

Media beds in with the military

AS THE Bush Administration's strategy for managing the news is put into gear, we need to be alert to the distorting language of spin. Bush announced the involvement of 'coalition forces' in the action. What he really means is a dominant US military presence, a much smaller UK involvement, and now an Australian contingent. Not much of a coalition, really.

Large numbers of reporters from the world's media are now 'embedded' with the military—150 with British forces and 660 with the US forces, and a grand total of over 5,000 of the world's media are deployed around the Gulf region. The Pentagon has a new million-dollar state-of-the-art media centre in Qatar, created by a Hollywood set designer. From the stage General Tommy Franks and other senior officers give their briefings.

The key questions are what freedom will the 'embedded' reporters have, and what kind of reporting from elsewhere in the Middle East will find its way into the mainstream media?

Gavin Hewitt, a BBC special correspondent, says the Pentagon's intention is to allow reporters access to military operations, but as the CBS news presenter, Dan Rather, said, 'There's a pretty fine line between being embedded and being entombed.'

In reality, as in the 1991 Gulf War, journalists who agree to go with combat units hand over their independence to the military. As a former CNN anchor, Bernard Shaw, points out, 'Journalists who agree to go with combat units effectively become hostages of the military, which can control the movements of the journalists and, more importantly, when they file their stories.'

Of course, there will be indepen-

dent journalists, but Kate Adie says she has been told that journalists operating on their own—'unilaterals'—will be targeted by the military if they are in areas where their presence is unauthorised.

The other issue is how the media will distort or censor the news as they adopt the role of cheerleaders for the conflict. In the USA, even before the war started, there was an absence of critical analysis and dissenting voices on the news programmes. FAIR in a study of news coverage on television over a two-week period found that 76% of the guests on programmes were associated with either the US or with governments that support the Bush administration's position on Iraq. Only 2% were sceptics or opponents of war.

Here we see most clearly in some of the national tabloid newspapers the jingoism and gung-ho war reporting which reduces the horror of war to a comic book treatment.

The BBC has some excellent editorial guidelines on reporting different views on the war, but sometimes the notion of impartiality can lead to exclusion of dissent. BBC executive, Richard Sambrook, suggested, in a leaked memo, phone-ins and emails 'are attracting some of the more extreme anti-war views' and makes the strange assertion that 'mid-ground majority views ... may be unmotivated or intimidated from calling'. He argued that 'we need to be careful both to get a realistic balance and to ensure a diversity of views'. The obvious effect of this approach would be to diminish the substantial body of anti-war views represented by the Stop The War Coalition.

For example, on 20 March, the day war started, the BBC's main news bulletin at 10pm ignored the protests in the UK and only partially reported

international protests, saying they were 'mainly in Muslim countries'.

There will all be an abundance of selective, partial reporting, censorship and disinformation in media reporting of this conflict. Pressures on journalists will come from the military, politicians and proprietors (Rupert Murdoch's newspapers are all signed up to support the war, for example) to fall in line.

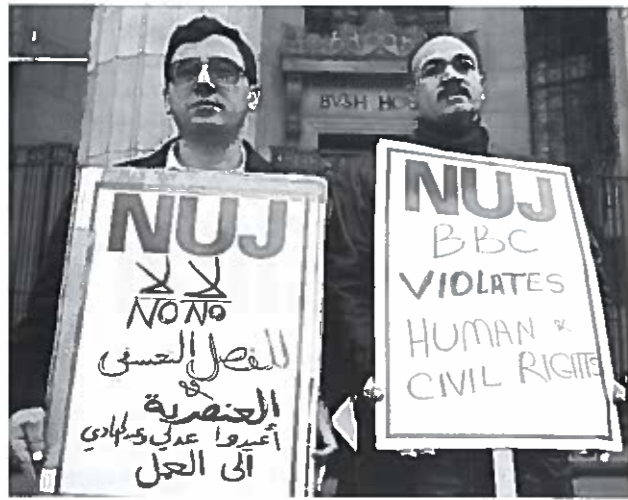
All the more important therefore to check out alternative sources, such as: www.mwaw.org; www.fair.org and www.MediaWar.info/censorednews.htm. And, of course, protest to the media when you read, hear or see biased or distorted reports.

Protest over 'Back our boys' decree

SIR RAY Tindle owns 130 local and regional papers in England and Wales. In a memo to executives and editors he has decreed that none of his newspapers will attack the decision to go to war while UK troops are fighting in Iraq. Even readers' letters doing so will be banned.

CPBF Chair, Julian Petley, in a letter sent to one Tindle paper, the Monmouthshire Beacon, commented: 'Congratulations, Sir Ray, for demolishing all those hoary old myths about the "free press" and the "fourth estate" over which journalists are apt to get so dewy eyed, and for proving—if proof were needed—that press freedom is simply the freedom of the newspaper proprietor to use his property and his employees for whatever purposes he so chooses. Your bold and courageous stand against one of journalism's most sentimental and cherished icons will surely earn you a place in the media history books'

Photograph by Rod Leon



Adli Hawwari and Dr Abdul-Hadi Jiad protest outside the BBC

PROTESTS AT BBC World Service sackings

TIM GOPSILL

THE SACKING on the spot of two senior BBC Arabic journalists has led to outrage among colleagues and questions about the World Service's relationship with its paymasters, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The journalists—a Palestinian and an Iraqi—were hauled from meetings at the Bush House HQ in central London on 18 February. There were no hearings, no appeal, as they were marched out of the Bush House HQ by security staff.

The NUJ is demanding their reinstatement. BBC journalists are to vote on taking strike action over the sackings after union reps from 60 workplaces voted unanimously to condemn management and to call for action. The journalists are Adli Hawwari, a Palestinian, and the Iraqi Dr Abdul-Hadi Jiad. In 16 and 12 years' service respectively there had never been any complaint about their work. The BBC said they were 'dismissed because of a breakdown of trust and confidence'. It leaked to the

media an account of a series of cases they had brought to Employment Tribunals alleging racial discrimination and victimisation. It was confirmed that the decision had been taken by Director-General Greg Dyke. The journalists say they were forced to go to law because the BBC failed to deal with the problems in-house.

On the day of the sacking, Adli Hawwari was producing the flagship 1pm programme while Abdul-Hadi Jiad was duty editor, responsible for the day's news. He had just chaired the morning conference when he was hauled into a meeting with BBC top brass—World Service and Global News Director Mark Byford and Director of Human Resources Stephen Dando—to be sacked on the spot. Adli Hawwari, who was producing the main lunchtime news programme that day, had already been dismissed.

