

The media and Iraq: a blood bath for and gross dehumanization of Iraqis

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Abstract

The war in Iraq has been accompanied by the highest ever number of casualties among members of the Iraqi and foreign press. While the end of the Saddam Hussein regime has reopened the way for vibrant media activity, the absence of security for members of the media has had a high human cost. The US-led war on Iraq, which was aimed at liberating its people from authoritarian rule, has not seen any serious attempt by the Western or even Arab media to focus on the human side of Iraq. Iraqi civilian death tolls are treated as nothing more than statistics.

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Wars and conflicts have been fought in the minds and hearts of people as much as on the battlefield. The Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) makes the connection between the two. In its preamble, the worldwide body states, “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.¹

While the need to win this mind battle has been an integral part of the war machine in the past, it is even more crucial in today’s digital revolution. In Iraq and in other parts of the world the battle for the mind, often fought on the pages of newspapers and on television screens, has been decisively won by warmongers and lost to those men and women initially trying to avoid it and seeking its end ever since.

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A closer look at armed conflicts and everything that surrounds them reveals that while a lot has been said (and to a lesser degree done) to regulate what happens in the war zone, little effort has been made to deal with the issue of war reporting, the protection of journalists from mental or physical harm, or the hate, racism and dehumanization that reporting about conflicts produces, even in some of the world's most professional journalists and media outlets.

The role of the media in armed conflicts

Before looking at the fate of journalists in the Iraqi conflict, it is useful to determine in more general terms what role the media play in armed conflicts. Perhaps the most impressive contribution that journalists have made in the area of public accountability can be seen in the publication *Crimes of War. What the Public Should Know*,² which is a guide to help journalists discern war crimes and distinguish them from other outcomes of war. In the foreword to the book, Richard Goldstone points out that war reporting can be a success story: “Reporters and other observers at the frontline of conflict often voice frustration that their reports and efforts hardly dent the public consciousness and do little to change an intolerable situation; but the fact is that accurate, timely, and thoughtful coverage of war crimes can have an impact far beyond any immediate calculation.”³ Goldstone sees the establishment by the United Nations of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia as the most dramatic recent example of the impact of that kind of reporting. “Visual and written reports of the plight of the victims of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia jolted the Security Council into taking the unprecedented step of creating a court as its own sub-organ. Never before had it even been contemplated or suggested that it should use its peacekeeping powers to that end. That ethnic cleansing was happening in Europe, and that the Cold War had come to an end was crucial to the endeavor. There can be no doubt, however, that it was media exposure that triggered the decision.”⁴

The media in Iraq before the invasion

In Iraq, the press even preceded the existence of the state. The first edition of the *Al Zora'a* daily was issued on 15 June 1869. Consecutive constitutions and press laws were relatively liberal, allowing for a vibrant Iraqi press and publications atmosphere. But after the Baath Party gained power in 1963, the situation started

1 Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, adopted on 16 November 1945.

2 Roy Gutman and David Rieff (eds.), *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know*, WW Norton, 1999. Available at <http://www.crimesofwar.org/thebook/book.html> (last visited on 30 November 2007).

3 Ibid., foreword by Richard Goldstone.

4 Ibid.

to deteriorate. Whereas Article 29 of the 1964 Constitution⁵ grants everyone the right to express his opinion, five years later Saddam Hussein seized power in his own Baath Party, imposed limits on that guaranteed freedom of expression and made violations of those limits punishable. Article 225 of the 1969 Criminal Code No.11 placed two major restrictions on the press: first, the press had to reflect the ideology of the ruling Baath Party as expressed in the annual Baath conference; second, defaming the president or the Baath Party was punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment.⁶ In 1986 the sentence was increased to life imprisonment, or capital punishment if the attack was malicious and aimed at changing public opinion against the ruling authority. A press publication issued on 26 December 1968 nullified all previous media licences, thus forcing all to reapply.⁷ It banned writing about twelve different subjects (clause 16) and required prior approval for writing in seven different areas (clause 17), and banned the foreign press from writing in eight areas (clause 19). In 1981 a law was passed assigning responsibility for the working of the press to the Ministry of Culture and Press, with the specific function of using the media to disseminate the ideology of the ruling party. Following the withdrawal of all opposition candidates, Saddam Hussein's son Uday Hussein took over as head of the journalists' union; absolute loyalty to President Saddam Hussein and his family became paramount, taking precedence over loyalty to the party or the country.

