public against the two Bush administrations' Iraq incursions, as we will see below.

Hence, war correspondents are caught up in a matrix of conflicting pressures between journalistic norms, media institutions, the state, the military and public responses to various wars. Some correspondents have distinguished themselves with critical and independent reporting, while others have served as instruments of state and military propaganda, as I will illustrate below. After these introductory remarks, I want to give examples of U.S. journalists/war correspondents transmitting war propaganda leading up to both the first and second U.S.-Iraq wars. I also give examples of war correspondents doing an exemplary job, and conclude with some comments concerning war correspondents in the age of digital media, as well as a discussion of new sources of images, information and commentary that constitute a significant expansion to military journalism and create the possibility for more critical views.

Propaganda and the Pool System in Bush Senior's Iraq War (1990-1991)

Sometimes propaganda stories from early days of the war, or a prewar situation, can be decisive in mobilizing consent to a nation's military interventions. In the so-called "Crisis in the Gulf" which emerged in August 1990 after Iraq invaded Kuwait, a propaganda story that Iraq was poised to invade

⁹ On the history of photojournalists in war and coverage of the cited Vietnam photojournalists, see Moeller, 1989.

¹⁰ Yet I agree with Hallin (1986) and Gibson (1987) that U.S. media coverage, and especially broadcasting, was largely pro-war with exceptions that became iconic in later documentaries and discussions.

Saudi Arabia may have been decisive in mobilizing quick support for a U.S. intervention against Iraq. In general, prewar "crisis" situations are often crucial, for once war begins, the state must have in place arguments to justify the war to mobilize significant support for a military intervention.

The disinformation campaign that legitimated the U.S. sending troops to Saudi Arabia, and eventually forcing Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, began working through the *Washington Post* on August 7, 1990, the same day President George H.W. Bush announced that he was sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. In a front page story by Patrick Tyler (1990), with a banner headline, "Saddam says Seizure of Kuwait Is Permanent," the *Post* claimed that in a previous day's meeting between the U.S. *chargé d'affaires* Joseph Wilson and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi leader was highly belligerent, claiming that Kuwait was part of Iraq, that no negotiation was possible, that he would invade Saudi Arabia if they cut off the oil pipes which delivered Iraqi oil across Saudi territory to the Gulf, and that American blood would flow in the sand if the U.S. sent troops to the region.

A later transcript of the Wilson-Hussein meeting revealed, however, that Hussein insisted that he had no intention of invading Saudi Arabia and indicated a willingness to negotiate with the U.S. and to discuss the problems of the region.¹¹ The *Post* story was taken up by the television networks, wire services, and press, producing an image that there was no possibility of a diplomatic solution, and that decisive action was needed to protect Saudi Arabia from an imminent Iraqi invasion. Such a story line legitimated the sending of U.S. troops to the Gulf and provided a perfect justification for Bush Senior's intervention in the region.

Editorial columns in the *Washington Post* the same day supported the Bush administration deployment. Mary McGrory published a column titled "The Beast of Baghdad," which also assumed that Iraq was set to invade Saudi Arabia and called upon Bush to bomb Baghdad! Precisely the same line appeared in an op-ed piece by the *Post's* associate editor and chief foreign correspondent Jim Hoagland, who kicked in with a column: "Force Hussein to Withdraw" (p. A19). As certain as McGrory of Iraq's imminent invasion of Saudi Arabia, Hoagland opened by proclaiming that "Saddam Hussein has gone to war to gain control of the oil fields of Kuwait and ultimately of Saudi Arabia. The United States must now use convincing military force against the Iraqi dictator to save the oil fields and to preserve American influence in the Middle East." According to Hoagland, Saddam Hussein "respects only force and will respond to nothing else."

¹¹ See Karsh and Rautsi (1991, p. 220ff.) and Kellner, (1992, p. 22ff.); the transcript of the Hussein-Wilson meeting is found in Salinger and Laurent (1991, pp. 137-147). Joseph Wilson, in his book *The Politics of Truth* (2005), writes: "During our session — the last he had with any American official before the war — I listened as he offered his deal through a translator: In exchange for keeping Kuwait, he would give the U.S. oil at a good price and would not invade Saudi Arabia. In a matter-of-fact manner, he dismissed the Kuwaiti government as 'history' and scoffed at President's Bush's condemnation of him" (467). Wilson also suggests that Bush senior and not U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, might have been the one who most encouraged Hussein to invade Kuwait due to conciliatory communication with the Iraqi president (pp. 101-102).

Yet it is not at all certain how many troops Iraq actually deployed in Kuwait during the first weeks of the crisis, and there is evidence that there were no significant Iraqi forces on the Saudi border, as the Bush administration was claiming. All pre-invasion reports produced by the Bush senior administration and uncritically reproduced by the U.S. corporate media indicated that Iraq had amassed more than 100,000 troops on the border of Kuwait. Initial reports during the first few days after the invasion suggested that Iraq had between 80,000 and 100,000 troops in Kuwait, more than enough for an occupation, as the Bush administration liked to point out, and as the mainstream media diligently reported; once the U.S. forces were on their way to Saudi Arabia, the Iraqi forces allegedly doubled and reports claimed that there were at least 100,000 Iraqi troops amassed on the border of Saudi Arabia alone. But these figures invariably came from Bush administration or Pentagon sources, and sources critical of the U.S. claims concerning the number of Iraqi troops deployed revealed a quite different figure (Kellner, 1992).

St. Petersburg Times reporter Jean Heller published an article, "Photos don't show buildup," on January 6, 1991, suggesting that satellite photos indicated far fewer Iraqi troops in Kuwait than the Bush administration claimed. Heller's suspicions were roused when she saw a *Newsweek* "Periscope" item that ABC's "Prime Time Live" had never used several satellite photos of occupied Kuwait City and southern Kuwait taken in early September. Purchased by ABC from the Soviet commercial satellite agency Soyuz-Karta, the photos were expected to reveal the presence of a massive Iraqi troop deployment in Kuwait, but failed to disclose anything near the number of troops claimed by the Bush administration. ABC declined to use them and Heller got her newspaper to purchase the satellite photos of Kuwait from August 8 and September 13 and of Saudi Arabia from September 11. Two satellite experts who had formerly worked for the U.S. government failed to find evidence of the alleged buildup. "'The Pentagon kept saying the bad guys were there, but we don't see anything to indicate an Iraqi force in Kuwait of even 20% the size the administration claimed,' said Peter Zimmerman, who served with the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency during the Reagan administration" (Heller, 1991, p. 1A)

Both satellite photos taken on August 8 and September 13 showed a sand cover on the roads, suggesting that there were few Iraqi troops on the Saudi border where the Bush administration claimed that they were massed, threatening to invade Saudi Arabia. Pictures of the main Kuwaiti airport showed no Iraqi planes in sight, though large numbers of U.S. planes were visible in Saudi Arabia. The Pentagon refused to comment on the satellite photos, but to suggestions by ABC (which refused to show the photos) that the quality of the pictures was not high enough to detect the Iraqi troops, Heller responded that the photograph of the north of Saudi Arabia showed all the roads swept clean of sand and clearly depicted the U.S. troop buildup in the area. By September, the Pentagon was claiming that there were 265,000 Iraqi troops and 2,200 tanks deployed in Kuwait, which posed a threat to Saudi Arabia. But the photographs revealed nowhere near this number and the U.S. government has refused to this day to release its satellite photographs.

Interestingly, Bob Woodward (1991) noted that the Saudis had sent scouts across the border into Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion to see if they could detect the Iraqi troops that the United States claimed were massed for a possible invasion of their country. "The scouts had come back reporting nothing. There was no trace of the Iraqi troops heading toward the kingdom" (Woodward, 1991, pp. 258-259). Soon

after, the U.S. team arrived with photos of the Iraqi troops allegedly massed on the Saudi border, and General Norman Schwarzkopf explained to the Saudis that the Iraqis had sent small command-and-control units ahead of the mass of troops, which would explain why the Saudi scouts failed to see them (Woodward, 1991, p. 268). Former CIA officer Ralph McGehee told journalist Joel Bleifuss: "There has been no hesitation in the past to use doctored satellite photographs to support the policy position that the U.S. wants supported" ("The First Stone," *In These Times*, Sept. 19, 1990, p. 5). Indeed, Emery (1991) reported that King Hussein of Jordan was also sent pictures of Iraqi tanks moving along roads near the Saudi/Kuwaiti border which had been shown to the Saudis, and that King Hussein claimed that the Saudis had "pressed the panic button" when they saw the photographs. King Hussein was skeptical and "argued that if Saddam Hussein had wanted to invade the Saudis, he would have moved immediately, when the only thing between him and the Saudi capital was a tiny and untested — if expensively equipped — Saudi army" (Emery, 1991, p. 25).

And so here is how the disinformation campaign worked to legitimate U.S. deployment of troops in Saudi Arabia: High Bush administration officials called in journalists who would serve as conduits for stories that Iraq refused to negotiate a withdrawal from Kuwait and that they had troops stationed on the borders of Saudi Arabia, threatening to invade the oil-rich kingdom. The Pentagon and Bush administration also released information at press conferences concerning the Iraqi threat to Saudi Arabia and Iraq's unwillingness to negotiate. These "official" pronouncements supplemented the unofficial briefings of reporters. In turn, editorial writers and commentators on TV networks took up these claims, which they used to bolster arguments concerning why it was necessary for the U.S. to send troops to Saudi Arabia.

