

HIGH TECH MEDIA COVERAGE OF A HIGH TECH WAR

(TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY, BEIJING 31-3-03)

GOOD EVENING, IT'S AN HONOR TO BE HERE AT TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY, AND TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH YOU. I WANT TO THANK YOUR FACULTY FOR INVITING ME.

AS JOURNALISM STUDENTS, YOU ARE LIVING DURING AN INCREDIBLE MOMENT IN TIME.

IT IS SAD, AND UNFORTUNATE THAT A WAR IS BEING FOUGHT, BUT IT IS BEING FOUGHT NONETHELESS, AND IT IS A JOURNALIST'S DUTY TO COVER AN EVENT LIKE THIS IN ORDER FOR THE PUBLIC THAT YOU SERVE, TO BE INFORMED.

FOR JOURNALISM STUDENTS IN CHINA, SUCH AS YOURSELF, YOU ARE ALSO AT A SPECIAL MOMENT BECAUSE IT'S OBVIOUS TO ME AT THIS MOMENT THAT CHINA'S JOURNALISM PRACTICES ARE IN A TRANSITION PROCESS FROM A STYLE OF

JOURNALISM THAT HAS BEEN PRACTICED SINCE THE FOUNDING OF “NEW CHINA”, TO A PRACTICE THAT IS MORE CONSISTENT WITH WESTERN STANDARDS.

IF YOU WERE TO WATCH CCTV-9 IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS, AND ITS COVERAGE OF THE NATIONAL PARTY CONGRESS, AND THEN THE WAR IN IRAQ, YOU WOULD SEE COVERAGE THAT IS ENLIGHTENING, TIMELY, ANALYTICAL AND BALANCED, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CHANNEL IN A NATION LIKE CHINA.

IN FACT, “BALANCE” IN COVERAGE BY THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH MEDIA, THE OTHER WESTERN MEDIA, THE IRAQI MEDIA, THE WIDER ARAB MEDIA, AND BY THE MEDIA IN OTHER NATIONS SUCH AS CHINA, WILL BE CENTRAL THEME OF MY REMARKS TONIGHT.

WHAT IS “BALANCE” IN COVERAGE? “BALANCE” OCCURS WHEN THE MEDIA PUTS FORTH MANY DIFFERENT, INTELLIGENT OR AUTHORITATIVE

VOICES BEFORE ITS AUDIENCE. IT'S REALLY A VERY SIMPLE CONCEPT, ALTHOUGH, AS WITH MOST THINGS IN LIFE, HARDER TO DO CORRECTLY ALL OF THE TIME.

SO TONIGHT, I AM GOING TO TALK ABOUT WAR COVERAGE AND FOCUS ON 5 AREAS:

- 1) THE ATTEMPT BY BOTH THE COALITION AND IRAQ TO CONTROL THE MEDIA
- 2) TELEVISION COVERAGE BY THE COALITION MEDIA
- 3) TELEVISION COVERAGE BY OTHER WORLDWIDE MEDIA
- 4) "NEW" MEDIA AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET, AND
- 5) PRINT JOURNALISM

BEFORE WE BEGIN, LET'S REMEMBER THAT THERE ARE 5,000 JOURNALISTS COVERING THE WAR IN IRAQ FROM VARIOUS LOCATIONS, AND 500 OF THEM ARE "EMBEDDED" WITH COALITION. IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT NOT ALL OF THE "EMBEDDED" REPORTERS ARE FROM THE US AND UK.

THERE ARE REPORTERS FROM MANY OTHER COUNTRIES, INCLUDING FRANCE, GERMANY AND RUSSIA, ALL COUNTRIES THAT LED WORLDWIDE OPPOSITION THE WAR.

SO LET'S START OUR DISCUSSION TONIGHT WITH THE ISSUE OF TRYING TO CONTROL THE MEDIA.

IN EVERY WAR, ALL SIDES MAKE A CONSERVED EFFORT TO "CONTROL" THE MEDIA. IT'S AS EFFECTIVE WEAPON SOMETIMES AS A GUN OR A BOMB. AS JOURNALISM STUDENTS, YOU SHOULD REALLY WATCH CLOSELY THE ATTEMPTS BY BOTH THE COALITION SIDE AND THE IRAQI SIDE TO DO THAT IN THIS CONFLICT, BECAUSE IT IS REALLY A CASE STUDY IN 21ST CENTURY ATTEMPTS AT THIS PROCESS.

IRAQ IS ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL THE MEDIA IN A KIND OF "OLD FASHIONED" WAY, AND I THINK THEY ARE DOING SO PRETTY EFFECTIVELY.

THEIR PRIMARY MEDIA WEAPON IS THE USE OF THEIR STATE OWNED MEDIA, THEIR TELEVISION AS A WEAPON TO AIR THE VOICES OF IRAQ'S LEADERS OR TO AIR NEGATIVE IMAGES OF THE COALITION, SUCH AS VIDEO OF CIVILIANS WOUNDED IN COALITION BOMBING, OR OF CAPTURED PRISONERS OF WAR (POWS), OR IMAGES OF IRAQIS TAKING ARMS TO STOP COALITION FORCES.

THE PROCESS HERE IS PRETTY SIMPLE. WHENEVER THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT FEELS IT IS NECESSARY TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE WHO ARE UNDER ATTACK IT SENDS FORTH AN IRAQI OFFICIAL TO GIVE A "PEP TALK" TO THE PEOPLE. OCCASSIONALLY IT'S SADDAM HUSSEIN HIMSELF. SOMETIMES IT IS THE IRAQI VICE PRESIDENT. MOST OFTEN IT IS THEIR INFORMATION MINISTER, MUHAMMED SAEED SAHAF.

OF COURSE, THERE ARE NO OPPOSING POSITIONS EVER ALLOWED IN THE IRAQI MEDIA IN EITHER PEACTIME, OR IN WAR.

