

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION



"ASSESSING MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE WAR IN IRAQ: PRESS REPORTS,
PENTAGON RULES, AND LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE"

Tuesday, June 17, 2003

9:30 a.m.

Falk Auditorium

Moderator:

RON NESSEN

Journalist in Residence, The Brookings Institution

Panelists:

VICTORIA CLARKE

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs

BOB FRANKEN

CNN, an "embedded" reporter in Iraq

TERENCE SMITH

Media Correspondent, The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, PBS

JOHN WALCOTT

Washington Bureau Chief, Knight Ridder Newspapers

P R O C E E D I N G S



MR. NESSEN: Good morning. Welcome to Brookings. I'm Ron Nessen. I want to welcome you to this forum at which we are going to assess press coverage of the war in Iraq, the Pentagon's press policies in Iraq, and what lessons each side learned from that experience.

First of all, let me introduce you very briefly to the panelists. You all, I think, have probably picked up your packets at the registration desk where you have more detailed biographies, but just briefly to tell you who's on the panel.

In the middle we have Torie Clarke, in her final days now as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

Down there at the end of the panel, Bob Franken of CNN. He was an embedded reporter in Iraq and will talk about that experience.

Next to me here, John Walcott, the Washington Bureau Chief for the Knight Ridder Newspapers. Knight Ridder had more embeds in Iraq than any other news organization, 31 reporters and photographers and one artist.

Terry Smith here, the media correspondent on the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on PBS.

And last, but not least, at the far end Steve Hess, a senior fellow here at Brookings. He has observed and commented on the performance of the news media in war and peace for a long time.

As I say, you'll find complete bios in your packets. There is additional information on this and related issues to be found on the Brookings website at brookings.edu, and there will be a full transcript of this event on the website either later this afternoon or first thing in the morning.

What we're going to do by way of a format is I'm going to ask some questions to the panelists to get our discussion going. There will be discussion back and forth on these issues, and then we will save time for the panelists to address your questions.

Torie, let me start with you, representing the Pentagon, and actually I think I'd lose my credentials as a hard-hitting journalist in residence here at Brookings if I didn't ask you first of all: Do you want to add anything to the announcement that you've resigned as of Friday?



MS. CLARKE: Not add anything, but just repeat what I've said probably a hundred times in the last 24 hours. I've got some things I need to take care of on the homefront, and I'm going to do that. And it's the right decision, but it is such a sad one for me. I have had just an extraordinary experience. And as I was saying to some people out in the hallway there, I consider myself so lucky to have done what I've done and at this time. It has been a real honor working for the military.

That's all.

MR. NESSEN: Okay. On to the war. The most memorable media development of the war coverage, it seems to me, was the concept of the embedded reporters. And I don't know, I've heard different numbers, 500, 600, 700 reporters, who were assigned to one unit throughout the war. They lived with the troops, slept with the troops, ate with the troops, ducked bullets with the troops, breathed in the sandstorms with the troops. And can you tell us whose idea was that to do it that way?

MS. CLARKE: It was actually an extraordinary evolution of a concept that already existed. If you've followed the Pentagon for some time, you know we've tried and Secretary Rumsfeld has tried since the very beginning to be very transparent in our business, to provide as much access as possible. If you put two or three of his predecessors together or my predecessors together, you would not have seen them do as many briefings, as many interviews, as many public events. They take communications very seriously.

In previous conflicts, including Afghanistan, we made the best effort possible to provide access to the media. Iraq was different for a lot of reasons, and so there was an extraordinary evolution of what we were already doing, and it had to do with the factors. It had to do with the fact that we knew if we went to war, we'd have a lot more people out there, a lot more soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. It had to do with the fact that we knew the more people saw the U.S. military, the more they would understand the mission and how they were going about their jobs, and the more the people saw of the Iraqi regime.

I've used this story several times, but I knew with great certainty if we went to war, the Iraqi regime would be doing some terrible things and would be incredibly masterful with the lies and the deception. And I could stand up there at that podium and Secretary Rumsfeld could stand up there and say very truthfully the Iraqi regime is putting its soldiers in civilian clothing so they can ambush our soldiers. Some people would believe us and some people wouldn't. But we had hundreds and hundreds of credible, independent journalists saying the Iraqi regime is putting their soldiers in civilian clothing.

So we knew that would be a very effective tool. But many, many--to more directly answer your question, it was something we were already doing. We

enhanced it. It was the result of the Secretary's leadership and literally hundreds of people, public affairs officers like Bryan Whitman and Tee McCrery (ph) and Major Tim Blair who did all the hard work of making it happen.

MR. NESSEN: Did you have to sell it to Secretary Rumsfeld?

MS. CLARKE: No. That's one of the great wrong urban legends in town. Again, if you look at his practice and policy, you could see where he would embrace something like this.

MR. NESSEN: The other common wisdom or urban legend, as you say, is that this was a brilliant idea to co-opt the usually skeptical press and to persuade them to write sympathetically about the buddies with whom they were sharing the foxholes. How do you think it worked out?

MS. CLARKE: Well, the only ones who say that are people who truly don't understand the media. The only people who say that are people who don't have faith and confidence that the media can and will be very objective and very independent. And I'd leave it to some of my partners up here, but if you looked at the reporting, it tended to be very straight, very factual, very, very credible. So I think the results put that allegation to rest pretty—

MR. NESSEN: Let me ask one of your partners up here who was an embedded reporter, Bob Franken. Bob, do you feel you were co-opted? Do you feel you pulled your punches?



MR. FRANKEN: I don't feel I did, bluntly, but I had to keep reminding myself that I was there to report on them, not us. I, quite frankly, think that some were. There was a sort of Stockholm syndrome. It's very tempting to become a part of the unit, and you had to remind yourself again that this was why-- may I indulge myself just a second and just so I can say to Torie, look her in the eye, and say: You're one of the few government officials who universally is going to be missed by everybody.

MS. CLARKE: Thank you.

MR. FRANKEN: And one of the toughest.

MS. CLARKE: I will miss you.

MR. FRANKEN: One of the toughest that you've ever dealt with. This is somebody who never played favorites but impressed everybody with her professionalism, and personally. We're going to miss you a lot.

MS. CLARKE: Thank you.

MR. FRANKEN: And as far as her being modest about her ideas, she's always been receptive to the idea, to the complaints that we would bring to her about prohibitions on coverage, and I think this was a natural evolution. I don't know that there's anybody else who could pull this off but Torie, and she deserves a lot of credit for improving immensely the ability to cover.

We still have a lot of improvements, I believe, that need to be worked on on both sides, but this was a major step forward from Gulf War I, and even a major step forward from Afghanistan the year before.

MR. NESSEN: What was the best thing about being an embedded reporter?

MR. FRANKEN: You were there. You were there. You experienced everything. That was part of it.

The other part of it is that the military people got to see firsthand that we weren't just a bunch of lazy pencilnecks, to use the expression, who would sit at our desks in Washington drinking coffee and reporting ignorantly.

One of my proudest moments came when this marine colonel, a John Wayne type if there ever was one, came up to this riffraff group of reporters, all of dirty, none of us had bathed, we were all eating the MREs, all that type of thing. And he said, "You guys are like the marines." I was embedded with the marines. "That is to say, you'll do whatever it takes to get the job done. Whatever it takes, no excuses."

That was a high compliment, but it also does speak to the great tradition of journalism that we were able to practice out there. And I'm sure we'll have a chance to talk about some of the limitations of all this. But, of course, the obvious advantage is we were there and covering the war from as close up as you possibly can get in a particular unit's case.

MR. NESSEN: Well, what were the limitations?

MR. FRANKEN: The limitations were, to be very blunt about it, that a lot of the military people need to be better trained on the role of the media. There was frequently a belief on the part of the military that we were there to represent the home team. Some of us bought into that, and, of course, that's not what we do. We are there to, as dispassionately as possible, as objectively as possible, report on bad and good of what's going on.

I was very fortunate. I was with a unit, a marine unit, with a very enlightened commander, a very enlightened general over that commander who had taken

the time prior to the war to send people to some media training. I think there's a huge need for more of that so that the next time around we can build on this experience and the war coverage can be better and we can have, I think, improved access on many occasions.