Hence, a successful disinformation campaign was undertaken by the Bush administration and the Pentagon to legitimate sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. Beginning in early October, a sustained propaganda campaign was underway that legitimated the U.S. use of military power to force Iraq out of Kuwait. This propaganda offensive involved demonization of the Iraqis for their "rape of Kuwait," as well as the demonization of Saddam Hussein as "another Hitler" and the incarnation of evil.¹² This campaign

¹² A study undertaken by the Gannett foundation indicated that there were over 1,170 articles linking Hussein with Hitler (LaMay et al., 1991, p. 42). This comparison obviously presupposes a false analogy in terms of the military threat to the region and the world from the Iraqi army — whose threat was hyped up from the beginning. Iraq's population of 17 million can hardly compare with Germany's 70 million and its military was significantly less threatening than Hitler's military machine, which was the most powerful in the world in the 1930s. Nor could Iraq, which depends on oil for more than 95% of its exports, be compared with an industrial powerhouse like Germany. It is also inappropriate to compare a major imperialist superpower with a regional power, Iraq, that itself is the product of colonization.

It might also be noted how the Bush Senior administration and media personalized the crisis, equating Iraq with its leader. Whereas in coverage during the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, in which the U.S. covertly supported Iraq, references were to "Baghdad" and "Iraq," during the Gulf crisis and war it was usually "Saddam Hussein" who was referred to as the actor and source of all evil (I am grateful to Richard Keeble for this insight).

was inspired by a British campaign during World War I, repeated by the U.S. when it entered the war, on the "rape of Belgium" which stigmatized the Germans as rapists and murderers of innocent children — charges later proven to be false.

The demonization of Hussein and the Iraqis was important because no negotiation could be possible, nor any diplomatic solution to the crisis considered, if they were depicted as absolutely evil and a threat on a par with Hitler and the Nazis. To help stigmatize the Iraqis, a Kuwaiti government group financed a propaganda campaign, undertaken by the U.S. public relations firm Hill & Knowlton, which invented Iraqi atrocities in Kuwait, such as the killing of premature babies who were allegedly taken out of incubators and left to die on the floor. In October 1990, a tearful teenage girl testified to the House of Representatives Human Rights Caucus that she had seen Iraqi soldiers remove 15 babies from incubators and leave them to die on the floor of the hospital. The girl's identity was not revealed, supposedly to protect her family from reprisals. This story helped mobilize support for U.S. military action, much as Bush's Willie Horton ads had helped him win the presidency by playing on primal emotions. Bush mentioned the story six times in one month and eight times in 44 days; Vice-President Dan Quayle referred to it frequently, as did General Norman Schwarzkopf and other military spokespersons. Seven U.S. senators cited the story in speeches supporting the January 12 resolution authorizing war.

In a January 6, 1992 op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, John MacArthur, publisher of *Harper's* magazine, revealed that the unidentified congressional witness was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the U.S. The girl had been brought to Congress by Hill & Knowlton, which had coached her and helped organize the congressional human rights hearings. In addition, Craig Fuller, Bush's former chief of staff when he was vice president and a Bush loyalist, was president of Hill & Knowlton and was involved with the PR campaign, as were several other former officials for the Reagan administration, who had close relations with the Bush administration.¹³

Thus, the Kuwaiti government developed a propaganda campaign to manipulate the American people into accepting the Gulf war, and the Bush administration used this campaign to promote their goals. Hill & Knowlton organized a photo exhibition of Iraqi atrocities displayed at the United Nations and the U.S. Congress and widely shown on television. They also assisted Kuwaiti refugees in telling stories of torture, lobbied Congress, and prepared video and print material for the media.

On January 17, 1992, ABC's "20/20" disclosed that a "doctor" who testified that he had "buried 14 newborn babies that had been taken from their incubators by the soldiers" was also lying. The "doctor" was actually a dentist and later admitted to ABC that he had never examined the babies and had no way of knowing how they had died. The same was true of Amnesty International, which published a report based on this testimony, and later retracted the report, which had been cited frequently by Bush and other members of his administration. ABC also disclosed that Hill & Knowlton had commissioned a "focus group" survey, which brought groups of people together to find out what stirs or angers them. The focus group responded strongly to the Iraqi baby atrocity stories, so Hill & Knowlton featured them in its PR campaigns for the Free Kuwait group.

¹³ MacArthur (1992) recounts the story in detail in his book *Second Front*.

In addition to carrying out a massive propaganda campaign, the U.S. government also instituted a sustained effort to control information and images through the pool system. Few of the U.S. broadcasting networks sought out critical or alternative views. The pool system restricted media access to soldiers and the battlefield; members representing different media like the press, radio, and television were organized into "pools" and taken to chosen sites. They were accompanied at all times by military personnel, called "minders," who restricted their access and tightly controlled their movements. The reports were then sent to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, where a Joint Information Bureau censored the reports that then became common material available to those media outlets that had joined the pool. This pool and censorship system produced tight control over the press and assured that positive images and reporting of the war would take place.¹⁴

Since Pool reporters were attended at all times by military escorts, had limited access to the battlefield, and their reports were subject to censorship, there really was not much critical war reporting from the pools. Hence, on the whole, the corporate media were conduits for the Bush Senior administration and the Pentagon during the 1991 U.S.-Iraq war, although a few critical stories emerged from the press, as well as some broadcasting that questioned the spin and sometimes outright lies (see Kellner, 1992).

Lies, Propaganda, and Embedded War Correspondents in Bush Junior's Iraq Preventive War of Choice (2003 -)

George W. Bush's 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq now appears as a *Fiasco* (Ricks, 2006), an act of *Hubris* (Isikoff & Corn, 2006), and *The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (Rich, 2006), with the Bush administration appearing in a *State of Denial* (Woodruff, 2006) concerning the extent of the catastrophe. Some war correspondents and the U.S. media as a whole now stand disgraced, both for their reporting on non-existent Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction" (WMDs) and threats to the U.S. from Iraq before the March 2003 invasion, as well as their propagandistic reporting during the offensive and the initial stages of the occupation. In the prewar crisis, certain journalists provided stories that bolstered Bush administration claims concerning Iraqi possession of WMDs, most prominently Judith Miller of the *New York Times*.

Miller was a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter, co-author of a respected book on biological weapons, *Germs* (2000), and a supposed authority on the military and terrorism. She was one of the first mainstream media reporters to provide alarming information about Iraqi WMDs, and as early as December 20, 2001, she had a front page story in the *New York Times*, headlined, "An Iraqi Defector Tells of Work on at Least 20 Hidden Weapons Sites." Miller claimed that an Iraqi defector had revealed information concerning an elaborate Iraqi WMD program, asserting that "he personally worked on renovations of secret facilities for biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons in underground wells, private villas, and

¹⁴ Following the example of British censorship of the press during the Falkland Islands/Malvinas war, the U.S. tightly controlled press access during the Grenada foray and instituted the pool system during the Panama invasion; for detailed analysis of how it worked during the Gulf War, see Kellner (1992, p. 80ff.).

under the Saddam Hussein Hospital in Baghdad as recently as a year ago" (Miller, 2001). The source would be the first of many of Miller's sources who would flunk lie-detector tests and be rejected by intelligence agencies (Rich, 2006, p. 41; Boehlert, 2006, p. 222).

Miller was closely allied with sources from the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and its highly suspicious leader Ahmed Chalabi, and also had close connections, as it came out later, to I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Dick Cheney's chief of staff, serving as a conduit for Bush administration and INC stories.¹⁵ On September 8, 2002, a caption "U.S. Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts" appeared in a *New York Times* front-page story by Miller with Michael Gordon. The piece claimed that Iraq was seeking nuclear weapons just when Dick Cheney and other members of the Bush White House were warning about nuclear weapons in Saddam's hand, and Bush and his National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice were alluding to dangers of mushroom clouds in their speeches. As Isikoff and Corn later analyze the flawed story (2006, p. 34ff.), Gordon did the reporting about Iraq's purchase of aluminum tubes which were allegedly of a type used for nuclear weapons production, while Miller's reporting continued drawing on a supposed Iraqi defector who had knowledge of Iraqi weapons programs. The day that the article was published, Dick Cheney appeared on television, citing the *New York Times* article as a source concerning Iraq's dire threats to the U.S., and for weeks thereafter, Bush administration officials used the story to create fears of an Iraqi nuclear attack (see Boehlert, 2006, p. 223f.).

It soon came out, however, that members of the U.S. intelligence community and international nuclear weapons monitoring officials were highly skeptical that the tubes were of nuclear weapons grade quality, and most believed that they were for conventional Iraqi weapons. One U.S. expert called Miller to tell her of widespread skepticism concerning the tubes, and a follow-up story "White House Lists Iraq Steps to Build Banned Weapons" by Miller and Gordon in the *New York Times* on September 13, 2002, acknowledged that there was a debate, but claimed that "it was the intelligence agencies' unanimous view that the type of tubes that Iraq has been seeking are used to make such [nuclear weapons-grade] centrifuges." While Miller and Gordon conceded that there was a debate, they claimed that skepticism was a minority view, an outright falsehood as it would turn out.

Indeed, both the State Department and Energy Department contested this position at the time, as did the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei.¹⁶ Likewise, it was later revealed that the Iraqi defector who alleged secret Iraqi WMD programs and numerous Iraqi WMD production sites who Miller continued to rely on for her front page stories had failed lie detector tests and

¹⁵ See the detailed account of Judith Miller's activities in Isikoff & Corn (2006) and Boehlert (2006), as well as the more condensed version in Rich (2006) and Ricks (2006).

¹⁶ See Gordon (2003). As I noted during the lead-up to the 2003 war against Iraq on my *BlogLeft*, every claim by Bush administration officials concerning alleged Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, ties to Al Qaeda, and so forth were refuted by major U.S. government or international agency authorities (see the *BlogLeft* archives at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/blogger.php>), accessed December 31, 2007). But this pattern of mendacity did not get coverage in the mainstream media, as every major Bush administration claim concerning Iraq WMD programs was trumpeted by an uncritical media (see Kellner, 2005).

was no longer taken seriously by intelligence agencies as a source of information (Isikoff & Corn, 2006, p. 55ff.; Ricks, 2006, p. 55f.).

