Capturing Saddam Hussein: how the full story got away, and what conflict journalism can learn from it.

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Abstract: The capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003 was reported with a sense of triumph which must have greatly satisfied the United States forces occupying Iraq. This was the victory they had been looking for; the seminal moment which signalled that the invasion had been a success. But the reporting of that event was also a missed opportunity: an example of incomplete story telling.

In this article, I use my personal experience of reporting on the event for the BBC as a starting point to examine what it, and the way it was covered, tell us about the omissions which are frequently a feature of conflict reporting. The article argues that the way in which reporters had to work in Iraq then meant that they did not convey all of the event's wider implications, and suggests how that might be improved.

Keywords: Reporting conflict; Iraq; Saddam Hussein; war correspondent; journalism; technology.

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Even in the midst of the most technologically advanced war which had ever been fought, there was still a craving for the kind of news which spreads through chance conversations. 'Is it true?' asked the soldiers searching the journalists. The reporters were on their way into an unscheduled news conference called by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) on a Sunday afternoon in Baghdad in December 2003. The soldiers' initial question prefaced their more pressing one, which soon followed: 'Does this mean I'll be able to go home early?'

As BBC correspondent in Baghdad that day, I was one of the reporters to whom that question was put. In response, journalists shrugged, or mumbled replies like 'Well, that's what we're going to find out.' There was impatience in some of their voices. They were in a hurry. They sensed that they might be about to get one of the biggest stories of their careers.

Since early that morning, rumours had been spreading in the Iraqi capital. Saddam Hussein had been captured. The Iraqi leader had been in hiding since the invasion which had driven him from power. Journalists who called their news desks in foreign capitals, to share the rumours, found that the rumours were already circulating there, too. It became impossible to establish where they had begun.

A sense of chaotic excitement acted as cover for a carefully planned operation which was underway inside the CPA building. At the same time as those wild, breathless, speculative, telephone calls had been taking place between journalists, another, more thoughtful, communication had been in progress.

The occupying powers in Baghdad were preparing to announce that the rumours were true: they had captured Saddam Hussein. Shortly after 3pm that Sunday afternoon, 14th December 2003, Paul Bremer, the leader of the CPA told the news conference, 'Ladies and gentlemen, we got him!'

Some of the Iraqi journalists leapt to their feet. They cheered wildly and shook their fists in the air. Some of the foreign press did so, too. Others were less sure how to react. Their faces betrayed signs of internal calculation. They seemed to reflect on how they, as reporters taking pride in their impartiality, should behave. They took in the huge professional challenge which lay ahead: time, as always, short – and an afternoon which might be one of the defining moments not just of their career, but of the United States' career as a superpower. As if to mark that, Washington had planned a major event. Those journalists who did not cheer - I was one of them - were left feeling like churlish party guests who refuse to join in the fun. 'It seemed as if journalistic rules cherished during 'normal' times had to be suspended for journalism to do its job,' (Waisbord 2002:206) Silvio Waisbord said of journalism in the United States after September 11th. That suspension was in force in Baghdad as it had been in Manhattan.

Nothing had been left to chance. US forces had captured Saddam Hussein the previous evening. The timing of the announcement, though, was the result of the demands of news management and presentation. 3pm in Baghdad was midday in London, and early morning on the East Coast of the United States. All the time zones west of the Iraqi capital were primed

for the news which would dominate their media that day, and, so the public relations (Davis, 2002; Davies, 2008) theory seemed to be, demonstrate that the United States and its allies dominated their foes.

The news conference unfolded like an expertly edited television programme. The opening words were designed not to grab the headlines, but to be them. 'Ladies and gentlemen, we got him!' was ready made to be used, as a whole or in part, for a newspaper or website front page. Only a few seconds in duration, it was rehearsed to fit perfectly at the top of a broadcast news bulletin. And, like any good news programme, this one not only gave its audience something striking and exciting at the top, it also had a surprise further down the running order to keep them tuned in.

