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**The Alistair Berkley Memorial Lecture  
held at the LSE on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004**

**“Media, the Law and Peace-building: from Bosnia and Kosovo to Iraq”**

**JAMES PUTZEL:**

I thank all of our discussants for sticking to time and also making very clear and interesting points. I am sure already Nik and Simon want to come back but perhaps let me open the floor to all of you and take a first round of questions and then I'll give Simon and Nik a chance to respond to both discussants and the first round of questions.

**QUESTION 1:**

My name is Judith Brown I'm doing a PhD entitled the *Image of Arabs in the British Media* and my question is particularly posed to Nik Gowing. I do appreciate the problems that journalists have in order to get stories but there are certain ways that I feel the media does not present facts in ways that the population can understand them in an unbiased way. If I can take an example, I have been monitoring BBC radio since last December and you haven't used the word 'occupation'. It has been used about 3 times on BBC radio by people who have been interviewed but none of the presenters have used the word 'occupation' which is fundamental to the problem. For example, the interviews on Rafah this week- how can you understand what is happening if you are not using the word 'occupation'? It means that the Israeli interviewees can get away with things that they wouldn't be able to get away with if you were using the word 'occupation'. So these are fundamental things in understanding but are being avoided by journalists who are presenting. My question - is this something that is imposed above or is it something which is internalised by the hegemonic power from within the journalists themselves so that they actually avoid using the word 'occupation' of their own free will or is it something that is imposed as a rule from above? Not only did the UN the FCO use the word 'occupation' but also Sharon himself so why not the BBC?

**QUESTION 2:**

Hello, Jean Seaton, University of Westminster. Under the conditions of a legitimate war, how would the media deal with pictures of casualties of soldiers that they were taking back home because I think in a way today is all predicated on whether the war is legitimate or not and the media would now pose actually very serious problems which we would all take seriously. This is very unfashionable to say here today - how you would conduct a war you

actually needed to conduct? You certainly couldn't have conducted D-Day landings under current conditions, and we might all agree, well I certainly wouldn't be here if D-Day landings hadn't happened, so I think at the other end of this problem is another problem, how would you deal with it?

**QUESTION 3:**

Tafar Chari from Durham University. A simple question, what does the word 'militant' mean and how do you decide to use it?

**QUESTION 4:**

Laurie Nathan and I am a South African based at the Crisis States Programme. I have a question that I want to put at Nik Gowing who I think is insufficiently critical of mainstream professional media. Despite the dramatic expansion of real-time transparency an area that remains relatively unseen is that of media disrespect for human rights, dignity and the safety of people in high intensity conflicts. During the anti-apartheid struggle I saw international television journalists at mass funerals stand on coffins to get better shots, I saw them setting up scenes with young children where they were asked to adopt militant poses. In Northern Namibia under the South African occupation I saw television journalists disrupt a church service in order to interview the priest. I saw a television journalist who was interviewing a trade unionist who asked not to be filmed- the journalist was nevertheless filming him surreptitiously with a handheld camera. In post-apartheid South Africa I have worked with a television journalist who asked people to commit illegal acts on camera and gave them the means to do so and there are many other stories. These stories of unethical journalism are not seen in the press, they go unreported on television. I don't believe that the government should check the media so the question is how can the media do a better job of checking themselves?

*Speakers Respond-*

**SIMON HASELOCK:**

It is good to be on the other side of the debate if we are going to have a truly interesting debate rather than have everyone fiercely agreeing. I am perfectly prepared to defend the remarks that I have made and the situation I now find myself in. The first thing I would say is that there seems to be a general assumption particularly on this table that the international community and the coalition of the willing for what it matters is as I described in my discussion is a single, living, breathing organism and it is not. It is a series of multi-headed hydras all arguing amongst themselves. I do not and I will say I do not represent the CPA in a policy way, I am merely somebody there who is trying to do a specific piece of work in a specific area and that is something that I will defend and talk more about in a minute. I can describe specific examples about what I or my team and I have achieved in the time we have been there and what we intend to continue to try to achieve and what the

results may be as a consequence. My justification is, however, that whatever has happened and whether we or the Coalition was right to go in the first place and however they have handled it in the interim means, that whatever the circumstances given the Fourth Estate argument that the development of the media in the most aggressive way possible can only be a benefit to whatever happens in Iraq hereafter.