AS JOURNALISTS, I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU A FEW CLUES TO HELP “INTERPRET” THIS TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO TRYING TO CONTROL THE MEDIA.

ON THOSE OCCASIONS WHEN YOU SEE SADDAM HUSSEIN ON STATE RUN TELEVISION, YOU CAN REASONABLY BELIEVE THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS VERY NERVOUS ABOUT THE SITUATION AT HAND. IF YOU RECALL, A STATEMENT BY SADDAM WAS AIRED ON STATE MEDIA ONLY HOURS AFTER THE INITIAL ATTACK ON ONE OF HIS HEADQUARTERS. THE STATEMENT WAS LIKELY PRE-TAPED IN ADVANCE OF THE ATTACK FOR JUST SUCH A CIRCUMSTANCE, THERE WERE NOT PRECISE REFERENCES IN IT AS TO TIME OR THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT HAD JUST OCCURRED. BUT IN ANY EVENT IT SERVED TO TELL HIS PEOPLE, AND THE WORLD, THAT HE WAS STILL ALIVE.

REPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS SUCH AS THE ONE IN IRAQ TEND TO HAVE LOTS OF CITIZENS WHO WANT

THE LEADERSHIP REMOVED, SO PRESIDENT HUSSEIN'S APPEARANCE WAS AS MUCH TO ENCOURAGE HIS SUPPORTERS, AS TO DISCOURAGE THOSE WHO WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIM GO.

PRESIDENT HUSSEIN APPEARED A FEW DAYS LATER AFTER THE WESTERN MEDIA CONSISTENTLY REPORTED THAT "SOURCES" WITHIN THE COALITION SAID THAT PRESIDENT HUSSEIN MIGHT INDEED HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY WOUNDED OR EVEN DIED IN THE INITIAL ATTACK. AFTER ALL, THIS TIME HE CITED DETAILS THAT PUT TO REST THOSE ALLEGATIONS. WE'LL TALK MORE ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF LEAKING INFORMATION IN A MOMENT.

NOW LET'S KEEP IN MIND THAT THE IRAQI MEDIA STRATEGY IS HAS TWO DIMESNIONS TO IT.

THERE IS A STRATEGY ALMOST EXCLSIVELY AIMED AT THE IRAQI DOMESTIC POPULATION, AND THEN THERE IS A SEPARATE STRATEGY AIMED SOLELY AT THE REST OF THE WORLD, IN ORDER TO CHANGE TO

WORLD OPINION.

PLEASE KEEP IN MIND, THAT “TIME” IS MORE ON THE SIDE OF THE IRAQI REGIME IN ORDER FOR IT TO SURVIVE, THAN IT IS ON THE “SIDE” OF THE COALITION, WHERE WORLD OPINION, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, DOMESTIC OPINION IN THOSE COUNTRIES CAN SHAPE POLICY.

OF COURSE, THAT OPINION IS CONVEYED, IF NOT LARGELY SHAPED, BY THE MEDIA IN THOSE COUNTRIES. MR. HUSSEIN DOES NOT HAVE THIS DILEMMA BECAUSE THERE IS NO FREE PRESS IN IRAQ.

OCCASIONALLY, AS IN THE CASE OF MR. HUSSEIN’S APPEARANCES, BOTH DIMENSIONS OF THE IRAQI MEDIA STRATEGY ARE SERVED BY THE SAME EVENT. MORE OFTEN THEY ARE NOT, WHICH BRINGS US TO THE IRAQI INFORMATION MINISTER, MR. SAHAF.

WHILE SADDAM HUSSEIN MAY MAKE, ACTUALLY

“HAS TO MAKE”, APPEARANCES AT CRITICAL TIMES TO MAINTAIN THE SURVIVAL OF HIS REGIME, IT IS LEFT TO THE IRAQI INFORMATION MINISTER TO REALLY IMPLEMENT IRAQ’S WORLDWIDE MEDIA STRATEGY.

SO EVERYDAY, USUALLY TWICE A DAY IN FACT, MR. SAHAF COMES BEFORE THE WORLDWIDE MEDIA, THOSE GATHERED IN BAGHDAD, AND BEFORE EVERYONE ELSE AS WELL THROUGH THE MANY SATELLITE TRANSMISSION SOURCES THAT HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED BY THE MEDIA IN THE IRAQI CAPITAL.

AT THESE APPEARANCES MR. SAHAF PUTS FORTH WHATEVER THE MOST RECENT AMMUNITION HE HAS AVAILABLE TO TRY AND CHANGE WORLD OPINION. FOR EXAMPLE, A BOMBING RAID THAT HAS KILLED CIVILIANS, IRAQI MILITARY PROGRESS, AND WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, HE FALLS BACK ON REFUTING THE MEDIA MESSAGE THAT IS BEING CIRCULATED BY THE COALITION.

DURING THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF THE WAR, MR. SAHAF SAID THE IRREFUTABLE PICTURES OF ALLIED TANKS BLAZING ACROSS THE DESERT WERE NOT ACTUALLY IN IRAQ, BUT GOING IN CIRCLES AROUND KUWAIT. HE SAID THAT PICTURES OF SURRENDING IRAQI SOLDIERS WERE NOT SOLDIERS AT ALL, BUT KUWAITIS DRESSED UP BY THE ALLIES TO LOOK LIKE IRAQIS.