Violence against journalists during the armed conflict in Iraq

Although international humanitarian law offers some protection to journalists,⁸ covering war makes the profession of journalism very dangerous. In the past four years more journalists have been killed and injured in Iraq than in any other part of the world. International organizations monitoring the status of journalists have repeatedly identified Iraq as the world's most deadly region for members of the media. While the chances of injury or death for a foreign journalist working in Iraq are high, the situation of their Iraqi counterparts is much worse.

According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), of the confirmed 242 deaths of journalists in the period 2003 to September 2007, 124 occurred in Iraq. Of those 124 journalists, 102 were Iraqi citizens.⁹ Add to that the tens of Iraqis killed who were media support personnel and the figure rises sharply. To put these figures in context, it is important to look at the much

5 Available in Arabic at <http://nahrain.com/d/dstr/1964.html> (last visited 27 November 2007).

6 For the full background, see the detailed report of the APFW, "Working with Iraqi journalists – towards a free and independent media", Final Report of its Fact-Finding Mission to Iraq, 10–17 June 2003, London, 2 July 2003, available at <http://www.apfw.org/data/report/english/2004/spe1100.pdf> (last visited 27 November 2007).

7 Ibid.

8 See in particular Art. 79 of Additional Protocol I (1977) to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and William A. Orne Jr., "Protection of journalists", in Gutman and Rieff, above note 2.

9 Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "Statistical profile of journalists killed on duty since 2003", available at http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/Iraq/Iraq_danger.html (last visited 26 November 2007).

lower fatalities in previous wars.¹⁰ The number of journalists who were killed in the line of duty is even starker when compared with earlier wars.¹¹

US military relations with journalists during the armed conflict

In spring 2003, the US army made it clear that they were not responsible for the fate of freelance journalists who were not embedded with the US army or one of its allies. Attempts to inform the US military exactly where the journalists were and the fact that they gathered together in a particular location did little to protect them. Televised reports, often broadcast live from the collective presence of non-embedded Arab and foreign crews, were reportedly seen by the US Central Command, based in nearby Qatar.¹² Nevertheless, the Palestine Hotel, where the journalists were based, was shelled. This incident has repeatedly been used by media organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dedicated to the defence of journalists as circumstantial evidence that the Americans intended to “scare” the non-embedded press and deter them from continuing their work.

The legality of attacking television and radio stations

At the height of the US-led war against Iraq in March 2003, US forces attacked Iraq’s main television station in Baghdad, destroying its above-ground structures. The television channel was soon broadcasting again, suggesting that the Iraqis, too, had anticipated an attack and prepared alternative ways of getting their signal out. Many see the frequent attacks on television and radio stations as a tribute to the importance in modern warfare of controlling the way in which a conflict is perceived. People often try to justify attacks on broadcasting studios by claiming that they are being used to rally the enemy population or transmit propaganda helpful to the enemy’s cause. Such arguments do not provide a valid reason for attacking. According to Article 52 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, which is generally recognized as reflecting customary international law, media organizations cannot generally be attacked unless they constitute military objectives.¹³ The legal definition of military objective, insofar as objects

10 Ibid. CPJ staff published the following figures for previous conflicts: Algeria (1993–6), 58; Colombia (1986–), 54; Balkans (1991–5), 36; Philippines (1983–7), 36; Turkey (1984–99), 22; Tajikistan (1992–6), 16; Sierra Leone (1997–2000), 15; Afghanistan (2001–4), 9; Somalia (1993–5), 9; Kosovo (1999–2001), 7; Iraq war (1991), 4 (all were killed after the official end of the war but died in the hostilities in the immediate aftermath.)

11 Ibid. Central American conflicts: 89 journalists killed in the years 1979–89; Argentina: 98 killed in 1976–83; Vietnam: 66 killed covering the conflict there from 1955–75 (deaths listed by Freedom Forum, a non-partisan foundation dedicated to free press and free speech for all people). The Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan, which surveyed the years 1962–75, lists 71 journalists killed. For the Korean War, Freedom Forum lists 17 journalists killed; it lists 68 killed in the Second World War, and 2 killed in the First World War.