It was not just Miller, however, who served as a conduit for Bush administration stories concerning Iraqi WMD programs, but the entire mainstream corporate media in the United States, including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. For example, based on an Iraqi exile's claim that was later shown to be fallacious, the *Washington Post's* Jim Hoagland wrote an op-ed piece claiming that Iraq trained terrorists in a Salman Pak site, and Patrick Tyler and John Taliabue maintained that "non-Iraqi Arabs had been given training in terrorism at this camp" (Isikoff & Corn, 2006, p. 54).¹⁷

To grasp why the mainstream media fumbled so badly on Iraq and Bush administration claims, one might look at two retrospectives by the two major U.S. newspapers explaining why they failed so miserably in the run-up to Iraq. A retrospective done by the *New York Times* on May 26, 2004, "From the Editors" on "The Times and Iraq" acknowledged:

We have found a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been. In some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged. Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged — or failed to emerge.¹⁸

While the *Times* acknowledged mistakes and conceded that it should not have relied on Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress (INC), it did not name Miller, even though she was author or co-author of most of the key flawed articles it mentioned in the report. Moreover, the *Times'* editors in the following days defended Miller's reporting, although, as we shall see below, eventually they were forced to fire her (Ricks, 2006, p. 385).¹⁹

An August 12, 2004, retrospective in the *Washington Post* notes how they, too, failed in their journalistic responsibilities on alleged Iraqi WMDs, and admits to being overly accepting of Bush administration claims. The *Post* noted in their retrospective that from August 2002 through the March 12, 2003 launch of the war, it had more than 140 front page stories that reproduced Bush administration rhetoric or positions on the war, such as "Cheney Says Iraqi Strike is Justified," "War Cabinet Argues for

¹⁷ Note that both Hoagland and Tyler were involved in disseminating propaganda that helped legitimate Bush Senior's sending troops to Saudi Arabia in the 1990-91 war on Iraq, as I indicate earlier in this study.

¹⁸ From the Editors, "The Times and Iraq" is available at http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/international/middleeast/26FTE_NOTE.html?ex=1167109200&en=c8a6e5dfcb93fb27&ei=5070 (accessed December 21, 2006).

¹⁹ Some days after the *Times* review, David Okrent, the new public editor assigned to self-critique the paper from within, named Judith Miller and Patrick Tyler as authors of the most egregious stories and criticized the editors for letting such bad journalism appear in the so-called "paper of record" (Ricks, 2006, pp. 383-384).

Iraq Attack," or "Bush Cites 'Urgent Iraqi Threat.'" To be sure, the *Post* did publish more critical stories, such as a Thomas Ricks' story, "Doubts," or Walter Pincus stories that were skeptical of Bush administration claims, but they were relegated to the back pages of the paper.²⁰

The *Washington Post* retrospective also called attention to the dimension of pack journalism. Bob Woodward, who broke the Watergate story but later became largely a stenographer of power, told Howard Kurtz (2004) that: "It was risky for journalists to write anything that might look silly if weapons were ultimately found in Iraq. Alluding to the finding of the September 11 commission of a 'groupthink' among intelligence officials, Woodward said of the weapons coverage: 'I think I was part of the groupthink'" (Kurtz, op. cit.).

Unpacking this further, the groupthink, or pack journalism, admission points to the highly competitive nature of corporate media where no one dare gets out of line or stray too far from conventional wisdom, as their career would be endangered. But there is a related problem to groupthink, and that is flak from the right wing and attacks by the Bush administration. Howard Kurtz notes:

"Given *The Post's* reputation for helping topple the Nixon administration, some of those involved in the prewar coverage felt compelled to say the paper's shortcomings did not reflect any reticence about taking on the Bush White House. [*Post* reporter Dana] Priest noted, however, that skeptical stories usually triggered hate mail 'questioning your patriotism and suggesting that you somehow be delivered into the hands of the terrorists'" (Kurtz, op. cit.).

The *Washington Post* also admitted in their retrospective that: "We are inevitably the mouthpiece for whatever administration is in power. If the president stands up and says something, we report what the president said" (Kurtz, op. cit.). The *Post* did not admit that their Op-Ed team was also gung ho for Iraq and that columnists like Jim Hoagland, Michael Kelley, Charles Krauthamer, Robert Kagan, and their editorial page, had been largely pro-war and enthusiastically reproduced Bush administration claims concerning Iraq.²¹ The *Post* also did not indicate the extent of Bush administration influence over the media and the systematic way that the Bush administration intimidates critics, denies access to reporters who are too critical, and even threatens them and launches attacks against them.²²

²⁰ See Howard Kurtz, "The Post on WMDs: An Inside Story. Prewar Articles Questioning Threat Often Didn't Make Front Page." *Washington Post*, August 12, 2004: A01.

²¹ Boehlert notes that in February of 2003 alone, the *Washington Post* editorialized in favor of war nine times, while between "September 2002 and February 2003, the paper editorialized 26 times in favor of the war" (2006, p. 208). Boehlert also notes that a wide array of "new found liberal hawks" and others among the chattering class of pundits signed on for Bush-Cheney's disastrous "preventive war" (ibid).

²² On Bush administration intimation of journalists and strategies for managing news, see Schell (2004), Kellner (2005), and Boehlert (2006).

The TV networks were even more propagandistic than the press in transmitting Bush/Cheney administration falsehoods concerning alleged Iraqi WMD and beating the war drums.²³ In the highly competitive environment of cable television, with multiple networks needing to fill a 24/7 window with news, and with intense competition between the news divisions of the big corporate networks, there are strong pressures to capture audiences with exciting stories like a forthcoming conflict with Iraq.

There are further corporate reasons why the TV networks were so pro-Bush/Cheney administration before, during, and at least for the first months after the Iraq invasion and occupation. There's a dirty little secret that TV networks make money and win loyalty and viewership during war, so, on the whole, it is in the TV networks' interest to go to war. Then, there is competition to become patriotic, because boosterism allegedly pulls in the largest audience and gets the least flax from fervently pro-war pundits and groups. Further, as is well known, the Fox network is a right-wing propaganda conduit, and NBC is owned by General Electric, one of the largest weapons producers (Brock, 2004), so certain network corporate and political interests in the Fox and NBC networks also promoted a bias toward war.

In *Lapdogs*, Eric Boehlert (2006) claims that "timidity" was a major force in driving the comfortable members of the mainstream corporate media to support the invasion of Iraq and to not investigate what now appears as bogus claims concerning Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.²⁴ Boehlert recounts the story of President Bush's March 6, 2003, press conference where he admitted the event was "scripted" and only called on pre-selected, safe reporters, with none of the press corps questioning him on the upcoming war against Iraq (2006, 205f.). Boehlert documents how the mainstream corporate media largely supported the Iraq fiasco (212f.), how they failed to report antiwar views, either from Democrats or the peace movement (215ff.), and how they were conduits for the bogus claims of the Bush-Cheney administration during the lead-up to and through the opening years of the war.²⁵

²³ For shocking confirmation of how U.S. mainstream corporate broadcasting networks uncritically reproduced Bush-Cheney positions on the Iraq invasion and occupation and attacked critics and dissenters, see the documentary *War Made Easy* discussed in Note 5.

²⁴ In his media watchdog site www.dailyhowler.com, Bob Somerby goes further than Boehlert, arguing that the mainstream media elite are cowardly, incompetent, lazy, and complicit as well as timid. While Boehlert's account of how the press rolled over for Bush from the Iraq war through early 2006 provides a wealth of material, drawn from his excellent reporting for *Salon*, he does not adequately acknowledge previous scholarship on the media and Bush/Cheney administration, nor does he seem to recognize or acknowledge previous formulations of some of his key categories. Kellner (2005) makes a distinction between the media as attack dogs against the Clinton administration and as lapdogs for the Bush-Cheney administration, contrasted to their normative role as watchdogs in classical democratic theory. Although Boehlert recognizes the useful reporting on David Brock's web site *Media Matters*, he does not cite Brock's book on *The Republican Noise Machine* (2004), although he uses Brock's phrase as if it was his own (2006, p. 14). And while Boehlert mentions the impact of corporate conglomerate take-over of media, he does not pursue the topic or draw on the work of McChesney, Chomsky and Herman, or other radical media critics.

²⁵ Demonstration of these same claims is made in the documentary film *War Made Easy* cited in Note 4. See also the two-part PBS *Frontline* documentaries *Bush's War* available on-line at

In addition, the mainstream corporate media did not question the "Bush doctrine" of "preemptive" war or indicate that the Iraq invasion was in fact an illegal "preventive war," that broke with the entirety of U.S. military tradition.²⁶ Hence, in retrospect, the U.S. corporate media failed miserably in questioning Bush administration claims concerning Iraqi's WMD and the dangers posed to the U.S. and the world, and it served as a propaganda conduit for the Bush administration's rush to war in Iraq.

The mainstream corporate media did not do any better when, in March 2003, the U.S. and U.K. invaded Iraq. More than 600 war correspondents were "embedded" with U.S. and U.K. troops, and the accompanying journalists were largely conduits for the Bush-Cheney administration and Pentagon propaganda. Being "embedded" meant that war correspondents accompanied divisions of the U.S. and U.K. troops invading Iraq and beamed back live pictures and first-person reports of, first, the triumphant blitzkrieg through Iraq, and then of the invading forces stalling and being subject to perilous counterattack, but eventually reaching Baghdad and overthrowing the Hussein government.