If the 'headline' drew cheers, the 'coming up next', drew gasps. A profession proverbial in its cynicism was astonished when the face of Saddam Hussein – bearded, long-haired, and bedraggled, but unmistakeably Saddam Hussein - appeared on a screen in the hall.

Confirmation of his capture had been expected, but this had not. Now, suddenly, there was Iraq's most wanted fugitive having his mouth held open as part of a medical inspection. A hand, gloved in surgical rubber, held his jaw apart, silencing the man whose word in this country had for so long been law. Saddam Hussein's appearance before the world was completely controlled by his captors. They sought to control the telling of the story of the capture, too. That control extended far beyond the fortified confines of the CPA buildings in

Baghdad. It reached right into the area of the country where Saddam Hussein had grown up, built his power base, gone into hiding, and been taken by his enemies.

The next day, Monday 15th December, was the first chance which most reporters had to try to get to the place where that had happened. The village of al-Dawr lay to the north of Baghdad, near the city of Tikrit, where the United States 4th Infantry Division had made a military camp in the former President's palace. Some journalists had tried to get there the day before, when news of the capture started to break – but this was hostile territory for foreigners, especially those from countries whose armies had joined the invasion, and the dark December days made it even more dangerous.

My BBC colleagues and I set off before dawn. We arrived in al-Dawr to learn that the farm buildings where Saddam Hussein had been hiding lay not far from the village, along a dirt road. Shortly after we got there, soldiers of the U.S. Army arrived to bar our way. We who had travelled to the area independently were kept back from our final destination for four or five hours.

It is logical and reasonable that access to a small area be controlled, even if, at the time, we resented that. The enforced delay provided us - and the other reporters who reached the same point as the morning went on - with an opportunity to talk to some of the villagers. Like us, they were curious about what was going on. A chain link fence separated us. Through a translator, I had a brief conversation. 'Why didn't he (Saddam Hussein) die a martyr?' and

'If we had known he was there, we would have come to fight for him,' were typical sentiments.

We had not been kept back to chat. A large helicopter designed for the transport of military personnel came into view overhead. It landed near the farm buildings where Saddam Hussein had been captured. Sensing our growing impatience, the soldiers explained what was happening. It seemed the helicopter had brought in the journalists who were 'embedded' with the U.S. 4th Infantry division nearby. Those members of the news media who had chosen to work under the conditions imposed by such an arrangement were being rewarded. They were getting access to the most sought-after news location in the world that day ahead of their competitors.

The system was an echo of that which was introduced during the earlier U.S. led campaign against Iraq, in 1991 (Thomson, 1992). As Carruthers says of the way in which places in 'media reporting teams' were allocated during that conflict,

> 'Only British, French, and US reporters were to enjoy this privilege, on the grounds that their national forces comprised the largest contingents within the coalition. Other nationals were shut out of this arrangement altogether, as were representatives of smaller or more critical publications from the three favored nations.' (2011:132)

On this occasion, the second-class treatment was meted out not only to 'smaller' outlets. The correspondents from Britain's two main television news outlets, the BBC and ITV news, were among those who were held back, as was the veteran Middle East reporter, Robert Fisk. The rules, though, were clear: those who had agreed to 'embed' with the U.S. Army were being granted privileges for having done so.

Once the dust from the departing helicopter had settled, and the 'embeds' had got their pictures, we were escorted to the hideout. There, behind a fence made of branches, and next to two shabby shacks, lay the entrance to the underground chamber where Saddam Hussein had concealed himself whenever it seemed that his pursuers might be near. The shacks contained things of a humble life: an old vest, and a half-eaten packet of sausages; the last laundry and frugal lunch of a dictator once used to luxury.

We were allowed to spend just a short time there. Journalists are used to working quickly. Time pressure is part of the job. That day, trends in television reporting added to that pressure. Where once it would have been sufficient for a correspondent simply to appear on camera once or twice in their report, that is no longer the case, especially on such a major news day as this. TV correspondents are expected not just to get the story, but, increasingly, to perform in their reports. Pieces to camera had to be shot in different ways in different locations, in the hope of imparting an element of exclusivity to reports which were not. Even in 2003, news organizations, especially those, like the BBC, who were predominantly terrestrial broadcasters, were increasingly multi-platform. Reporters who were fortunate enough to get to the hideout were subject to intense pressure not only to tell their story in a

distinctively better way than the person standing next to them, but also to do so in different ways for different media. Style battled with content.