12 The documentary film *Control Room* shows that the US Central Command was following up what was being broadcast on Arab and foreign television coming out of Iraq.

13 See Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, ICRC/Cambridge University Press, Geneva and Cambridge, 2005, pp. 115 ff.

are concerned, is that they are objects which “by their nature, location, purpose or use, make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage”.¹⁴

According to the CPJ investigation, US military fire is the next leading cause of death, accounting for those of nine journalists, or 22 per cent of the overall toll. Journalists have died in US bomb, rocket and aerial attacks; they have been killed by US fire at or near checkpoints and roadblocks. The CPJ states that while

there is no evidence to conclude that the US military has deliberately targeted the press in Iraq, the record does show that US forces do not take adequate precautions to ensure that journalists can work safely. And when journalists are killed, the US military is often unwilling to launch an adequate investigation or take steps to mitigate risk. Official investigations have been conducted in only three cases in which journalists were killed by US forces.¹⁵

As to that preceding the fall of Baghdad, the US military did investigate an April 2003 incident in which a US tank had fired on Baghdad’s Palestine Hotel, killing two journalists and wounding three others. The military’s report shed light on some details but failed to answer a crucial question: why did US commanders, who knew that the hotel was filled with journalists, not relay this information to the troops who attacked the upper floors with a high-incendiary rocket? Finally the CPJ draws the following conclusion: “the killing of the journalists, while not deliberate, was avoidable”.¹⁶

A further troubling concern is that the attacks on “enemy media” are seen as aimed at deterring independent journalists from filming and reporting on the other side. If an invading army is able to control the images coming out of a war, they will reflect its respect for humanitarian law and the conduct of clean and sanitized operations. If, to the contrary, reporters are able to reach and reflect on the suffering that the bombs cause, especially to civilians, the credibility of the invading army’s narrative is shattered. As the Iraqi capital was about to fall to the US military in early April, it seemed that the United States wanted a particular image to be burnt in the minds of people around the world. In the two days preceding the 9 April 2003 fall of Baghdad, five foreign journalists died; Spanish print journalist Julio Parrado and camera operator Jose Couso, Jordanian/Palestinian Al Jazeera reporter Tareq Ayoub, German reporter Christian Liebeg and camera operator Taras Protsyuk were killed on 7 and 8 April by the occupying

14 Protocol I, Art. 52(2). See also Marco Sassòli, “Legitimate targets of attacks under international humanitarian law”, background paper prepared for the Informal High-Level Expert Meeting on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law, Cambridge, 27–29 January 2003, Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University.

15 CPJ, Report of 2005, available at www.cpj.org/news/2005/Qatar23may05na_report.html (last visited 27 November 2007).

16 See Joel Campagna and Rhonda Roumani, “Permission to fire”, Committee to Protect Journalists, New York, May 27, 2003, available at http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/2003/palestine_hotel/palestine_hotel.html (last visited 12 January 2008).

army. Much has been written about whether these journalists were victims of an accident of war or whether there was any deliberate act by the US army.¹⁷ In a 2005 investigation by the CPJ, the army was criticized for not carrying out a serious investigation into these killings. The report stated that “No fewer than 41 journalists have been killed in Iraq since hostilities began in March 2003. Insurgent actions are responsible for 56 per cent of the deaths of journalists in Iraq to date. Insurgent forces have killed journalists in suicide bombings, crossfire incidents, and in targeted killings.”¹⁸

Iraqi media after the invasion

The fall of the Iraqi regime as a result of the US-led offensive had far-reaching internal effects for the Iraqi press.