A great debate emerged around the embedded reporters concerning whether journalists who depended on the protection of the U.S. and British military, lived with the troops, and signed papers agreeing to a rigorous set of restrictions on their reporting could be objective and critical of their protectors.²⁷ From the beginning, it was clear that the embedded reporters were indeed "in bed with" their military escorts, and as the U.S. and Britain stormed into Iraq, the reporters presented exultant and triumphant accounts that trumped any paid propagandist. The embedded U.S. network television reporters were largely fervent cheerleaders and spinners for the U.S. and U.K. military and lost any veneer of objectivity. But as the blitzkrieg stalled, a sandstorm hit, and U.S. and British forces came under attack, the embedded reporters reflected genuine fear, helped capture the chaos of war, provided sometimes vivid accounts of the fighting, and occasionally deflated propaganda lies of the U.S. or U.K. military.

Indeed, U.S. and British military discourse was exceptionally mendacious, as has happened so often in recent wars that are as much for public opinion and political agendas as for military goals. British and U.S. sources claimed during the first days into Iraq that the border port of Umm Qasar and major southern city of Basra were under coalition control, whereas TV images showed quite the opposite. When things went badly for U.S. and British forces on March 23, a story originated from an embedded reporter with the *Jerusalem Post* that a "huge" chemical weapons production facility was found, a story allegedly confirmed by a Pentagon source to the Fox TV military correspondent who quickly spread it through the

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/bushswar/> (accessed April 16, 2008). The *Frontline* Web site has a wealth of valuable materials on the war, including interviews with major participants and journalists who covered the war.

²⁶ As critics of the Bush-Cheney administration Iraq policy have indicated, the Iraq invasion was really a "preventive war" in that there was no imminent threat or clear and present danger to the United States. Whereas "preemptive war" is grounded in international law, "preventive war" would be a sharp departure from previous U.S. military doctrine and is akin to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. On "preventive war," see Keller & Mitchell (2006) and Kellner (2007).

²⁷ On embedded reporters in the U.K., see Tumber, 2004, p. 190ff. For examples in many countries, see studies in Korte & Tonn, 2007.

U.S. media (the BBC was skeptical from the beginning, as it turned out rightly, since the report was bogus).²⁸

When U.S. officials denied that they were responsible for major civilian atrocities in two Baghdad bombings during the week of March 24, reporters on the scene described witnesses to U.S. airplanes flying overhead and in one case found pieces of a missile with U.S. markings and numbers on it. And after a suicide bombing killed four U.S. troops at a checkpoint in late March, U.S. soldiers fired on a vehicle that ran a checkpoint and killed seven civilians. The U.S. military claimed that it had fired a warning shot, but a *Washington Post* reporter on the scene reported that a senior U.S. military official had shouted to a younger soldier to fire a warning shot first and then yelled that "you [expletive] killed them" when he failed to do so. Embedded newspaper reporters also often provided more vivid accounts of "friendly fire" and other mishaps, getting their information from troops on the ground and on the site, instead of from military spinners who tended to be propagandists.²⁹

After major wars, there are inevitable books by journalists who covered the events, as well as by soldiers, military historians, and other writers describing the background, battles, trajectories, role of the media, outcomes, and other topics. During the current war, there are already memoirs by soldiers and embedded journalists, as well as military histories and the critical versions cited above with titles like *Fiasco* (Ricks, 2006), *Hubris* (Isikoff & Corn, 2006), *The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (Rich, 2006), and *State of Denial* (Woodruff, 2006).

Of the works by embedded reporters, Evan Wright's *Generation Kill* (2004) is the most revealing and celebrated, while Nathaniel Fick's *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer* (2005) is one of the best accounts of first-hand fighting by a soldier.³⁰ Wright was assigned by *Rolling Stone* to cover the Iraq invasion first-hand and he was embedded with the Marines of the First Recon Battalion, which was one of the first units that crossed the Kuwait border to invade Iraq. First Recon engaged in ferocious battles during the early weeks of the invasion up to Baghdad, giving Wright a first-person perspective on the initial stages of the war and the destruction of Iraqi villages and towns en route. By chance, Wright was assigned to Fick's unit, and the two books together provide an excellent account of the opening stages of the rush to Baghdad and U.S. occupation much more detailed, critical, and compelling than either the U.S. corporate media or later historians.

²⁸ Soon after, British and then U.S. military sources affirmed that the site was not a chemical weapons production or storage facility. For a critique of a series of "smoking gun" discoveries of weapons of mass destruction facilities and their subsequent debunking, see Jake Tapper, "WMD, MIA?" *Salon* (April 16, 2003) and "Angry Allies" *Salon* (May 30, 2003).

²⁹ On the Baghdad bombings, see the reporting of Robert Fisk in the *London Independent* (collected at http://www.robert-fisk.com/home_page.htm; accessed December 21, 2006). For the story that questioned official U.S. military accounts of the checking shootings of a civilian family, see William Branigin, "A Gruesome Scene on Highway 9," *Washington Post* (April 1, 2003: A01).

³⁰ Watkins won a National Magazine Award for the series of articles that appeared in *Rolling Stone* that provide the basis of the book and it was on *People's* Top 10 Books of the Year list. Fick won the Barnes and Noble Discover Award and was selected as a Best Book of the Year by the *Washington Post*. Both books are discussed and extolled in *Massing 2007*, which I draw on below.

In an outstanding review article on Wright and Fick's accounts, drawing on many other recently published books by soldiers, Michael Massing (2007) argues that these first-person testimonies provide much more lively and vivid accounts of the Iraq war than official military historians, especially of the more brutal and violent aspects of the Iraq invasion and occupation. Massing makes a telling comparison between Wright's and Fick's accounts of the early battles leading into Baghdad and the fight for Baghdad itself, contrasted to an official military history like *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* by Michael Gordon, a *New York Times* reporter who co-penned, with Judith Miller, some of the shameful stories about Iraqi WMD described above, and General Bernard Trainor, a retired Pentagon insider and military historian who frequently served as a network commentator. While the latter criticizes some of the "grievous errors" that the Bush-Cheney administration and Pentagon made in planning the war, Massing notes that:

Yet when it comes to describing the invasion itself, their writing is oddly bloodless. Attacks tend to be referred to in a fleeting blur of acronym-laden aircraft and tanks, armored vehicles and munitions, with acts of destruction sequestered in brief euphemistic phrases. Here are some examples from the book (with emphases added):

- As Sanderson's battalion prepared to advance up Highway 1, it came under Iraqi artillery fire. Within minutes, Lieutenant Colonel Doug Harding unleashed a barrage of lethal counterfire. This was the first significant artillery duel of the war. The Americans *got the better of the exchange, suppressing Iraqi fire for the time being.*
- McElhiney realized he would have to fight in close quarters and destroy the Iraqi air defenses one at a time. Using 30mm guns and rockets, he *took out the mosque.*
- The regiment's 2nd LAR and Recon moved on the town border, which was skillfully and tenaciously defended. Covered by Cobras, the Marines headed north to the town from the western side of the Gharraf River, paralleling Highway 7. Craparotta's 3/1 moved up and . . . *cleared the town.*

The town referred to in this last passage is Muwaffaqiyah — the same place Wright describes as having been partly flattened by the Marines. The brief, bald description in *Cobra II* of Muwaffaqiyah as being "cleared" conveys none of the horror, devastation, and death that, according to *Generation Kill*, accompanied the attack. Unlike Wright, Gordon and Trainor were not present for the attack. In seeking to reconstruct it, they relied heavily on interviews with the soldiers who carried it out and who had little incentive to dwell on the unarmed Iraqis who might have died as a result of their actions. Written from the perspective of those planning and executing the invasion, *Cobra II* — like so many other accounts — tells us little of what it was like to be on the receiving end of the violence.³¹

³¹ See Massing, 2007.

In his book on Vietnam, J. William Gibson (1987) contrasts the “warriors’ knowledge” gleaned from soldiers on the ground compared with official reports from the military or political sources. As noted, some soldiers have already written first-rate books on Iraq, and Wright’s *Killing Time* can be compared with Michael Herr’s Vietnam book *Dispatches* (1977) as an illuminating journalistic account by a reporter embedded during some of the fiercest fighting in the battle for Iraq.³² Wright shares Herr’s vivid writing style, his pungent observations, his close and sympathetic relationships with the troops, and his critical insights into the conduct of the war, while generally taking the young soldiers’ side against their officers. While this is not a major theme of his book, Wright provides a telling look at the gung ho and militarist bias of the U.S. press corps on the eve of the Iraq war: “When I watched the broadcast of Colin Powell making the case for war to the UN, I was aboard a Navy ship in the Gulf with a group of American reporters who cheered whenever Powell enumerated another point building the case for invasion. They booed when European diplomats presented their rebuttals. Being among reporters here has sometimes felt like the buildup to a big game, Team USA versus The World” (2004, p. 15).

Wright and Fick provide much more graphic views of the violent invasion of Iraq in March 2003, its destruction of hamlets and villages, and the chaos of a country thrown into barbarism than the more sanitized official U.S. media and government accounts. The embedded journalist and young officer both put on display the hegemonic aggressive hypermasculinism long associated with the military, although both end up questioning this ideal and reveal the ambivalence toward war of many of the soldiers.³³

Hence, the embedded and other reporters on the site could provide documentation of the more raw and brutal aspects of war through telling accounts that often put in question official versions of the events, as well as propaganda and military spin. But since every posting and broadcast of the embedded correspondences was censored by the U.S. military, it was the independent “unilateral” journalists like Robert Fiske, or Patrick Cockburn, of the British *Independent*, who provided some of the most accurate accounts of the horrors of the war and the U.S. and UK military mishaps during the war itself. Thus, on the whole, the embedded journalists were largely propagandists who often outdid the Pentagon and Bush administration in spinning the message of the moment.

Moreover, the U.S. broadcast networks, overall, tended to be more embedded in the Pentagon and Bush administration than the reporters in the field and print journalists. The military commentators on all networks provided little more than the Pentagon spin of the moment and often repeated gross lies and propaganda, as in the examples mentioned above concerning the U.S. bombing of civilians or the checkpoint shooting of innocents. Entire networks like Fox and the NBC cable networks provided little but propaganda and one-sided patriotism, as did, for the most part, CNN. All these 24/7 cable networks, as well as the big three U.S. broadcasting networks, tended to provide highly sanitized views of the war, rarely showing Iraqi casualties, thus producing a view of the war totally different than that shown in other parts of the world (Kellner, 2005).