When it comes to the notion that there are no similarities between these three places I actually find that I resent that a little, in the sense that I stand by the fact that there are circumstances which are in my experience of having spent 5 years in Bosnia, 3 years in Kosovo and now nearly a year in Iraq where there are direct comparisons. It doesn't take the brains of an archbishop to realise that they are different places. The cultures are different, some of the specific tensions are different, Iraq is significantly larger as a problem than either of the two places in the Balkans- this is self-evident. The fact that the circumstances of the international intervention are clearly different I don't think I need to even cover that. Yes the circumstances in the Balkans are such that we have never really been at any stage the target of local opposition and maybe in the policy or in the way things should be done there has been some resistance but there has been no violent resistance. Clearly from the very beginning there has been a distinct resistance from the international community to intervention in Iraq and the legitimacy is clearly a question. The fact remains that the results of the central totalitarian control are very similar and they have similar effects and I will argue that although...

**JAMES PUTZEL:**

Can you just hold on to that argument because Nik just asked me if he could make a very quick comment before Jonathan Steele has to leave. We'll pass it back to you just after 3 minutes.

**NIK GOWING:**

Can I, with your understanding, just park several of those questions which we heard. I'm not going to avoid them. But I'll talk about them after Simon's spoken.

I think Jonathan fortunately does underline what I talked about -- the culture of concealment and the culture of impunity. But I do think it is important for me just to intervene about James Miller and the remarks that Jonathan made.

We all have made dreadful mistakes in our careers and some of them have been life-threatening. I think in his defence, and I only met him once, but I know Sira very well, it is important for you to understand that the point I was making there was not about whether it was a foolish thing to do because many distinguished journalists have as well -- Kurt Schork of Reuters included. He was a distinguished journalist in Sarajevo and became the

doyenne of reporters there. But when he was in Sierra Leone went up a road with Miguel Gil the APTN award winning cameraman. They made a bad judgement on a day. Both of them were killed by crossfire [in an ambush].

The same thing happened with Rachel Corrie one of the activists who was killed in Rafah, and Tom Hurndell, and also someone who is less known to everyone, Ian Hook who was working for the UN in Jenin and mysteriously died when there was an Israeli military operation.

The reason I am saying all this is I think it is only fair to James and his memory that the point I was making is that the Israeli's more than a year on are still dragging their feet about whether there should even really be an investigation; whether the investigating system within the IDF should even produce the weapons, someone should be arrested, or should push it to a court case.

I just had 10 days ago the latest press release about James Miller's case. I think the reason I am dragging it up again is that it is very important to understand what this issue of impunity and concealment is about. Its about the assumed right of those -- particularly the Americans, and I don't say this about the British at the moment -- particularly the Americans and the Israelis who believe they can get away with this because there is no process as Jonathan said, and I certainly said earlier.

When you see [US] General Abizeid and General Sanchez looking very uneasy [facing cross examination in a Congressional hearing over the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse issue], these military men are very uncomfortable about the political imperative that is being imposed on them at the moment. If there is one memory that is to be taken away from this it is that we in the broadcast business -- and there is going to be a difficult meeting within the next few weeks and I won't give you any details -- feel there is an immense amount of lobbying to be done on this, to reverse this trend otherwise terrorists and guerrilla groups will do exactly the same thing.

This is about our right and our ability to do what Jonathan has underlined and I said: which is the right to be there even in the most desperate and dangerous circumstances. But what we don't expect is that we will be targeted by the most sophisticated military nations in the world.

I am sure I speak here with the approval of my BBC managers because Brian Whitman, the assistant defence secretary, appeared at a big conference -- he came in via satellite from Washington -- back in November called News Exchange, which I was partly chairing. He said, "the US will control the battle space it has to". Secondly when there are civilians -- we as journalists are civilians -- "we [the US Military] have to be sure that in no way are they compromising the battle field".

That is a very, very troubling thing for them to be saying and working on the assumption that they will always be able to do it: because we will be there and getting in their way and recording things that they may prefer that we didn't record. At that point let me pause because there are other issues. But I just wanted to clarify the record particularly on James Miller.

**JAMES PUTZEL:**

Jonathan, just before you leave, do you want to come back on any of the questions?

**JONATHAN STEELE:**

Well first of all I'm sorry I do have to leave in about 2 minutes. I knew that if I went into specifics about the James Miller thing someone would object.