The Bremer Press Order

Shortly after the occupation of Iraq, Paul Bremer, the US Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority, issued a seven-clause Order (No.14)¹⁹ on 10 June 2003, which banned the media from publishing or republishing (and broadcasting) material that dealt with five different areas. The order banned media content that incited violence, civil disorder, or violence against the Coalition forces, or advocated the alteration of Iraq’s borders or the return of the Baath Party. Order No. 14 also gave the United States and its allies the right to arrest violators (up to one year’s imprisonment), to withdraw media licences and to “seal the premises of any media organization found to be in breach of this order”. By December 2003 Orders No. 65 and No. 66 were issued, dealing with the broadcast media.²⁰ Order No. 65 established a regulatory body for all broadcasters, while Order No. 66 established the Iraqi Media Network as the public service broadcaster for Iraq. Although Order No. 14 appears to be restrictive, in general the new situation caused the Iraqi media to boom.

According to the Arab Press Freedom Watch (APFW), within nine weeks of the fall of the administration of Saddam Hussein ninety newspapers were established.²¹ These newspapers fit roughly into three categories:

- newspapers that had been established outside Iraq until 9 April 2003;
- newspapers that were established and funded by the US-led alliance; and

17 See Committee to Protect Journalists, “13 confirmed cases of journalists killed by US forces (March 2002–August 2005)”, available at http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/Iraq/Js_killed_by_US_13sept05.html (last visited 27 November 2007).

18 See Committee to Protect Journalists, “US military consistently fails to probe journalist killings in Iraq”, available at <http://www.cpj.org/news/2005/iraq14sept05na.html> (last visited 27 November 2007).

19 Available at <http://www.iraqcoalition.org/regulations/index.html#Regulations> (last visited 27 November 2007).

20 Ibid.

21 APFW, above note 6.

- newspapers that were established by the tens of new parties and powers that had emerged since the war.

Media reflecting ethnic or sectarian groupings, independent media outlets and new local, regional and satellite television stations quickly followed, often with similar legal and financial support to those above.

The fact-finding mission by the APFW was the first effort by an independent Arab organization to visit Iraq after the fall of Saddam's regime. It was in Iraq from 10 to 17 June 2003, and issued a detailed report on the situation of the Iraqi press. The report reveals a chaotic media landscape in which many media outlets are literally bought by governments, political groups and parties and have a clear agenda.²² As the occupying US military became entrenched in Iraq and as the insurgency became more potent, the safety of Iraqi and other journalists was again in question. Acts of terror, intimidation and outright kidnapping, injury and killing of Iraqi and Arab journalists because of their profession grew as the Iraqi war continued. The major pan-Arab satellite stations Al Jazeera and Al Arrabiyeh were initially the focus of attacks and intimidation; their offices were closed and their journalists and crews assaulted. With time the closure of Al Jazeera's offices became permanent, while the office of Al Arrabiyeh television, which was temporarily closed, was reopened. Yet journalists for Al Arrabiyeh continued to suffer intimidation and death. In the years 2003–7, six journalists working for this pro-Saudi television network were killed. The CPJ says that by mid-2007 the network that had suffered the most deaths was the US-sponsored Iraq Media Network (which includes Al-Iraqiya TV, its affiliates, and the *Sabah* newspaper), thirteen of whose journalists were killed.²³

The influence of the United States on the Iraqi press

While incidents of death and injury of members of the press (caused by the army or insurgents) were widely reported, US army officers were involved in a much less talked-about operation. It took a few years for the public to learn that US military personnel were paying Iraqi newspapers to publish articles that made the US military effort in Iraq look good. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, articles written by US military "information operations" troops are translated into Arabic and placed in Baghdad newspapers with the help of a defence contractor. Many of the articles "one-sidedly trumpet the work of US and Iraqi troops, denounce insurgents and tout US-led efforts to rebuild the country".²⁴

22 Ibid.

23 This is followed by Baghdad TV, where 7 journalists were killed; Al-Arabiya, 6; Al-Shaabiya, 5; Reuters, 5; and Kurdistan TV, 4. See Committee to Protect Journalists, "Statistical profile of journalists killed on duty since 2003", available at http://www.cpj.org/Briefings/Iraq/Iraq_danger.html (last visited 26 November 2007).

24 Mark Mazzetti and Borzou Daragahi, "US military covertly pays company to place stories in Iraqi press", *Los Angeles Times*, 30 November 2005.

The *Los Angeles Times*, in a dispatch from Washington in December 2005, said that the operation is designed to mask any connection with the US military.