³² For an account of Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* and its representation of Vietnam, see Kellner, 2000; for a comparison between Herr and Wright’s war reporting, see Tonn, 2007.

³³ On hypermasculinism and its alternatives, see Kellner, 2008.

The embedding system was evidently a propaganda success, as the embedded journalists tended to identify with troops, and were often dependent upon them for their survival. Moreover, embedded reporting was inevitably from the perspective of the U.S. or U.K. troops, and while there were some critical reports, journalists were forbidden to show dead bodies of either U.S. and U.K. troops or Iraqis. So while the embedded system increased information and provided access to at least some battlefields, it also shaped the information and presentation and constricted access, as there were a limited amount of embedded reporters in a small number of military units. At best, it showed some fragments of the war.

Yet reporting in Iraq was dangerous and 92 reporters were killed by 2006, with a record 32 killed in 2006, the largest number of journalists killed in a single country since the Committee to Protect Journalists started compiling statistics 25 years ago.³⁴ Early in the war, on the way to Baghdad, two U.S. embedded reporters were killed, David Bloom of NBC and the hawkish Michael Kelly, a *Washington Post* columnist. It was especially dangerous for independent and non-U.S. journalists. There had been deadly (accidental?) attacks by U.S. forces on Al Jazeera and the BBC office in Afghanistan, as well as a lethal attack on the Al Jazeera office in Baghdad, documented in the film *Control Room* (2004), which has helped to fuel a controversy whether they were targeted.³⁵ There were also attacks by U.S. troops on the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad and other sites where western journalists were staying (Kellner, 2005).

As the insurgency intensified, there were a large number of reporters killed or seriously wounded in Iraq, including Bob Woodward of ABC and Kimberly Dozier of CBS; in the latter attack on a CBS crew by Iraqi insurgents, four people were killed, including two veteran journalists (see Kurtz, 2007, p. 80ff. & p. 191ff.).³⁶

³⁴ See Katharine Mieszkowski, "The deadliest year for journalists in Iraq," *Salon*, December 01, 2006 at http://www.salon.com/politics/war_room/print.html (accessed December 21, 2006) and the Committee to Protect Journalist report at http://cpj.org/Briefings/2006/killed_06/killed_06.html (accessed December 21, 2006).

³⁵ The highly respected historian of war correspondents Phillip Knightley was skeptical of U.S. claims that they did not target journalists in the Iraq war, writing: "I believe that the traditional relationship between the military and the media — one of restrained hostility — has broken down, and that the U.S. administration, in keeping with its new foreign policy, has decided that its attitude to war correspondents is the same as that set out by president Bush when declaring war on terrorists: 'You're either with us or you're against us'" (Knightley in Miller, 2004. p. 100).

³⁶ A December 21, 2006 *Associated Press* brief explains the close relation between embedded reporters and the military:

A recovering Kimberly Dozier, the CBS News reporter seriously wounded by a car bomb in Iraq on May 29, expressed gratitude this week to the U.S. military personnel who saved her life. Dozier, still undergoing therapy in New Zealand to repair legs shattered by shrapnel, posted a story about her recovery, "Emerging From a Nightmare," on the CBS News Web site. "The U.S. military treated me as one of its own, saving my life a few times over, with the best people, the best training and the best equipment," she wrote. See <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/iraq/complete/la-et->

As noted, embedded TV journalists tended to be propagandists for the Bush/Cheney administration, especially Fox News reporters like Shephard Smith, Oliver North, and veteran tabloid journalist Geraldo Rivera (Geraldo, however, was chastised and returned home when he drew a map on the sand on live television, revealing the position of U.S. troops). Among print journalists, no doubt the most extreme propagandist among the embedded war correspondents was Judith Miller, who, before the war in Iraq, published countless reports of Iraqi WMDs, all of which turned out to be bogus. In April 2003, Miller was embedded with the U.S. Military WMD search team, Mobile Exploitation Team (MET) Alpha. Given top security clearance, she was a favorite of Pentagon and Bush/Cheney administration forces who continued to feed her information which she reproduced concerning Iraqi WMDs (see Isikoff & Corn, 2006, p. 215ff.; Ricks, 2006, p. 382f.; Boehlert, 2006, p. 225f.).

On April 21, 2003, the *New York Times* published a story by Miller on a big WMD scoop: "Illicit Arms Kept Till Eve of War, an Iraqi Scientist is Said to Assert." Miller reported that a man in a baseball cap who claimed to be an Iraqi scientist asserted that just before the war, Iraq had destroyed some WMDs and moved some to Syria, but that he could lead the U.S. to supplies of material that were building blocks of Iraqi WMD programs. He also asserted that Iraq had been cooperating with Al Qaeda on weapons programs and that he had buried some weapons himself. Later it came out that this alleged "defector" and "Iraqi scientist" was a fraud, like her earlier Iraqi WMD sources.

Yet Miller continued to endow Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress with great credibility. Shortly after her April 21 story, she had a follow-up story claiming that the Iraqi defector had led MET to change its working strategy, from searching sites to attempting to find people who had worked on Iraq WMD programs, a project that would be aided by Chalabi and the INC (Miller, 2003c). The next day, Miller released another startling report, "U.S.-Led Forces Occupy Baghdad Complex Filled with Chemical Agents," claiming that yet another site with Iraqi chemical weapons had been found, with the added detail that Iraqi "scientists are suspected of having tested unconventional agents on dogs within the past year, according to military officers and weapons experts" (Miller, 2003d).

Once again, Miller's story turned out to be totally bogus, but with this series of reporting, that had the imprimatur of the *New York Times*, it is not surprising that months after the invasion, large numbers of people polled believed that the U.S. had found Iraqi WMD, as Miller's and other reports of supposed findings of Iraqi WMD were broadly circulated through the media.³⁷

quick23.3dec23,1,6205453,print.story?coll=la-iraq-complete) (accessed December 21, 2006). Later when a CBS executive flew to Germany to check out Dozier's medical condition, he profusely thanked a young man, also shot, who had helped her get medical attention, nothing: "'We'll never be able to repay the debt of gratitude to the military for what you did for Kimberly . . .'" "'We think of her as one of us, sir,' the soldier said" (Kurtz, 2007, p. 193).

³⁷ The University of Maryland World Public Opinion site indicates that heavy television watchers were the least informed on Iraq and tended to falsely believe in connections between Iraq, WMD, and Al Qaeda, long after these claims were disapproved, and that those who were heavy Fox viewers were least informed; see the site at

Miller would soon find herself, however, on the outs with the U.S. military. When MET Alpha was ordered to leave Baghdad to search for weapons in a town south of the capital, Miller was furious and bombarded U.S. officials with calls and e-mails, insisting that they stay in Baghdad and work with Chalabi on sourcing Iraqis who had supposedly worked on WMD programs. The imperious Miller allegedly got her way and was able to convince MET to postpone leaving Baghdad and to work closely with Chalabi to find Iraqis who had worked on WMD programs, but their inability to find any compelling evidence eventually led the Pentagon to sour on Miller (Isikoff & Corn 2006, p. 215ff.).

On May 28, 2003, the CIA released a report indicating that a tractor trailer outfitted with material to produce biological weapons confirmed an important claim that the Bush administration, and, in his UN speech, Colin Powell had made before the war. In a report filed just before leaving Iraq, Miller (2003e) maintained this was the "smoking gun," an assertion that the Bush administration, including the president, made over the next days, until this "finding" too was discredited (Isikoff & Corn 2006, p. 226ff.; Ricks. 2006, p. 382f.).

After returning to the U.S. in late May 2003, Miller found that she was the target of immense public anger for her prewar reports of Iraqi WMD programs that turned out to be groundless, and she convinced the *Times* to allow her to escape this embarrassing situation by returning to Iraq in June. But she filed nothing of significance on her return, and clashed with the Bush/Cheney administration chief of public affairs for Central Command, Jim Wilkinson, leading to her to being thrown out of the country. Upon her return to the U.S., her two protectors at the *New York Times* had themselves resigned in disgrace in the aftermath of the Jayson Blair scandal, in which a young *Times* reporter had published a series of bogus stories (Isikoff & Corn 2006, p. 246ff.).

Continuing her interest in Iraqi WMD stories, Miller had fateful meetings with Dick Cheney's Chief of Staff, Scooter Libby, in Summer 2003. Libby and the Bush White House were engaged in a ferocious battle against Joe Wilson, the former acting embassy chief in Baghdad during the August 1990 crisis after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. As I reported at the time in my 1992 book *The Persian Gulf TV War* (1992) and discussed above, Wilson was the last U.S. official to negotiate with Saddam Hussein before the first U.S.-Iraq war in 1991, and his meeting was used by Patrick Tyler in a *Washington Post* story that spread throughout the U.S. media which legitimated sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia, as if Hussein was threatening to invade the country. Wilson had been awarded for his service by President George H. W. Bush and had served in African embassies under the Bush and Clinton administrations (Wilson, 2004). Now, however, he was at the receiving end of a fierce attack by the Bush administration because of a *New York Times* op-ed piece he'd written, questioning Bush administration claims concerning Iraqi nuclear programs (Wilson, 2003).

