

A Study of Guidelines for War Reporting

OKAMOTO Takashi

On July 22, 2003, U.S. forces in Iraq raided a residence in the northern city of Mosul connected to Saddam Hussein's family, in which the former president's two eldest sons, Uday and Qusay, were hiding, killing both. On July 24, the U.S. Department of Defense released pictures of the slain brothers, who had died in a hail of bullets. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld defended the release of the pictures by drawing attention to the fact that the brothers were extremely brutal leaders and by claiming that demonstrating their deaths in this way was an effective means of impressing upon the Iraqi public that Saddam Hussein's regime had come to an end. U.S. television stations broadcast the pictures almost without exception.

On July 25, moreover, the U.S. military displayed the brothers' bodies to Western and Arab media in Baghdad, allowing pictures to be taken. This footage was broadcast uncensored on certain news channels, such as CNN.

War Reporting in the U.S. Media

Whenever footage or pictures of U.S. captives or casualties in war had previously been broadcast on television or published in newspapers and magazines, the U.S. government and military authorities had criticized such actions, maintaining that they were in contravention of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War and demanding that domestic media refrain from carrying such footage. When footage of the bodies of American troops being dragged through the streets during the 1993 Somalia conflict was carried by television stations both in the United States and around the world, U.S. public opinion was inflamed to the extent that the footage was said to have proved the decisive factor in the United States' decision to withdraw from Somalia. Footage of captives and casualties can, indeed, have an enormous impact on politics and military strategy.

Footage broadcast by the Middle Eastern television station Al-Jazeera of the bodies of U.S. and British troops during last year's Iraq War, moreover, elicited strong condemnation from U.S. and British authorities. Certain U.S. television stations and journalists, however, expressed the opinion that since

casualties in the war included both Iraqi and American troops, it did not make sense to refrain from broadcasting footage only of American casualties. These various reactions revealed the complexity of, and lack of consensus regarding, the issue.

It seems there was also debate within the U.S. government with respect to the handling of pictures and footage of the slain brothers Uday and Qusay; however, as to how the matter was debated within the various U.S. media corporations, nothing in the way of detailed information has been forthcoming.

Clearly defined program and broadcasting standards are nonexistent in the world of U.S. broadcasting. Even supposing that there were standards for appropriate broadcasting, it is perhaps more realistic to concede that any attempts to introduce standards regulating the "freedom of the press" would ultimately run aground on the question of how effectively such standards could function in U.S. society.

Diversity in the Japanese Media

There was wide divergence in the responses of the Japanese media to the distribution of the pictures of Uday and Qusay's bodies from late on the 24th to early on the 25th.

On the morning of the 25th, during its program *Ohayo Nippon* [Good Morning Japan], which begins at 5 A.M., NHK announced on the five, six, and seven o'clock news that "the U.S. Department of Defense has released pictures of the two dead sons of former Iraqi President Hussein," limiting its report to facts related to the release of the pictures. It neither carried the pictures themselves nor gave any explanation why it did not broadcast the pictures.

Asahi National Broadcasting (TV Asahi)'s *News Station* on the 25th broadcast the released pictures of the bodies. No reference was made, however, as to why the decision had been taken to broadcast them, or of the reasons or criteria of judgment used in the decision.

For *News 23*, a program on Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), footage was shown of a television screen on which a different television station was broadcasting the pictures of the two bodies. TBS gave no explanation either of why it had not carried the pictures itself or of why it had used this "indirect footage."

Following the first report on the 23rd (before dawn Japanese time), in which it was announced that a shootout in Iraq had left four dead, two of whom were possibly the sons of former President Hussein, Japanese television stations repeatedly broadcast scenes of the fierce firefight around the residence in Mosul. The footage of the raid conducted with the objective of

killing the brothers came across to the viewer as if broadcast without any qualms or restraint, leaving little doubt in the minds of its audience that Uday and Qusay had been killed. The one-sided presentation to the public of this footage of a shootout that essentially disregarded the human rights of two individuals, Uday and Qusay, or that was arguably even carried out for the express purpose of obliterating their human rights, without any mention of the inherent brutality or horror of these actions, was extremely cold-blooded, falling far short of the objective broadcasting standards that should be pursued by the media. The subsequent release and broadcast of pictures of the two bodies perhaps presented the broadcasting media with their best chance to make up for these failings; however, whether through oversight or omission, the opportunity was not taken.

There was yet greater divergence in newspaper coverage. Morning editions of the Asahi, Yomiuri, Tokyo, and Nikkei newspapers (Tokyo area final edition) on the 25th simply reported the fact that the United States had released pictures of the brothers without carrying the pictures themselves.

The Mainichi and Sankei newspapers, on the other hand, carried pictures of the bodies in their morning editions on the 25th (Tokyo area final edition). The Mainichi printed close-up pictures showing both bodies from head to chest, but did not touch on why the Mainichi Newspaper Company had decided to carry the pictures, either from the perspective of the brothers' human rights or their portrait rights. The Sankei, however, while only carrying a picture of Qusay, used five columns to report on the matter, affording it considerably more attention than the other five newspapers. No explanation was given in the Sankei article of why the paper did not carry a picture of Uday; however, the article showed a marked difference to other papers in its treatment of the issue, reporting the views of those within the U.S. government who had urged caution vis-à-vis the release of the pictures by raising such concerns as their harmful influence on children and calling attention to the fact that the U.S. had roundly condemned the release by the Iraqi military of images of U.S. troops captured or killed.