The Pentagon has a contract with a small Washington-based firm called Lincoln Group, which helps translate and place the stories. The Lincoln Group's Iraqi staff, or its subcontractors, sometimes pose as freelance reporters or advertising executives when they deliver the stories to Baghdad media outlets.²⁵

The military's effort to disseminate propaganda in the Iraqi media is taking place even as US officials are vowing to promote democratic principles, political transparency and freedom of speech in Iraq, and are training Iraqi reporters. Former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld described the proliferation of news organizations in Iraq as one of the country's great successes since the ouster of Saddam Hussein. Once these methods became public knowledge, the US army stated that it had stopped the operation.

The dehumanization of the Iraqis

Although the publicly declared mission of the war in Iraq is to liberate the Iraqis from the shackles of dictatorship, little has been done actually to introduce Iraqis as human beings to the American public. In fact, keeping a tally of Iraqi deaths has not even been on the radar screen of US and other Western media. For its part, the US-led Coalition did not help much either. Soon after the Iraq war began, the commander of the US forces, General Tommy Franks, made it clear that the Americans have no intention of quantifying the results of their actions: "We don't do body counts", he said.²⁶ During the Vietnam War, the body count was served up every day on the evening news. While Americans ate dinner, they watched a graphic visual scorecard: how many Americans had died that day, how many South Vietnamese and how many communists. Ira Chernus, a professor of religious studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder, who was one of the first to deal with this issue,²⁷ criticized the army's decision. "At the time, it seemed the height of dehumanized violence", he said in reference to the decision to publish the Vietnam figures. However, "Compared to Tommy Franks' new way of war, though, the old way looks very humane indeed", he argued. Chernus continues,

[T]rue, the body count turned human beings into abstract numbers. But it required soldiers to say to the world, "Look everyone. I killed human beings today. This is exactly how many I killed. I am obliged to count each and every one." It demanded that the killers look at what they had done, think about it (however briefly), and acknowledge their deed. It was a way of taking responsibility.

25 Ibid.

26 Quoted in Ira Chernus, "Bring back the body count", April 2003, available at <http://www.common-dreams.org/views03/0401-12.htm> (last visited 27 November 2007).

27 Ibid.

Chernus concludes by saying

[T]oday's killers avoid that responsibility. They perpetuate the fiction so many Americans want to believe – that no real people die in war, that it's just an exciting video game. It's not merely the dead who disappear; it's the act of killing itself. When the victim's family holds up a picture, US soldiers or journalists can simply reply "Who's that? We have no record of such a person. In fact, we have no records at all. We kill and move on. No time to keep records. No inclination. No reason".²⁸

The problem was not solely the military but also the US media, that blindly followed the US army rather than continue in their usual posture of questioning their government. A former Time Warner chief executive officer admitted the presence of what he termed "patriotic police" in most US newsrooms.²⁹ A report of the Seventh Annual Aspen Institute Conference on Journalism and Society held in Queenstown, Maryland, on 18–20 June 2003 documents this. "Walter Isaacson, who headed CNN during the first months of the war on terrorism, said he felt constantly whipsawed between what he called the "Patriotism Police", who complained that CNN's coverage did not eagerly back the administration and the "Lap Dog Police" who complained it did."³⁰ A year after the war, the *New York Times* also made an internal critique of their war coverage, but none of this changed the dehumanization process for which the US media (especially television) were responsible. The same "patriotic police" terminology was repeated in another Aspen Institute conference.³¹ American editors there echoed Isaacson's remarks and explained the pressures that they faced in their newsrooms.

Nowhere was this dehumanization more evident than in the absence of an actual counting of Iraqi casualties. While US and international press covering the Palestinian–Israeli conflict regularly end each story with a tabulation of how many Israelis and Palestinians have been killed, for instance since the beginning of the Palestinian intifada, no such practice has been manifested by the US or the world press at the end of stories on Iraq.

Debate on the human toll of the war for Iraqis

While the establishment US press has shown no interest in calculating, reporting or inquiring about the number of Iraqi deaths, it is ironic that President Bush was willing to deal with this issue when asked about it by a member of the public. At the close of a public event on 12 December 2005 Bush was asked if he knew the approximate total of Iraqis who have been killed, including civilians, military

28 Ibid.

29 See <http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2007/08/27/3438/> (last visited 27 November 2007).

30 See Adam Clymer, *Journalism, Security and the Public Interest*, Aspen Institute, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 6.