Soon the December daylight began to disappear. There were security concerns as well as pressing deadlines. Some reporters headed back to Baghdad, others made their way to the press centre which had been set up in the Presidential palace which now housed the 4th Infantry Division's base. There was another delay before they were permitted to enter, and begin to prepare their material for sending.

Reflections on the coverage of the event

The coverage of the capture of Saddam Hussein was strongly affected by issues of access and objectivity, and by the pressure on journalists working on the story.

Access was limited by the restrictions which U.S. troops placed upon reporters; by the numbers of correspondents who were trying to get to the hideout at the same time; and by concerns over security.

From a superficial point of view, the role of the U.S. troops posted to keep journalists back from the farm was to control the number of people who were trying to get to the area. In effect, in fulfilling this apparently security-related role, the soldiers were additionally carrying out one of news management. As Tumber and Palmer conclude about embedding, 'the looseness of the guidelines gives military commanders who are less sympathetic to journalists the discretion to remove unwanted reporters' (2004:28). We, who were not formally embedded, were at the mercy of a similar kind of discretion. As Tumber and Palmer also write 'the ability of the unilaterals (those journalists not officially embedded to report on the war) was often hampered by obstruction from the military, and concerns over safety.' (2004: 33).

So it was there. Any reporter who tried to reach the site without the troops' permission would presumably have been physically restrained and then probably detained. Wandering off alone would have been to invite danger. In either case, it meant taking a risk, and perhaps not getting the story we were working so hard for.

Part of that story was the reaction of the villagers who, it seemed, had only recently themselves discovered that Saddam Hussein had been close by. Yet aside from the brief conversations conducted through the nearby fence, no real dialogue with them was possible. The soldiers did not like the villagers' being there. This was extremely hostile territory for the occupying forces. They soon told the villagers to retire to a distance which made further conversation impossible. We could perhaps have taken the road back and gone into the village itself. However, to do so would have meant losing our prized places in what was in effect the queue to see the hideout. Nor would it necessarily have been safe.

The numbers trying to get to the hideout, the 'spider-hole', as U.S. troops and officials called it, also limited access. Reporters wanted so badly to get there that those who had not been in the area in the immediate aftermath of the capture still travelled there in the days that followed. The effect of so many people wanting to get to such a small place was to frustrate, or at least limit, journalists' attempts to understand what had happened there.

That day – seeking the impression of exclusivity referred to above - editors put a great deal of pressure on reporters at the scene to place themselves at the heart of the action, such as it was thirty six hours after the actual capture. Audience members, watching some of the resultant coverage, could almost have been led to conclude that the most important information they were being given was not that Saddam Hussein had been captured there. It was instead that a reporter from the news organization whose output they were watching was at the scene. In other words, the reporter's presence was in effect given greater prominence than the story they were nominally telling. While this sort of excessive personalization is perhaps understandable on the day itself, it is part of a wider trend in reporting conflict and international affairs in general which, at its worst, can stand as an obstacle to audiences' comprehension (Sreberny and Paterson 2004:6).

Security concerns were a further factor. Even if the reporters held back by the troops had wanted to use the delay to explore the surrounding area a little more, they would probably have been ill-advised to do so. This region of Iraq, near to Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's power base, was deeply hostile to the occupying forces. By extension, local people might have seen

reporters from Britain or the United States as agents of an enemy. This was before the kidnappings of foreign journalists but, ever since the attack on the United Nations building in Baghdad the previous August, foreigners in Iraq had known they were in a potentially dangerous environment. These concerns were understandable – but their effect was to limit the range of voices and views which were reflected in the coverage of the news of Saddam Hussein's capture.