On 7 March reps from BBC chapels all round the country unanimously condemned the decision as 'in flagrant breach of long established BBC agreements with the unions on

BBC whips up a storm of protest

BARRY WHITE

THE DECISION of the BBC not to show the Correspondent documentary 'Israel's Secret Weapon' at the programme's usual peak-time slot resulted in a reported 1,000 plus complaints to the corporation. The programme scheduled to be shown on Sunday 16 March examined the development of Israel's hidden nuclear programme and highlighted the case of Israeli nuclear whistleblower, Mordechai Vanunu who in 1986 first

drew the world's attention to their existence. Once the storm of protest was underway the BBC announced they would shift the programme to 11.20pm the following day. Despite the timings reputation as the 'graveyard slot' it was reported that some one million viewers tuned in. The programme was pulled because coverage from the Azores summit overran by 15 minutes. Viewers were treated instead to an old Fred Dibnah documentary on windmills!

Amid the protests a joint statement was issued by the Campaign to Free

the conduct of the disciplinary process'. It sends a chilling warning to all BBC staff that from now on, anyone can be summarily dismissed in a similar fashion.

The meeting also condemned the BBC for its carefully orchestrated attempts to 'demonise' the two sacked journalists in the national press, and for then issuing an unprecedented email sent thousands of BBC staff. The NUJ is demanding an enquiry into the affair. The World Service is not, like the rest of the BBC, funded by the Licence Fee. It is paid for by the Foreign Office, and the BBC house journal Ariel, reporting a seminar on the funding arrangements in 1998, said the service was 'an important instrument of British foreign policy'. In its statement on the sackings the BBC said the FCO had been informed. Why? The World Service is supposed to be independently managed and personnel matters are nothing to do with government.

The BBC has rejected a union request for a top-level national meeting to discuss the sackings. **Campaign material—posters, stickers, leaflets—are available from the NUJ.** More on their case at www.nuj.org.uk

Vanunu and for a nuclear-free Middle East. The NUJ and the CPBF which called the cancellation 'unjustified' and insisted that the film be shown the following Sunday at the programme's usual time, so that it could reach its original audience. Proof yet again, if it was needed, of the importance of media activism. To find out more contact the Campaign to Free Vanunu at 185 New Kent Road, London SE1 4AG. E-mail: campaign@vanunu.freeseve.co.uk

www.vanunu.freeseve.co.uk 18

BBC TO REMOVE CHANNELS FROM SKY DIGITAL

TONY LENNON

THE BBC will this morning announce a shock move to pull all its channels off of the encrypted Sky Digital platform after failing to reach agreement on how much it should pay BSkyB for carriage. The move will plunge the government's digital strategy into chaos. That was how one website reported the news that the BBC plans to move all of its channels off Sky onto a new satellite.

In fact the government's digital strategy has not been thrown into confusion, and the path to analogue switch-off is now clearer than ever. BBC TV and radio channels will continue to be available to people with satellite boxes via the Sky electronic programme guide, but will not require consumer access cards in order to be viewed (they will be 'clear to air' in the jargon). The move, which is likely to be followed by ITV, C4, and C5, achieves two things: it saves money by avoiding use of Sky's encryption system, for which terrestrial broadcasters are being blatantly overcharged; and it enables the design and sale of a free-satellite box similar to the Freeview DTT boxes now on the market (no card, no subscription, pay once for the box and receive free PSB channels indefinitely) The timing of the move is linked to the recent availability of transponders on a new satellite Astra D2, which has a smaller footprint than Sky's Astra platform, and therefore doesn't raise as many

problems over broadcasting rights (sports, creators, performers, etc) which were the main reason that BBC channels on Sky were encrypted in the first place. I would expect to see non-card satellite boxes bundled with a dish at a price below £200 within a year to 18 months. This provides the government with the answer to question of how, after analogue switch-off, PSB TV could be radiated free to the 20% or so of the population who will still not be able to receive DTT—they'll all have access to free satellite, provided they can afford the equipment.

FOX, MONSANTO AND THE RIGHT TO LIE

IN AN update on a story covered in FPI 18 we get an amazing insight into how corporate power can highjack the First Amendment on freedom of speech to prevent independent, investigative reporting. The case concerns Jane Akre and her husband, Steve Wilson, who were sacked by a Fox television station for refusing to alter their findings about the use of Monsanto's controversial bovine growth hormone (BGH) in Florida cattle.

On 14 February, a Florida appeals court ruled there is absolutely nothing illegal about lying, concealing or distorting information by a major press organisation. The court reversed the \$425,000 jury verdict in favour of journalist Jane Akre who charged she was pressured by Fox Television management and lawyers to air what she knew and

documented to be false information.

The ruling basically declares it is technically not against any law, rule, or regulation to deliberately lie or distort the news on a television broadcast. On 18 August 2000, a six-person jury was unanimous in its conclusion that Akre was indeed fired for threatening to report the station's pressure to broadcast what jurors decided was 'a false, distorted, or slanted' story about the widespread use of growth hormone in dairy cows. The court did not dispute the heart of Akre's claim, that Fox pressured her to broadcast a false story to protect the broadcaster from having to defend the truth in court, as well as suffer the ire of irate advertisers.

Fox argued from the first, and failed on three separate occasions, in front of three different judges, to have the case tossed out on the grounds there is no hard, fast, and written rule against deliberate distortion of the news. The attorneys for Fox, (part of Rupert Murdoch's global media group, News corporation), argued the First Amendment gives broadcasters the right to lie or deliberately distort news reports on the public airwaves. In its six-page written decision, the Court of Appeals held that the Federal Communications Commission position against news distortion is only a 'policy', not a promulgated law, rule, or regulation. Fox aired a report after the ruling saying it was "totally vindicated" by the verdict.

For further information go to www.foxbghsuit.com

The dogs of Fleet Street show their teeth

TOM O'MALLEY

AMIDST THE turbulent political events surrounding the build up to the attack on Iraq of March 2003, the press had to defend its behaviour in front of the House of Commons Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport.

This Committee's inquiry into Privacy has been sparked, in part, by the passage of the Communications Bill through Parliament and the possibility that press regulation might be brought under the remit of the new

Office of Communications, OFCOM.

But the dogs of Fleet Street have been showing their teeth, at each other and at politicians.