MR. NESSEN: I want to talk John Walcott about another aspect of the embedded reporters because Knight Ridder did have more than any other publication. How did you deal with the fact that you were getting all these dramatic pictures and you were getting all these dramatic stories, but the focus--as somebody said, you were looking at it through a straw. And how did you take all these embeds, very narrowly focused reports, and turn them into something that gave a larger picture what was happening?



MR. WALCOTT: Well, the simplest part of that is that we brought up from the Miami Herald the guy I think is the best rewrite man in American journalism, a guy named Marty Merzer (ph), to integrate all of those soda-straw views so that what you got was not so much isolated views but a fly's-eye view looked at through a lot of different lenses, looking in different directions, and trying as best we could on a daily basis to put that together into some kind of a coherent picture along with the reporting we were getting from reporters who were not embedded. So we would do one main story every day that incorporated all of that and then take the best of the soda-straw views because, as Bob said, the highest value here was actually being at the point of the spear.

And so, for example, when we had moments like that, for example, the release of the POWs, Peter Baker from the Washington Post and Juan Tamayo from the Miami Herald were able to get onto the airplane that flew them out, and that was a terrific story. It wasn't the whole story that day. So we did a story that mentioned that fact, and then we did a separate story on that flight out that the POWs made.

MR. NESSEN: But you had somebody pulling all these 31 reports together.

MR. WALCOTT: As best we could every day.

MR. NESSEN: Now, you have--a lot of the Knight Ridder newspapers are in cities and towns with military bases.

MR. WALCOTT: Yes.

MR. NESSEN: And the families are among your readers. Did that affect your coverage at all?

MR. WALCOTT: Enormously. Here in Washington, I think we tend to talk about war as if it's another policy issue. And that's not the way it looks if you live in Columbus, Georgia, or you live outside Fort Campbell, Kentucky. War is—

MR. NESSEN: You have papers in those cities.

MR. WALCOTT: We do. War is what your Dad or your Mom or your son or your daughter or your brother or your sister is off doing and why they're not home. And one of the reasons we had so many embeds was to perform that function which other papers don't necessarily have, and that is, being the hometown paper, telling the folks back in Columbus what the 3rd Brigade or the 3rd Infantry Division is doing.

We had a young reporter from the little newspaper we own in Biloxi, Mississippi, with a marine amphibian assault unit, and he became a local celebrity because he became the main line of communication between those reservists--most of whom seem to work at Wal-Mart. Every story that came through mentioned—

[Laughter.]

MR. WALCOTT: --Lance Corporal So-and-so from the Wal-Mart. The Wal-Mart must have been empty in Biloxi.

MR. : They have a lot of employees, obviously.

MR. WALCOTT: It's a big store. But that was a function that we took very, very seriously, that I think, you know, other papers may not have because of where they circulate.

MR. NESSEN: I want to ask you this and I want to ask Bob and also Torie: People who oppose the war have complained, continue to complain that those on the ground didn't show enough blood, didn't show enough bodies, didn't show enough dead babies, and if they had shown what the war was really like, it would have turned off public opinion and forced President Bush to end the war.

Did you get those kinds of complaints? And is there any validity to them?

MR. WALCOTT: We did, although I agree that one of our jobs is to show the face of war as it really is, and we did that in the photographs we moved and in some of the detail and some of the stories we moved. And, frankly, some of our reporters are still having trouble dealing with some of the things they reported because they're not things that any human being should ever have to look at.

The decision to publish those pictures or to put them on the air rests with, in our case, the editors of the individual papers. And they are constantly walking the tightrope between showing war as it really is and publishing in a newspaper that's going

to be sitting where the kids see it on their way to school in the morning. And that is a difficult decision.

MR. NESSEN: Bob, did you get those kinds of complaints? Did CNN get those kinds of complaints?

MR. FRANKEN: I don't know whether CNN did. One of the wonderful things about the war is I was out there and couldn't—

[Laughter.]

MR. FRANKEN: --deal with the daily stuff at my job. But I think that we have to remember that in Vietnam, for instance, where there was pretty much unfettered access--it's still debated whether that was a good thing--you rarely saw the dead Viet Cong, you rarely saw the villagers and that type of thing because of the very physical situation. You were usually attached to a unit. That's how you got to the action.

That was the case here. If there was some combat, I wasn't usually able to move out and go and shoot the other side. In fact, one could argue that one of the inherent problems with the embeds is that we didn't have anybody embedded with the Iraqi side. But the fact is we did not. Physically we couldn't cover that. So chances are there is a lot that we missed simply because we physically were unable to get to it.

MR. NESSEN: Just as a footnote to history, as a correspondent in Vietnam for NBC, during the first years of the war NBC had a rule that you didn't show close-ups of dead bodies. You could show them as kind of little mounds out there in the distance, but you couldn't show close-ups. So times change.

Torie, you've heard this complaint, and what reaction do you and your colleagues at the Pentagon have?

MS. CLARKE: Again, I think if you look at the body of work or covering all the reporting from the major combat operations, I think you saw a lot of the horrors of the war. In the early days, there was a terrible incident in which some civilians were killed at a checkpoint, and there were reporters there and it was reported widely and with great detail. And it was awful, absolutely awful. And it was awful for the marines who were involved. But I think that showed the horrors of war in a very, very compelling fashion. And I can remember photographs.

One of the things that has not been focused on enough, in my opinion, is the stunning still photography from this war, absolutely stunning. And I would not want to be in the shoes of an editor who has to make these decisions. And I know there's a difference, there's a difference in the United States versus, for instance, other parts of the world in which they show more graphic images. I don't buy into that. I happen to think that our news organizations tend to strike a pretty fair balance there.

MR. NESSEN: Terry, you wrote extensively in the current issue of the Columbia Journalism Review an analysis of the press coverage of the war. And one of the things you said as it applied to the embedding of reporters was: "There is a real danger of getting too close to your subject."

Can you elaborate a bit on that?



MR. SMITH: Well, I think, first of all, that the--could we go to the phrase "embedded reporters"? Could we work on that, Torie—

[Laughter.]

MS. CLARKE: I didn't create it.

MR. SMITH: With the inevitable suggestion that reporters are in bed with sources and the subjects.

MS. CLARKE: I think somebody in the media created that expression.

MR. SMITH: Can we call them "deployed reporters" or "assigned reporters" or anything you want.

The danger--first of all, let me applaud the decision taken by the Pentagon by Torie and her associates to change the way access was provided to the U.S. forces in the field in this conflict as opposed to Desert Storm, the first Gulf War, as opposed to Grenada and Panama and other instances where the media were kept away from the action, were delayed, were held back, actually denied access to it.

This was a different approach, and I think it has set a new standard in the sense that I can't imagine in a future conflict not having this, unless the circumstances actually prevented it for some reason. It's going--this will be the model now, I believe, unless you know otherwise, for the future. And so it's worth looking at because this is what we're going to have, this is what we should have in the future, and maybe it can be improved upon. I'm sure it can be.

The danger of getting too close to your sources is one that's true in journalism generally, but it really applies in a case like this, as Bob was describing, of great intimacy between the media traveling with the units and the personnel, sharing the same hardships, dangers, et cetera.

There is a natural affinity, a simple human reaction to protect those who protect you, to be considerate of those with whom you're sharing all of this.

I don't have any great problem with that, and I think in the main the reporting I saw remained professional and balanced. But there was cheerleading going on. There was a certain amount of gushing. Oliver North referring to "my marines" went over the line, even though he had—

MR. NESSEN: He probably was not considered a main-line reporter, though, mainstream reporter.

MR. SMITH: He was there for Fox News.

You know, there were exceptions. There was a good deal--there was some reporting of what we are doing by journalists, but all in all, it was an excellent development. It broadened the lens on the battlefield and on the experience, and it should be applauded, repeated, and perfected.

MS. CLARKE: Well, one slight push-back on this notion that there was cheerleading going on. I guess it depends on how you define a word, but the fact of the matter is the troops performed superbly. It goes to Tommy Franks' plan. It goes to the preparation. It goes to everything that you see and experience with the military if you spend any time with them. They performed superbly.

If a football team performed superbly in the Super Bowl and it was reported as such, you wouldn't say the reporters were cheerleaders. You'd say the team played really well.

Now, I think there may have been some notable exceptions, but I got to tell you, they did very, very well and that came across in the reporting.

MR. NESSEN: Bob?