Given his Iraqi and African experience, Wilson had been sent to Niger, where he'd served as ambassador, to investigate where Niger was providing "yellow cake" uranium to Iraq, which could be used

http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/international_security_bt/102.php?nid=&id=&pnt=102&lb=brusc (accessed December 21, 2006).

to produce nuclear weapons. In the build-up to the Bush Junior Iraq war of choice, new stories were circulating claiming that Iraq was buying "yellow cake" from Niger. Because of his previous experience, and perhaps because his wife, Valerie Plame, was an undercover CIA agent, Wilson was again sent to Niger in 2002 to investigate whether Iraq was indeed purchasing uranium quality "yellowcake" from Niger that could be used in nuclear weapons.³⁸ Both the Bush/Cheney administration and the British government were alleging at the time that Iraq was purchasing material from Niger that could be used in constructing nuclear weapons, and that this was damning proof that they had an active nuclear weapons program.

Wilson returned from Niger with a report that there was no credible evidence that Iraq was purchasing nuclear material from the country, and soon after, some documents that allegedly validated the transaction, which were a source of U.S. and U.K. intelligence reports, were revealed to be fraudulent (Isikoff & Corn 2006, p. 98ff.). However, in his 2003 State of the Union speech, George W. Bush repeated the allegation and Wilson was steamed, believing that his report was being ignored, or the Bush/Cheney administration was simply lying.³⁹ After revealing his suspicions to journalists, Wilson (2003) published an op-ed piece on July 6, 2003, in the *New York Times* that exposed the continued fallacious claim concerning the Niger story.

In retaliation against Wilson in classic Karl Rove/George W. Bush fashion, the former ambassador was fiercely attacked in the mainstream corporate media, and his CIA undercover agent wife, Valerie Plame, was outed when it was reported that Wilson's wife in the CIA had arranged for him to be sent on the Niger mission. The incident unleashed a federal investigation under prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald with intense focus on White House officials, especially Dick Cheney's Chief of Staff Scooter Libby and Karl Rove, as well as the reporters who they spoke to who might have been leaked the source; an Intelligence Agent identity protection act made it a crime for government officials to reveal uncover agents, and since columnist Robert Novak had mentioned Plame in a story on Wilson, an intense investigation was underway to see which White House officials had leaked Plame's identity to the media and which reporters they had spoken to.

Although she never wrote on the story, Judith Miller was one of the reporters who had spoken to Scooter Libby, a central focus of the investigation who was eventually indicted. The *New York Times* and Miller, however, refused to testify initially concerning Miller's conversations with Libby, using a First Amendment defense that journalists' sources should not have to be revealed. Other journalists caved in,

³⁸ A tremendous controversy and ongoing political-legal battle would emerge concerning whether Wilson's wife Valerie Plame had indeed initiated Wilson's trip or merely suggested that he talk to agency people about Niger and Iraq because of his earlier experience. One of the major scandals of the Bush administration erupted when top Bush administration officials "outed" Ms. Plame/Wilson as a CIA agent, as part of a ferocious attack on Wilson who was suggesting that the Bush administration was lying in their claims concerning an alleged Iraqi nuclear weapons program. For Wilson's take on the incident, see his biography (2004), and for a detailed and judicious overview of the entire affair, not yet resolved, see Isikoff & Corn, 2006.

³⁹ On the politics of lying in the Bush-Cheney administration, see Kellner, 2007.

but Miller hung tough and was jailed for 85 days until Libby finally gave her permission to discuss their conversation with the federal prosecutor.

Thus, the major propagandist for the Bush administration Iraq invasion emerged from jail a First Amendment martyr, but lingering animosity toward Miller for her shoddy Iraq WMD reporting, failure to reveal crucial facts about her Iraq reporting and her connection with Libby to her *Times* editors, and other conflicts with her bosses, led to her leaving the paper in November 2005 (Isikoff & Corn, 2006, p. 416; Ricks, 2006, p. 384f.).

Alternative Media, New Media, and the Contradictions of U.S. Journalism

And so it was that Joseph Wilson played a key role in the Iraq adventures of two Bush administrations, while Judith Miller fell from superstar diva reporter to become the most discredited journalist of her generation and a major villain in the Bush-Cheney administration effort to sell a disastrous Iraq war on the basis of a bed of lies. On the whole, during the Bush-Cheney administration, the corporate media failed to investigate, in any depth, the scandals of Bush and Cheney, their bogus claims over weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, their systemic assaults on U.S. democracy, the destructive consequences of their domestic and foreign politics, and their systematically mendacious discourse throughout four years of governing and the 2004 election period (Kellner, 2005; Boehlert, 2006; Rich, 2006; Gore, 2007). Hence, although the media were *attack dogs* during the Clinton era, they became *lap dogs* during the Bush-Cheney era and have largely abandoned their role as *watchdogs* investigating economic and political scandal and corruption in the public interest, thus aggravating a crisis of democracy in the United States (Kellner, 2005).

In regard to the Bush/Cheney Iraq war of 2003-, while the mainstream corporate media were initially a source of propaganda for Bush administration and Pentagon claims concerning Iraqi WMD, ties to Al Qaeda, and other (non-existent) threats to the U.S., alternative and new media were a source of critical information that questioned every single claim that the Bush/Cheney administration and its supporters made concerning Iraqi threats before, during, and after the war. The 2003 war against Iraq unfolded the debut of on-line journalists like Salam Pax and Riverbend, Iraqis who wrote web reports directly from Iraq that gave an unvarnished picture from the beginning that contrasted with the initially triumphalist and sanitized reporting of the U.S. corporate media.

The Iraq conflict also saw the rise of military blogs, or milblogs, in which U.S. military personnel gave first-hand accounts of their activities, as well as an intensification of warblogs, in which bloggers spent the day at home, or perhaps surreptitiously at work, offering first-person accounts if they were in the war zone, or surfing the Internet and posting a variety of news, information, and comments, ranging from the antiwar left to the pro-war right.⁴⁰ Political blogs and Internet Web sites like Juan Cole's *Informed*

⁴⁰ On warblogs and milblogs, see Roering, 2007. As Roering notes, some of the early war and milblogs have now been published as books; for a much discussed milblog turned into a book, see Buzzell (2005). The two best known warblogs from Iraq include Pax, 2003 and Riverbend, 2006. Massing (2008) provides

Comment (<http://www.juancole.com/>) and my own *BloLeft* (<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/blogger.php>) collected critical news and commentary throughout the war and continue to the present, as the debate persists in the U.S. and globally over U.S. policy in Iraq.

The differences between audiences getting their information from alternative media versus the U.S. corporate media have been highly significant. Those relying on the latter on Iraq were largely absorbing Bush/Cheney administration propaganda, and turned out to be worse-informed than those who sought alternative information from the Internet and new media.⁴¹ It is a major contradiction of the current U.S. media and political situation that at a time when there are more information sources than at any point in history, the majority rely on television and inadequate news sources and are thus under- or misinformed.

Yet the hegemony of traditional media is being challenged by emergent digital technologies and new media. Indeed, new digital cameras and video also played a key role in the Iraq media spectacle, especially as it unfolded during the violent and controversial period of the occupation, insurgency (Kellner, 2005), and, some would claim, civil war, turbulence which is continuing as I write in early 2008. For instance, the photos that were at the center of the Abu Ghraib scandal originated in digital pictures taken by troops themselves that were eventually circulated over the internet and given to CBS News and investigative reporter Seymour Hersh (see Hersh, 2004 and Kellner, 2005). When the photos were broadcast throughout the world in 2004,⁴² they constituted one of the great media spectacles and scandals of the war, one that raised serious questions concerning the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Other scandalous photos and video circulated through the global circuits of communication, including a story and pictures of U.S. troops committing atrocities at Haditha, Iraq. In what is emerging as one of the major atrocities of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, U.S. Marines were accused of killing 24 innocent villagers on November 19, 2005, to obtain revenge for one of their unit who was killed by a roadside bomb. The troops were accused of shooting four Iraqis and a taxi driver, and then attacking nearby houses where many of the civilian occupants were killed. At first, the Marines claimed that 15 civilians were initially killed by a bomb blast and eight insurgents were killed in a fire fight. Local residents contested the story, claiming the villagers who were attacked were innocent, and a young Iraqi had video

a detailed analysis of McClatchy Newspapers "Inside Iraq" blog in which Iraqis report on their everyday life and problems, a topic that Massing notes is increasingly ignored in the U.S. corporate media.

⁴¹ See Note 37.

⁴² See the dossier and accompanying texts on the photos in Salon at http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/index.html (accessed December 21, 2006). Bennett et al., (2007) document how after the initial shock of the release of the photos the Bush-Cheney administration and Pentagon tended to frame the story that was shorn of its potential critical impact.

footage of the homes where the killings allegedly took place and in the morgue where the bodies were deposited, indicating execution-style, close-up shooting.⁴³

While the episode was ignored by the mainstream media, *TIME* magazine published a story in March 2006 on the massacre (McGirk, 2006). After a Congressional hearing and discussion in Congress, when Congressman Jack Murtha (D-PA) said that the incident was illustrative of the pressures that young American troops were subjected to who were untrained to be policemen in a violent and dangerous situation where they were not wanted, the story made the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* in their June 4, 2006, editions.⁴⁴ In December 2006, the marines were officially charged with multiple counts of murder, setting up what might be the highest profile atrocity prosecution of the Iraq war.⁴⁵

Many documentary films have been made during the current Iraq war, using hand-held digital video, some shot by soldiers or Iraqis.⁴⁶ Soldiers found their war experiences in Iraq portrayed in a cycle of *cinéma vérité* films. As Susan L. Carruthers suggests, a number of the early Iraq documentaries "align sights with the U.S. military," and show the war from their experience and perspective, while another group "strives to convey the texture of everyday life under occupation for ordinary, and extraordinary, Iraqis."⁴⁷ The former category includes Michael Atucker and Petra Epperlein's *Gunner Palace* (2005), which uses humor, insight, and humanity to depict the inappropriateness and dangers of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, by portraying a U.S. group of troops, operating out of one of Saddam Hussein's palaces (hence the title). In ironic juxtapositions, the film takes viewers from watching U.S. troops swimming in an opulent pool to breaking into the houses of suspected insurgents, terrifying their inhabitants, and engaging in fights with anti-American forces.