The result was a narrative which generally lacked objectivity. 'Objectivity' is itself such a contested concept that it is difficult to refer to it without offering some kind of definition. Tumber and Prentoulis have provided useful analysis in this respect

'As the major signifier associated with the occupation of journalism, 'objectivity' is associated and often confused with ideas of 'truth', 'impartiality', 'balance' and 'neutrality'. For example, a journalist's aim may be to reach the truth (and in order to approach the truth they may need to be impartial) but that does not necessarily imply that the means used or the means that could be used, are objective.' (2003: 215-6)

A journalist's own impressions are always going to influence their writing. (Impressions are not the same as personal feelings which, as Martin Bell said, have 'no business' (Bell 1995:142), in war zone reporting.) Some of the most effective accounts of events such as these are effective precisely because they include details which enable an audience to visualize a place or a moment. Nevertheless, and perhaps inevitably, the overall tone of the coverage tended to promote the view – prevalent since the celebratory atmosphere of the

news conference the day before – that the capture of Saddam Hussein was a total triumph for the occupying forces. The restricted access described above reinforced this – although there is one point here about editorial values which must be emphasized. It is not reasonable to question the idea that getting to the hideout was the priority for news organizations on that day. One of the biggest single news stories since the invasion had happened, and – on that day at least - it had to be given the prominence that it deserved.

In the days that followed, more could have been done to try to put the event into context. The atmosphere of celebration and triumph which was created around the capture should have been more rigorously questioned. While the celebration may have been sincere, the triumph was deceptive.

As Peter Maass has written of the way in which the pulling down of a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad the previous spring was covered 'I had little awareness of the media dynamics that turned the episode into a festive symbol of what appeared to be the war's finale. In reality, the war was just getting underway.' (Maas 2011: 4)

Maass' article includes later recollections of reporters who were in the square when the statue was taken down. Some of them clearly felt that the accounts which were reaching audiences were incomplete. As he notes of those present, 'much of the crowd was made up of journalists and marines' (Mass 2011: 14).

The toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue, and the later capture of the former Iraqi leader himself, were both portrayed as moments of great victory for the United States and its allies. Both, with hindsight, were invested with greater importance than they merited.

Return to Gaza

From the professional point of view of a journalist covering the war in Iraq, I was very pleased to have been involved in reporting the capture of Saddam Hussein.

Even at the time, though, I was concerned that the overall impression which we reporters in Iraq were giving was one of unqualified success for the occupying forces. As such, it was potentially misleading. I tried to redress this in a piece which I wrote for the BBC's website a few days later.

The mood in the "Sunni triangle" north and west of Baghdad is completely different. In the heartland of Saddam Hussein's former power base, there are two emotions: sadness and astonishment.

In al-Dawr, where Saddam was finally dragged from his underground hideout, people are shocked at what has happened.

"Saddam had a gun. Why didn't he resist?" one villager asked me.

No-one can believe that the man who portrayed himself as the heir to a noble Arab warrior tradition did not put up a fight. (Rodgers 2003)

Even coverage like that did not really question the United States' interpretation and presentation of the capture. It did at least show that there were people not prepared to rejoice, but there was no suggestion that they were preparing to fight. Yet, given that the insurgency in earnest began the following spring, there must have been people at that stage who were planning it. That part of the account of the invasion and occupation of Iraq was missing, with the result that, while the United States may have captured their quarry, journalists did not capture the full story, and audiences, in whose name the invasion had been launched, were not being told what they needed to know, what Jean Seaton has called 'our realistic apprehension of what is happening' (Seaton 2003:48).

I had gone to Iraq only on a short assignment. At the time, I was the BBC's correspondent in the Gaza Strip, a post I held from 2002-2004. I shared an office with Fayed Abushammala, who was correspondent in the territory for the BBC's Arabic Service.