Broadcasting Standards in Japanese Television

In Japanese television, NHK and the National Association of Commercial Broadcasters (NAB) have the "Domestic Program Standards" (hereafter, the Program Standards) and the "Broadcasting Standards" respectively to be applied to daily program production and broadcasting.

When NHK devised the Program Standards in 1959, the following five "basic principles" were designated as goals of broadcasting.

- 1) To contribute to the realization of the ideal of world peace and to the welfare of humankind.
- 2) To respect fundamental human rights and to pursue the universal establishment of the spirit of democracy.
- 3) To aim for the improvement of character in terms of culture, sentiment, and morals, and to cultivate a spirit of rationalism.
- 4) To contribute to the preservation of the nation's distinguished cultural heritage and to the cultivation and proliferation of new culture.
- 5) Maintaining our prestige and dignity as a public broadcaster, to meet the expectations and desires of the public.

While NHK's Program Standards have since been revised several times, these basic principles remain unchanged even today. Based on these principles, "General Broadcast Program Standards" and "Standards for Broadcast Programming by Category" further set down the organization's ethos and goals, with the former subdivided into fourteen categories such as "Human rights, dignity, and honor," "Race, ethnicity, and international relations," "Politics and economics," "Conflict and legal proceedings," "Taste and decency," and "Terms and expressions," and the latter subdivided into eight categories of program, such as educational, news, and entertainment programs. Standards for production, scheduling and broadcasting are delineated according to these various categories.

On the other hand, NAB's Broadcasting Standards states that "commercial broadcasting is committed to the welfare of the public, the advancement of culture, and the prosperity of industry and economy, and to contribute towards the realization of peaceful society," with emphasis on the following five goals:

- 1) Fast and accurate news reporting
- 2) Sound entertainment
- 3) Promotion of culture and education
- 4) Favorable influence upon children and young adults
- 5) Moderate and honest advertising

Based on these basic principles, the Broadcasting Standards are further explained under various headings such as human rights, society, sex, crime, news broadcasting, advertising, and the handling of prizes and presents.

However, neither NHK's Program Standards nor NAB's Broadcasting Standards include "standards for war reporting" that provide guidance on how matters related to war and conflict should be broadcast. Moreover, there exist no clear regulations or standards regarding the handling of the kind of close-up footage of captives or casualties witnessed in recent war reporting.

Irrespective of the differences between NHK and NAB, these days every imaginable kind of footage floods into news centers from around the world virtually twenty-four hours a day. While television stations continue to make selective decisions on what to broadcast based on the amount of time allotted for the news, when it comes to footage of prisoners of war and the bodies of combatants, in practice the decision on whether or not to broadcast is made on a case-by-case basis with reference to program or broadcasting standards.

In the case of NHK, decisions on how to handle footage of prisoners of war and the bodies of combatants have hitherto been made on the basis of two of the nine guidelines in the section on "Terms and expressions," which is, in turn, the eleventh item in the NHK Program Standards' "General Broadcast Program Standards." The two guidelines are: "Expressions that would cause feelings of fear, anxiety or discomfort should be avoided"; and "acts of brutality and physical pain should neither be described in detail nor blown out of proportion."

Commercial broadcasters, on the other hand, have handled the matter in accordance with the regulation in NAB's Broadcasting Standards that "detailed representation of gruesome scenes must be avoided, even if the reporting of such is factually accurate" and the accompanying explanation: "Excessively detailed portrayal of gruesome scenes runs the risk of causing discomfort to the viewing audience. As regards the acceptable limits for the use of such scenes, it is vital to carefully examine each case, with consideration of the potential impact of the nature of the incident and coverage thereof and of the human rights and feelings of the parties concerned and their families."

Following the outbreak of hostilities against Iraq by the U.S. and British militaries, NHK reconfirmed its policy that: (1) giving due weight to considerations of human rights, as far as possible footage of prisoners of war or the bodies of combatants would not be used; (2) however, in cases where such footage was adjudged particularly newsworthy a separate assessment would be made.

Naturally, when one considers the fact that war reporting should cover the reasons behind war that include not only political and economic factors and confrontation over military affairs but also a broad worldview and historical appreciation of conflict between nations and peoples spanning the centuries, it is clear that war reporting cannot simply be regulated by ordinary broadcasting and program standards. Consequently, some voices have begun calling for Japanese television to prepare guidelines for war reporting, with the War Guidelines used by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) receiving considerable attention as a possible model. (See appendices.)