MR. FRANKEN: Well, Terry just said something I want to expand upon a little bit. Quite frankly, I've always been worried on occasion in Washington where the beat reporters become cheerleaders for the institutions they cover. And I think that it's perfectly similar. The good journalist has an obligation, from my point of view, to make sure that everybody he covers remembers we have different interests here. You don't have to explain that to somebody like Torie. She knows that big time. But oftentimes you do have to explain that.

I made it a point in fairly blunt language to see to it that my hosts, so to speak, out there in the desert daily got a dose of that. As a matter of fact, I don't know if you've read it or not, but the guy who was the PAO for the marines wrote about it, and

he writes about this particularly irritating guy, and I'm very proud to tell you that was me.

[Laughter.]

MR. FRANKEN: And I also had a little speech when I was in a dangerous situation where I would say to the unit leader, I'd say, "Look, let's get this straight. It's not your responsibility to protect me. Obviously if I'm in danger, I would expect you to do it as a human being, and if you're in danger, I'll do it as a human being. But you have no obligation to me."

I'm not sure I meant it, but—

[Laughter.]

MR. FRANKEN: But I would go through that. It was really important that that separation was maintained, just as it was when I covered Congress. And anybody who was not able to withstand the Stockholm syndrome, as I called it before, probably isn't doing his job or her job as much as he should. I think that most of my colleagues did.

MR. SMITH: If I could just follow up on Torie's analogy about a football game or a football team that has performed well, it wasn't the reporting of the score that I'm talking about was the issue. It was the tone and presentation that, in my opinion, particularly on cable news, tended to cross the line into cheerleading and flag waving quite literally on the screen, a little flag waving away.

Well, you know, I wouldn't put that on my screen.

MR. FRANKEN: But a lot of that--and I don't mean to spend too much time on this. A lot of that had nothing to do with what we were doing in the field.

And, by the way, one other thing that's essential, and I know we'll about it some more, is the fact that what made this different was being allowed to report live. That meant that their ability to control what we said was exceedingly limited. We can debate whether that's a good thing or a bad thing. But if you want to talk about a football game, there was to a certain extent live play by play on this war.

MR. NESSEN: Yes, I do want to come back and talk about the whole issue of how technology has changed, and I need to get to Steve Hess. But I need to ask Terry two more questions, Terry, based on your article in the Columbia Journalism Review.

In specifically talking about television, you said that television coverage was often long on image and short on details; you saw and heard some of the bang-bang, but the larger narrative was often missing.

MR. SMITH: Well, I think that's true. It was immensely compelling to watch Kerry Sanders going up with units as they approached a berm and engaged the enemy. And it was--it was almost addictive television to watch because it was close--it was either real time or close to real time. And yet what did you actually learn from that? You could see some puffs of artillery landing at the target, you know, three-quarters of a mile or a mile or two away. And yet what was the strategic significance of that target? That often got lost.

What was the larger significance of the whole move in that direction, down that highway, encircling that city? What was the picture? That's what your rewrite man did. That's what--many of the papers had somebody who would sit either in Kuwait City or one location or another and pull it all together. And I thought you got that in print. I thought you could see the big picture. But you had to search for it in some of the television coverage because it was so immediate and understandably focused on the most dramatic.

MR. NESSEN: Finally, you write that Secretary Rumsfeld was right when he complained about the rapid mood swings in the media coverage from positive to negative, critical to adoring, everything was going great, everything was going to hell in a hand basket.

Could you just speak—

MR. SMITH: Well, he was right. I mean, remember those first two weeks. Remember the sense of inevitable and immediate victory that permeated the first 48 to 72 hours of reporting. There was an assumption that the Iraqis were going to roll up like a cheap carpet and this parade would proceed to Baghdad uninterrupted.

Well, that was unrealistic to begin with, I would argue, and then when, of course, it didn't go that smoothly and, of course, there were problems and the plan was not perfect in every regard and the weather intervened, the horrendous sandstorms, all these things, in my opinion, news organizations should have anticipated better and worked into the coverage and kept it in some kind of perspective so that--I mean, you had stories, Johnny Apple in the Times and others writing about a quagmire within a week or ten days. I mean, that is a simply unreasonable parallel to make. And as a result, news organizations then, I think, began to see the glass half-empty. And they were somewhat surprised when the sandstorm cleared, supplies caught up with the front units, the march to Baghdad resumed, and, of course, went in like that on that Wednesday morning, as I recall.

And so, yes, I think news organizations should learn from this that these things are not set piece affairs and stand back a little and temper your assessment.

MR. NESSEN: Steve Hess, could you reflect on two things that I think almost every speaker here has alluded to in one way or another? One is the difficulty in

producing a big picture out of all these little dramatic, very dramatic reports coming from the embedded reporters; and related to that, the impact that technology has had on covering war, the ability to go live from the battlefield.



MR. HESS: Well, going last, I can comment on lots of things, but I do want to make it unanimous, Torie, in enthusiasm for what you and your colleagues did in embedding. We sometimes talk about win-win propositions, but I think you produced one of the most remarkable win-win-win propositions. It's clear that journalists, who want access more than anything else, were given remarkable access. It seems to me clear that the military got much more favorable coverage than they would have had had there not been embedding. And it's clear that the public saw a type of picture that they had never, never had an opportunity to see before.

I would say--by the way, I, too, am an enthusiast of Terry Smith's analysis in the new *Columbia Journalism Review*, if you've not read it, and there's also a very good one by Jack Shafer in *Slate*. So we're starting to give some thought to what was a very recent event.

I would disagree, Terry, only on a comment that you made there and again today that this [large scale embedding] becomes something that's unimaginable not having again. I can imagine it very easily. All you really have to do is look at how the military have chosen a media plan to cover wars, from World War II to Vietnam to Gulf War I to II, to see that nothing is locked in cement and they will change as the need changes and we can't always be sure that we're going to have an advocate in the Pentagon like Torie Clarke or a Secretary of Defense like Don Rumsfeld.

I think a lot of things happened here that need not happen in the future and it would be very easy to go back. This was, I think in part, designed for a short war. If this was indeed going to be a very long war where you would have journalists who were not trained particularly in physical discomfort and boredom, I think you would find they become very grumpy and the American people and the Pentagon would feel very differently about embedding.

Also, we were very lucky. Remember, Torie and her colleagues did a remarkable thing. They did not just embed Americans. They embedded nations all over the world, many of whom were against us and were our enemies. We could very well have had a situation, just as we have suicide bombers, to have had suicide journalists, in which case it would then be very clear in the equation between the military and the journalists which side the American people came down on.

So we were very lucky, and my point is that I think it's up to us and people who talk about this sort of thing constantly to tell the military what a remarkable thing they did and make it harder for them in the future to not go back on what was a remarkable thing. I think, you know, within a year, Torie, at the Kennedy School at

Harvard there will be a case study in which they are teaching what you did, and I can even give it a name. It will be called "Torie's War."

[Laughter.]

MR. HESS: You have done something really quite remarkable.

A couple other things to comment on. I thought Bob made a very interesting point about how this process affected the military in its perceptions of journalists. I hope he's right. But I rather think it may have changed the view of journalists about the military, and maybe in the long run that's more important. Remember where we're at now. This isn't any longer the generation that was in World War II and came out of it. It is no longer the generation that was drafted. So many of these young journalists had no experience with the military, and probably in a socioeconomic sense where from whence they came, namely, college and professional schools, rather looked down on these grunts who couldn't grow up to be TV anchors and must now think that these people do something that's very difficult, things that maybe they couldn't do, and things that are very important. So I hope this was an educational process that worked both ways.

In terms of the technology, the question you asked me, obviously we have the technology to do this, and at first I think the coverage was "gee whiz." It got over that relatively quickly, but that was important. I think that was also a factor that must have been in Torie's thinking that, you know, if she didn't do it this way, it might have been done this way, anyway.

As for the argumentation that we didn't see the big picture, I think that is in a sense rather unfair to the Bob Frankens who were embedded. They weren't seeing the big picture, but it expanded out, and as John Walcott explained, newspapers could do a far better job than television. They had at least a whole day to do it, and they could bring all of these things together and I think did do a very, very good job, and also added that new factor that Torie mentioned, too, which I thought was quite remarkable and deserves another comment, and that was the still photograph, which I think we almost went back to the era of Life magazine, it was so good and it was so vivid. And that's a part of technology, too. We now have the color that could do it.