YOU HAVE TO GIVE MR. SAHAF SOME CREDIT FOR THE WAY HE DOES HIS JOB. HE IS PASSIONATE AND CLEVER, AND THEREFORE CONVINCING SOME OF THE TIME. HE FINDS THE BEST “SPIN” AVAILABLE, AS WE SAY IN THE WEST. IN FACT, IN ANOTHER TIME AND ANOTHER COUNTRY, MR. SAHAF WOULD HAVE A GREAT FUTURE IN THE PUBLIC RELATIONS BUSINESS.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE COALITION’S MAIN REASON FOR WAGING WAR IS “TO REMOVE WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION”. WHEN 2-THOUSAND CHEMICAL WARFARE SUITS, GAS MASKS AND ANTIDOTES ARE

FOUND COALITION FORCES AT AN IRAQI MILITARY INSTALLATION, AND PUT FORTH BY THE COALITION AS EVIDENCE OF EXISTING CHEMICAL WEAPON CAPABILITY BY THE IRAQIS, MR. SAHAF RESPONDS BY SAYING THAT “OF COURSE THERE ARE CHEMICAL SUITS BEING USED BY THE IRAQI ARMY, AFTER ALL IRAQ IS AFRAID OF A CHEMICAL WEAPON ATTACK BY THE COALITION!”

IN HIS EFFORTS, MR. SAHAF IS ALTERNATELY CREDIBLE AND UNBELIEVABLE, DEPENDING QUITE FRANKLY ON ONE DYNAMIC, THE PICTURES AT HAND.

IN A TOTALITARIAN REGIME, IT IS USUALLY EASY TO SIMPLY CALL SOMETHING THAT IS “BLACK, “WHITE”, BUT WHEN DEALING WITH WORLD OPINION IN THE AGE OF MASS INFORMATION, IT DOESN'T WORK. FEW PEOPLE, EVEN IRAQI SUPPORTERS BELIEVE THE VIDEOTAPE OF THE TANKS OR THE IRAQI PRISONERS IS FABRICATED, AND THERIN LIES THE VERY BACKBONE OF THE COLAITION'S MORE COMPLEX,

RISKY AND REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY FOR CONTROLLING MEDIA COVERAGE, WHICH IS TO USE THE MEDIA THE CHRONICLE THEIR OVERWHELMING MILITARY POWER, AND FORCE A QUICK SURRENDER. THE BACK BONE OF THAT STRATEGY IS THE PROCESS OF “EMBEDDING” REPORTERS WITH COALITION TROOPS.

TO UNDERSTAND THE COALITION’S STRATEGY, WHICH WAS FORMULATED BY THE U.S. PENTAGON, YOU NEED TO KEEP IN MIND THE FOLLOWING THINGS:

THAT INDEPENDENT TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF THE VIET NAM WAR MORE THAN 30 YEARS AGO CHANGED AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION AND FORCED THE GOVERNMENT TO ABANDON VIET NAM, AND

THE WATERGATE SCANDAL, WHICH RESULTED FROM REPEATED LIES BY THEN AMERICAN PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON, CREATED A DEEP DISTRUST BETWEEN THE US MEDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT AT

ALMOST EVERY LEVEL IN THE UNITED STATES. THIS RELATIONSHIP OF DISTRUST HAS EXISTED BETWEEN THE AMERICAN MEDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT EVER SINCE, AND SO THE ADMINISTRATION CONCOCTED A BOLD AND RISKY STRATEGY TO INVITING THE MEDIA ALONG WITH THE MILITARY, A STRATEGY THAT HAS BROUGHT A NEW WORD TO PROMINENCE IN ENGLISH, "EMBEDDED".

I BELIEVE THIS STRATEGY REVOLVES AROUND THE PREMISE, WHICH IS DESCRIBED BY THE PHRASE, "KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE AND YOUR ENEMIES CLOSER."

IN OTHER WORDS, IF YOU HAVE REPORTERS TRAVELING WITH YOU AND ABIDING BY SIGNIFICANT, AND FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW, REASONABLE RESTRICTIONS ON WHEN THEY CAN REPORT, THEN YOU HAVE SIGNIFICANT CONTROL OVER WHAT'S REPORTED BECAUSE YOU HAVE SIGNIFICANT CONTROL ON WHERE THE JOURNALISTS ARE REPORTING FROM, AND THEREFORE, WHAT

THEY ARE REPORTING.

UNLIKE VIET NAM, THE ADMISITRATION HAS, THROUGH THIS STRATEGY, VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED ALL OF THOSE INDEPENDENT REPORTERS RUNNING AROUND WITH THEIR CAMERAS AND REPORTING ON WHATEVER THEY WANT ... SOME OF WHICH MAY BE HELPFUL TO THE ADMINISTRATION'S MESSAGE, AND SOME WHICH IS NOT.

IT IS TRULY A BOLD STRATEGY, BUT IT HAS ONE GREAT RISK ATTACHED TO IT.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EVEN THE EVENTS THAT YOU CONTROL DO NOT "LOOK" SO GOOD TO THE CAMERA'S LENS? WHAT IS THE EFFECT WHEN THE WAR DOES NOT GO SO WELL? WILL THE OPPOSITION THROUGHOUT THE WORLD TO THE WAR GROW SO GREAT THAT EVEN A RESOLUTE ADMINISTRATION MUST ABANDON ITS POSITION? WILL AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION SHIFT, AS IN VIET NAM, BECAUSE THE OF CASUALITIES AND TIME THAT IT IS TAKING

TO WIN THE WAR?

THOSE THINGS ARE POSSIBLE, AND CLEARLY PRESIDENT HUSSEIN IS COUNTING ON THEM TO HAPPEN, KNOWING THAT WITHOUT PUBLIC PRESSURE TO HALT THE WAR, HIS MILITARY WILL EVENTUALLY LOSE TO A MUCH SUPERIOR FORCE.

OF COURSE, IF THINGS GO WELL MILITARILY FOR THE COALITION, OR IF CREDIBLE DISCOVERIES OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION ARE DISCOVERED BY COALITION FORCES, THEN THOSE THINGS ALONE COULD SHIFT THE COURSE OF THE WAR GREATLY IN THE COALITION'S FAVOR.