Paul Dacre, editor of the Daily Mail, attacked the Independent's editor, Simon Kellner. Kellner had the temerity to tell the Select Committee that there should be an Ombudsman, reporting to OFCOM to hear complaints against Press Complaints Commission decisions. Dacre claimed that Kellner's comments were 'based

on a total misconception of how the PCC works'.

The editor of the Sun Rebecca Wade appeared before the Committee in the week that the paper published 'revelations' about the private life of Ron Davies, a former Secretary of State for Wales. A better warning to MPs to lay off the press could not have been delivered. Few MPs would have missed the significance of the timing of this story.

The government were equally as sensitive to the dangers of meddling with the owners who back the PCC.

continued on page 7

SPIES & LIES

STEPHEN DORRIL

SHORTLY after the release of the government's intelligence dossier on Iraq, the doyen of government-watchers, Peter Hennessy, told a group of intelligence writers and specialists that this was a unique and significant event. For the first time the government had allowed a Joint Intelligence Committee assessment to be made public. An enthused Hennessy thought that we would see more similar initiatives in the future.

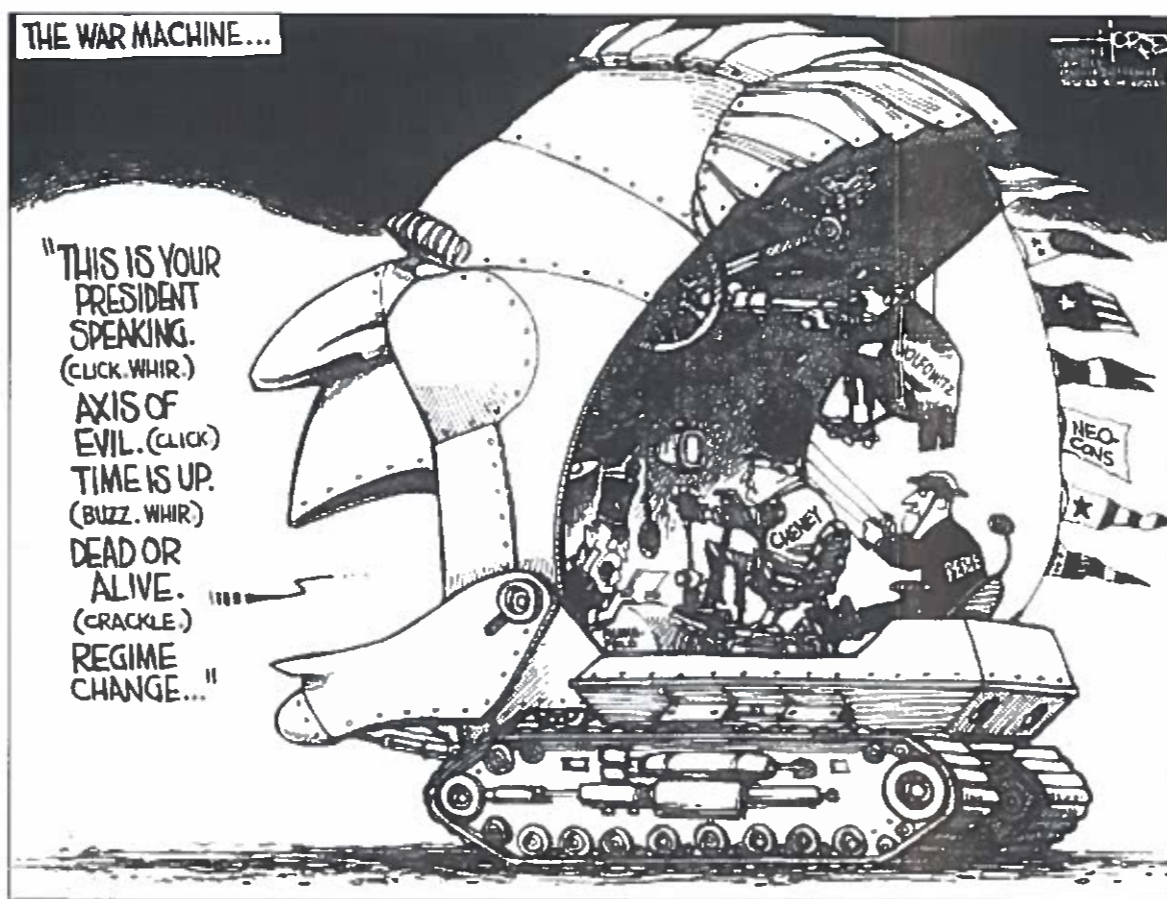
Alas, this may turn out to be the last such occasion the spooks surface. The dossier proved to be an embarrassing mixture of long out-of-date material, wild suppositions and, now we know, reliance on forgeries which contained, UN inspectors revealed, 'laughable and childlike errors' about the non-existent export of uranium from Niger to Iraq. The infamous aluminium tubes turned out not to have a nuclear purpose. Jack Straw's claim that Iraq was 'weeks' away from building a nuclear bomb was simply untrue.

In the UN Security Council, the two chief weapons' inspectors calmly, and deliberately, pulled apart the intelligence which had been given to them by the Americans and British. An inspector on the ground in Iraq described the intelligence as 'rubbish'. This was before the second Cabinet 'intelligence' dossier was exposed for its plagiarism.

The majority of the scoops and insider stories which the press have lapped up in the last few months on Iraq's nuclear capability, mobile biological weapons laboratories, links with al-Qaeda etc. have simply disintegrated.

Two important points emerge: one, the intelligence has been, as former Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe once said, 'not even cornflakes in the wind'; secondly, the most gullible people in the world are journalists.

As the range and reach of the media expands, the world of intelligence has become a vital arm of government propaganda. Most political stories are so minutely picked over that even the best efforts of the spin-doctors can only delay the appearance of the inside story. Intelligence,



The view on Bush by David Horsey, Pulitzer prize-winning cartoonist of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

however, is different.

Governments hide behind the walls of secrecy, safe in the knowledge that reference to the refrain that 'ministers do not discuss intelligence' or 'we cannot discuss operational matters' or 'we need to protect those carrying out these tasks' will stop in their tracks the journalists' traditional response that 'this bastard is lying'.

At a RUSI conference on the post-September 11 world, the secretary of the Parliamentary committee on intelligence put the blame on journalists for the misuse of intelligence and their reference to 'secret sources'. In effect, journalists just made it all up. If only that was the case.