BBC War Reporting Guidelines

The Argentine military's invasion of the British Falkland Islands in 1982 led to all-out war between the United Kingdom and Argentina. In coverage and broadcasting of the conflict, which was eventually won by the British military, the BBC adopted a policy of referring to the British military as "British troops," rather than "our troops," in reports and broadcasts from the frontline, consistently using the third person denomination. This policy was fiercely condemned and attacked by then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Nevertheless, the BBC held fast to the policy and, during the Gulf War of 1991 and the Iraq War of 2003, compiled and published guidelines for war reporting. The following attempts a comparative analysis of the two sets of guidelines, examining a number of issues raised therein.

Aims and Rationales of the Guidelines

The war guidelines established during the Gulf War begin by setting out the BBC's role and mandate as follows:

When the country is at war we do not want to add to the dangers facing the armed forces. Our audiences in Britain are understandably most sensitive to the war suffering inflicted on the troops and their families. We also have to be very sensitive to those concerns.

It is equally important that the need for trustworthy news is at its greatest during times of crisis. People should have confidence that they are being told the truth, that whatever information is withheld from them is justified and is withheld for no longer than necessary.

The guidelines for the Iraq War, however, begin by emphasizing the BBC's responsibilities as an international broadcaster, and the concomitant weight of expectation generated by this standing:

In the current conflict, as an international broadcaster the BBC has a special responsibility to its audiences, both in the United Kingdom and across the world, who turn to us in large numbers for accurate news and information. Our audiences should have confidence that they are being told the truth. They also look to the BBC to help them make sense of those events by providing impartial analysis and by offering on our programmes a range of views and opinions, including the voices of those who oppose the war in Britain and elsewhere.

The guidelines further clarify the BBC's position with:

Matters involving risk to, and loss of, life need handling with the

utmost regard to the mood and feeling of our audiences. A number will have relatives or friends directly involved in the conflict. We will need to handle painful stories sensitively and with care.

The guidelines also advise that programming and scheduling should be undertaken with sufficient consideration of the fact that, in light of ongoing hostilities, certain kinds of programs, such as drama and comedy, may be inappropriate.

What is clear here is that while the guidelines for the Gulf War define the BBC's role in terms of causing no danger to British troops, the guidelines for the Iraq War make no mention of such consideration of the armed forces, emphasizing instead the BBC's duties and responsibilities as a news organization.

Language of Reporting

The guidelines for both the Gulf and Iraq Wars underline the importance of objective and unemotional language, with both documents calling attention to the fact that: "Tone matters a great deal. Sombre news should be reported sombrely."

Further, on the question of how to refer to British forces, the Gulf War guidelines state: "Too much can be made of whether we refer to 'British troops' or to 'our troops.' It will usually be appropriate to say 'British troops' for the sake of clarity and unadorned meaning." The Iraq War guidelines also state that "it will usually be appropriate to say 'British troops,'" but with the reason for this given as the fact that "so many BBC reports are broadcast globally."

This emphasis on the use of "British troops" in BBC reporting would appear to have less to do with the maintenance of objectivity and neutrality in war reporting than with clarity of meaning and the worldwide range of the BBC's broadcasting.

Withholding Information and the Term "Enemy"

Both sets of guidelines state that: "We must be prepared to withhold information for a while at the request of British military authorities in the field or of the MoD [Ministry of Defense] so long as they give us satisfactory reasons for doing so." Both documents further advise that audiences should be informed of the fact that information has been withheld, and that the information should be broadcast as soon as the reasons for withholding it are no longer germane.

Regarding the reasons for withholding information, the Iraq War guidelines state that: "These reasons must be mainly to do with danger to ongoing or

The BBC Reporting Guidelines for the Gulf and Iraq Wars

	Reporting Guidelines for the Gulf War (1991)	Reporting Guidelines for the Iraq War (2003)
Aims and rationale of the guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To not add to the dangers facing British troops • Trustworthy news vital during times of crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessary to provide accurate news to not only a British, but also a worldwide, audience • Regard for the feelings of the audience; care in program scheduling
Language of reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective and unemotional language • Tone important; sombre news to be reported sombrely • Use of "British Troops" more appropriate than "our troops" • For the sake of clarity and unadorned meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of "British Troops" more appropriate than "our troops" • For the sake of clarity, and also because BBC reports are broadcast globally
Withholding information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information may be withheld if satisfactory reasons exist • These reasons must be related to danger to ongoing or intended operations • Reasons for this explained by the caveat that: "facts can alert enemy forces." 	
Scenes of death and injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circumspection in the handling of pictures and accounts; consideration to the dignity of individuals • Pictures should not normally be close up • Unusually distressing reports to be preceded by warnings • Reporting of especially harrowing reality: • Must be justified by special reasons • An awful truth may have to be conveyed vividly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting of especially harrowing reality: • Must be justified by the context • We should not sanitise the awful realities of war
Coverage of prisoners of war	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No interviews to be attempted with anyone connected to missing service personnel who may be prisoners of war • Because this material may be used by interrogators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aircrew who might be captured should not be identified, nor should any personal information be given that might identify them

intended operations; it may be the details of a particular troop movement, the nature of its armaments or its location." The Gulf War guidelines employ this same reasoning, with the additional caveat that "facts can alert enemy forces." Of note here is the explicit use of the term "enemy" in the context of reasons for withholding information.