So really quite a remarkable experience all around, and this is an interesting panel. I'll sit back and listen.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I think the point you make about exposing a whole new generation to the military has stuck in my mind as being one of the real effects of what you did, Torie. And, John, you must have sent young reporters. I mean, the reporters you sent to Iraq must have been, by and large, young. Do you get any of this sense that these are people they don't associate with, they haven't been in the military, they don't have a draft to face, that they just don't really encounter reporters--reporters just don't encounter military people in their normal lives?

MR. WALCOTT: I couldn't agree with Steve more. I think that may be the most lasting benefit that has come out of this. I believe, and in part--I served in 1997, before I went to work at Knight Ridder, on a panel for Secretary Defense Cohen that was studying training of women in the armed services, and I spent a lot of time at Parris Island and places like that. And it became very clear to me then that an enormous gap had grown up in our country between the people who serve and the people in my profession. The last time most of us encountered each other was, you know, maybe we played football in high school together. And so I don't think the issue was whether we were writing with sympathy about the military. We were writing with no understanding and with a lot of what I think was bias, a lot of presumptions about why people went into the military and who they were and how smart they were.

All of that was wiped out in a very short period of time. Before the war, we sent as many of our people as we could to train with the units they'd be covering, at Fort Irwin or Fort Polk or wherever we could, in Germany, to acclimate them. And almost immediately every one of them would come back and say, "They're not who I thought they were. They're not big, strong, and stupid."

MR. NESSEN: It works both ways.

MS. CLARKE: Right.

MR. WALCOTT: It did indeed.

MR. NESSEN: There was, because of that same gap, a vast ignorance on the part of the military about—

MR. WALCOTT: And prejudice.

MR. NESSEN: And prejudice and attitude and ideas about the media, about news organizations, about their motivations, their methods of doing business. So there's been some exposure on both sides.

On the other hand, it was--what?--six or seven hundred people for a finite period of time. I wouldn't exaggerate that a social and cultural and intellectual gap has been completely closed by this—

MS. CLARKE: No, but a lot of ground was covered. I've heard the kind of story Bob's told about his marine again and again, and people in uniform have come to me, even some of the biggest skeptics of the program, and they've said, you know, "I was wrong." And the lower-level people said, "I saw how hard these people worked. I saw that they were willing to put their necks on the line for their jobs." That's meaningful to somebody in uniform.

MR. : And clearly General Franks.

MS. CLARKE: So I think we've covered—

MR. : We had one great incident similar to the one Bob had, where one of the reporters who hadn't showered in three weeks and had been through a lot, one of the young officers in the unit she was with came up and said, "I know why we're here. We're here because we're ordered to be here. We don't have any choice. What the hell are you doing here?"

[Laughter.]

MR. NESSEN: Bob?

MR. FRANKEN: Well, first of all, just to be a contrarian a little bit, I am convinced and was convinced before that the gap wasn't that big. I think that what has occurred with the voluntary military is that you, quite frankly, have a higher educated, more hip, to use our language, military. And so there really wasn't that much to explain. I mean, we had a vehicle that they called "the clown cart," which moved us around. It was a two and half. And we would run around—

MS. CLARKE: Move the media around?

MR. FRANKEN: The media around, the clown cart, and they were so surprised to find out we loved that. And they would assign these young marines who would come on, and it would take us about five minutes to pollute their minds. You know, they'd suddenly go from being, you know, sitting there at attention and all this to realize that we couldn't be all that bad because we had an MP3 player going loudly the whole time and, you know, the music would be blaring as we were going down the highway. And our biggest problem was explaining to these young people who the Righteous Brothers were, for instance.

[Laughter.]

MR. FRANKEN: They'd never heard them. But other than that, it was really--there wasn't that much really to cover. The gap wasn't that big.

And if I could just comment on one thing that Steve said, he is forgetting--when he says the reporters aren't used to boredom and physical discomfort, he's forgetting that we have to cover committee hearings in Congress.

[Laughter.]

MR. FRANKEN: So just a variation on that line. So it's something that we were quite used to and, quite frankly, this was a hell of a lot more fun than covering the committee hearings.

But the fact of the matter is that we can make too much of this. This was a story under arduous circumstances. There's nothing remarkable about that if you've been reporting. You cover stories under arduous circumstances with people who you have to understand and understand quickly. That happened a lot of the time.

MS. CLARKE: I also think it was six or seven hundred--it depends on how you count them--journalists. But I think the news organizations in general did a fabulous job of picking who they sent. I think they thought long and hard about who they were sending and why. And even if they were the younger people, they tended to be responsible, they tended to be very hard workers. With the embedded journalists, we had very, very few problems.

MR. : How many had to pull out? Did any?

MS. CLARKE: Very small handful. Very small handful, a couple of illnesses—

MR. : Other than Geraldo, you mean? Only Geraldo?

MS. CLARKE: He was not embedded. We had a few instances in which people had some illnesses and really needed to get out, but that was about it.

MR. NESSEN: Let me ask a couple of questions, and then we're going to go on to a more formal what lessons were learned, and then we're going to take questions from the audience.

Anybody have any thoughts about the retired colonels and generals?

MS. CLARKE: I do.

MR. NESSEN: Yes?

MS. CLARKE: Well, as somebody who has lived in this town way too long and realizes a lot of people make--a lot of people in this room make their living being analysts and commentators. Whatever the issue, I've always thought—

MR. NESSEN: Without knowing anything about the issue, you mean?

MS. CLARKE: Some do, some don't. But I've always thought their role was inflated. And because of the embedded reporters, because of the volume and velocity of real news coming back from the war, the role of the analysts and the commentators was far less. It would be hard to name who was the most prominent, who was the most vocal analyst on it because it was the straight reporting that was so extraordinary and was driving everybody's view and everybody's reading, in my opinion.

And then there is a tendency among some, including some in my building, to say, "Oh, these armchair quarterbacks, these retired generals, they don't know what they're talking about." There were a couple. In general, those who were on that I saw--and there was so much. It was hard for me to watch everything or read everything. In general, those that I saw tended to be pretty responsible, tended to be quite honest, the confidence to say, "I don't know. There's a lot of stuff happening. I don't know what it all means. It'll take a day or two for it to shake out." Pretty extraordinary, and some of them were willing to do that. Some of them, but it was a small handful, weren't.

So I'd say some were irresponsible and basing their comments on a woeful lack of information. Most of them I thought were pretty good.

MR. NESSEN: Terry, any thoughts on—

MR. SMITH: I want to share with you one question that was put to Jim Lehrer, at a cocktail party, I believe, midway through the war. A woman came up to him and said, "Now, I notice there are all these generals on broadcasts and commercial television, and you on the NewsHour, you have a panel of colonels. Are colonels cheaper?"

[Laughter.]

MR. SMITH: And at our rates, they were.

MR. NESSEN: Steve?

MR. HESS: I do have one complaint on this that's a little different, and it was the journalists who were asking the generals questions. I thought the generals did okay, by and large, and I'm told that behind the scenes they even did better, that they had a function in helping the production understand what was going on. But I was constantly irritated by some journalists asking the general a question that was a prediction: What's going to happen? That sort of thing.

And it's very hard to say, "I don't know," or change the subject, especially if they're not experienced at it. So I would think that if the generals need a little training in how to be journalists, the journalists need a little training in what questions are honorable questions to ask the generals.

MR. NESSEN: Bob?

MR. FRANKEN: One thing that confuses me, first of all, what's interesting to me is that the generals were criticized a lot of times, and colonels, for being second-guessers. And I think we've now gotten to the point where we're second-guessing the second-guessing. And I suppose this is just going to grow exponentially.

But one thing that puzzles me, Terry, is that, on the one hand, everybody is saying that while the newspapers did a good job of putting things in perspective, television did not, and then in the next breath say, "But we had generals on whose job it was to do just that."

Now, is there some disconnect here?

MR. SMITH: Yes, they were not used as well as they could have been-- this is a broad statement, obviously--for precisely that purpose. You could have used this cadre of experienced officers and had a time or even multiple times during the course of a day every day in which you asked them simply: How is the war going? What has happened in the last 24 hours? What is the sense of where it's going and the way it's developing?

It seemed to me instead they narrowed the generals down to much more specific and limited and confined analysis that, therefore, didn't fulfill that role.