BY THE WAY, IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE HERE THAT CONTROLLING THE MEDIA WAS NOT THE ONLY REASON FOR THIS STRATEGY. AS THE ADMINISTRATION HAS ACKNOWLEDGED, THE OTHER STRATEGY WAS TO USE THE MEDIA TO QUICKLY GET PICTURES ON THE AIR WORLDWIDE THAT SHOWED BOTH MILITARY SUCCESS AND MORE IMPORTANTLY,

IMAGES OF IRAQIS WHO ARE “JUBILANT” AT THEIR “LIBERATION” BY THE COALITION ... IMAGES THAT WOULD CONVINCED ALL IRAQIS TO ABANDON SUPPORT OF THE HUSSEIN REGIME, AND THUS CAUSE THE REGIME TO COLLAPSE. THAT IS PURELY A MILITARY STRATEGY THAT, IF TRUE, TRULY USES THE AMERICAN MEDIA AS A WEAPON AS POTENT AS POWERFUL AS THE ONES THE SOLDIER’S USE.

IN ADDITION, THE COALITION USES THE COMMON WESTERN STRATEGY OF CONSTANTLY “LEAKING” INFORMATION TO THE MEDIA, KNOWING THAT IT WILL BE REPORTED WITHOUT DIRECT ATTRIBUTION.

EARLIER, I SAID THE WESTERN MEDIA REPORTED “SOURCE” INFORMATION BY COALITION SOURCES, AND THAT INFORMATION WAS DISSEMINATED BY THE MEDIA COVERING THE COALITION. THIS IS TYPICAL OF THE WAY IN WHICH THE COALITION WILL TRY TO USE WESTERN MEDIA, BY “LEAKING” INFORMATION THAT THEY ARE SURE THE MEDIA WILL THEN BROADCAST, BUT WHICH THEY CAN

DENY SAYING AT A LATER TIME.

IN FACT, I AM QUITE SURE THAT THE COALITION LEAKED INFORMATION THAT THE WAR WOULD BE OVER QUICKLY, AND THAT IRAQIS WOULD IMMEDIATELY RISE UP TO OVERTHROW MR. HUSSEIN.

WHEN THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN, IT CREATED PROBLEMS ON A NUMBER OF LEVELS:

IT DASHED EXPECTATIONS AND MADE THE PUBLIC MORE PESSIMISTIC.

IT ALLOWED ANTI-WAR PARTIES WORLDWIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO APPLY MORE PRESSURE, AND IT MADE COALITION FORCES SEEM WEAKER.

STILL, WHEN QUESTIONED BY THE MEDIA THAT THEY HAD INDEED CALLED FOR A QUICK WAR, COALITION OFFICIALS WERE ABLE TO SAY, 'WE NEVER SAID THAT', BECAUSE THEY HAD LEAKED THE INFORMATION RATHER THAN PUBLICLY STATING IT.

FURTHERMORE, THE COALITION GOES OUT OF ITS WAY TO TALK TO THE PUBLIC. THE BRIEFINGS FROM WASHINGTON, LONDON, CENTRAL COMMAND IN QATAR AND ON THE GROUND IN IRAQ ARE ALMOST OVERWHELMING IN THEIR FREQUENCY.

THIS STRATEGY KEEPS REPORTERS OCCUPIED AND KEEPS THE COALITION'S MESSAGE FLOWING IN A NUMBER OF WAYS, WHICH, IF NOTHING ELSE, GIVES THEIR SPOKESPEOPLE DOMINANCE OF THE AIRWAVES.

THIS CONSTANT AVAILABILITY TO THE MEDIA WORKS WELL WHEN THE WAR GOES WELL, BUT WHEN THINGS ARE NOT GOING WELL FOR THE COALITION, AND REPORTERS WANT TO PURSUE THESE DEVELOPMENTS, THE BRIEFERS, FROM PRESIDENT BUSH TO SECRETARY RUMSFELD, AND ON DOWN THE CHAIN OF COMMAND, BECOME VISIBLY ANNOYED, DEFENSIVE AND FRUSTRATED. THIS FURTHER UNDERMINES THEIR OWN POSITION, ALL OF THIS PART OF A SITUATION THAT THEY

THEMSELVES CREATED.

BUT WHETHER WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THE IRAQI OR THE COALITION'S VERY DIFFERENT STRATEGIES, THEY BOTH REVOLVE AROUND ONE ESSENTIAL DYNAMIC OF MEDIA COVERAGE ... VIDEO, EITHER "LIVE" OR ON TAPE, AND OF COURSE THAT MEANS THAT BOTH STRATEGIES REVOLVE AROUND TELEVISION COVERAGE.

SO LET'S TALK ABOUT THIS NEW TELEVISION COVERAGE OF THE WAR, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR JOURNALISM.

AS A U.S. TELEVISION EXECUTIVE I CAN EASILY IMAGINE THE DIFFICULTY IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS BY THE AMERICAN MEDIA AS TO WHETHER OR NOT TO ACCEPT THE PENTAGON'S "INVITATION" TO HAVE THEIR REPORTERS "EMBEDDED" WITH COALITION TROOPS.

AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, THE RELATIONSHIP

BETWEEN THE AMERICAN MEDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ADVERSERIAL FOR QUITE A LONG TIME, SO THE INITIAL REACTION BY THE AMERICAN MEDIA TO THE CONCEPT OF “EMBEDDED” REPORTERS MUST HAVE FELT LIKE THE MEDIA WAS MAKING A “FAUSTIAN” PACT, A PACT WITH THE “DEVIL”.

BUT IT WAS ALSO, TO QUOTE FROM THE FAMOUS AMERICAN FILM, “THE GODFATHER”, AN OFFER THAT THE MEDIA COULD NOT REFUSE.

FOR ONE THING, BECOMING “EMBEDDED” WITH THE MILITARY MEANT A GUARANTEED ACCESS TO THE MOST VALUABLE COMMODITY FOR MEDIA COVERAGE ... VIDEO. IT’S NOT EASY TO GET THOSE SAME KINDS OF PICTURES, WHEN YOU ARE OPERATING INDEPENDENTLY AS TELEVISION JOURNALISTS. YOU HAVE TO BE RESOURCEFUL, RISK EVEN GREATER DANGER, AND NEVER BE ASSURED OF ACCESS TO THE STORY THAT YOU ARE AFTER.