The term "enemy" is also used in the Gulf War guidelines in a section entitled "Contributions from Experts": "Programmes must take care over contributions especially from experts, including retired military people: when they predict future courses of action or set out options in detail they might inadvertently help the enemy." While the Iraq War guidelines also include a paragraph under the heading "Contributions from Experts," the term "enemy" is not used.

The above differences in the two sets of guidelines may reflect the respective international situations prior to the commencement of both wars, such as the adoption or not of a United Nations resolution. Nevertheless, the disharmony evident in the use of the term "enemy" in the same document that advises against reference to "our troops" reveals a certain lack of logical consistency.

Footage of Casualties and Prisoners of War

Both guidelines list the following instructions:

- Care should be taken with pictures and accounts of injured, dying and dead combatants, with consideration given to the dignity of the individuals concerned.
- Pictures should not normally be close up.
- The fact that even pictures taken at a distance may identify individuals before next-of-kin have been informed should be kept in mind.
- Warnings should be given beforehand if a report might cause unusual distress.

On the handling of particularly unpleasant realities, the Gulf and Iraq War guidelines respectively prescribe that: "Harrowing actuality has to be justified by special reasons: an awful truth may have to be conveyed vividly"; and "We should not sanitise the awful realities of war but especially harrowing actuality and pictures have to be justified by context."

No reasons are given by either set of guidelines for these approaches to "especially harrowing reality"; however, if one were to take the liberty of filling the gap, the reasons might conceivably be framed as follows: "Reporting on war without conveying any distressing images not only runs the risk of inaccurate representation, but also of reducing war to something less than the

horrendous reality it is. For these reasons, there may be occasions when it is appropriate to broadcast harrowing reality and pictures." The BBC's approach to this issue reveals the organization's autonomy as a news organization.

On the other hand, with respect to prisoners of war, the Gulf War guidelines prescribe, in the second set of supplementary guidelines issued after the commencement of hostilities, that: "We must not try for interviews with anyone connected with missing service personnel who may be prisoners of war. We are advised that the material might be highly prejudicial to the safety of PoWs because it may be used by Iraqi interrogators." The Iraq War guidelines reiterate this directive, adding more detailed guidelines on interviews with air crews in particular to the effect that: "aircrew or other service personnel who might be captured should not be identified with a particular operation. Nor should we publish any information, from whatever source, which might identify these personnel or give details of their personal backgrounds."

Further to the above, both guidelines also contain sections prescribing standards for interviews with relatives of casualties and reporting on opposition to war.

In addition, the Iraq War guidelines contain a section on the handling of news related to the high profile topic of weapons of mass destruction, calling for a cautious approach befitting a news organization:

- Chemical, biological and nuclear weapons evoke special horror. We must be careful when referring to them.
- If we say they have been used we should be absolutely certain of the fact.
- If their use is only rumored our reports must not be alarmist or excited.
- The possibility of their use is to be discussed calmly.

Reference Value of the BBC Guidelines

In 1925, prior to the commencement of Japan's first radio broadcasts, recognizing the potential impact of the broadcasts, government authorities notified communication ministry division chiefs in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya of seven issue areas that broadcasts should avoid, including: matters that would disturb the maintenance of public order or offend public decency; and matters pertaining to diplomatic or military secrets. These were the very first regulations to be applied to broadcasting in Japan, which, over the course of the following years leading to the Pacific War became subject to increasingly stringent and comprehensive control by the military and other authorities.

After the war was over, in December 1949, NHK, having learned from these bitter experiences, one year before the establishment of the Broadcast Law and following the lifting of censorship of broadcast programs by the

allied occupation's General Headquarters, compiled independent regulations for the first time: The NHK Broadcasting Rules. The NHK's current Program Standards are based on these rules.

The Broadcasting Rules established ten basic principles applying to all radio and television broadcasts. The first principle stipulated that: "Broadcasts must contribute to both the realization of the ideal of world peace and the welfare of humankind." While it is likely that this principle was written to reflect the spirit of Japan's new 1946 constitution, it is worth noting that the first basic principle of the current Program Standards remains essentially identical in content.

In the case of the BBC, however, there is no such reference to the pursuit of world peace through broadcasting, as a guiding principle or objective, in either the Royal Charter granted by the national sovereign or in the Agreement based on the charter that is negotiated with the government. Further, in the current Agreement, which came into effect in May 1996, six program standards have been stipulated for the first time, including: that all programs (1) provide a properly balanced service consisting of a wide range of subject matter; (2) serve the tastes and needs of different audiences and, in particular, in order to show concern for the young, are placed at appropriate times; and (3) do not involve improper exploitation of any susceptibilities of those watching or listening to its religious programs or any abusive treatment of the religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination (Minoha Nobuhiro, "BBC Tokkyojo wa do kawatta ka" [How the BBC Royal Charter Has Changed], *NHK Hoso Bunka Kenkyujo nempo*, annual bulletin of the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute).