MR. FRANKEN: You know, one of the things I would point out, by the way, is that the generals' role, at least as I've experienced it, who worked for us-- generals, colonels--is to also see to it that we are given some private expertise. Once every couple of weeks I'd be able to catch up with e-mail. You cannot escape e-mail anywhere, even in the middle of the desert. And there would usually be something from Colonel Don Shepherd--or General Don Shepherd, who was retired Air Force, who was one of our consultants; General Wesley Clark is another. And they would send me notes: "Bob, I saw you did such and such and so and so. Be aware of this." And then he would share some expertise. And I think that that's something that you get as part of the package, which I think is extremely valuable.

MS. CLARKE: I've got to say, I think some of this commentary that the news organizations should have done a better job of pulling it together for the viewer or explaining it to the viewer, it's so patronizing. I think Americans are smarter and smarter consumers of information every day. I think most of them are smart enough and were smart enough to watch a lot, to read a lot, to figure things out for themselves, to understand that there were certain things not appropriate to be talking about on live television. It was not appropriate in the middle of a war to be talking about what was going to happen the next day.

I happen to think they're pretty smart and pretty educated, and for the most part, they got it.

MR. NESSEN: John?

MR. WALCOTT: I think there's one point we're missing. There are two issues that have gotten mixed up and they're separate. The one we've discussed is the commentary, mostly on television, sometimes in print, by retired general officers, colonels, I even saw a few majors out there. Equal opportunity.

MR. : They must really be cheap. That's like two for the price of one.

MR. WALCOTT: I don't know what the price was. I have to ask Bob what the price rates are.

MR. FRANKEN: I was in the desert. How would I know?

[Laughter.]

MR. WALCOTT: But it's important to know that all of the criticism was not coming from retired generals. Some of it was coming from active-duty generals, and as the situation in Iraq evolves, there are questions that I know that the Army will go back and look at when it does its lessons learned process about the size of the force, about whether the adequate number of military police units were deployed with the force, all of those kinds of questions. And some of those were raised early on by people who were less enthusiastic about the war plan, who felt that there were elements of it that were a gamble, and they simply weren't entirely with the program.

They raised some of those questions, and they were not all retired.

MS. CLARKE: However, with one or two notable exceptions, I think, active-duty generals or colonels criticizing the effort were almost all on background.

MR. WALCOTT: Yes, and for reasons that I certainly understand. And they weren't simply criticizing them. They were raising questions about this element or that element. Some of those questions turned out to be wrong, questions, for example, about the Air Force's ability to provide close air support, effectiveness of close air support in the war. Other questions I think are still out there about the size of the force that we now have deployed in Iraq, its ability to police the country, the types of units we have, the wear and tear on particularly the 3rd Infantry now. Those are legitimate questions, and they were being raised inside as well as outside.

MR. NESSEN: Before I ask for the lessons learned--and I guess we've talked a lot about the lessons learned already--I want to ask you about the two stories that to me are the most confusing, there's the most finger-pointing about, it was the Pentagon's fault for giving out bad information, it was the press' fault for getting it wrong; and, that is, the Jessica Lynch story and the archaeological museum story.

Where did those stories go so badly wrong? Torie, you look like—

MS. CLARKE: No, I'd be happy to start. One of the few areas in which I have any experience and knowledge on the military is with POWs, having worked for John McCain for a long time and knowing the POW community. And I am very, very sensitive to the feelings and emotions of the families. And from the very beginning,

when we knew we had POWs, our mission, our intent at the Pentagon was to say as little as possible, about their status, about any expected rescue attempts, for all the obvious reasons. So we were in the "keep it as low key as possible" front on the POWs.

The rescue of Jessica Lynch, which I think time will tell, will show was one of the most remarkable joint exercises ever, obviously a lot of interest, a lot of speculation, how did it happen, how did it occur, what was her condition, again, my primary focus and emphasis was on her and her physical and mental well-being. And we made a conscious decision, and we communicated throughout the military establishment: we will say as little as possible about this. General Brooks will brief those elements of the operation that he can, and he did it, and he did it truthfully, and we didn't reveal some of the techniques and tactics that were used because they could be used again. And we will say very little about her status out of respect for her.

I think just about every single person in the military adhered to that policy and guidance. I think, based on the reporting I saw, there were some people outside the military establishment who really didn't know what was going on and really didn't have firsthand information about her or about the circumstances, and they chose, whether to ingratiate themselves with reporters or for what reasons I don't know, to feed some reporters some bad information. And I won't go into too many details, but there was a widely copied story in the Washington Post which embellished the rescue to a large extent. And a lot of this will come out in the wash. But when that appeared and people came running into my office and talking to General Brooks and coming to all of us, we were waving them off, waving them off, waving them down. And we actively discouraged any speculation about that story.

So, again, we want to make clear who was talking, who wasn't. It'll all come out in good time and the appropriate way. But I think there was some misinformation being given out to certain people.

MR. : The Post goes back and retraces that story today, where they—

MR. : It does.

MR. NESSEN: Terry?

MR. SMITH: I just want to ask you a question, Torie. You say it'll come out in the wash. We're in the wash cycle now. I mean, these--you know, the prisoners are back. I could understand everything you're saying during the time when they were in captivity and when plans were being made to try to get them out. But since then, a lot of these questions have been raised by the much reporter BBC documentary and other things. And I know firsthand that the Pentagon has, your office has declined to come on our broadcast and others and explain point for point what was wrong and what happened. Why that reticence now?

MS. CLARKE: Well, actually, we've been on several broadcasts and several stories going through the details as we think are appropriate to show. We chose not to go on that particular program because it would just give greater credence to a ridiculous story put out by the BBC, which has been shot down by a lot of credible journalists.

Jessica Lynch is still in the hospital. Again--and I'll admit to a real soft spot here--I have the greatest concern about the physical and mental well-being of POWs, and I think that is the first priority and that's what we should stay focused on.

MR. NESSEN: Bob?

MR. FRANKEN: Let us not forget that it is the function of every administration, every congressional office, every institution, certainly in Washington, to spin and to, if not sometimes to misrepresent--and I'm not ready to make that accusation--it is certainly to find the best explanation for things that might occur; in addition to which, "the fog of war" is an expression we've now all heard. It is a reality.

My personal experience was I was with Peter Baker and Juan that day when the POWs were released, and after a bit of a confrontation to get access, I was given access, during which time I kept on getting increasingly heroic accounts of how these seven were released.

I don't doubt for a minute that each person who told me--and it was all military--believed it. He wanted to believe it. He wanted that story out. The way I handled that, by the way, was put all three of them on the air, the three that I got, and say we'll probably really not know, but here are the ones, folks, you decide which one is plausible--this occurring instantly, by the way, as we were showing the pictures of the released POWs. That happens. Things aren't that neat. You don't have a press officer, for instance, with the Iraqis releasing the POWs and putting out a paper statement that you can go over. It doesn't happen that way. It's confused. It's difficult. That's one of the challenges reporters have, is to try and go through that.

I can see that the Jessica Lynch story would be told and retold like the old game about people sitting and telling the story and it changes before it gets to the last row, it's quite a bit different. I can see that happening. I can see the Pentagon saying, "We would like to adopt the one that is one that makes us look the best." That's perfectly normal.

MS. CLARKE: But if you look at what General Brooks did when he first briefed the rescue and you look at what all of us said day in and day out--and, again, I'm speaking about the overwhelming majority of people in the military--we were downplaying it. We were downplaying it. We weren't hyping it. We weren't spinning it. We don't do that, by the way. We were the ones downplaying it.

In this case, if you want to go to a particular source, go to the Washington Post and look at the original story, which was based on, I believe, intel sources.

MR. NESSEN: John?

MR. WALCOTT: Actually, we have gone back over this. Aside from the "we don't do that, by the way."

[Laughter.]

MR. WALCOTT: You're right. We can't find--we did not find anywhere in the record any Pentagon official General Brooks or anyone else, selling this version of the rescue that appeared in the Washington Post. And we can't--we don't know where that came from.

There is an old saying in the military that the first intelligence report is always wrong, and it may be as simple as that. Juan Tamayo did interview the lawyer, who's now in this country, and he told Juan at the time that one of the reasons he walked six miles, or whatever it was, to tell the Americans where Jessica Lynch was because he had seen someone slapping her in the hospital. There apparently was a military command post at some time in the basement of that hospital, whether it was in use at the time—

MS. CLARKE: An Iraqi military—

MR. WALCOTT: Yes, an Iraqi military command post. It was some distance--I've forgotten how far, a couple of miles, I think--from the marines' forward position in Nasiriyah at the time. And I think the BBC report, my best guess and having looked at it is that the BBC report of blanks was a reference to what they call "flash bang" grenades, which make noise and light and blind people and disorient them but don't send shrapnel, don't kill people. They are the world's biggest blanks, but I guess you could call them blanks. It may have been a misperception of that.