We worked together covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians watched closely the situation in Iraq, trying to understand how it would affect their fight with each other. As it became clearer that the United States would attack Iraq, so the opposition to the coming invasion grew in Gaza. Many Palestinians saw Saddam Hussein as a friend and ally. Photographs of him appeared in shop windows and car windscreens. Most often, he was shown wearing battledress and a black beret, smiling and waving. Less frequently, he was pictured in traditional dress, a latter-day Arab knight preparing to repel invading crusaders. His heroic status in Gaza was derived from his implacable enmity towards Israel. Residents then remembered fondly the sight of Iraqi scud missiles crossing the winter desert sky in January 1991, during the previous U.S.-led campaign against Iraq, on

their way to strike Tel Aviv. Saddam Hussein sent money to the families of those who had been killed in the conflict with Israel. For a people who felt they had few friends, Saddam Hussein did sometimes seem like the king-warrior of his photographs.

Living and working in this environment had made me deeply sceptical of the suggestion, advanced by neoconservatives in the United States, that their invading forces would be welcomed as liberators. My scepticism was not based on an idea that the people of Iraq overwhelmingly supported Saddam Hussein, as his rigged referenda had suggested. It was based on the loathing for living under occupation which I saw around me. I could not imagine that Iraqis would readily accept what the Palestinians found so crushing, stifling, and humiliating. Of course, if the invaders really were able to deliver the freedom and prosperity they predicted would follow the removal of Saddam Hussein, then perhaps the population would not rebel in large numbers. If durable peace did follow war, the occupation could be short. It seemed, though, that neoconservative wishful thinking alone made such a prospect likely.

On my return from Iraq, Fayed and I spoke of the conflict, and the way the BBC was covering it. He wondered why the BBC had not tried to work in Iraq the way that we did in Gaza. Fayed had built up an extensive network of contacts throughout the Gaza Strip. Despite the size of the territory – some 45km from north to south by just 10km from the sea to the fence which marked the beginning of Israel – travelling around it was extremely difficult. The journey from Gaza City to Rafah, a town and refugee camp in the south of the territory near the border with Egypt, should have taken around thirty minutes. It could take ten times as long, or be impossible altogether, depending on the activities of the Israeli army. This limited ability to travel meant that reliable contacts in nearby places were invaluable. They were invaluable not just for political information, for rumour, and for opinion, but for facts. Eyewitnesses could provide us with what we were otherwise kept from. Fayed's

network consisted of security officials; members of Palestinian political movements; medical personnel; neighbours; relatives; and friends. There were some sources it was difficult for him to call upon: the Israeli Army in particular. They operate a round-the-clock press office with English-speaking personnel, but Palestinian journalists are not encouraged to call. I was able to add Israeli military comment to the information which Fayed's sources provided. On the occasions when there was a British story (twice during my time there the Israeli Army shot British citizens – one fatally, the other dying later) I was able to contribute information from British diplomatic sources.[1]

The network which the bureau established worked extremely efficiently. During my two years there, both Fayed and I were challenged over our reporting. His fellow Gazans sometimes accused him of being insufficiently pro-Palestinian. I received emails accusing me of being too pro-Palestinian. I do not recall a time when we were challenged over the facts we presented, only over the way we presented them.

Since I stopped being a full-time journalist, and began instead to teach and research journalism and media, I have focused on conflict reporting. I began by re-reading those memoirs and other accounts of working journalists which I had found most illuminating during my time as a reporter.

One idea above all others seemed to encapsulate the challenges faced by journalists in wartime, 'Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it'. (Herr 1975: 175)

Michael Herr was writing about Vietnam, but his words conveyed perfectly the complexity of the task which faced a later generation of reporters: the generation which wrote about the conflicts which broke out following the end of the cold war, and the attacks of September 11th. These were only 'conventional' wars in the sense that they did not involve nuclear

weapons. By any other measure, they did not fit with an adjective which suggested states going to war against each other with regular standing armies.

My recent research, therefore, has been dedicated to finding a way of developing a kind of reporting which can better 'reveal' the conflicts of our age. My work has focused on the potential offered by the latest technology, but also on examples from history.

William Howard Russell, who reported from the Crimean War for 'The Times', is usually considered the first of the professional war correspondents. A man who shared his surname, James Russell, was my ancestor, and a soldier at the battle of Waterloo.