As discussed above, there are evident differences between the war reporting of NHK, which is conducted with reference to the basic broadcasting principles and program standards, and of the BBC, which is based on war broadcasting guidelines that are established separately from and take precedence over the program guidelines. This may be explained in part by the respective histories of the two countries since World War II and the consequent and significant differences in worldview and attitudes to state, politics, and war. While in Japan's case, given constitutional constraints, no Self Defense Force unit with a direct capacity to use military force has to date been dispatched to a country or region at war (or in conflict) for the specific purpose of engaging in battle (military action), the United Kingdom has sent troops to fight in not only the Falklands, Gulf, and Iraq Wars, but also the Suez Crisis of 1956, and, moreover, has dispatched troops to a number of regional conflicts as a member of NATO. To put this another way, while as far

as the Japanese SDF and media are concerned, military action and the coverage thereof remain extraordinary occurrences, to the British military and media they have become almost semi-routine.

A further explanation is that while in Japan the idea that no war is justified has gained considerable support as a result of the past fifty years of so-called postwar education based on the constitution, in the United Kingdom as well as the majority of nation states the ideas of “just war” and “war to defend human rights” are approved as legitimate concepts. This reality is, by way of example, substantiated by the retaliatory war triggered by the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In view of Japan’s establishment of the military-emergency legislation in June 2003, therefore, and given that the Japanese media will perhaps henceforth face an increasing need to report on war, some opinion leaders have begun to ask whether it might be necessary to establish guidelines on war reporting similar to the BBC guidelines.

However, even if the BBC guidelines were to be used as reference, a disparity in levels of maturity between war reporting in the United Kingdom, where war coverage has become semi-routine, and that in Japan, where war coverage has thankfully stayed an extraordinary event, would naturally remain in evidence. We also ought to bear in mind the fact that the BBC guidelines are compiled, and then published, giving due weight to the organization’s duty to explain the BBC’s policies on war reporting to its audience (accountability). There is, of course, no question as to the importance of compiling safety guidelines to ensure the security of war reporting from battle areas. Efforts should not stop there, however, and we would do well to prepare and compile guidelines on war reporting detailing how matters of war should be best conveyed, all the while bearing in mind the constant basic principle of the Program Standards: our contribution to the realization of the ideal of world peace.

(Translated by Ian Martin)

*Appendix I: BBC Guidelines for the 1991 Gulf War***War Considerations****Likely issues in a Gulf war**

When the country is at war we do not want to add to the dangers facing the armed forces. Our audiences in Britain are understandably most sensitive to the war suffering inflicted on the troops and their families. We also have to be very sensitive to those concerns.

It is equally important that the need for trustworthy news is at its greatest during times of crisis. People should have confidence that they are being told the truth, that whatever information is withheld from them is justified and is withheld for no longer than necessary.

WITHHOLDING INFORMATION

We must be prepared to withhold information for a while at the request of the military authorities in the field and of the MoD so long as they give satisfactory reasons for our doing so.

- These reasons are mainly to do with danger to ongoing or intended operations: facts can alert enemy forces. It may be the size of a particular troop movement, the nature of the armaments it has or its location. Usually detail is to be withheld rather than all news of a particular event.
- Personal details of dead and injured are justifiably withheld until next of kin have been told.
- We should be sensitive to matters of taste but these are for us to decide, not for the MoD or the operational forces.
- We should seek to give significant information withheld as soon as the reason for holding it back has gone. Some facts may have to be withheld for only a few hours; some for a few days; some for much longer.

The Ministry of Defence may, as during the Falklands war, give confidential briefings to editors to help steer through the problems.

Reporters and correspondents in the field will be accompanied by 'minders' who advise against certain pieces of information. This advice is to be observed unless there are very strong reasons for not doing so.

Reports from the field may have to be submitted to other vetters in the battle area. Again changes will have to be accepted in all but the rarest cases.

Disputes can only be settled by discussion either in the battle area or between editors and the Ministry of Defence.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WITHHOLDING OF INFORMATION

Programmes should make it known in general terms that some information will be held back for military reasons and that reports out of Iraq are rigorously censored.

- We may wish to say of some reports that significant facts have been left out.
- When significant information withheld for a time is released for broadcast we can say that the BBC and the rest of the British media had held it back for military reasons.

SOURCING REPORTS

Programmes should normally make it clear where their information has come from.

- Reporters and correspondents in the battle areas will often be reporting what they have themselves seen. That should be evident.
- We will have a great deal of information from briefings. That too should be evident.
- Information from Iraq or any other country should usually be labelled as such.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM EXPERTS

Programmes must take care over contributions especially from experts, including retired military people: when they predict future courses of military action or set out options in detail they might inadvertently help the enemy. Prior discussion over such contributions is needed at senior level. Peter Bell for television news and current affairs, Jenny Abramsky for radio news and current affairs, and Roger Bufton for regional news and current affairs.

LANGUAGE OF REPORTING

The way we report is as important as the reliability of what we report. We have to be both objective and compassionate. Our main job is to provide information without emotional gloss but when we are reporting human ordeal it is right to show we care.

- Tone matters a great deal. Sombre news should be reported sombrely.
- Too much can be made of whether we refer to 'British troops' or 'our troops'. It will usually be appropriate to say 'British troops' for the sake of clarity and unadorned meaning.
- But, as during the Falklands war, 'our' has its place too, especially in interviews

and in reports from close-quarters with the troops which often have an illuminating personal quality.