But the bottom line is what Torie said, we have not been able to find anywhere in the record any military official overselling this as a heroic mission or claiming that it was done under heavy fire or anything of the sort.

MR. NESSEN: I guess, Torie, you have probably heard one of Don Rumsfeld's favorite expressions many times in this case, right? "Those who know aren't talking, and those who talk don't know."

MS. CLARKE: It holds pretty true.

MR. NESSEN: All right. I don't think we're going to find out today how 170,000 looted antiquities got to be 33 missing antiquities, but we'll do another panel on that.

The Pentagon has a -- [tape ends].

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-- lessons learned process after every battle or engagement and the media doesn't. But it seems to me there must have been lessons learned from this that will carry forward into the coverage of future wars. So let's hear relatively briefly what you think those lessons learned are, and then we'll go to audience questions.

Steve, you've sort of—

MR. HESS: Well, I think, first of all, what we're going to find is that what happened during the Iraq war will simply happen again and again because it's the nature of the beast. And we needn't worry about that. We can just predict it in a sense, Terry talking about the highs and lows of it.

This is something in the nature of journalism. Look at coverage of the White House. It's a bit like the fun house with the mirrors, you know. What's good comes out great, and what's bad comes out horrendous and awful. So you're going to get a good deal of that going on, anyway.

The question of civilian casualties and the gore, a lot of that has to do with American etiquette attitudes of the media. We don't see gore in traffic accidents. We try to avoid it. We worry very much about the people who jumped out of the building in the World Trade Center. We're different than other countries, and that's going to happen regardless of whether it has anything to do with telling the brutality of war or not, we know that television, which a six-year-old can watch, is not going to have gore if it can avoid it.

The question of the Stockholm syndrome question. We have--in the book that Marvin Kalb and I have coming out in a couple weeks, we have a very interesting statement from a Japanese newspaper embedded reporter who cheered, of course, when a bomb went off near him and saved his life. You know, that's to be expected.

But we really won't know until we analyze all the other countries with their embeddeds to see if it made any difference in that way or whether it was cheering the home team. Did the Germans and the French play their embeddeds in the same way? Well, we'll see. And if they didn't, then that has nothing to do with the process of embedding but rather with from whence you came.

So all of these things really are worth considering, but they're not unique. And I think that's one thing we have to keep in mind in this analysis.

MR. NESSEN: Bob, as a front-line reporter, embedded reporter, what do you think you learned and what do you think your colleagues in the front lines learned that you'll put into play the next time you get sent off to cover a war?

MR. FRANKEN: First of all, let's agree on a new word: "attached."

[Laughter.]

MR. FRANKEN: But, first of all, I've always considered what I do for a living a great alternative to growing up. And this was just an example of that. I hate to say this. There's not much I did learn. I've been shot at before. I've gone without taking a bath for a month before, sort of like the Peanuts character Pig Pen. And it was another remarkable story. This is a wonderful profession where you get the chance to have the best seat in the house for something that people care about. This was the most recent example of that.

But I didn't learn a lot, and what I did learn, frankly, I learned in all the boot camps I went to beforehand. Between the official ones at Quantico and the ones that CNN provided, I feel like I'm prequalified to be a Navy SEAL.

But the fact of the matter is that this was just another great story. I think what happens oftentimes is that we in the media so want to be cheered that we come back and talk about how heroic we were, when all we really did is to go out there and do what we're supposed to do. I'm not downplaying it. I'm proud of what I did out there. I'm proud of what my colleagues did. But I've been proud of what we've done before, going all the way back to the Vietnam War. This was another case.

What was remarkable about this at all was the fact that the Pentagon opened the doors for us a little bit and allowed us--and I hope we get the chance to talk more about this--to do it live. That really stopped in its tracks a lot of the censorship because the reporter had the last word.

MR. NESSEN: John, as a bureau chief and editor and so forth, what do you think you and your fellow senior press executives learned from this?

MR. WALCOTT: Oh, a number of things, and not all of them are negative. I think sometimes there's a perception that lessons learned always have to be negative. And in this case they aren't all negative by any means. I think this system worked. I think I'd argue with Steve a little bit that it's going to be easy to change this for the simple reason that I think if some future Pentagon tries to change it, there's going to be a holler not from the media but from Fort Benning and Fort Campbell and Fort Stewart and Fort Riley about people who want that reporter there with Mom or Dad.

MR. HESS: Can I interrupt you, though? Because the other side of embedding in that there were 500 seats in the theater but only 50 of them were front-row seats. So there were 450 people sitting in the second balcony. When this question is rehearsed again, how is your organization, which is a pretty tight-fisted organization, how is the bottom-line people going to feel about sending out, whatever it was, 50 reporters when most of them were not having the good seats?

MR. WALCOTT: Actually, Steve, at any given point in the war, almost every one of them had a good seat. One of the things that a lot of the reporters learned, which Bob alluded to earlier, is that war is frequently, you know, 30 days of boredom

followed by 30 seconds of panic. And almost every reporter who has complained that they were bored within a day or two was in a panic.

So given the tempo of this operation, almost every one of our people found themselves on the front line at one time or another. Not everyone was on the front line the whole time, but almost everybody got their share of good stories. And I think that's true of every news organization because of the size of the force.

You talk about our being tight-fisted. I do have to respond to that because--well, because it isn't true. When this started, our CEO, Tony Ridder, who is the one usually accused of being tight-fisted, we asked him, "What's the budget for this?" And his answer was, and I'll quote him: "Whatever it takes." And we took him at his word, believe me. I'm sure we'll have to settle up later, but—

[Laughter.]

MR. WALCOTT: That's what he said, so that's what we did. The question never arose and so--and I don't expect it'll arise in a future circumstance.

So I think we learned a lot about the importance of being the hometown paper, how important that was to the people in those towns. That's, I think, burned into all of our minds.

The second thing is I'm beginning to think that we ended this embed program too soon, and that may be something we need to talk about because some of what the Pentagon worried about originally is now starting to happen, and that is, the Iraqis describing versions of events where we don't have reporters present. And that problem may not have been avoided but only delayed, and so we may have all gotten out too early.

We learned a lot about the importance of training reporters, how valuable that was, both the training the Pentagon provided and also that that was available commercially that we took advantage of for everybody, and about choosing reporters, who can do this and who can't, because Bob is right, this is our job. This is not some extraordinary heroic effort. But it's not a job that everyone do or wants to do, just like a soldier. So we learned, I think, a good deal about that.

And, finally, this lesson: I'm proud of the job we did pulling things together. I think we probably could have done it much better, and I think it underscored, as Terry and Steve have both said, the importance of trying to bring some perspective to balance the urgency of these soda-straw views that are coming in over satellite phones. It's very easy to get carried away when you've got a reporter live on a satellite phone and you can hear the sound of battle. It's very easy to get carried away by that and to lose perspective. And so the job of the editor, if you will, and of the rewrite person and so on is very important, and a lot of this underscored that.

MR. NESSEN: Terry, your observation?

MR. SMITH: I would say that the news organizations, this was a very good reminder for news organizations that you mustn't let new opportunities and even new technology divert you from your central role and what you're there for. You mustn't let even the access replace the big picture. You mustn't--you have to keep asking the questions, and this applies every bit as much now in the wake of the war as it did before the war and during the war.

You may feel confident about the plan that General Franks developed and the way it was executed, but it is totally legitimate to keep asking those questions about that plan and whether or not it was flawed in this respect or in that respect. That's the duty, the obligation of news organizations in a situation like that, like this. They shouldn't be distracted from it. They shouldn't be distracted now from asking the questions. Go back over the things that the administration said before the war that offered the justification for this expenditure of money and lives.

The President of the United States stood up and told us that Saddam Hussein and Iraq constituted a national security threat to the United States and to people in this country. How does that stand up in the wake of the war and in the current circumstances?

We heard a great deal about these weapons of mass destruction. Keep asking the questions, not only where are they but how important is it if they are or are not found. What about--I mean, these are the big questions, and my fear is that with new opportunities, new technologies, some of it very arresting and immediate, that some of these questions and some of this question asking gets lost.