**NIK GOWING:**

I didn't object, I just clarified, Jonathan.

**JONATHAN STEELE:**

Well, clarified. My point is exactly the same as yours, I think that there has to be an inquiry and the Israelis have to hold an inquiry and I also think that there is a responsibility of journalists to take certain minimal precautions and I think from that case, from the evidence shown this morning, I know nothing about the James Miller case, it seemed to me to leave at night was dangerous and I'm sorry I won't hear the reply you give to the colleague here about the bad behaviour about many of us.

**NIK GOWING:**

Would you like to give any answer about that?

**JONATHAN STEELE:**

Well I would actually endorse the question and support the question. Let's face it, a lot of us are quite aggressive people, we wouldn't go into these battlefield situations if we weren't. There is a kind of press rage like road rage- 'you're getting in my way' this kind of thing people are very quick to get angry in these situations and are not always the coolest, most rational or disciplined people and they do complete these violations in the name of free speech. I have seen some of the things myself, probably done some of them myself. You know it is just the invasion of privacy, in Britain you are not supposed to interview the widow of somebody who has just been killed in a car crash. We don't show that on the BBC or in an interview in the *Guardian*. But you go abroad and that all goes out the window we constantly interview widows and people who have suffered the most appalling personal tragedies in front of us or just before we got there. So I think constantly we have to think of the dignity of the people we are writing about as well as their rights.

**JAMES PUTZEL:**

Thank you Jonathan, and Simon I would like to now come back to you. I am

sorry to have interrupted your response. And maybe in about no more than 5 minutes try to address these questions and then you'll have a chance to come back again.

**SIMON HASELOCK:**

I think the point I was trying to make is that there is a difference between the strategic differences and the practical similarities between these three areas. There are, in my view and in my experience in the work that I've done at the working level, significant similarities that I tried to describe and I stand by them. Similarly I used the TE Lawrence final epithet quote at the end of my presentation, and again you can over-analyse the specific words, I used his words as he said them and the point is that there are many people in Iraq who would consider it to be their war. Many of the Iraqis I speak to who are involved in the government side and the ordinary people in Baghdad who I spend considerable time talking to would consider there to be a war going on there and would consider it to be their war for all sorts of reasons whether it will be a war of resistance which I will accept there is a legitimate argument for or whether it be a war against those people they consider to be resisting. But it is a local war and we may have been involved in starting it but it is there and we therefore have a duty to do what we can to try to improve the situation. As far as the reference that 'it is their country and our time is short' it is precisely the attitude and approach we should be taking to make sure that they are the people who are making the decisions and that every bit of work that we do is consulted and they understand and that they agree and that they are the people that make the decisions.

I am asked about what I can say to show that we are trying to develop a system that is potentially antagonistic to the coalition. I am not looking to be antagonistic. I am looking to create a media which is the conscience and the antagonist of whatever authorities there are in Iraq. And that is the job of the fourth estate. The Order 14 which is the order that is used to close down newspapers two newspapers were closed down they were not closed down with any consultation with me and for reasons which are not necessarily obvious to me or to other people who have commented on the situation. The fact is Order 14 will be amended if not repealed before the end of this month, maybe a little bit longer than that, as a direct result from our interventions. We have also established a proper structure for a regulatory body the success of that being based on the principle that we spent a lot of time discussing more with local media experts and politicians than we did within the Coalition. We have now established an FCC/Ofcom equivalent and that has been staffed by a board of Iraqis, those names came from Iraqis and not just from the Governing Council but from a broad church of NGO's and professional bodies. We have also created the IMN which is this much laughed at if you like or considered a failed project. How do you turn that in to an institution that should be left behind for the Iraqis? We have developed a system where a BBC model has been introduced and a board of governors

has been appointed and a Director General has been appointed, and again Iraqi appointed and chosen by Iraqis and not just from the political establishment. That institution will now draw up a charter, it will establish its rules of procedure and it will become the nucleus of a model that will be developed into the equivalent of an Iraqi public broadcaster. But at the same time I would not say for one minute that these things are easy or we are not going to have problems. As we have already heard, RTK as an institution has at once been the sort of jewel in the crown as far as post-conflict public broadcasters are concerned and at the same time been the major antagonist in March's problems.