31 Aspen Institute Conference, "Covering the other: intolerance and bigotry in the American and Arab media", Aspen Wye River Conference Center, Queenstown, MD, 7–9 June 2006.

police, insurgents and translators. Bush responded by saying: “I would say 30,000, more or less, have died as a result of the initial incursion and the ongoing violence against Iraqis.”³² Suddenly, major newspapers and broadcast outlets were unexpectedly engaged in a discussion about the human toll of the war for Iraqis. Reporters began to cite the tally of civilian deaths kept by the organization Iraq Body Count as a possible source for Bush’s claim.³³

The New York-based Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) voiced the following reflection following the Bush statement: “The mainstream media have shown little interest in documenting or quantifying the suffering of Iraqis. But a recent comment by George W. Bush provoked an unexpected round of discussion of the topic.” FAIR continued by saying, “Often overlooked was the fact that Iraq Body Count’s research is limited to civilian deaths – not including insurgents or security forces, as asked by the questioner – and only those civilian deaths that were reported by the media.” The resulting total, as the group acknowledges on its website, is therefore a low estimate: “It is likely that many if not most civilian casualties will go unreported by the media.”³⁴ Another scientific survey of total civilian deaths in Iraq that was published in the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, suggested in 2004 and 2006 a much higher death toll, of at least 100,000.³⁵

But even this sudden press interest in Iraqi civilians was soon to fizzle out, and the press would once again fail to mention Iraqi deaths consistently. Marking the anniversary of the war in Iraq, George Stephanopoulos reported on 18 March 2007 that more than 3,200 US military were dead³⁶ and at least 24,000 had been wounded, and about 60,000 Iraqis had been killed.³⁷ It is very likely that these figures came from Iraq Body Count. FAIR considers the use of Iraq Body Count’s figures as an overall estimate of how many Iraqis have died in the war to be “sloppy reporting”.³⁸ For one thing, it is explicitly a count of civilian deaths, ignoring Iraqi combatants who died either resisting the US invasion and occupation or defending the US-backed government. Estimates for the number of Iraqi combatants killed in the initial invasion range from 7,600–10,800, according to the Project on Defense Alternatives,³⁹ to 13,500–45,000 according to the

32 Quoted from Associated Press in the *Seattle Times*, 30 December 2005, See http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/2002679454_webbush12.html (last visited 27 November 2007).

33 See for instance “Counting Iraqi casualties”, 16 December 2005, available at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=2778> (last visited 27 November 2007).

34 Ibid.

35 L. Roberts, R. Lafta, R. Garfield, J. Khudhairi and G. Burnham, “Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey”, *Lancet*, Vol. 364, no. 9448 (2004), pp. 1857–64; and G. Burnham, R. Lafta, S. Doocy and L. Roberts, “Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: A cross-sectional cluster sample survey”, *The Lancet*, Vol. 368, no. 9545 (2006), pp. 1421–8.

36 On 13 December 2007 the US Department of Defence confirmed 3,891 US soldiers killed. See <http://icasualties.org/oif/> (last visited 13 December 2007).

37 Diane Sawyer, also from ABC, mentioned almost the same figures: 3,218 US military fatalities, not to mention the 60,000 Iraqis who have been killed. See FAIR, “ABC (under)counting Iraqi dead”, 21 March 2007, available at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=3064> (last visited 27 November 2007).

38 Ibid.

39 Project on Defense Alternatives, 20 October 2003, available at <http://www.comw.org/pda/0310rm8ap1.html> (last visited 27 November).

London *Guardian*.⁴⁰ The total of Iraqis killed fighting the United States has surely increased substantially in the four years that followed. As for Iraqi forces allied with the United States, the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count website has counted 7,774 deaths of Iraqi police and military up to 20 March 2007, based on news reports.⁴¹ It is striking that even these allied deaths – nearly twice the number of US forces killed – is often ignored in US press accounts.