IN ADDITION, COMPETITION BETWEEN MEDIA OULETS IS SO INTENSE THAT THE IDEA THAT ONE MEDIA OUTLET WOULD FORGO SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY THAT THIER COMPETITION MIGHT TAKE, IS UNTHINKABLE. HENCE, A KIND OF “PACK” MENTALITY RESULT.

IN ADDITION, AS A MEDIA EXECUTIVE, I WOULD ALSO RATIONALIZE THAT MY JOURNALISTS MIGHT BE “SAFER” GOING ALONG WITH COALTION TROOPS THAN BEING ON THE BATTLEFIELD BY THEMSELVES. WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET THAT COVERING A WAR, IN ANY MANNER, IS A VERY DANGEROUS BUSINESS.

BUT WHEN YOU DO COVER A WAR WITHOUT TAKING PART IN THE EMBEDDING PROCESS, YOU ARE “FREE”. FREE TO REPORT WHAT YOU WANT, WHEN YOU WANT. AND IN A SOCIETY THAT HAS A “FREE” PRESS AS A MAJOR COMPONENT OF ITS VERY MAKEUP, THE FREER A PRESS IS TO OPERATE, THE BETTER SERVED THE MEDIA IS TO SERVE IT ROLE.

WHEN YOU ARE “EMBEDDED”, YOU VOLUNTARILY SUBJECT YOURSELF TO SOME DEGREE OF “CENSORSHIP”. THE RULES OF THE EMBEDDING PROCESS GUARANTEE THIS WILL HAPPEN BECAUSE UNDER THIS PROCESS, REPORTERS ARE:

- 1) NOT ALLOWED TO REPORT THE ACTION THAT THEY SEE UNTIL GOIVEN PERMISSION BY THE MILITARY FORCES THAT THEY ARE TRA VELLING WITH.
- 2) NOT ALLOWED TO REPORT CERTAIN FACTS THAT WOULD QUITE LOGICALLY “COMPROMISE” MILITARY SECURITY.
- 3) NOT ALLOWED TO LEAVE THEIR MILITARY UNITS, GO OFF ON THEIR OWN FOR A WHILE, AND THEN RETURN TO THOSE MILITARY UNITS.

NOW LET ME BE CLEAR HERE, THE PROCESS DOES NOT MEAN THAT REPORTERS HAVE TO REPORT THE COALITION’S POINT OF VIEW, OR THAT THEIR REPORTS ARE CENSORED BY THE MILITARY EXCEPT FOR INFORMATION THAT MAY COMPROMISE THE OPERATIONAL SECURITY OF THE MILITARY MISSION.

NEVERTHELESS, IF YOU TAKE ALL OF THIS INTO ACCOUNT, THE MEDIA THAT IS “EMBEDDED” WITH THE MILITARY IS “CENSORED”. LET’S THINK ABOUT, YOU ARE A JOURNALIST, BUT YOU CAN’T GO WHERE YOU WANT, WHEN YOU WANT. THAT VERY FACT ALONE MEANS YOU ARE RESTRICTED TO REPORTING ONLY ONE STORY, AND NOT OTHERS.

STILL AS A MEDIA EXECUTIVE I WOULD SUGGEST THAT THERE WOULD BE GREAT VALUE HAVING SOME OF MY JOURNALISTS “EMBEDDED” WITH COALITION FORCES, IF MY MEDIA ORGANIZATION “BALANCED” THAT COVERAGE WITH OTHER REPORTERS WHO WERE OPERATING INDEPENDENTLY OF THE EMBEDDING PROCESS.

IN REALITY HOWEVER, THIS DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE HAPPENED, AND I THINK THE REASON WHY IS SIMPLE, LOGICAL AND OBVIOUS.

EVEN FOR NEWS ORGANIZATIONS AS LARGE AS CNN,

THE BBC, AND THE OTHER AMERICAN AND BRITISH NETWORKS, THERE IS A “FINITE” AMOUNT OF PEOPLE AND RESOURCES.

I SUSPECT THAT THE ABILITY TO GO ALONG WITH MANY COALITION UNITS, WAS OVEWHELMING FOR AMERICAN MEDIA EXECUTIVES, AND ONCE AGAIN, FOR COMPETITIVE REASONS, MEANT THAT YOU KEPT DEVOTING MORE AND MORE RESOURCES TO THE “EMBEDDING” PROCESS. ALL OF A SUDDEN YOU LOOK UP, AND YOU SIMPLY DON’T HAVE ANY MORE PEOPLE TO DEVOTE TO THE TRADITIONAL, “INDEPENDENT” PART OF THE REPORTING PROCESS.

AND WHEN YOU LOOK AT COVERAGE ON CNN OR THE BBC, THERE IS A PATTERN, A “SAMENESS” TO IT. IT FOCUSES ON REPORTS FROM VARIOUS EMBEDDED REPORTERS, REPORTS FROM CORRESPONDENTS COVERING GOVERNMENT AGENICES, SUCH AS THE WHITE HOUSE, DOWNING STREET, THE PENTAGON, CENTRAL COMMAND IN QATAR, ETC. REPORTS FROM VARIOUS REPORTERS TRULY “ANCHORED” TO THEIR

POSITIONS, AND THEN THE ALMOST NEVER ENDING SUPPLY OF BRIEFINGS BY COALITION OFFICIALS.

AFTER A NEWS ORGANIZATION HAS COVERED ALL OF THAT, YOU REALLY DON'T HAVE ANY RESOURCES LEFT, AND THUS FOR THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH VIEWER, IN PARTICULAR, THE COVERAGE IS VERY ONE SIDED. IT IS NOT TRULY "BALANCED".