Garrett Scott and Ian Olds's *Operation Dreamland* (2005) is a product of the filmmaker's embedding within the 82nd Airborne's Alpha Company, stationed in a former resort outside Fallujah,

⁴³ See Perry & Barnes, 2006 and "Video Taken By Journalism Student Key as 12 Americans Face War Crimes Probe in Iraq," *Associated Press*, March 20, 2006 at http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1002199897 (accessed June 30, 2007). Photos taken by a U.S. military investigation team also put in question the Marines initial story; see the sources in Note 45..

⁴⁴ See Ghosh, 2006 & Duffy 2006p; Thomas & Johnson, 2006; and the account by *TIME* magazine correspondent Tim McGirk who first reported the story at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/haditha/themes/media.html>. See also the later discussion in Kurtz, 2007, p. 190f.

⁴⁵ See White, 2007. So far no scholarly treatise has been written on the Haditha killings, although there is a very detailed Wikipedia entry with key known facts of the case and conflicting interpretations; see "Haditha Killings" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haditha_killings (accessed April 18, 2008). In addition, there is an excellent 2008 PBS *Frontline* documentary "Rules of Engagement" on the incident accessible on-line at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/haditha/> (accessed April 16, 2008).

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive study of Iraq documentary and fiction films during what I call a "Golden Age of Documentary," see Kellner, forthcoming.

⁴⁷ Susan L. Carruthers, "Say Cheese! Operation Iraqi Freedom on Film," *Cineaste* (Winter, 2006), p. 31.

ironically called "Dreamland." The film depicts the U.S. troops' experience of one of the most hostile and violent parts of Iraq, opening with the company arriving in Fallujah in January 2004. At first, soldiers go on patrol and talk about why they joined the military and future job prospects. A variety and cultural diversity of soldiers are presented, breaking stereotypes that U.S. troops are monolithically pro-war and militarist. Yet as the soldiers are exposed to more hostility and violence, they became critical of the U.S. invasion and occupation, as well as antagonistic toward the Iraqis. As the troops break into houses seeking weapons and insurgents, we see children and women cowering in the background, men are pushed around and sometimes made to lay down on the floor, and are at other times handcuffed and taken away from their families, obviously producing a climate of hostility. One scene is shot in a night-vision phosphorescent green, and the eyes of the U.S. soldier and the Iraqis glow as aliens, poignant images that make clear how the two sides appear as monsters and aliens to each other.

The documentary ends on an ambiguous note with titles indicating that Alpha Company was replaced by Marines in March who fought vicious battles and then were forced to abandon Fallujah to insurgents. Other titles recount how the Marines returned in November to retake the city, and a few glimpses of the wreckage of the city capture the extent of its devastation, raising questions about the destructive effects of the U.S. intervention.

Some documentaries focused on specific units of U.S. National Guard soldiers and their Iraq experiences. Brent and Craig Renaud's *Off to War* (2005) follows a small group of Guardsmen from the Arkansas town of Clarksville from their October 2003 deployment to Fort Hood and then Iraq through their 18-month tour of duty.⁴⁸ The troops are a diverse lot with a bevy of different opinions about the war, some of which change after they arrive in-country. Using a reality TV-series format, but more restrained, probing, and reflective, the series puts a human face on the tremendous sacrifices that U.S. soldiers and guardsmen are undergoing in Iraq. The series shows the Arkansas guardsmen receiving inadequate training and getting Vietnam-era equipment, suddenly finding themselves in violent combat situations for which they are not prepared.

When asked why they were sent to Iraq, the troops at first were hard-pressed to answer, with a couple of men claiming that "they killed a lot of our people," and others agreed, referring to false claims that Iraq was involved in 9/11. As the months go by and members of their unit are killed or maimed, as marriages disintegrate, and folks on the home front and some of the guardsmen are torn with anguish, the series makes clear the price paid by ordinary citizens for Bush-Cheney administration blunders.

⁴⁸ The initial release to film festivals in 2005 of *Off to War* portrayed the first month of their deployment while a multi-episode Discovery Channel series showed the entire 18 months, now available on DVD on four disks. User comments on the "Internet Movie Data Base" from families of troops are generally positive, claiming that the documentary "allows a non-biased, first person account, of what's happening to these men 'Off to War' is the closest you're going to get to experiencing a tour of duty in Iraq without actually serving." Others claim, however, that the soldiers complain too much and that the series has an antiwar bias, arguments contested by other viewers who claim that soldiers always gripe and that the series captures the reality of the guardsmen's Iraq experiences and the anguish of relatives at home; see the User's Comments at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0455986/usercomments>.

In Deborah Scranton's *The War Tapes* (2006), three New Hampshire national guardsmen use digital cameras provided them by the filmmaker to catch the experience of the strangeness of occupying a country they do not understand and confronting constant hostility that they do not grasp. After declining an invitation to be an embedded journalist with the New Hampshire National Guard, Scranton negotiated a deal whereby a number of guardsmen would be given digital cameras and volunteer to send footage via the Internet to be compiled and edited.⁴⁹ *Fog of War* (2003) producer Robert May and *Hoop Dreams* (1994) creator Steve James joined the project, and after a year of editing the more than 800 hours of footage, the film was premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, where it was awarded Best Documentary.

Assigned to serve in Fallujah in March 2004, the guardsman arrived just before insurgents hung up the burned bodies of several U.S. war contractors and the U.S. responded with fierce military force, providing a follow-up to the documentation of *Operation Dreamland*.⁵⁰ Assigned to Camp Anaconda in the Sunni triangle, footage in *The War Tapes* shows the guardsmen escorting Halliburton supply trucks, patrolling local neighborhoods, and hanging out during downtime. The film includes footage of their families and their homecoming and has the troops reflect throughout on their war experiences.

One of the soldiers notes that Halliburton is Dick Cheney's old company, and the film makes clear that contracts for Bush-Cheney administration cronies is one of the driving forces of the war, along with oil. The anti-war thrust of the film is expressed by the articulate mother of the Lebanese-American soldier Sgt. Zack Bazzi and the girlfriend of Sgt. Steve Pink, who makes clear the senselessness of the incursion and the distress it causes for the soldiers' families. The soldiers themselves are cynical, and Steve Pink insists that the war is being fought for money and oil, although Zack Bazzi notes at the end that, basically, he saw the war as just providing jobs for himself and those who worked for the corporations that profited from the war.

Some of the soldiers in *The War Tapes* are shown suffering from Iraq war post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a topic taken-up in Patricia Foulkrod's poignant *The Ground Truth* (2006), which features interviews with U.S. troops on their experiences of the Iraq war. The film presents scenes detailing or describing atrocities, and also shows the aftermath of wounded and maimed U.S. troops trying to understand what happened and come to terms with their experience. In a similar genre, HBO's award-winning *Baghdad E.R.* (2006) focuses on emergency hospital treatment of wounded U.S. troops and Iraqis, providing powerful images of the carnage of war on the bodies of the young soldiers and Iraqi innocents.

⁴⁹ See Gina Piccalo, "War, as seen through these soldiers' eyes," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 2006: E4. Piccalo notes that 10 of the 180 soldiers in the regiment agreed to take the cameras and shot the footage, although just three were chosen for the film.

⁵⁰ Another documentary, Iraqi journalist Ali Fadhil's *Fallujah: The Real Story* (2005), however, documents the incredible level of destruction of the city. On the film, see the *Democracy Now!* interview with the filmmaker and other information available at <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=06/01/25/155226>

Hence, the expansion of digital cell phones with video capacity, sites like YouTube to disseminate them, and a growing multimedia video and documentary culture challenge the dominance of mainstream corporate media. In addition to new media, a novel type of media critic has appeared who questions mainstream media and their sourcing. As the Iraq war continued into 2008, most mainstream media war correspondents tended to largely rely on official military sources. But a sharp criticism of this reliance on U.S. military sources by Glenn Greenwood in an article subtitled, "No matter how many times it results in false reporting, our press corps continues to base their 'war reporting' on unverified military and government claims," cites a June 22, 2007, story where the BBC and entire U.S. mainstream media reported: "U.S. helicopters have killed 17 gunmen with suspected al-Qaeda links in Iraq's Diyala province north of Baghdad, the U.S. military says." Greenwood notes that local villagers bitterly contested the claim that the victims were "Al Qaeda" members, claiming that they were locals who were organized to fight Al Qaeda and the BBC investigated and confirmed their story. U.S. corporate media, by contrast, Greenwald complained, tend to follow U.S. official military sources, despite a long record of inaccuracy and mendacity.

Part of the problem in Iraq, of course, is that it is too dangerous for American war correspondents to travel through the country to do independent verification. Yet Greenwood is surely right that a major problem with U.S. media war coverage is over-reliance on military sources and not enough of the independent reporting that was typical of a certain breed of traditional war correspondent.

In conclusion, however, I would argue that in an era of emergent digital media, traditional media war correspondents are decentered in importance, although their stories can gain significant influence and critical mass if they are circulated on the Internet and global broadcasting circuits. Although some traditional war correspondents like Robert Fiske, Patrick Cockburn, and Thomas Ricks, and newcomer Evan Wright, as well as investigative reporters like Seymour Hersh, countered Bush/Cheney administration propaganda and lies about their Iraq misadventure, the episode also saw the rise of a new kind of war correspondent emerging with new media such as blogs, digital photography or videography, and expanded possibilities for the latter to produce significant critical coverage if the story is taken up by mainstream media. Hence, while the major story of U.S. journalism and the mainstream corporate media in the reporting of two Bush administration wars is largely a shameful one, there are still journalists who maintain high professional standards and new digital media to provide alternative and critical sources of information and evidence and checks on misdeeds of government and corporate media. The traditional ideal of the war correspondent witnessing and telling the truth thus lives on in the world of new media, although it has seriously receded within the U.S. mainstream corporate media in the ongoing Iraq war.