The reality is that intelligence is the area in which ministers, and the MI6 info ops staff behind them, can say anything they like and get away with it. Intelligence with its psychological invite to a secret world, and with its unique avoidance of verification, is the ideal means for flattering and deceiving journalists. Journalists will be given secret briefings or access to Iraqi defectors and take them at their word, even though defectors are the most unreliable of all sources.

Ministers know that journalists will simply lap it up and editors will splash it on their front pages. They know that journalists do not have the high-level intelligence contacts to check on the 'facts'. In Britain there is no equivalent of Bob Woodward.

But the stories keep on coming - The three

giant cargo ships said to be carrying Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (Independent, 19 Feb), Saddam 'killed missile chief' to thwart UN team (Sunday Telegraph, 2 March), and 'Saddam's Thai gem spree hints at getaway plan' (Sunday Times, 9 March). These are just three of numerous stories which rely on little more than a nod and a wink from some 'official' or leaked document. What ever happened to the investigative journalists' standard of three separate sources? Even one would be good. The intelligence services have not shared Hennessy's enthusiasm for the public light shone on their intelligence-gathering. MI6 officers have briefed journalists angry at the way their material has been used by the spin doctors whilst CIA officers have gone public, 'distressed at the politicisation of intelligence'.

The real point is, however, that MI6 and the CIA simply do not have reliable intelligence. There is no 'smoking gun', there is no 'Adlai Stevenson moment' because, despite the billions spent, they have simply been unable to penetrate a totalitarian regime. It was the same with the Soviet Union. There is no mystery about this: intelligence agencies are not very good. The only mystery is why journalists have not treated them with the same derision and contempt they generally reserve for politicians. Maybe, hopefully, the row over the plagiarised Cabinet dossier will change our view. Stephen Dorril's most recent book is *MI6: 50 Years of Special Operations* (Fourth Estate)

Mike Granatt's Prescription

NICHOLAS JONES

AFTER having endured for so long the tyranny of New Labour spin, the government's one thousand civil service information officers appear finally to have had enough.

Their head of profession, Mike Granatt, believes it is time that Alastair Campbell and the rest of Tony Blair's politically-appointed spin doctors were flushed out of the Westminster shadows and required to account for themselves.

Granatt used a seminar of public relations executives last month in February to issue a brave wish list on behalf of the civil servants who are employed in what he says has now become Europe's biggest and most costly publicly-funded, state-run information service. This was his two-point plan:

- All special advisers (like Campbell and Co.) should be put on a properly-controlled footing and be required to speak on the record and operate in an open and up-front way as political spokesmen and women for the cabinet ministers for whom they work.
- All Downing Street lobby briefings should be held on camera so as to restore the authority of the senior information officers who currently serve as the Prime Minister's official spokesmen.

Granatt's prescription for curbing the excesses of the government's spin machine was extracted from him with great deftness by the recently-ousted Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards, Elizabeth Filkin, who is chair of QMW public policy seminars and who herself is no stranger to the powerful political forces which New Labour have unleashed.

Instead of putting Granatt on the spot by asking him to comment directly on the shortcomings of the present administration—and run the risk of getting into too much hot water with the Cabinet Office—she urged him to look ahead and present his scenario for the government information and communication service of 2013.

Granatt said he was convinced that in ten years time civil servants would continue to find they were being pushed to the limit of the rules on political impartiality. If the government of the day wanted a credible information service then there would have to be clearer rules: the job of information officers was to tell the facts and it would be the task of special advisers to deliver the essence of the government's political message.

'At present special advisers do this behind the

scenes. We want them to do it up front, where they can be seen, heard and challenged. If all cabinet ministers had their own political spokesmen, that would be the best way of putting the political advisers on a proper footing. What we want is unambiguous accountability for the civil service and for the special advisers.'

Granatt, formerly director of communications at the Home Office, became head of the government's information service in 1997 and was a member of the Mountfield working group which changed the rule book for civil service press officers by encouraging them to work with special advisers to 'grab the agenda' by trailing government announcements.

Having heard Granatt choose his words with such care when giving evidence in the past to parliamentary select committees and official inquiries, I was surprised to hear him speak in such a forthright manner.

Earlier in my own address to the seminar I had argued the case both for the televising or all briefings and for it to be made a requirement that when special advisers dealt with the news media there should be a presumption that they would be publicly identified and that their conversations with journalists were on the record.

On hearing Granatt's wish list, I congratulated him for having given his blessing to the drive to curb the activities of Labour's spin doctors in the wake of incidents like the Jo Moore affair. Did it really mean the civil service believed that the Alastair Campbells of this world should be subject to greater accountability? 'Yes, we've got to flush out the special advisers,' was his unequivocal reply.

By being so explicit, Granatt has given the clearest possible signal about the kind of recommendations he would like to see emerging from the two committees examining the lack of a clear dividing line between civil servants and Blair's political appointees.

The first of two reports, from the Committee of Standards in Public Life, is due to be published shortly before Easter. It will be followed in June by the findings of a separate review team appointed in February under the chairmanship of Bob Phillis, chief executive of the Guardian Media Group.

Phillis has been asked to conduct a 'radical review' of government communications and the role played by the spin doctors

Wapping revisited

NICHOLAS JONES

RUPERT Murdoch can rarely be faulted on the audacious and imaginative way he has expanded his media empire. His masterstroke in the mid 1980s was News International's covert operation to establish a union-busting printing plant at Wapping in East London which revolutionised newspaper production. Twenty years later Murdoch is in poll position to pull off another coup de grace by purchasing Channel 5. It would give him the bridgehead he badly needs in terrestrial television and could herald a shake-up in British broadcasting as far-reaching as his knock out punch to the print unions.

The comparisons between the subterfuge surrounding the Wapping saga and the secret manoeuvres over the government's Communications Bill make uncomfortable reading for anyone who works in television or radio. There is the same conspiracy of silence as in 1985: once again Murdoch has no intention of revealing his game plan until after the government has delivered on its hastily-made promise to abandon long-standing controls over the ownership of the broadcasting industry; a great deal is also at stake for his fellow media proprietors, most of whom who would welcome de-regulation and who are desperate to protect their own investments. Perhaps not surprisingly with so many vested interests in play there has been little news coverage or probing of either Murdoch's strategy or Tony Blair's true intentions.

ITV is in disarray awaiting the outcome of the merger talks between Carlton and Granada; any sense of anxiety within the BBC is being smothered by the management. For once the Corporation's army of advisers and lobbyists appear to be without a clear strategy; they are at Murdoch's mercy. If the BBC's hierarchy dare to kick up a fuss in public while the legislation is going through Parliament there could be swift and unimaginable retribution.