I BELIEVE THAT AFTER THIS WAR IS OVER YOU WILL SEE A SERIOUS EVALUATION OF THE EMBEDDING PROCESS BY MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS THAT WILL POINT OUT ALL OF THESE FLAWS, AND MAYBE EVEN REMOVE IT AN OPTION IN FUTURE CONFLICTS.

AND I BELIEVE, LESS THAN 2 WEEKS INTO THE WAR, THAT MEDIA OUTLETS REALIZE THIS PROBLEM ALREADY AND ARE TRYING TO RECTIFY IT BY USING OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

YESTERDAY, I SAW CNN INTERNATIONAL RUN AN ENTIRE REPORT FROM THE ARAB NETWORK "AL

JAZEERA” AND ONE OF THEIR CORRESPONDENTS IN IRAQ. I HAD NOT SEEN THIS BEFORE. BY THE WAY, I SUSPECT, THOUGH I DO NOT KNOW, THAT THIS REPORT DID NOT AIR ON CNN’S DOMESTIC SERVICE.

AND TO CNN’S CREDIT, I THINK THAT BY RUNNING THE AL JAZEERA STORY, CNN INTERNATIONAL IS ALREADY TRYING TO RECTIFY THIS “IMBALANCE” IN ITS COVERAGE, AND ONE WAY TO DO THIS, OF COURSE, IS TO HAVE ARRANGEMENTS WITH NEWS ORGANIZATIONS OTHER THAN YOUR OWN, TO USE THE MATERIAL OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT MAY NOT SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE.

THIS LEADS ME TO MY THIRD POINT OF FOCUS TONIGHT, THE ROLE OF NON-COALITION AND NON-IRAQI MEDIA IN COVERING THIS WAR.

YOU ARE ONCE AGAIN VERY FORTUNATE TO BE YOUNG JOURNALISTS AT THIS POINT IN TIME BECAUSE ADVANCEMENTS IN TECHNOLOGY, AND THE LOWER COSTS OF THOSE ADVANCEMENTS,

ALONG WITH LESS RESTRICTIVE GOVERNMENT PRACTICES ARE ALLOWING THE CREATION OF NEWS ORGANIZATIONS ALL OVER THE WORLD.

AL JAZEERA IS A PRIME EXAMPLE. IT IS THE FIRST SO-CALLED INDEPENDENT MEDIA OULET IN THE ARAB WORLD. IT IS NOT REALLY COMPLETELY “INDEPENDENT”, FROM THE GOVERNMENT IN QATAR WHERE IT RESIDES, BUT IT IS STILL IMPORTANT THAT IT EXISTS.

FOR ONE THING, AL JAZEERA HAS SPAWNED MORE ARAB NETWORKS THAT HAVE SPRUNG UP. THIS IS GREAT ... GREAT FOR THE ARAB WORLD, AND FOR THE ENTIRE WORLD.

HAVING SAID THAT, I DO HAVE SERIOUS RESERVATIONS ABOUT AL JAZEERA’S COVERAGE.

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT IN CONFLICT, ONE MAN’S TERRORIST, IS ANOTHER MAN’S FREEDOM FIGHTER, AND THIS IS TRUE, AND IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ALL

SOCIETIES TO HAVE MEDIA OULETS THAT FOCUS ON SUBJECT MATTER THAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEIR VIEWERS.

BUT TO MY WESTERN EAR THERE STILL HAS TO BE “OBJECTIVITY” IN COVERING A STORY.

UNFORTUNATELY, WHEN I LISTEN TO AL JAZERRA, I DON’T CONSIDER THEIR REPORTING OBJECTIVE, AND THAT’S TOO BAD BECAUSE I WANT TO FIND THEIR COVERAGE OBJECTIVE. I WOULD LIKE TO THINK OF AL JAZEERA AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION THAT FOCUSES ON THE ARAB WORLD, WHICH I FEEL COMFORTABLE TURNING TO AS A VIEWER.

I DO NOT FIND AL JAZEERA OBJECTIVE FOR A SIMPLE REASON THAT YOU AS JOURNALISTS SHOULD ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND, THE SIMPLE FACT THAT JOURNALISTS SHOULD NEVER TELL THEIR AUDIENCE, THEIR VIEWERS OR READERS WHAT THEY “THINK”, ONLY WHAT THEY “KNOW” TO BE FACTS.

THERE IS A BIG DIFFERENCE TO THE EAR IN HEARING A REPORTER SAY SOMETHING “SHOULD” HAPPEN, AS OPPOSED TO “COULD” HAPPEN. THE USE OF “THOUGHTS” IN THE FORM OF OPINION OR ANALYSIS SHOULD BE LEFT TO THIRD PARTIES WITHIN A JOURNALIST’S STORY ... GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, CREDIBLE ANALYSTS, AND EXPERTS, BUT NOT THE REPORTER.

NEVERTHELESS, AS I SAID, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT AL JAZEERA EXISTS. IT’S BETTER THAT THE ARAB WORLD HAS ITS OWN MEDIA OUTLETS, EVEN WITH SOME BIAS IN PRESENTATION, AND HOPEFULLY, IN THE FUTURE IT WILL MATURE INTO HAVING A MORE OBJECTIVE PRESENTATION. IF IT WANTS WESTERN VIEWERS TO LISTEN, IT WILL HAVE TO.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE WORLD, THE WORLD THAT IS NEITHER THE US, UK OR WESTERN ... THAT IS NEITHER IRAQI OR ARAB? I BELIEVE THAT CHINA IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A MEDIA THAT REPRESENTS THAT WORLD.

IF YOU WATCH CCTV-9 FOR EXAMPLE, YOU SEE, WHAT I BELIEVE IS A PERSPECTIVE REPRESENTATIVE OF CHINA IN PARTICULAR, AND THE NATIONS OF THE NON-ALIGNED WORLD IN GENERAL.