Now, as far as intelligence goes, Torie, I can now share with you because I've learned where Saddam Hussein is because I asked my top Iraqi source. Tony Shallal (ph), who runs the Luna Grill—

[Laughter.]

MR. SMITH: There are several of them around. Tony's Iraqi American, very smart guy, and I asked him and his brother, Andy, "Where is Saddam Hussein?" They looked at me as though I was an idiot. They said, "He's in Falluja. Everybody knows he's in Falluja." I said, "Oh, everybody knows that?" "Yes, of course, he's in Falluja. There's no problem. He's got a lot of Sunnis there. They protect him. Everybody knows that." And I said, "Well, that's very interesting. Do you suppose the Pentagon knows that?" "Well, they certainly should," they said. So that's where he is. He's in Falluja. Go get him.

MS. CLARKE: Got it.

[Laughter.]

MR. NESSEN: So, Torie, other than the fact that embedding works and that Saddam Hussein is in Falluja, what else did the Pentagon learn?

MR. SMITH: Everybody knows that.

MS. CLARKE: Well, there is a very formal lessons learned process underway, and all things information are a part of it, and that'll be coming out in the weeks and months ahead.

MR. NESSEN: Will there be a report of some kind, a formal report?

MS. CLARKE: Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Public.

MS. CLARKE: Absolutely. It is less about lessons learned. It's more about validation of what a lot of us thought. Transparency works. Good news and bad news, transparency works. The good news gets out; the bad news gets dealt with quicker. That's a good thing.

As MacArthur said, the key to success in victory is preparation. This embedding worked because there was a lot of hard work on the part of a lot of people, on the military side and on the journalist side. And Bob I think is too modest. These people put their lives at risk. They put their lives at risk. They went into very, very dangerous situations to do their jobs. I don't think we should underestimate that.

In the category of doing things differently, we actually--we had about 700 journalists embedded, even though we've never really acknowledged to the leadership how many we had. During the course of preparation, they'd ask us, "Well, how many are you planning on?" We'd went "hmmph, hmmph," you know, and go on to the next issue.

We would have had more, but news organizations ran out of people and money to give us more, which is pretty extraordinary when you think about it. But I would say try to have more, and I would also try to have more foreign journalists. We can't all sit around and complain about foreign media coverage if we're not out there engaged. So I would change that slightly.

MR. NESSEN: All right. Now, we'll see what the audience has to ask you about. We have folks with microphones who will come around when you're recognized. Stand up so we can see you and hear your questions and give your news organization.

I think this gentleman raise his hand first.

MR. CURRY: Thank you. I'm Jim Curry from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

Torie, for you, is the idea of embedded journalists going to be incorporated into official Defense Department doctrine now, or is it going to be left as an ad hoc situation?

MS. CLARKE: Well, two things. There's a lot to be determined, but it has been official policy. It has been practice, you know, especially including my watch. In Afghanistan, to the greatest extent possible, we had media there with the forces, air and ground.

I am quite confident--Steve's right. People can always backslide, but I am quite confident people feel so good about this process that you'll see more people in the military embracing it.

My hope is that the attitude extends beyond just military conflicts. That's what everybody thinks about. But I hope it extends to the greater day-to-day business of the Pentagon.

MR. CURRY: But you do have written public affairs doctrine, and I'm wondering if this is going to be now part of it.

MS. CLARKE: It's something that's under consideration. And what made--one of the things, if there are critical factors, you know, single critical factors that you want to draw out in why and how this worked, Secretary Rumsfeld and Chairman Myers in, I believe, January sent out a P4, a Personal 4, to everybody in the military that said if and when we go to war, we want to facilitate the greatest media access possible and for these reasons, so you do the following kinds of things. Delivering that kind of mission and intent from the leadership had a big impact.

MR. HESS: Can I say something? Because not everyone--or few know that Jim Curry teaches one of the most remarkable courses in training the military in the meaning and the understanding and the sensitivity of the press. And this is part of the gestalt.

The thing about being in the military is what do you do with them when there's no war, and the answer is you train them. And part of this training now increasingly, I believe, is about understanding the media and their importance, partly because you're dependent on them to get some big budget through the Congress.

MR. FRANKEN: And talk about a gap before--and I disputed whether the personality gaps, that is to say, the individual gaps were that large. But there is a huge institutional gap between the way the military does what it does and how the media operate. We, to varying degrees, are all about instant gratification, particularly in television. That's now how the military works. It is the opposite of how the military

works. And what you do, I think, is the kind of thing that can improve that so at least we have this tense relationship that we can co-exist.

I was very lucky, as I said, with the group I was with. They had had probably your training. But we need much more of that, and, of course, we need to always be aware that we can't snap our fingers and get things done when you're operating with the military. It doesn't happen that way.

MR. NESSEN: Other questions? Bernie?

MR. KALB: Bernie Kalb. I'd like to take up Terry Smith's invitation to ask a question of Torie Clarke. I recognize—

MS. CLARKE: [inaudible] panelists.

MR. KALB: I recognize this is not a press briefing, but Terry has hit the subject right on the head in connection with Jessica Lynch. We are in the wash right now. It seems to me that my colleagues, journalistic colleagues on that panel cannot let you escape this morning without pinpointing questions about Jessica Lynch. I heard a network correspondent last night say that she was the victim of a traffic accident. I recall the film that was made available that night when she was taken out on the stretcher.

Now, I'm not unaware or insensitive to the point you're making about sensitivity about POW families, but there are 300 million Americans as well who want to know what really happened. And if you know--if you know--then that should be shared.

MS. CLARKE: Of the 300 million people in this country, I think a lot of them understand why we should be so sensitive about the feelings and the emotions and the physical and mental well-being of our POWs. Among the many outpourings of questions and comments we got from the public during the war, a lot of them had to do with POWs--now, let me finish.

[Laughter.]

MS. CLARKE: Let me finish. So don't generalize about them in that way. I think they understand and I think they share my sensitivity to those POWs.

If you go back and look at General Brooks' briefing, if you go back and look at what we said at the Pentagon, if you go back and look at the fact that we released previously unreleased footage, combat camera footage from that rescue operation, which is not something Special Forces are comfortable doing at all, if you go back, as Knight Ridder did, and look through the record at what we said--and we've been very, very consistent about it--I think you will see truthfulness, I think you will see responsible sharing of information, and I think that holds up pretty well. I really, really do.

I think you should ask some tough questions of people who reported the story in a way that may have been very, very inaccurate. So maybe somebody from the Washington Post should be here answering some tough questions about how that story was reported. If you look at how we shared the news and information about that rescue, I think you'll find it's a pretty consistent and pretty responsible handling of the situation.

MR. KALB: Can I have a follow-up, please?

MR. NESSEN: Okay.

MR. KALB: Do you know, Terry, what actually happened--Torie, excuse me. Do you know what happened?

MS. CLARKE: I have some information about it, and I have not gotten the full after-action report. I have not.

MR. KALB: Well, if you don't have the full after-action--but it seems to me that that story should not be allowed to dribble in fog. There were the pictures made available, and in a sense, by saying the question is sensitivity of POWs, the Pentagon doesn't have a monopoly on sensitivity about that issue. It seems to me that this story should be untangled from fog, from myth, or whatever, so that people indeed do know.

MS. CLARKE: I think there are—

MR. KALB: I think Terry's right on the money on the question of—

MS. CLARKE: I think there are some people—

MR. KALB: --following up with questions.

MS. CLARKE: I think there are some people who are--who want to be caught up in the fog and the mystery or the intrigue, and they're looking for something mysterious when it may be not that mysterious. As Bob was saying, the fog of war, ten people see a traffic accident, you're going to get eight different versions of how it happened. That's just reality. That is just real life. But I can promise you--because we get the public inquiries every day. We get the e-mails, we get the thousands of phone calls and letters and faxes. And what they're saying is: "You take care of those people. You take care of those people." There's not this huge public outcry.

I think there is an outcry among certain individuals, and, fine, that's your right. But ask some tough questions of the Washington Post.

MR. : You know, just a comment on that. There are questions, Torie, that can be answered that--and for which I suspect there are very reasonable

explanations about whether or not the Special Forces were advised the day before that the Sadaam Fedayeen had pulled out of the area.

MS. CLARKE: Oh, time out, time out.

MR. : Let me just finish.