Newspapers like the Sun, The Times and Sunday Times would love to retaliate by stoking up the latent campaign to persuade the government

to ditch the BBC licence fee and expose the Corporation to the full rigour of market forces. The BBC's governors, already a potential target, would find their independence was in jeopardy amid a growing clamour to allow the new broadcasting regulator, OFCOM, to monitor and supervise the BBC.

Since I left the BBC's staff last October on completing thirty years as a political and industrial correspondent I have been helping the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom to promote a wider debate about the changes which will flow from the Communications Bill once it becomes law in July.

Doing the rounds at broadcasting seminars, briefings and campaign meetings I have reached one inescapable conclusion: the level of doublespeak about Tony Blair's real motives in relaxing the rules which currently restrict cross ownership between newspapers and television reminds me of the duplicity which preceded the opening of News International's non-unionised printing plants at Wapping and Kinning Park in Glasgow.

Blair has been careful to leave no fingerprints which could give a clue as to his hidden agenda or the extent of the government's relationship with Murdoch, just as Eric Hammond, then general secretary of the former EETPU, was able to testify to the TUC in the aftermath of the strike over Wapping that he had not 'colluded' with News International in the secret recruitment of electricians who helped install and operate the equipment that cost the jobs of 6,000 print workers.

In the course of numerous conversations with advisers and strategists caught up in the lobbying frenzy surrounding the Bill I have tried without success to pin down two vital facts: when and why did Blair agree at the very last moment to drop the 20-20 rule on cross media ownership which currently forbids Murdoch (who owns 36% of British newspapers) from taking control of Channel 5.

In the lengthy consultative process which preceded the publication of the Communications Bill there were no

specific proposals relating to Channel 5. Both the December 2000 white paper and the November 2001 consultation paper on media ownership invited comments on a range of options; both documents stated the government was working on the assumption it would keep the current ban on foreign ownership of ITV.

The clearest steer I received was that Blair decided in February 2002 to ditch both restrictions. From what I could discover, this decision was taken against the advice of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

When News International purchased the Sun its circulation was well under a million and many within the industry were convinced the change of ownership posed no threat and would not lead to a significant increase in the company's share of the British newspaper market.

Tessa Jowell, the Culture Secretary, used the very same argument last December to justify a possible Murdoch take over of Channel 5: the rule was being relaxed 'in recognition of its currently small audience share and limited reach.' She made no mention of the fact ownership of a free-to-air channel would attract heavy investment and strengthen Murdoch's already expanding empire in satellite television.

ITV executives have a deep sense of foreboding: they believe Murdoch would use his newspapers to cross promote Channel 5 and any significant increase in its current 6% audience share would put pressure on Channel Four. Once Channel 5 was relaying Sky News, Murdoch would be able to mount a renewed bid to become ITV's sole news provider which could in turn prove fatal for an already weakened ITN.

News International's move to Wapping was the green light the rest of the newspaper proprietors were waiting for; it was only a matter of time before the print unions lost their stranglehold on the industry. Once Murdoch gets a foothold in free-to-air TV, Britain's unrivalled range of public service broadcasting could face the same kind of upheaval.

The Labour peer and film producer, Lord Puttnam, is promising a tough fight now that the bill has reached the House of Lords.

Censored 2003: The Top 25 Censored Stories by Peter Phillips and Project Censored Seven Stories Press £12.99

THIS BOOK is a marvellous resource for anyone who wants to gain insights into the way the US corporate media marginalise important news stories. Over 200 people are involved in Project Censored, a freedom of information initiative based at Sonoma State University, California. The Project screens thousands of stories each year and a panel of judges then receives and decides on the ranking of the top 25 stories selected.

As the Project director, Peter Phillips, argues: 'Within the consolidated corporate media world, non-sexy and unemotional stories seldom meet the entertainment standards of the industry. Hundreds of important stories fail to receive the news attention they deserve. Censorship today is a subtle system of information suppression in the name of corporate profit and self-interest.'

The top two stories out of the 25 deal with concerns close to the heart of Free Press. The top story was about the moves by the US regulator, the Federal Communications Commission, to privatise the airwaves (see FP 122), and the second with the moves within GATS to privatise public services, which we covered in the last issue.

But Censored 2003 is about more than highlighting the stories which the mainstream media missed, vital though that is. It contains an excellent introduction by Bob McChesney, which documents the US media's abject performance over its coverage on the 'war on terrorism', the 'rah-rah corporate journalism' which praised Enron as an exemplar of the New Economy even though evidence of the company's shady operations had been around since the mid-1990s, and the way the media reported President Bush's 'victory' in the 2000 election.

There are also other excellent essays by Mark Crispin Miller on The Big Ten Media Giants and Norman Solomon on Media War and the Rigours of Self-Censorship. This is only a brief indication of the range of rich material in the book. As in previous editions the Project has also included the inspired, zany, but chillingly accurate cartoon comments of Tom Tomorrow.

Obituary

Frank Allaun

IT IS with great sadness that we record the death of Frank Allaun, a long-standing and strong supporter of the CPBF. He died on 26 November last year, aged 89. Other obituaries have paid tribute to his work as a peace campaigner, on housing issues and as a dissident Labour MP. A begrudging obituary in the Daily Telegraph did reveal one surprising fact about him - Frank was a ballroom dancing gold medallist. Here, however, we record and pay tribute to his work around issues connected to the CPBF.

Frank was a member of the National Union of Journalists, and his journalistic work included being industrial correspondent for the Manchester Evening News, Northern industrial correspondent for the Daily Herald, and editor of Labour's Northern Voice from 1951-1967.

Frank chaired a Labour press and publicity committee and a media policy group which proposed a range of legislative reforms, including the 'right of reply'. He introduced a Media Bill in 1983, which had the 'right of reply' proposal in it. Indeed it was the first of a number of

attempts by the CPBF to introduce such a policy.

Frank's network of contacts among MPs and local councils was also very important in building support for our attempt to establish a North West CPBF. As a result of lobbying, in which Frank played a key role, we were successful in gaining funding from the Greater Manchester Council in 1983, and ran a lively series of meetings and activities in Liverpool and the Manchester area until funds ceased in 1992.

Frank was the co-author of *Spreading The News: A Guide to Media Reform* (1989), a book which sold well on the CPBF book lists during the early nineties.