CCTV-9 HAS DONE A GREAT JOB AT COVERING THE WAR, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU CONSIDER THE CHANNEL HAS NEVER PRODUCED THIS KIND OF LIVE COVERAGE BEFORE.

CCTV-9 HAS ABANDONED ITS NORMAL PROGRAMMING PATTERN TO CONCENTRATE VIRTUALLY ALL OF ITS PROGRAMMING. IT HAS TEMPORARILY DROPPED “CULTURAL” PROGRAMMING, AND REPLACED IT WITH MORE “NEWS” AND “NEWS” INTERVIEW PROGRAMS.

THE INTERVIEW PROGRAMS ARE A COMBINATION OF “LIVE” PROGRAMMING THAT OFFERS INSTANT ANALYSIS, WHICH REACTS TO EVENTS AS THEY OCCUR, AND A TAPED FORMAT OF MULTIPLE

EXPERTS.

THE “EXPERT” WHO APPEARS LIVE IS ALWAYS SOMEONE FROM THE CHINESE POLITICAL COMMUNITY, WHICH I THINK IS THE RIGHT THING.

THE “EXPERTS” ON THE TAPED PROGRAMS ARE A COMBINATION OF CHINESE AND FOREIGN EXPERTS.

CCTV-9 NEWS IS DOMINATED BY IRAQ STORIES, AND ONCE AGAIN, DOES 2 THINGS WHICH ARE UNIQUE TO A CHINESE NEWS PROGRAM.

IT ALWAYS FOCUSES ON A CHINESE ANGLE TO THE STORY. SOMETIMES THAT FOCUS IS “REACTIVE”. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY COVER THINGS THE FOREIGN MINISTRY BRIEFINGS, OR STATEMENTS BY THE CHINESE MUSLIM ASSOCIATION OR THE CHINESE RED CROSS.

IT IS ALSO ENTERPRISING ABOUT ITS CHINESE-FOCUSED COVERAGE. EVERY DAY CCTV-9 NEWS HAS

BEEN USING CHINESE MILITARY ANALYSTS TO ASSESS THE LATEST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WAR. REMEMBER, CCTV-9 IS BASICALLY AN OVERSEAS SERVICE WITH MORE THAN 8 MILLION HOMES IN THE US AND UK ALONE, SO THOSE VIEWERS SEE A MILITARY PERSPECTIVE DIFFERENT FROM THEIR NORMAL CHANNELS, THUS PROVIDING TO THEM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.

IN ADDITION, CCTV-9 ALWAYS AIRS THE MEDIA BRIEFINGS BY A BOTH SIDES, WHICH I THINK IS SIGNIFICANT, AND ONCE AGAIN PROVIDES ITS WESTERN VIEWERS A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON COVERAGE.

OVERALL, I THINK CCTV-9 GIVES VIEWERS A PERSPECTIVE THAT IS OBJECTIVE, BUT DIFFERENT FROM THE US AND UK. IT IS A PERSPECTIVE THAT GIVES THE VOICES OF BOTH SIDES EQUAL TIME, AND A VOICE THAT DOESN'T FORGET THAT PEOPLE ARE DYING, AND QUESTIONING, THROUGH ITS EXPERTS, THE REASON WHY THIS WAR IS HAPPENING AT ALL.

THE VIEWER E-MAIL TO CCTV-9 FROM ITS WESTERN AUDIENCES HAS BEEN VERY POSITIVE, AND ITS RATINGS IN CHINA HAVE INCREASED 8 TIMES SINCE THE WAR BEGAN.

I'D LIKE TO NOW TALK ABOUT "NEW MEDIA" COVERAGE OF THE WAR, AND DIVIDE MY COMMENTS INTO 2 PARTS ... THE KIND OF COVERAGE, AND THE INTERNET AS A DELIVERY SYSTEM.

FIRST. LET'S DISCUSS THE KIND OF COVERAGE. I THINK IT IS FASCINATING WHAT IS HAPPENING. THE EMERGENCE OF "BLOG" WEBSITES FROM THE WAR ZONE HAS TAKEN THE KIND OF ENHANCED COVERAGE THAT THE INTERNET HAS BEEN PROVIDING IN THE PAST TO A NEW LEVEL.

"BLOG" NEWS IS DIRECTLY FROM THE FRONT, USUALLY WITHOUT THE KIND OF EDITORIAL SUPERVISION THAT TELEVISION OR PRINT REPORTERS NORMALLY GO THROUGH WITH THEIR OWN EDITORS.

THE MATERIAL IS USUALLY MORE PERSONAL, OFTEN MORE BIASED, AND MORE DETAILED.

THESE WEBSITES ARE INTERACTIVE, THEY LET WORLD COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY WITH PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE WAR. WHAT A GREAT THING.

I THINK THE CHALLENGE FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO WANT TO FOCUS ON NEW MEDIA JOURNALISM WILL BE IN PROVIDING GUIDENCE TO YOUR AUDIENCE. THERE ARE SIMPLY TOO MANY WEBSITES, AND A WEB SURFER CAN SPEND MORE TIME TRYING TO FIND WEBSITES THAN ACTUALLY READING THEM, AND MAY NEVER FIND THE ONE THAT HE OR SHE WOULD REALLY LIKE TO SEE.

THUS THE WORLDWIDE WEB NEEDS EDITORS WHO CAN UNDERSTAND EDITORIAL INFORMATION, AND THEN ORGANIZE IT FOR THEIR VIEWERS.

IT ALSO NEEDS TO CONTINUE TO STRETCH THE

BOUNDARIES OF THIS DYNAMIC MEDIUM. REMEMBER, "BALANCE" IS A PROCESS OF HEARING MANY DIFFERENT, INTELLIGENT AND AUTHORITY VOICES.

I THINK ONE GREAT THING ABOUT NEW MEDIA IS ITS INTERNET DELIVERY COMPONENT.