References

- Allan, Stuart & Zelizer, Barbie (Eds.). (2004). *Reporting War. Journalism in Wartime*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Boyd-Barrett, Oliver. (2004). "Understanding: the second casualty," in Allan and Zelizer: 25-42.
- Bennett, W. Lance, Lawrence, G. Lawrence, & Livingston, Steven. (2007). *When the Press Fails Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bleifuss, Joel. (1990). "The First Stone," *In These Times*, September 19, p. 5.
- Boehlert, Eric. (2006). *Lapdogs. How the Press Rolled Over for Bush*. New York: Free Press.
- Brock, David. (2004). *The Republican Noise Machine: Right-Wing Media and How It Corrupts Democracy*. New York: Crown.
- Buzzell, Colby. (2005). *My War. Killing Time in Iraq*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Duffy, Michael. (2006). "The Shame of Kilo Company," *Time online*, May 28, 2006 at <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1198892,00.html> (accessed June 30, 2007).
- Emery, Michael. (1991). "How Mr. Bush Got His War: Deceptions, Double-Standards and Disinformation." Westfield, N.J.: Open Magazine Pamphlet Series; originally published in the *Village Voice*, March 5, 1991, pp. 22-27.
- Fick, Nathaniel. (2005). *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*. Boston and New York: Mariner.
- Gordon, Michael. (2003). "Agency Challenges Evidence Against Iraq Cited by Bush," *New York Times*, January 10, at http://www.nytimes.com/ref/international/middleeast/20040526CRITIQUE.html?_r=2&oref=slogin&oref=slogin (accessed December 21, 2006).
- Gordon, Michael, & Miller, Judith. (2002). "U.S. Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts," *New York Times*, September 8, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/08/international/middleeast/08IRAQ.html?ex=1167195600&en=4df1b4ac0d7ea9b3&ei=5070> (accessed December 14, 2006).
- Ghosh, Aparisim. "On Scene: Picking up the Pieces In Haditha," *Time online*, May 29, 2006 at <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1198977,00.html> (accessed June 30, 2007).

Gibson, J. William. (1987). *The Perfect War*. New York: William Morrow.

Greenwood, Glenn. (2007). "Our rotted press corps, a division of 'Camp Victory.'" *Salon*, June 30, at http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2007/06/30/war_reporting/print.html (accessed July 2, 2007).

Hallin, Daniel C. (1986). *The Uncensored War. The Media and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Heller, Jean. (1991). "Photos don't show buildup," *St. Petersburg Times*, January 6: 1A.

Herr, Michael. (1977). *Dispatches*. New York: Knopf.

Hersh, Seymour. (2004). *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*. New York: HarperCollins.

Hoagland, Jim. (1990). "Force Hussein to Withdraw," *Washington Post*, August 7, 1990: A19.

Isikoff, Michael & Corn, David. (2006). *Hubris*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Karsh, Efraim, & Rautski, Inari. (1991). *Saddam Hussein. A Political Biography*. New York: The Free Press.

Keeble, Richard. (2004). "Information warfare in an age of hyper-militarism," in Allan and Zelizer 2004: 43-58.

Keller, William & Mitchell, Gordon (Eds.). (2006). *Hitting First*. Pittsburg, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Kellner, Douglas. (1992.) *The Persian Gulf TV War*. Boulder, Col: Westview.

_____ (1995). *Media Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

_____ (2000). "From Nam to the Gulf: Postmodern Wars?" in *The Vietnam War and Postmodernity*, edited by Michael Bibby. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press: 199-236.

_____ (2001). *Grand Theft 2000*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.

_____ (2003a). *Media Spectacle*. London and New York: Routledge.

- _____ (2003b). *From 9/11 to Terror War: Dangers of the Bush Legacy*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.
- _____ (2005). *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy*. Boulder, Col.: Paradigm Press.
- _____ (2007). "Bushspeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the 'War On Terror,'" *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 37, no. 4 (December 2007), special issue on "Presidential Rhetoric," pp. 622-645.
- _____ (2008). *Guys and Guns Amok: Domestic Terrorism and School Shootings from the Oklahoma City Bombings to the Virginia Tech Massacre*. Boulder, Col.: Paradigm Press.
- _____ (forthcoming). *Cinematic Visions and Social Conflict: Hollywood Cinema in the Age of Bush/Cheney*.
- Knightley, Phillip. (2002 [1975]). *The First Casualty. From the Crimea to Vietnam and Kosovo: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker*. Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press.
- Korte, Barbara & Tonn, Horst, eds. (2007). *Kriegskorrespondenten: Deutungsinstanzen in der Mediengesellschaft*. Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Kurtz, Howard. (2004). "The Post on WMDs: An Inside Story. Prewar Articles Questioning Threat Often Didn't Make Front Page." *Washington Post*, August 12, 2004; Page A01.
- _____ (2007). *Reality Show. Inside the Last Great Television News War*. New York: The Free Press.
- LaMay, Craig et al. (1991). *The Media at War*. New York: Gannett Foundation Media Center.
- MacArthur, John R. (1992). *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Massing, Michael. (2007) "Iraq: The Hidden Costs," *New York Review of Books*, December 20, 2007 at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/20906> (accessed January 1, 2008).
- _____ (2008). "As Iraqis See It," *New York Review of Books*, January 17, 2008 at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/20934> (accessed January 4, 2008).
- McGirk, Tim. (2006). "Collateral Damage or Civilian Massacre in Haditha?" *Time*, March 19, 2006 at <http://www.time.com/time/world/printout/0,8816,1174649,00.html> (accessed June 30, 2007).
- McGrory, Mary. (1990). "The Beast of Baghdad," *Washington Post*, August 7, 1990: A19.

McLaughlin, Greg. (2002). *The War Correspondent*. London: Pluto.

Mieszkowski, Katharine. (2006). "The deadliest year for journalists in Iraq," *Salon*, December 01, at http://www.salon.com/politics/war_room/print.html (accessed December 21, 2006).

Miller, David, ed. (2004). *Tell me lies. Propaganda and Media Distortion on the attack on Iraq*. London: Pluto Press.

Miller, Judith. (2001). "An Iraqi Defector Tells of Work on at Least 20 Hidden Weapons Sites." *New York Times*, December 20, 2001 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/20/international/middleeast/20DEFE.html?ex=1167195600&en=361f981a3691b5b0&ei=5070> (accessed December 14, 2006).

_____ (2003a). "Illicit Arms Kept Till Eve of War, an Iraqi Scientist is Said to Assert." *New York Times*, April 21, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/21/international/worldspecial/21CHEM.html?ex=1167195600&en=bde498de60962b9e&ei=5070> (accessed December 14, 2006).

_____ (2003b). "Focus Shifts From Weapons to the People Behind Them," *New York Times*, April 23, 2003 at http://www.nytimes.com/ref/international/middleeast/20040526CRITIQUE.html?_r=2&oref=slogin&oref=slogin (accessed December 14, 2006).

_____ (2003c). "U.S.-Led Forces Occupy Baghdad Complex Filled with Chemical Agents," *New York Times*, April 24, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/24/international/worldspecial/24CHEM.html?ex=1167195600&en=af95838d0b4e27ca&ei=5070> (accessed December 14, 2006).

Miller, Judith & Gordon, Michael. (2002). "White House Lists Iraq Steps to Build Banned Weapons" *New York Times*, September 13, 2002 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/13/international/middleeast/13ARMS.html?ex=1167195600&en=9248565f993c0990&ei=5070> (accessed December 14, 2006).

Moeller, D. Susan. (1989). *Shooting War. Photography and the American Experience of Combat*. New York: Basic Books.

Pax, Salam. (2003). *The Baghdad Blog*. London: Atlantic.

Rich, Frank. (2006). *The Greatest Story Ever Sold. The Decline and Fall of Truth from 9/11 to Katrina*. New York: The Penguin Press.

Ricks, Thomas. (2006). *Fiasco. The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. London and New York: The Penguin Press.

Riverbend. (2006). *Baghdad Burning: A Girl Blog from Iraq*. London: Boyars.

Roering, Johanna. (2007). "'Getting the Word Out.' Warblogs als Kriegsberichterstattung," in Korte and Tonn 2007: 181-196.

Salinger, Pierre, & Laurent, Eric. (1991). *Secret Dossier: The Hidden Agenda Behind the Gulf War*. New York: Penquin Books.

Schell, Orville. (2004). "Introduction," Michael Massing. *Now They Tell Us*. New York: *The New York Review of Books Press*.

Tonn, Horst. (2007). "Wie wird Krieg erzählt?" in Korte and Tonn: 287-304.

Tumber, Howard. (2004), "Prisoners of news values?: journalists, professionalism, and identification in times of war," in Allan and Zelizer 2004: 190-205.

Thomas, Evans & Johnson, Scott. (2006) "Haditha, Iraq: Probing a Bloodbath," *Newsweek*, June 12, 2006 at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/13124487/site/newsweek/> (accessed June 30, 2007).

Wright, Evan. (2004). *Generation Kill*. New York: Berkley Caliber.

White, Josh. (2007). "Death in Haditha," *Washington Post*, January 6, 2007: A01.

Williams, Raymond. (1982). "Distance," in Alan O'Connor (ed), *Raymond Williams on Television*. London: Routledge, 1989.

Wilson, Joseph. (2003). "What I Didn't Find in Africa," *New York Times*, July 6, 2003, at <http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0706-02.htm> (accessed December 14, 2006).

_____ (2004). *The Politics of Truth*, New York: Carroll and Graf.

Woodward, Bob. (1991). *The Commander*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

_____ (2006). *State of Denial*. New York: Simon and Schuster.