He was a regular attendee at meetings on media topics in Manchester after his retirement as an MP in 1983, and the last time I saw Frank was at a meeting where David Shayler, Stephen Dorril and myself were speaking in the Mechanics Institute. He had a gentle personality, and was soft-spoken, but beneath was a character with rock solid dedication, determination and commitment. He will be missed.

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

The Dogs of...continued from page 3

Patricia Hewitt, the Secretary of State for the Department of Trade and Industry has declared that no such thing will happen. Quoted in the Press Gazette on 7 March, Hewitt asserted that the government was 'absolutely committed to self-regulation through the PCC. If we get a proposal in the House of Lords to put the PCC on a statutory footing, we will defend self-regulation by the PCC very vigorously'.

It is important that the Committee carries out these kinds of investigations. For not only does the fact that they come around once every few years testify to the failure of self-regulation, it also highlights the need for sustained campaigning to try and establish both a press freedom law and legislation to allow for swift redress for members of the public who are victims of press inaccuracies. But, as this inquiry shows, the owners and editors will not give an inch without a serious fight.

CPBF

Saturday 28 June

NUJ, 308 Grays Inn Road, London WC1
AGM 10.00-12.30pm
Registration from 9.30am

This year's AGM is more important than usual. It is the occasion when we have to clarify where the CPBF's priorities (and limited resources) are to be focused after our work on the Communications Bill. We will be publishing discussion documents and want to ensure the widest possible participation by our members in this important debate. Please give it your priority and come along

AGM

Further details, plus registration fees, from CPBF National Office

BOOK THE DATE NOW!

CPBF NEWS

'NO TO MURDOCH' SAYS POLL

POLLS shows majorities against US ownership of ITV and Murdoch buying Channel 5

More than half the people of Britain are opposed to government plans to allow ITV to be taken over by a US based global media giant and Rupert Murdoch to take control of Channel 5.

Two phone polls carried out for the NUJ have showed that 52% are against the proposals in the Communications Bill currently before the House of Lords. The 'yes' votes were 23% (with 24% don't know). The poll about Murdoch and Channel 5 also registered 52% against with 32% in favour, and 16% 'don't know'.

The polls clearly show public concern about global ownership of these two commercial TV channels. Such concerns, however, have not influenced the Government, determined to press ahead with the legislation. However, the bill is likely to get bogged down in the Lords where there are moves to delete the clause in the bill, which would allow

Channel 5 to be taken over by Murdoch. The Prime Minister added the clause to the draft Bill at the last minute.

It scraps the cross-media ownership rule that prevents an owner of more than 20% of the news-paper market buying into a terrestrial TV channel. Although it still applies to ITV, Blair also sanctioned global companies being allowed to buy ITV, despite contrary advice from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Only one section polled favoured Murdoch taking over Channel 5.

People aged between 16 to 24 recorded 56% in favour and 27% against (17% don't know). The highest section opposing were people aged between 45 to 54 with 68% against and 21% in favour (10% don't know).

The poll was carried out by Taylor Nelson Sofres. They interviewed 1006 people by phone between 7-9 March 2003. The full poll can be found on the CPBF web site on www.cpbf.org.uk with the earlier poll on American ownership of ITV carried out between 4-6 February 2003.

WHAT THE POLL SHOWED.

UNDER new government proposals, Rupert Murdoch, who controls SkyTV and owns the Sun newspaper, would be allowed to buy Channel 5 television. Would you support such a move?

These were the answers (all figures are percentages)

	Total	Male	Female	16/24	25/34	35/44	45/54	55/64	65+
Yes	32%	38%	25%	56%	42%	31%	21%	23%	19%
No	52%	50%	54%	27%	44%	56%	68%	54%	61%
Don't Know	16%	11%	21%	17%	14%	13%	10%	23%	20%

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Continued from page 3

for circulating misinformation. This was a straightforward propaganda manoeuvre designed to distract attention from the fact that the false stories have all been authorised by military command structures and also to warn journalists not to get out of line.

Some embedded reporters fell over themselves to explain that they only reported what the military allow them to. Late at night with very few people watching Richard Gaisford an embedded BBC reporter said 'If we ran everything that we heard in the camp then certainly there would be a lot of misinformation going around. We have to check each story we have with them. And if they're not sure at the immediate level above us—that's the Captain who's our media liaison officer—he will check with the Colonel who is obviously above him and then they will check with Brigade headquarters as well.'

This open acknowledgement of the system of control is rare and was provoked by official criticism. Gaisford's comment is interesting for the acknowledgement it makes that reporters are actually fully integrated into military commands structures. This complements the identification revealed by phrases such as 'we' and 'our' in reports of military action. Reference to the 'level above' as the press officer does indicate a fundamental subordination to military propaganda needs. But this is hardly surprising since the contract that reporters sign explicitly requires reporters to 'follow the direction and orders of the government' and prohibits them from suing for injury or death even where this 'is caused or contributed to' by the military.

The unprecedented access is the carrot, but the stick was always on hand. Two embedded journalists who have allegedly strayed over the line were been expelled and during the second weekend of the war 'many embedded reporters found their satellite phones blocked for unexplained reasons'. Moreover, some embeds were, according to Christian Lowe of US military magazine Army Times, being 'hounded by military

public affairs officers who follow their every move and look over their shoulders as they interview aviators, sailors, and maintainers for their stories.'

Each military division in the gulf had 40 to 60 embedded journalists, and between five and six public affairs officers 'behind the scenes'. They reported up to the Coalition Press Information Center (CPIC) in Kuwait and the \$1 million press centre at CentCom in Doha. From there the message is co-ordinated by the Office of Global Communications in the White-house in consort with Alastair Campbell, Blair's top spin doctor in Downing Street. The fanciful notion that the misinformation of the first weeks of the campaign were been due to journalists having conversations with 'a squaddie who's shining his boots', as a British MoD official spun it, is itself a key part of the propaganda war. All of the myriad misinformation coming out of Iraq in the first two weeks has been fed out by the US/UK global media operation. As one reporter in Doha noted 'At General Tommy Franks's headquarters, it is easy to work out whether the day's news is good or bad. When there are positive developments, press officers prowl the corridors of the press centre dispensing upbeat reports from pre-prepared scripts, declaring Iraqi towns have been liberated and that humanitarian aid is about to be delivered. Yet if American and British troops have suffered any sort of battlefield reverse, the spin doctors retreat into their officers at press centre and await instructions from London and Washington.'