THIS COMPONENT HAS ALLOWED PRINT JOURNALISM TO HAVE A REAL RENAISSANCE IN REPORTING, AND THIS IS A GREAT THING, TOO.

PRINT JOURNALISM IS AN IMPORTANT MEDIUM FOR DEPTH AND INDEPENDENT REPORTING. WE'VE TALKED A GREAT DEAL ABOUT THE LACK OF INDEPENDENT REPORTING BY TELEVISION NEWS IN THIS WAR, AND WE'VE SAID THAT ONE REASON IS THE DIFFICULTY FOR TV JOURNALISTS TO COVER A WAR BY THEMSELVES.

PRINT REPORTERS HAVE LESS OF A PROBLEM DOING SO. THEY WORK ALONE, UNENCUMBERED, BY A

TEAM WHOSE EQUIPMENT INCLUDES AN OBVIOUS AND FORBIDDING CAMERA.

MY FAVORITE NEWSPAPER IS THE NEW YORK TIMES, AND JOHN BURNS, WHO IS THEIR ONLY CORRESPONDENT WHO IS STILL IN BAGHDAD, IS PRACTICING GREAT INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM EVERYDAY.

UNTIL RECENTLY, THE SUPERB WORK BY JOHN BURNS, AND OTHER PRINT JOURNALISTS, WOULD HAVE GONE LARGELY UNNOTICED, IN THE FAST PACED AND IMMEDIATE NEWS WORLD THAT WE LIVE IN. HIS MATERIAL WOULD HAVE BEEN SEEN BY READERS A DAY LATE, AND THEN ONLY IF THEY WERE ABLE TO GET THE NEWSPAPER.

BUT WITH THE INTERNET, THE “BEHIND THE LINES” COVERAGE PROVIDED BY PEOPLE LIKE JOHN BURNS IS AS IMMEDIATE AS TELEVISION COVERAGE.

SINCE JOHN BURNS IS ONE OF THE FEW WESTERN

JOURNALISTS LEFT IN BAGHDAD, HIS ARTICLES ON THE NEW YORK TIMES WEBSITE ARE THE FIRST THING THAT I LOOK AT EVERY DAY.

HIS ARTICLES ARE A BETTER DESCRIPTION THAN THE FAR-AWAY, AND AERIAL VIEWS FROM THE VIDEO CAMERA. HIS WORK IS PROOF THAT THE PEN IS TRULY MIGHTIER THAN SWORD.

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE FROM MARCH 21ST, THE SECOND DAY OF THE WAR:

“THE ATTACKS TURNED THE TARGET AREA INTO A CAULDRON OF FIREBALLS AND DRIFTING SMOKE, WITH ONE HUGE BUILDING AFTER ANOTHER ERUPTING INTO A FURY OF FLAME AND OBLITERATED GRANITE, MARBLE AND STEEL.”

IN ANOTHER ARTICLE HE WRITES:

“EVEN IRAQI LOYALISTS, AT LEAST AT THE LEVEL OF COMMON MEN AND WOMEN, SAY PRIVATELY THAT,

THIS TIME, THE LONG YEARS (OF SADDAM HUSSEIN) MAY BE UP. BUT THEY, AND OTHER IRAQIS WHO DO NOT SUPPORT MR. HUSSEIN, HAVE FOUND THEMSELVES IN SOMETHING LIKE AN ACCORD IN RECENT DAYS OVER THE NIGHTMARE THAT COULD LIE AHEAD.”

THAT’S THE KIND OF REPORTING THAT ONLY PRINT AND NEW MEDIA JOURNALISM CAN TRULY PROVIDE.

SO IN CONCLUSION, LET’S LOOK AT SOME LESSONS THAT WE CAN START TO LEARN FROM THIS “NEW” WAR AND THE JOURNALISM THAT IS BECOMING ASSOCIATED WITH IT.

- 1) BOTH SIDES IN A CONFLICT DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO CONTROL AND SHAPE THE MEDIA. THEY USE THE MEDIA FOR THEIR OWN ENDS.
- 2) WHEN YOU SEE TRADITIONALLY TOTALITARIAN LEADERS WHO ARE USUALLY UNSEEN EXCEPT ON OCCASIONAL AND VERY FORMAL OCCASSIONS, IT USUALLY MEANS THEY FEEL THE NEED TO BOLSTER THEIR PUBLIC BECAUSE THEY ARE

UNDER DURESS.

- 3) WHEN YOU SEE WESTERN LEADERS GROW VISIBLY HOSTILE AND FRUSTRATED BY THE MEDIA COVERING THEM, THIS ALSO MEANS THEY ARE UNDER DURESS.
- 4) THE PROCESS OF “EMBEDDING” REPORTERS SACRIFICES INDEPENDENT REPORTING FOR GREAT PICTURES. IT WOULD BE MORE OF AN ASSET TO THE PUBLIC, IF NEWS ORGANIZATIONS WHO PARTICIPATE IN IT, “BALANCED” THEIR COVERAGE WITH AN EQUAL NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT STAFF.
- 5) AS A MEDIUM WHOSE NATION IS NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE CONFLICT, YOU MIGHT HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE MORE “BALANCED” COVERAGE, THAN THOSE MEDIA WHOSE NATIONS ARE ACTUALLY INVOLVED.
- 6) NEW MEDIA PROMISES GREAT NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR THE PUBLIC, BUT IT STILL HAS LONG WAY TO GO, AND MUST START TO BE ORGANIZED BY JOURNALISTS WHO SPECIALIZE IN IT.
- 7) PRINT JOURNALISM HAS MADE A REAL

RESUGENCE THANKS TO THE INTERNET DELIVERY SYSTEM, AND ONCE AGAIN CAN PROVIDE THE KIND OF DEPTH AND INDEPENDENT COVERAGE THAT IT IS KNOWN FOR.