MS. CLARKE: No, wait. I have to stop you. One of the most ludicrous things I have heard, absolutely ludicrous, and put out in this ridiculous BBC documentary, is that our Special Forces were told the day before that when you go in there, you're not going to face a lot of resistance. How many days into the war were we when this happened? We were in the middle of the war, in the middle of major combat operations. All information is suspect. All information is suspect. You get information from a variety of sources, and you stitch it together, and you hope you're going in with some pretty good information. But you know you're going into a highly dangerous situation. So—

MR. : Yeah, but, Torie, of course it is. That's--that's—

MS. CLARKE: But to put any credence—

MR. : It's apparent to everyone that—

MS. CLARKE: --into the allegations that—

MR. : No, I'm not putting any credence. I'm saying that you and the Pentagon can answer some of these questions, and there are explanations for them. For example, no Special Forces unit would go in unprepared to meet combat, regardless of what they'd been told the day before about whether they would or would not meet resistance. They would obviously prepare for resistance and assume it, in fact, until proven otherwise. So there are questions about that. There are questions about the efforts reported to get her--medical personnel from the hospital to get her back across the American lines.

All I'm saying is I believe that, in fact, you can be fully sensitive to the prisoners, their families, and to the needs of security and operational control, and still answer a lot of these questions and that you would dignify the experience of the participants by so doing.

MS. CLARKE: Well, but if you look at General Brooks' briefing in which he gave a pretty accurate and pretty thorough blow-by-blow of the action, you've got a pretty clear picture of what went on. And he was also dead honest and dead straightforward about where they encountered resistance and where they didn't. So I think that the record's been pretty good.

MR. : One could argue that had there been coverage other than just combat camera, we wouldn't be having this problem right now. And I know what the response to that is. This was a dangerous situation, blah, blah, blah, except that on a couple of occasions this time I was sent at the spur of the moment into situations comparable, to go up, for instance, when they opened Tallil Air Base and all that, going up through Ambush Alley, and there was no hesitation at all. I honestly believe that this is--one of the lessons to be learned is that you try and maximize independent reporting, even in something like this.

MS. CLARKE: To the greatest extent possible.

MR. : And I think that these problems would have largely not occurred had there been an independent reporter there instead of our having to rely exclusively on government accounts.

MR. NESSEN: Any other questions from the audience?

MR. : I'm Jim (?) of CD Publications. I had the luxury in the war of not being shot at. Sitting in this room and many like it around town, debating the cosmic issues of whether we should be there, but I really would be interested in each of your personal views as to where you think we stand right now. We entered a pre-emptive war, something we've done before but in, you know, much lesser cases, in the cradle of civilization. Many, many regimes have tried to straighten out this part of the world with no success over millennia.

I'd be interested in your personal view--here we are, we're having kind of a victory conference right now, you know, in the wake of all this and we came out okay. I'd be interested in your personal views as to where you think we are immediately and certainly down the road, having taken that step that's quite irreversible, and we're there for a pretty long time.

MR. NESSEN: I don't really think that's an issue that necessarily goes to the question of media coverage or Pentagon media policy, so we'll leave that for another time.

Over here?

MS. SHEPHERD: Hi. My name is Alicia Shepherd. I write about the media. And, Torie, it seems like with your background and everything we've learned about a crisis situation or where there's a lot of misinformation, that, you know, you come at it with full force. Why isn't it that you feel a responsibility now to say this is what happened with Jessica Lynch? You're the only one--the Pentagon is the only one who can tell that story. Why not, you know, get rid of all this fog of war and just, you know, meet it head on instead of saying go back and look at the record, you know, ask other people? I mean, why not you come out and tell us what happened?

MS. CLARKE: Well, I think if you look at the track record of the Pentagon, good news and bad news, we've been out there and very forthright. For instance—

MS. SHEPHERD: What about this story?

MS. CLARKE: Let me finish the question. In the early days of the war, as a matter of fact, a bus, a Syrian bus was hit and civilians were killed. And we stood--right after it happened, we stood up at the podium and said this is what happened, here's how we think it happened, this is approximately how many people we think were injured, killed, it was a terrible thing. So we've got a pretty good track record.

Two things. Jessica Lynch is still in the hospital. Secondly, major combat operations are over, but we do still have a lot of people over there. Third, every situation is unique, especially when you're talking about Special Forces. You have techniques, you have tactics that hopefully you can use again. There are some things that are not appropriate to reveal. And I'll repeat myself but it bears repeating. If you go back and look at General Brooks' briefing--and I encourage you to do it--you will see a pretty full and robust accounting of what happened.

And I am totally with Bob Franken. The more you can have independent media coverage, the better off we are. In some circumstances it just doesn't work. If the mission counts on secrecy and it counts on speed, as this one did, it would be very, very hard. Not beyond belief, and there are instances where we've had it. We had lots of reporters embedded with Special Forces. But there are things that are just very, very difficult to facilitate that kind of coverage. But the Special Forces did release combat camera footage, again, something which is very, very sensitive to them. So a lot of ground was covered.

MR. : A couple of the questions have been answered. Our reporter, Joe Galloway, talked to the Special Operations Command last week and gave--in answer to the question Terry raised, among other things, were they told that the Fedayeen had vacated the hospital, the answer is yes, they were. And as everyone has suggested, that didn't matter. No one was going to plan this operation based on that intelligence and go in with guns loaded with blanks because someone told them that the Sadaam Fedayeen had left.

So were they told? Yes. Did it matter? No. Should it have mattered? I don't think it should have.

MR. NESSEN: We'll take one or two more questions. Right here?

MR. : My name's (?) from (?) newspaper. Does this embedding business, especially with the lopsided presence of journalists, leave the other side of the story grossly underreported, and especially something that we see now, I mean, you know, there's really a chronic deficiency as we see today? You know, for us that are

exposed to the Arabic media and other news outlets, our journalists there in the field and so on, we see a different story about, you know, American forces going into neighborhood search-and-destroy missions, killing a lot of people and leaving a lot injured and so on.

Anyone care to comment, Ms. Clarke and others?

MR. : First of all, I don't necessarily agree that the embed process needs to continue, but nothing would stop any of our news organizations from sending us back as reporters to expand upon what we discovered as we were reporting.

For instance, I was in the city of Kut with the military--Kut is about a half-hour or so from the Iranian border--and one of the things I saw was the presence of Iranians already. And this was a huge part of the story. I think that perspective and others might be worth pursuing further as we discuss should the administration have known about the possible Balkanization of Iraq. That is a story that needs to be done. It hasn't been discussed adequately. Maybe some of us should go back or at least share our experience with colleagues, you can go back and start looking at these things. The story of Iraq is hardly going to go away, and it may be replaced on television sometimes with the latest golden retriever story. But the fact of the matter is that--I'll get in trouble for that. But, anyway, the fact of the matter is that this is a story that is just beginning. It is a story that has the potential to be another Yugoslavia. And some of us have gained some insights that might be helpful in pursuing that story.

MS. CLARKE: And I wish we did have more interaction with their media. We did so much better this time around than we have in previous conflicts. Arab media were embedded. Al-Jazeera, representatives from Al-Jazeera were embedded with U.S. forces. We would have had more representatives from Al-Jazeera, but several of the countries from which the units were operating wouldn't let Al-Jazeera in their countries. But we made a little bit of progress. We can make a lot more. But it's a two-way street.

MR. : By the way, it reminds me, we've been so overwhelmed and so fascinated in the embedded process that we actually didn't say anything about the unilaterals. You didn't have to be embedded, you know. There were an awful lot of reporters going around on their own, and, of course, all of the reporters in Baghdad were not embedded. And interesting things happened there, beside the fact of which it was an incredibly dangerous war.

Now, I remember being on this platform after Afghanistan, and I think there were eight killed. I said this was the most dangerous war in history for the time and the number, and now I think 13 were killed here. And I think perhaps three were embedded of the—

MS. CLARKE: Four.

MR. : Four of the 13 were embedded, and the others were independent. So we didn't just get the news from the people like Bob Franken who were embedded.

MR. NESSEN: Well, I thank the panel very much. I think this has been a lively discussion, an informative and intelligent discussion, and I hope a useful discussion. We are going to have other events over time, both focused on what's happening in Iraq in the aftermath of the war and dealing with various media issues, too.

So we thank you for coming and urge you to check the website for additional information. Thank you.

MS. CLARKE: Thank you, sir.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, the briefing was concluded.]