My family has a letter which he wrote back to his wife and sons to tell them that he had survived what he called 'a most Bloody Battle with the French as ever was fought'. Although he is only one cavalryman out of thousands of combatants who took to the battlefield that day, he is aware of the strategic importance of the fight in which he is involved. 'We are in hopes that another firm battle will settle this business,' he writes, 'for we are now two days march into France without interruption and report says his army is almost annihilated.' Having started his letter with reassurances to his family, he goes on to tell them what he knows of the wider situation, before returning, towards the end, to his own condition. 'I would change the subject and inform you of myself. I have lost all my things. This day I am getting a dead Frenchman's shirt washed to put on. My horse was wounded and sent into Brussels during the action and has lost my whole kit so I am now as I stand.' In the space of six hundred or so words, we get an impression of the personal experience of a soldier who fought in one of the most important battles of his age, and of that battle's wider significance.

Some forty years later, William Howard Russell was watching the suffering of British soldiers dying of their injuries in the Crimea. 'It was agonizing to see the wounded men who were lying there under a broiling sun, parched with excruciating thirst, racked with fever, and agonized with pain – to behold them waving their caps faintly, or making signals towards our lines, over which they could see the white flag waving.' (Russell 2008: 220) His is a different perspective. He is looking from a distance. James Russell, who writes of 'dead and wounded' from his own regiment, The Scots Greys, 'scarcely to be numbered', presumably saw the same kind of suffering right next to him but chooses not to distress his wife and young sons with the details. For his is a personal account, not meant for publication, where William Howard Russell's account was something else altogether: a professional account, most definitely intended for publication. The two types combined can surely provide audiences with a fuller picture than often they receive from conflict zones. Contemporary technology provides the opportunity for accounts such as my great-great-great-great grandfather's not only to reach families more quickly, but also to be made public.

This has already started happening. In the autumn of 2009, the BBC's 'Today' programme began broadcasting – in addition to news and features from BBC journalists in Afghanistan – contributions from a serving British Army officer, Major Richard Streatfeild.

'I always had a view that maybe as soldiers we weren't as good at explaining to people, to a broader audience, what it was that we were going through on a day to day basis. There were very few genuine voices from the front line coming through,' (Streatfeild 6 January 2011

interview) he says. The process which led to Streatfeild's contributions was complicated. The BBC and the Ministry of Defence, were 'nervous' (Streatfeild 6 January 2011 interview) about each other's motives. There were practical difficulties, too. While internet access and simple equipment (Streatfeild says he used a basic voice recorder, and then sent his reports as email attachments) made his contributions possible in the first place, he could not have been relied upon as a regular correspondent. 'There was a period from January, through to about the end of February, middle of February, where we were involved in such a lot of stuff operationally that I didn't write a thing,' (Streatfeild 6 January 2011 interview) he recalls.

It is reminiscent of the problems which Philip Knightly describes in 'The First Casualty'.

Before the Crimea, British editors either stole war news from foreign newspapers, or employed junior officers to send letters from the battlefront, a most unsatisfactory arrangement. For not only were these soldier-correspondents highly selective in what they wrote, regarding themselves first as soldiers and then as correspondents; they also understood little of the workings of newspapers, or even of what constituted 'news'. (Knightley 1989: 4)

Such an arrangement, its difficulties notwithstanding, would not work today. Streatfeild does not see himself as an 'officer-journalist' or 'soldier-correspondent'. No serious news organization, apart perhaps from one designed for serving soldiers, would use an officer as a reporter. They can, though, be used as contributors to a greater extent than they have been before.

If we are going to hear from army officers, we should also hear from their enemies. We should hear from them for two reasons above all: in the interests of true impartiality, and because we need to hear from them if we are to get as full a picture as possible of what is going on. In the same way that few insurgencies or guerrilla conflicts are ever solved without representatives of states and regular armies talking to those they consider terrorists, no

insurgency can be properly reported unless journalists talk to the insurgents. In any news culture that prizes impartiality, a reporter would never dream of doing a political story without talking to more than one party. The same should be true of reporting conflict.