- It will often be appropriate to refer to 'the Allies' or to 'Allied forces'.

CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS

Chemical and biological weapons evoke special horror. We must be careful when referring to them.

- If we say they have been used we should be absolutely certain of the fact.
- If their use is rumoured only our reports must not be alarmist or excited.
- The possibility of their use is to be discussed calmly.

SCENES OF DEATH AND INJURY

We have to be circumspect about pictures of and accounts of soldiers injured, dying and dead. Consideration should be given to the dignity of the individuals concerned, and to their families and friends.

- We should not be so explicit as to cause needless distress.
- Pictures should not normally be close up.
- Remember too that pictures may identify, even at a distance, before next-of-kin know.
- Harrowing actuality has to be justified by special reasons: an awful truth may have to be conveyed vividly.
- Warning should be given if a particular report will cause unusual distress.

Any interviews with military people fresh from the battlefields have to be undertaken with the utmost consideration. Rigorous questioning will often be inappropriate and we must try to make sure not to intrude on people who are disorientated or in a state of shock.

INTERVIEWS WITH RELATIVES

Interviews with relatives of military people killed or injured can be a source of difficulty.

- Bereavement and grief are part of the inevitable effects of war and we should not hide the fact.
- Tearful interviews and other emotional scenes may be shown considerately.
- The proper perspective is most difficult and calls for good judgement. Scenes of distress should not falsely overcome the coverage. They should not dominate unless there are reasons for widespread overwhelming grief.

- Particular communities may be more severely affected than the country at large and it is proper for this to be reflected especially in regional and local coverage.
- Our normal guidelines on scenes of distress apply. Relatives must not be badgered for interviews. If they refuse we should not persist. We should not be intrusive even when grief is publicly displayed. We must not dwell excessively on particular grief stricken scenes. We must try not to be part of a media crush involving bereaved or distressed people. Whenever possible camera crews should keep their distance and editors should try to make sure that if unacceptable pictures have been shot they should not be shown.

OPPOSITION TO WAR

In spite of sensitivities we must reflect any significant opposition in the UK (and elsewhere) to the military conflict.

- Those who speak and perhaps demonstrate against war are part of the national scene to be reported.
- We should gauge the level of opposition and report it accordingly.
- Our treatment has to take account of the emotions raised: it is not a matter of suppressing legitimate opinion but of reporting it reasonably and allowing it to express itself appropriately.
- When we are withholding information anti-war groups may for good reasons of their own try to expose this. They may even give the very information being held back, thus risking the damage we are trying to avoid. Careful assessment is called for before we accept that the information has been thrust into the public domain.

John Wilson, Jan. 91

War considerations - 2

The following adds to the original guidelines issued just before the start of the Gulf War.

CONCERN FOR RELATIVES: DELAYING INFORMATION

Out of concern for the families of the forces in the Gulf we accept the MoD policy of not announcing losses of aircraft until next-of-kin have been told.

- If we have a report of a loss which has not been announced we must check with the MoD before carrying the report to find out whether next-of-kin have been told.

- If they have we should say so in our report.
- If they have not we need to discuss. Programmes must refer to senior level: Peter Bell (or substitute) for daily television nca programmes; Samir Shah (or substitute) for weekly tv nca programmes; Jenny Abramsky (or substitute) for radio nca programmes; and Mark Byford for regional and local nca programmes.
- The decision will normally be to withhold the report unless the information has already been published prominently in Britain or unless there is a further outstanding reason of a public interest kind.

We may be asked to withhold for a while a report of an aircraft loss if making the information public might jeopardise a rescue attempt. This could happen even though next of kin had been told the crew were missing. We should observe such a request.

CASUALTIES: TERMINOLOGY

When reporting casualties be as precise as possible.

- If we know people have been killed as well as some injured refer to "dead and injured".
- Say "casualties" when we are uncertain as to whether there are deaths.
- We should be thoroughly precise as soon as we can, as in "Three people were killed and twenty injured".

John Wilson, 23 Jan. 91

War considerations - 3

Here's additional guidance on interviews with relatives of Gulf casualties

APPROACHES TO NEXT-OF-KIN

Any programme wanting information from or interviews with the next-of-kin of service people killed or injured should observe the following which extends the guidance on sensitivity already laid down:

- The MoD, either nationally or locally, must be the prime point of contact.

- If programmes receive direct approaches they can take them up. The same applies to approaches made to them through third parties other than the MoD such as, say, the local vicar, a Gulf support group or a close friend.
- Direct approaches by programmes to next-of-kin or other close relatives are to be avoided. Exceptions must be approved at senior level.

The BBC has agreed with other national broadcasting organisations that all approaches for interviews with next-of-kin will be made jointly under a pool arrangement and that all the material from such approaches will be shared. Regional television and local radio aim also to pool approaches and material.

The BBC is willing to share interviews with other family members.

We must not try for interviews with anyone connected with missing service personnel who may be prisoners of war.

