

Personal notes from Mediawar event, Reporting Iraq – What went right, what went wrong?, held on July 15, 2003 at the Guardian offices in Farringdon, London.

Jonathan Rutherford, managing editor of Mediacrime: Not a journalist but has thoughts on what the conflict means for British democracy and the role of the media in calling our rulers to account. Britain has an unwritten constitution. 2 million protesters made no difference. Integrity of intelligence brought down. Butler report fallen on stony ground. Liberal imperialism. TE Lawrence (of Arabia) in the 20s. Democracy has been undermined by the war; universities have become commercial and thrown in the towel.

Roger Mosey: The BBC has to do the best job it can. It didn't get everything right in Iraq. It is not cowed by governments. Not pro-war or pro-occupation. Reported anti-war news, i.e. Robin Cook resigning. There's a different perspective now because in 2002 people believed that Iraq was in possession of WMDs. Newsnight two years on. Paxman accused of not challenging the PM enough. Mosey refutes this. Blair is not a war criminal – his decision for war was 'ill conceived'. Reflecting on the case for and against, ultimately it is the British public who make decision on British government, not the BBC.

Jim Maceda: Was always embedded with US or British forces and was with other journalists in the confines of the hotel (under lock-down) for the remaining five weeks. Richard Engle was almost abducted by three cars outside the hotel so the majority of the work was done from the confines of the hotel. Kidnappings were occurring outside the hotel. Journalists felt like targets and completely vulnerable. Many journalists didn't go because the security limitations are too great and mean they are unable to do their jobs. One occasion at a red light a man put his head through the window of the car and offered \$1500 dollars to the driver if he handed over the camera man.

Jake Lynch: Propaganda is not necessarily deception. In history lies are rare. Juxtaposition of parts of the argument that support the argument. It is like advertising – repetition makes the same point over and over until it sinks in. The caveat to this argument was not repeated in the same way. Hindsight puts different complexion on WMD issue. The British government dossier in Jan 2003 – Where are the missing weapons stocks? Eg. Missing anthrax is actually harmless because it was made so long ago. Spores 'go-off'. Because propaganda depends on repetition we must insert the caveat every time the message is repeated. E.g. The missing nerve agents are most likely to be useless because they were made so long ago. Reports often linked Zaqarwi to Falluja however he has never been in Falluja, yet this commonly held assumption is never challenged. The Iraqi National Congress was prone to telling their new allies what they wanted to hear and again no caveat was inserted.

Maire Messenger Davies: There is a lot of common ground between journalists and academics, both pursue the truth. Events have not overtaken research as some suggest. We can draw out things that don't change. Some lessons apply wherever you are. E.g. the way children are presented and their responses to conflict. Very few women and children appear in war coverage. War is very macho. Other side of the coin is civilian casualties,