As the war became bogged down at the end of the first week, The Russian website www.aeronautics.ru with links to Russian intelligence reported an intercepted report from the US Psychological Operations Tactical Group for the Special Ground Forces Command. The report was concerned about the development of a 'resistance ideology' in Iraq. Its solution was 'A more active use of the Iraqi opposition was suggested for propaganda work... The same opposition members will be used to create video footage of the "repented" Iraqi POWs and footage of

the local (Iraqi) population 'opposing Saddam.' (www.aeronautics.ru, March 29, 2003, 0924hrs MSK [GMT +4 DST]). As the US tanks rolled into Baghdad 11 days later footage of Iraqis was indeed transmitted around the world. But the propaganda coup was short-lived as Iraqis quickly came out to protest against 'foreign hegemony', leading to the US and UK military shooting and killing unarmed demonstrators. The propaganda war must go on.

ANSWERING BACK

Media Lens: correcting for the distorted vision of the corporate media. MediaLens is our response to the unwillingness, or inability, of the mainstream media to tell the truth about the real causes and extent of many of the problems facing us, such as human rights abuses, poverty, pollution and climate change. www.medialens.org/

Media Workers against the War, billed as: 'The best global source on the web for anti-war news, views and updates on the international peace movement—updated daily' www.mwaw.org/

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INTELLIGENCE FAILURE No weapons of mass destruction

STEPHEN DORRIL

THE NEWS that the 75th Exploitation Task Force, having found no weapons of mass destruction, is leaving Iraq is proof of one of the great intelligence disasters of the last fifty years. Despite the CIA and MI6 spending hundreds of millions of pounds targeting intelligence-gathering efforts on Saddam and the massive media campaign on WMDs, not a single weapon has been discovered.

The media response to this disaster has been, surprisingly, not to blame the intelligence services but to accuse the politicians of spin. The idea that the politicians 'over-hyped' the intelligence and forced the services to 'politicise' their intelligence has become the standard and accepted explanation—see Rachel Sylvester (not a journalist normally connected with intelligence stories) in *The Telegraph* (29 April), 'Spies want to be allowed to spy—not to spin for politicians', and in *The Guardian* (30 April), 'An insult to British intelligence'. This is, however, another intelligence line—a defence to pre-empt the possibility of an official inquiry into this intelligence debacle.

This line of defence first surfaced when the Joint Intelligence Committee-sanctioned dossier on WMDs was released into the public domain against the wishes of MI6, but at the insistence of Tony Blair and Jack Straw. Senior MI6 figures made it known to correspondents that they viewed the dossier as being 'politically motivated'. They had been unwilling to release material which, they argued, might identify the original source. The evidence suggests, however, that the reason for their reticence in releasing intelligence-derived material was that the services knew that it was, at best, weak.

The story began shortly after the

election of New Labour to government in 1997. The Paddy Ashdown diaries include an intriguing entry. Blair told Ashdown, a former MI6 officer, that he had seen 'intelligence about Saddam and what has happened to these weapons. I can tell you, it's so scary I can't believe it.' He added: 'I don't understand why the French don't get it.' Clearly, MI6 had presented its own dossier and Blair had swallowed it whole.

At the end of the year, with divisions on the UN Security Council over sanctions on Iraq and the hindering by Baghdad of the weapons' inspectors, MI6, according to Seymour Hersh (*New Yorker*, April 2003) 'resorted to spreading false information about Iraq' through its I/Ops unit. An agent within the UN inspection team funnelled to MI6, 'intelligence that was crap'. This was subsequently planted on MI6's media contacts and outlets throughout the world.

Some of this disinformation was obvious at the time. There was a flood of articles, particularly about the transfer of nuclear material and weapons to Iraq, and also to al-Qaida. According to George Jones in *The Telegraph* (19 April), throughout 1998 Blair was in receipt of more intelligence which fuelled his worries about WMDs. Even before September 11, Blair was warning the Americans about the dangers of the 'marriage' between terrorists and rogue states with WMDs. Iraq was identified as a state developing a ballistic missile capability which could be weaponised with WMDs.

The reality is that MI6 had been pushing the WMD agenda for a number of years, partly to persuade the UN and, particularly the French to do something about Iraq. They used

intelligence which they knew to be 'crap' and some of which was undoubtedly forged, as in the case of the Niger documents on nuclear supplies to Iraq. They used the testimony of Iraqi defectors which was tainted and unreliable, and falsified the intelligence from other defectors who stated that Saddam ordered the destruction of WMD warheads some years previously (see Hersh, *New Yorker*, May 2003).

Politicians certainly spin and pushed the intelligence services to provide the evidence of WMDs in Iraq, but the services had already been spinning their tales for a few years before September 11. The untangling of the origins of the war on Iraq begin with the election of Tony Blair and in the trail of disinformation which followed in the newspapers and other MI6 Information Ops outlets.

MY MUM READS
THE DAILY MAIL
AND EVEN SHE
SAYS: DON'T
ATTACK IRAQ



Stephen Dorril is the author of *MI6: Fifty Years of Special Operations (Fourth Estate)*.

Photo by Stefano Cagnoni



The BBC's War

DAVID MILLER

THE BBC, as the national broadcaster, has always found it difficult to resist government pressure in war. During the Falklands war, for example, it was attacked as traitorous for airing doubts about the war, but its senior management was clear that the bulk of its output had either not reported Argentinian claims or had 'nailed' them as 'propagandist lies'.

The level of public opposition to the war in Iraq was difficult for the BBC to navigate. The war exposed a serious disconnection between the political elite and the public, so the usual method of ensuring 'balance'—interviewing politicians—was never going to be enough. Other channels, including even ITV's lightweight Tonight programme, tried new ways of accessing opposition, while the BBC cautioned its senior management, in a confidential memo dated 6 February, to 'be careful' about broadcasting dissent. Once the war began, the BBC restricted the range of acceptable dissent yet further.

The BBC argues that its reporters are not perfect and make mistakes on a 'daily basis'. 'We don't only make them in (a pro-war) direction,' the deputy head of news, Mark Damazer, protested last month. But in the first half of the war almost all the false stories, such as those about non-existent Scuds or the capture of Umm Qasr, Nassiriya or Basra, reported by the BBC, originated with the US and UK military.