- We are advised that the material might be highly prejudicial to the safety of PoWs because it may be used by Iraqi interrogators.

John Wilson 25 Feb. 91

Appendix II: BBC Guidelines for the Iraq War

War Guidelines Editorial Policy Guidelines

INTRODUCTION

In the current conflict, as an international broadcaster the BBC has a special responsibility to its audiences, both in the United Kingdom and across the world, who turn to us in large numbers for accurate news and information. Our audiences should have confidence that they are being told the truth. They also look to the BBC to help them make sense of those events by providing impartial analysis and by offering on our programmes a range of views and opinions, including the voices of those who oppose the war in Britain and elsewhere.

Matters involving risk to, and loss of, life need handling with the utmost regard to the mood and feeling of our audiences. A number will have relatives or friends directly involved in the conflict. We will need to handle painful stories sensitively and with care.

Channel and network controllers and schedulers will also want to keep under review the nature of programming, ranging from films, drama, comedy and music, which might be thought inappropriate in the light of hostilities.

LANGUAGE OF REPORTING

The way we report is as important as the reliability of what we report. We have to be objective. Our main job is to provide information without emotional gloss but when we are reporting human ordeal or distress, it is right to be sensitive to feelings:

- Tone matters a great deal. Sombre news should be reported sombrely.
- For the sake of clarity, it will usually be appropriate to say “British troops”, especially as so many BBC reports are broadcast globally.

SOURCING REPORTS

Reports should normally make it absolutely clear where the information has come from, and be attributed accordingly:

- Reporters and correspondents in the battle areas will often be reporting what they have not themselves seen. That should be made evident.
- We will have a great deal of information from both military and various governments’ briefings. That too should be made evident and tested as to its reliability.
- Programmes may well wish to use video material provided by British or other governments showing the success of a military mission—for instance the damage caused by so-called ‘Smart’ weapons. All such material should be clearly labeled. It may also be wise to provide commentary to ensure audiences understand that such footage has been selected for a purpose. It will not normally be possible to gauge the overall effectiveness of a military campaign from such material alone.
- Where there is any uncertainty about the source of a particular piece of information or pictures it should be clearly labeled.
- We should be aware that some TV material may have been staged for the camera and on other occasions training exercises may be presented to us as showing genuine conflict. If we are unsure about the authenticity of the material, we must script the pictures accordingly.
- When looking for confirmation or for a second source for unconfirmed reports, please be aware of the danger that information can appear to be confirmed by a second source when in fact that second source is merely reporting what the first has said.
- We should also make clear if our reporting has had to take place with a “minder” present or our ability to travel has been circumscribed by the authorities.
- Beware of speculation, and overstated claims from all sides. Context is essential.

WITHHOLDING INFORMATION

Whenever possible, we should explain the rules under which we are operating:

- We will be prepared to withhold information for a while at the request of British military authorities in the field or of the MoD so long as they give us satisfactory reasons for our doing so. (These reasons must be mainly to do with danger to ongoing or intended operations; it may be the details of a particular troop movement, the nature of its armaments or its location. Usually it will only be the detail that is to be withheld). It should be withheld for no longer than absolutely necessary. And reconsidered if the information has been published widely elsewhere.
- We should be sensitive to matters of taste but these are for us to decide, not for the MoD or the operational forces.
- Great care will be taken over publishing details of the movements of the Prime Minister or other senior figures in public life.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WITHHOLDING OF INFORMATION

- Whenever practicable, we should be honest and open with our audiences when information has been withheld and should give the reason for it.
- Where we do withhold significant information for operational reasons we should seek to give that information as soon as the reason for holding it back has gone. Some facts may have to be withheld for only a few hours; some for longer.
- If reports have been censored or monitored or if we have withheld information, we should say so. In doing so we should attempt to indicate to the audience why we have done so.
- Normal BBC newsgathering practice is that we will attempt to report from every relevant location. However, if the restrictions on reporting from some places become so great as to prevent us from presenting a meaningful picture then the BBC may wish to withdraw from such places until such time as circumstances change.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM EXPERTS

Programmes must take care over contributions especially from experts, including retired military people. We must avoid inviting such contributors to speculate about the details or options of future military action in such a way that might inadvertently compromise those options. We must take extra care to ensure the accuracy and reliability of any discussion on weapons of mass destruction. We must also ensure impartiality by broadcasting a range of views over time.

REPORTING CASUALTIES

The BBC has adopted a strong general rule that, as far as is reasonably possible, next of kin should not learn of a person's death or injury from a BBC programme, bulletin or website. This should apply equally in times of war and will usually mean withholding personal details of the dead and injured until we can be sure that the next of kin have been informed.

- Any exception to withholding such information should be referred to the Head of Newsgathering, or in the case of National and Regional Broadcasting to Nigel Kay, or for World Service Language Services, Phil Harding, Director, English Networks and News, World Service. (Each Division will make appropriate arrangements to cover absence.)
- Such a decision should normally only be taken when the information has already been published widely in Britain or there are overriding reasons of public interest to publish. In order not to jeopardise a rescue mission, we may be asked to withhold for a while information about an aircraft loss, even when next of kin have been told. We should normally observe such a request. Any circumstances where this may not apply should also be referred to Head of Newsgathering or to Nigel Kay for National and Regional Broadcasting, or to Phil Harding for World Service.