Conclusion: 'The Gaza Model'

The reporting of the capture of Saddam Hussein failed to tell the full story in that it failed to reflect the anger at the occupation of Iraq – anger which at that time was growing, and would, only four months later, explode into uprising. These shortfalls could have been reduced, if not avoided, by the establishment in Iraq of the kind of journalistic network of sources which the BBC used in Gaza during my time as correspondent there.

In 'Supermedia', Charlie Beckett argues, 'What we are striving for here is what I call 'Editorial Diversity'. Essentially, this is an openness to engage with new sources, perspectives, and narratives, and an ability to use them to create networked journalism.' (Beckett 2008: 150).

To this end, I have identified four main areas where journalism in wartime can evolve in order to improve. I call this the "Gaza model' for conflict reporting, because one of its main inspirations is the network of sources which the BBC built up in that territory.

> The Gaza model for conflict reporting is
>
> collaborative
>
> drawn from as many sources as possible – both sides in a conflict indispensable
>
> impartial by providing balance *over time*
>
> and uses mobile technology and social networks for news gathering and distribution

Conflict reporting needs to be collaborative in order to make the most of information which different journalists are able to gather, as when Fayed Abushammala and I pooled our resources in Gaza.

It needs to be drawn from as many sources as possible. Had I spoken to the villagers of al-Dawr for longer that day, I might have been persuaded to seek to learn more about the likely extent of opposition to the occupation. Instead, like Maas, only later did I realize that, 'In reality, the war was just getting underway.'

While I am proposing using a wider range of sources, I do not expect them all to be reflected in every individual report. Instead, I believe there is a case for abandoning rigorous ideas of balance – i.e. if a report contains a clip with an Israeli, it must also contain one with a Palestinian – in favour of the idea of impartiality over time. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, an entire report could focus on Israeli views provided another entire report focused on Palestinian views. The idea of 'balance over time' is already used by the BBC and other broadcasters to satisfy the legislation governing the covering of elections. It would work well here, too.

More extensive use of mobile technology is my fourth point. In the twenty years I worked as a journalist, it changed massively the way in which news was gathered and distributed. Many authors (Beckett, 2008; Shirky, 2009; Seib, 2008) have written on these effects, so there is no

need to go into further detail here. Since the conflicts I have looked at here – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between 2002 and 2004, and the invasion of Iraq, mobile technology has become more widely available. Now, members of a reporters' network are more likely to be able to send video, stills, or audio rather than just give information over the phone. All the same, this is only part of the solution. As Robinson et al have written, 'Even if, over time, new communication technologies have increased the potential power of news media outlets, increasingly professional government media-management techniques may have been effective in countering these developments.' (Robinson et al 2010: 29). As always, journalists will need to strive to have better, and more credible, sources than those with power – political or commercial - who might seek to undermine them.

I do not underestimate the huge editorial, political, and practical challenges which such an approach will involve. Politicians will rage against the idea of 'terrorists' being given a platform. Editors - as can be their habit – will on occasion seek to dictate the story to their correspondents.

And the 'new sources' of which Beckett writes will need to be given time and space. The reporter who makes him or herself the story should take a step to the side. My time in the 'spider hole' that December day could have been better spent talking to more sources rather than filming endless versions of a piece to camera. As Daniel Hallin predicted more than a decade ago, with reference to earlier sources, 'For one thing, as Carey (1993) has argued, journalists will probably have to shift from conceiving of themselves as, in effect, a representative or stand in for a unitary but inactive public, to a role of facilitating and publicizing public dialogue.' (Hallin 2000: 234-5).

It is time for these trends to be combined into a new and more complete way of covering

conflict. Let us listen to the angry voices behind the fence for what they may tell us of what is

to come.

[1] Tom Hurndall, an activist with the pro-Palestinian 'International Solidarity Movement', was

shot on 11 April 2003. He died from his wounds on 6 January 2004. James Miller, a

cameraman, was shot and killed on 2 May 2003.

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