According to Damazer, 'It's perfectly proper for

us to say 'a British defence source has said...' and not report it as gospel truth... The secret is attribution, qualification and scepticism'. But it is a secret with which news teams are not always familiar. According to Sambrook, the 10 O'clock News is more 'solid' than rolling news because editors have time to 'weigh up material'. Yet, on the first night of the war, the 10 O'clock News stated on 12 separate unattributed occasions that Scuds had been fired by the Iraqis. There were no examples of the BBC repeating unattributed information from either the Iraqi's or the anti-war movement as fact.

Sambrook says it is 'important (to) correct' false stories. But this doesn't mean that they will actually say 'and not as the BBC wrongly stated earlier' or 'and not as the military told us yesterday'. Indeed serious discussions of misinformation are all but impossible on the BBC network. Radio Four's The Message postponed a discussion with Stephen Dorril, an expert on MI6 misinformation, because it was deemed too 'sensitive' (4 April). The programme finally went out on 2 May.

The fundamental orientation of the BBC is towards UK and US forces. The use of terms such as 'liberation' to describe US and UK victories continued after Damazer noted it was 'wrong' on 27 March, cropping up as late as 7 April in a John Simpson dispatch. Iraqi actions, against US troops, have been defined as 'terrorism' (23 March). Defending this Newsnight's Gavin Esler refers critics to the dictionary. But by any definition, many Iraqi's have been 'terrorised' by UK forces, and cluster bombs and Depleted Uranium are indiscriminate weapons of terror. Yet, the 'balance' of the BBC ensures that the UK government will

not be referred to as 'terrorist'. Casualties have also been a sensitive issue. The international study for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung shows that the BBC has devoted 52% of its coverage of casualties to US/UK casualties and 45% to Iraqi's, even though Iraqi casualties far outnumber those of the coalition. On German television the proportions were reversed.

Pro-war assumptions were also revealed in the failure to use warnings when reporting was restricted by the coalition. According to Sambrook, 'We do preface our reports from embedded reporters, saying that they cannot give operational details or location. That is the only constraint on their reporting.' This was not true. There was no consistent prefacing of embedded reports with warnings, as there was in Baghdad. In the Iraqi capital, reports were said to be 'monitored' and reporters sometimes 'restricted' in their movements. With the coalition, no 'restrictions' are said to be in place. In fact, embedded reporters signed a contract requiring them to 'follow the direction and orders of the government'.

As Baghdad fell on 9 April, BBC reporters could hardly contain themselves in their haste to endorse the victors. This was a 'vindication' of the strategy and it showed Blair had been 'right' and his critics 'wrong'. Here the BBC enunciated a version of events very similar to that of the government. According to the BBC, 'dozens' witnessed the statue pulled down by US marines in Baghdad on 9 April, while 'thousands' demonstrated against 'foreign hegemony' in the same city on the 18th. Yet the footage of the former was described as 'extraordinary', 'momentous' and 'historic', while the larger demonstration was greeted with scepticism. Are they 'confined to a small vocal

minority?' the newscaster asked. Sambrook says that the BBC stands by the 'judgement' of its reporters, but this has little to do with objectivity or balance. The fact is that there are other 'judgements' about the significance of the events which the BBC systematically excluded. The BBC is required by law to report on such matters dispassionately, not issue judgements on matters which align closely with the propaganda of one or other side in conflict.

After the fall of Baghdad, the images of 'liberation' gave way to scenes of 'occupation' in the killing of significant numbers of unarmed civilians. But broadcasters blithely ignored the evidence of their own eyes and did their best to excuse the slaughter. In Falluja (22.00, 29 April) the US killed 13 and injured close to 100. Iraqis claimed that the protestors were peaceful and unarmed. According to the BBC though 'shots were exchanged and they soon grew out of control'. To say that shots were exchanged is to accept the US version. Later the reporter stated 'it's clear a ferocious gunfight followed. The walls of homes opposite pockmarked by machine gun rounds'. But from the evidence shown it is not clear that a ferocious gunfight followed. The pockmarked wall was opposite the School which the US had commandeered and was evidence only of US bullets being fired. This kind of misreporting is all very reminiscent of the conflict in Northern Ireland, but this time the most worrying development is that British reporters should so unquestioningly accept propaganda from the US army.

Embedding propaganda

DAVID MILLER

EMBEDDED journalists are the greatest PR coup of this war. Dreamt up by the Pentagon and Donald Rumsfeld the 'embeds', as they are now routinely described, are almost completely controlled by the military. Embeds agreed to give up most of their autonomy in exchange for access to the fighting on military terms. Most importantly embeds were afforded protection from physical harm by the military. So far in this war the main danger for journalists has come from western military. So the protection on offer is more of a threat than a reassurance for independent reporters.

Each embedded reporter has to sign a contract with the military and is governed by a fifty point plan issued by the Pentagon detailing what they can and cannot report. The list of what they can report is significantly shorter than the list of what



Terry Lloyd, ITV News journalist—killed in Iraq when US soldiers open fired on his vehicle. US military have agreed plans for an inquiry. Thirteen other journalists/media workers were killed during the war, two are still missing—presumed dead.

they cannot.

According to reports there were 903 embedded reporters including 136 with UK forces. The PR genius of the embed system was that it allowed unprecedented access to the fighting and, also, unprecedented identification by the reporters with the military. British minister of defence Geoff Hoon has claimed: 'I think the coverage... is more graphic, more real, than any other coverage we have ever seen of a conflict in our history. For the first time it is possible with technology for journalists to report in real time on events in the battlefield.' It is certainly true to say that it is new to see footage of war so up-close, but, it is a key part of the propaganda war to claim that this makes it 'real'. In fact, the aim of the embedding system is to control what is reported by encouraging journalists to identify with their units. To eat and drink together, to risk danger and to share the same values. Ted Koppel of US network ABC, told *The Washington Post* that his feelings towards the soldiers were 'very, very warm'.

This identification with the soldiers works to ensure self censorship is generally effective. Phillip Rochot a respected reporter for *France 2*, currently working independently in Iraq: 'Embedded journalists do a fair amount of voluntary self-censorship, controlling what they say. In any case their views are closely aligned with the anglo-american position. They are soldiers of information, marching with the troops and the political direction of their country. They won't say anything wrong, they feel duty-bound to defend the anglo-american cause in this war.' Hoon also acknowledged the effect of this reporting in appearing to reduce opposition to the war in the first days: 'The imagery they broadcast is at least partially responsible for the public's change of mood.'

But towards the end of the first week of the war US and UK officials started to blame embedded reporters and the pressure of 24 hour news cycles

Continued on back page