CASUALTIES: TERMINOLOGY

When reporting casualties we should be as precise as possible:

- If we know people have been killed as well as some injured refer to "dead and injured".
- Say "casualties" when we are uncertain as to whether or not there are deaths.
- We should be thoroughly precise as soon as we can, as in "Three people were killed and twenty injured".

SCENES OF DEATH AND INJURY

We should be circumspect about pictures of and accounts of injured, dying and dead combatants. Consideration must be given to the dignity of the individuals regardless of national origin:

- Pictures should not normally be close up and should not linger too long.
- Remember too that pictures may identify individuals, even at a distance, before next-of-kin know.
- We should not sanitise the awful realities of war but especially harrowing actuality and pictures have to be justified by the context.

- Warnings should be given beforehand if a report will cause unusual distress. Particular care is required for reports during daytime or the early evening.

Any interviews with military people fresh from the battlefields have to be undertaken with care. Rigorous questioning will often be inappropriate and we must try to make sure not to intrude on people who are disorientated or in a state of shock.

INTERVIEWS WITH RELATIVES

Interviews with relatives of those killed or injured need especially sensitive handling.

- While the MoD, either nationally or locally, will normally be the prime point of contact in relation to British casualties, if programmes receive direct approaches they can take them up. The same applies to approaches made to them through third parties other than the MoD such as, say, the local vicar, a local support group or a close friend.
- Direct approaches by programmes to next-of-kin or other close relatives are to be avoided. Head of Newsgathering, or Nigel Kay must approve exceptions.
- Audiences are sometimes angered by such interviews where they do not know the circumstances under which they were obtained. Sometimes a few words of explanation in the introduction or the report may help prevent such misunderstandings.
- Bereavement and grief are part of the inevitable effects of war and we should not hide the fact. But tearful and emotional interviews should be shown with due consideration for the interviewee.
- We should not be intrusive even when grief is publicly displayed. We must not dwell excessively on particular grief-stricken scenes. We must try not to be part of a media crush involving bereaved or distressed people. Whenever possible camera crews should keep their distance and editors should take great care in the editing of such pictures. Live transmission requires particular restraint. (See below).

PRISONERS OF WAR

Normally we will not broadcast interviews with anyone connected with missing service personnel who may be prisoners of war. Such material might be highly prejudicial to the safety of PoWs because interrogators may use it. Any exceptions must be discussed with the Head of Newsgathering and the Controller, Editorial Policy.

INTERVIEWING AIR CREWS

Current advice is that aircrew or other service personnel who might be captured should not be identified with a particular operation. Nor should we publish any information, from whatever source, which might identify these personnel or give details of their personal backgrounds (e.g., details of their families, home-base or home-town addresses or other information, including photographs which could assist an interrogator in the event of capture).

Any proposal that might appear to go beyond the terms of this advice should be referred in the first instance to Head of Newsgathering.

OPPOSITION TO WAR

Enabling the national and international debate remains a vital task: the concept of impartiality still applies. All views should be reflected in due proportion to mirror the depth and spread of opinion. We must reflect the significant opposition in the UK (and elsewhere) to the military conflict and allow the arguments to be heard and tested. Those who speak and perhaps demonstrate against war are to be reported as part of the national and international reality.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Chemical, biological and nuclear weapons evoke special horror. We must be careful when referring to them:

- If we say they have been used we should be absolutely certain of the fact.
- If their use is rumoured only our reports must not be alarmist or excited.
- The possibility of their use is to be discussed calmly.

24 HOUR NEWS SERVICES

Continuous news services, especially on television, raise additional considerations during a widespread conflict.

At times, live or recently recorded pictures and reports may be available which show scenes of death or injury. It is essential that editors allow sufficient time for considered editorial judgement before transmitting such pictures or reports. Our audiences will expect fast and up to the minute reports on our continuous services but above all they will expect us to meet our obligations to decency, and informing next-of-kin.

With scenes of death and injury, production teams will need to consider carefully the cumulative effect of the repeated use of such images, especially if they are included in headline sequences and in regular news updates.

In fast-moving situations, and in seeking confirmation that a story is true, editors

will need to be especially careful to ensure that they are not relying on the same source re-cycled (see earlier section on Sourcing Reports).

BBCi

These war guidelines also apply to the BBCi News and other online services, where warnings should also be given about images which users might find upsetting. Care must be taken over the text used to describe horrific events.

Message Boards and End User Generated Content:

Message boards may need to be pre-moderated given the risk that a message board could be hijacked for extremist views or misleading or untrue reports.

Hosts of message boards need to be alert to the increased editorial care needed at a time of hostilities.

Escalation Procedures:

BBCi already has escalation procedures in place to ensure that inappropriate material is removed without delay. During a period of conflict, it will be especially important that these escalation procedures are adhered to in full, to ensure the highest editorial standards.

Stephen Whittle, Controller, Editorial Policy