What I do think in response to what Mark was saying that there was a contradiction here- on the one hand believing in the legitimacy of the intervention and the soft-handed international community while on the other hand suggesting that we should continue to control certain things. How long do we do this for? At some stage we have to make a decision that the time is right to go and that the mistakes they make are their mistakes. We cannot sit and nanny these people forever. We have been in Kosovo for how many years now? Five years plus. We have to let go and let these people make their own mistakes.

**NIK GOWING:**

Regarding the Rwanda 10-years-on discussions -- particularly having written a big paper about how the media covered Rwanda in 96'97 and the Great Lakes Crisis, and the manipulation that went on with the Americans particularly with refugee numbers by trying to deflate all the concerns about what was happening in the Congo.

You raise a very important series of questions. And one of them remains troubling to me. In fact I raised this in our Editorial meeting only yesterday and it goes back to some of the things some of us have talked about in many of the post Rwanda evaluations 10 years on.

What would have happened if the current technology that I showed you today and the current transparency that has been used in Iraq had been available in Kigali from April the 6th ten years ago?

I raise that question because would it have allowed us to show in much greater scale up to 800,000 being killed in a month? It would have been incredibly risky for a cameraperson or anyone with a secret camera. But there area plenty of examples, none of which I have shown you today not because they're sensitive but because they're not on my machine.

For example, one is of an architect in Jenin during the Jenin crisis on a Channel 4 documentary who had been taking video of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners being captured. She was an architect taking great risk of

shooting [video] from her kitchen window while it [Jenin] was under Israeli [military] occupation. That tape emerged many, many days later. But at least it was evidence that something was going on, and the kind of scale of the Israeli occupation. I am asking the question because I don't know the answer.

In Darfur at the moment- why are we not there? Why can't we get there if there are 800,000 to 1 million people threatened with starvation and genocide? I am speaking against my own principles here. Why are we not able at the moment to show just how terrible it is given who is warning what, including MSF, and the Swedish government and the German government and so it goes on?

It is not a question of news priorities. It is a question of safety and the immense difficulties. The *Economist* had a big article 2 weeks ago. Ishbel Matheson [BBC correspondent] was there three weeks ago and had a very difficult time. She got one shot of three men on camels who were members of the Khartoum backed militias, and so it goes on.

Things are changing in our business in a significant way. And I just remind you of what happened in Goma just across the border from Rwanda three years ago when the volcano on which tens of thousands of people had camped during 1996 and 1997 when they were kicked out of Rwanda. That volcano when it exploded: we had virtually live pictures coming in from Goma within about 3 hours from the first molten mass beginning to emerge from the fissures. It was remarkable and I said to myself what if this had happened in '94, '95 with the kind of technology?

I am rhetorical here: I don't know what the answer is but it shows how things are changing. And how we would have covered Bosnia? I think much of our technology which we can now use -- you cannot dis-invent it thanks to people like Sony and Toshiba and so on. A laptop -- the kind of laptop I use this morning -- can be essentially a kind of broadcast station. If we had been forward deployed with the Croat forces up on the inter-ethnic boundaries; if we had been forward deployed with the Bosniacs as well, even though they had been very manipulative (and Mark you may have a view on this) I think we would have shown a lot more about what was going on. But I think we would have been at much greater risk of being duped, caught and maybe trapped.

One of my colleagues was in Kisangani in the DRC back in '96-'97 and she got to see many of the bodies and film it at kilometre 82, or whatever it was, to get evidence of what was happening. This was when we first had this kind of technology. She went back to the villa in Kisangani, beamed it up to us at BBC World in London. I don't think it got on to the national broadcast here, but within an hour there was a knock on the door from those who said, 'you do

that again and you're dead.' So there's a down side to this new transparency that we have.

Let me try and address the questions. Picking up what Jonathan said, I think that behaviour you described is indefensible and I am not going to sit up here and defend it. But I think that there's an interesting parallel -- and I won't mention any names -- between the kind of colleagues of ours who are prepared to risk being arrested or detained by the insurgents or the Ba'athists on their 14 hour drive from Amman to Baghdad and end up going through hell as you can see from the newspapers, fortunately they survived. The kind of people who are clever enough and savvy enough to find ways to smuggle themselves into Najaf and Karbala; and to provide us with that dateline and that eyewitness account. They are the people who are prepared to take the risks. It might be they do things like that, just as in the military -- as a former Royal Marine would tell you -- guys who are trained to kill aren't exactly the best people to go out and have a few drinks with in Aldershot or Plymouth on a Saturday night. You might end up being smashed around the head.

There is a certain type of psyche of the person who is going to reveal this, who is going to take those risks, and maybe show disrespect. I don't defend it, you're right to raise it. But on the other hand a lot of what I'm talking about and what I showed requires risks, the kind of risks that lead to some people being killed in ways I described earlier.

The question about Arab journalism. I would urge you to do the most precise content analysis that you can.

In broad terms I think you have got it completely wrong in your assumptions in the way you expressed it in a very long question about 'occupation' and avoiding it.

I work for an international channel, and I have to assure you and everyone here that we go through a daily and an hourly anguish about the language we are using. But it is not unique to the BBC. We are conscious as we are in competition with the Arab channels, all of which I have mentioned, who are doing an excellent job that we have to maintain our image of objectivity however you define that, of fairness and of accuracy. I don't use the word truth there because you can't get truth often in real-time and we are deeply conscious of it.

But let me tell you, so are Arab journalists. Three days ago I was in Beirut at a three day seminar which is off the record with a very large number of Arab journalists, [organised by]the World Service Trust, because we're in the business of exchanging ideas with Arab journalists in the greater Islamic world and in the Middle East about how we do our journalism. I heard very

senior journalists anguishing over the kind of language they are using and they are being asked to use by their editors. Particularly the word 'martyr' which obviously enters the lexicon of assumed language particularly from the more radical elements of the Arabic media. But they were very frank about how uneasy they feel. They were having a very refreshing conversation. We obviously at the BBC don't use that kind of language. But I think you are wrong to make that explicit and implicit accusation about the way we choose our language. Sometimes the wrong word slips out because we're all human beings. Particularly someone like me who is often speaking without a script and trying to reflect and source everything as something is unfolding in front of my eyes quite often live. But to think that there is some great conspiracy, I would urge you to realize that that is wrong. If the moment you use emotive language you are beginning to give- (*inaudible interruption from questioner...*) I'm just suggesting to you that you are making an assumption that is largely wrong.

From Jean, how we would deal with casualties. I hinted at that at the beginning of my presentation, and if I read you right Jean, it is about weapons of mass destruction or some major incident. It is something, it is a terrible, terrible scenario that we are all dreading will happen in this country and I can't give you a cut and dry answer.

We are anguishing over this. I dread going into the office some days wondering if today's the day. An enormous amount of work has gone on with the authorities, not so they'll shut us down, but to make sure that we will have our mobile phones operational, to make sure that we'll have uplinks. Because if you remember what happened during the Madrid bombings two months ago: the mobile phone system in Madrid collapsed through overuse. And the challenge we are going to have, even though we have got all this technology, is literally getting means of communication possible.

At a time when the Metropolitan Police don't know what is going on -- and I thought that to myself two days ago when the purple condoms were thrown at the Prime Minister. Imagine that that whole chamber had to be closed and all the MP's had to be hosed down. We could have been in that situation and I wonder how then we would have reacted. The guys appeared in their CBR suits, and we were moving down that road. But fortunately in the past two and a half years since 9-11 a lot of procedures have been put in place. There are vulnerabilities as were highlighted by [the] Panorama [programme] last week- which remember the Home Office and the Government did not cooperate with. Those are scenarios that are being played out and we are working through. And I don't know all the details. But I know very clearly there is a concern about what will happen. There are people like Simon Wessley at Kings College hospital who will tell us that actually people won't panic in the way that you would expect. We don't know how the human being, the human brain, the human form, is going to respond to a moment

when it could be sarin; it could be some dreadful chemical which is suddenly emerging up from the manholes in London. But it is a very important question. And I can't answer it in thirty seconds I am afraid.

There was a final question about how the media can do more to check themselves. Well, if you look at Hutton and you look at the *Daily Mirror* last week saying they were wrong on the front page on Saturday and you look at . . . . and Jonathan's not here . . . . the *Guardian* [who] have an ombudsman. I think that is what is likely to emerge from the Hutton enquiry and from the process the BBC have been going through. That is what my Director of News has been indicating. We will have more of an ombudsman and a timely response to complaints about checking themselves. But we are not perfect, we are flawed and we are fallible at times. We have to accept that we should say - on air if necessary - that we got it wrong and that is what is happening more and more.