Any total based on official record-keeping or news reports is almost certainly going to be incomplete – particularly in a country like Iraq, where reporters' well founded fear of being attacked by either side results in their seldom venturing out of Baghdad (or into most neighbourhoods in Baghdad, for that matter). As Iraq Body Count itself notes on its website, "It is likely that many if not most civilian casualties will go unreported."⁴²

For what it is worth, the United Nations reviewed government records and death certificates and reported a civilian death toll of 34,000 for 2006 alone.⁴³ Iraqi Health Minister Ali al-Shamari also estimated in November 2006 that 100,000 to 150,000 Iraqis had been killed by violent acts since early 2004.⁴⁴

It took a university professor to try to reopen the topic more than a year later. Andrew J. Bacevich, who teaches history and international relations at Boston University, restarted this discussion in an article entitled "What counts in Iraq",⁴⁵ in which he wrote about the absence of an accounting of civilian deaths in Iraq, touching not only on the high-profile Haditha and Mahmudiyah incidents but also on the more common accidental killings at checkpoints, such as the one that took place in Samarra in early 2006. Bacevich points out in his piece that the military was criticized for the Vietnam body counts and, as a result, has not publicly counted civilian wartime deaths since then.

Vanity Fair contributor James Wolcott points to Bacevich's piece as an "important piece ... about the callow attitude towards civilian casualties that has helped make enemies of those we boast about having liberated". He notes that the attitude, as described by Bacevich, is nothing new and "at least American policy is consistent, because we've been making the same mortal mistakes in Afghanistan, perhaps with even more roaring disregard".⁴⁶

Dehumanization by the Arab media

The US media have not been alone in the systematic dehumanization of Iraqis. Arab media outlets have not done much better. Major events that have caused

40 *Guardian*, 28 May 2003.

41 See <http://icasualties.org/oif/> (last visited 13 December 2007).

42 See <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/> (last visited 27 November 2007).

43 *New York Times*, 17 January 2007; FAIR, above note 37.

44 BBC News, 10 November 2006; see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6135526.stm (last visited 27 November 2007).

45 Andrew Bacevich, "What counts in Iraq", *Washington Post*, 10 July 2006.

46 See http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/blogs/wolcott/2006/07/blowback_can_be.html (last visited 27 November 2007).

large numbers of Iraqi victims have been reported in a routine manner by Arab newspapers and television stations. Compare the coverage of Iraqi and Palestinian deaths in any Arab media outlet, and it becomes clear that Palestinian lives (if assessed simply by the time and space allotted to them) are much more valuable than those of Iraqis. The difference will also be obvious even in a comparison of the coverage of a car-bombing in Lebanon (most likely by a fellow Arab) and a car-bombing in Iraq. Arab media often reflect the apathy that Arab leaders are displaying towards the situation in Iraq. Some argue that many opponents to the US-led invasion simply translate their opposition to the war into a lack of interest in the daily casualties that are the direct or indirect result of it, whereas others argue that the Arab media's handling of the Iraqi situation is not unique to them. Faisal Qassem, the anchor of one of the leading talk shows on Al Jazeera television, has taken issue with the way in which the Arab media have been guilty of a large-scale dehumanization campaign. Qassem, whose show *Al Itijah al Mu'akes* (The Opposite Direction) introduces representatives of diametrically opposed points of views and lets them fight it out in front of tens of millions of Arab viewers, is well respected throughout the Arab world. In a syndicated article published in Arabic in mid-June 2005, he attacks Arab regimes and the Arab press for their dehumanization of their own citizens, as well as fellow Arabs for the way in which they deal with general issues and ignore the human element. After outlining the history of how Arab dictators have used the media to stay in power and to focus on external and regional problems, he calls for an immediate change towards more humane media: "It is time that Arab media gives more attention to human beings rather than public issues. It is time that we begin from the bottom up and not from top down, as has been the hallmark of Arab media since its inception."⁴⁷ Qassem ends by saying,

Believe me that once we deal with our small problems, that our bigger problems will be solved automatically. The marginalized person will not be able to face up to the large problems unless he is relieved of his small worries. Will our media serve the individual or do we need to first place the individual at the top of the agenda of our dehumanized politicians through a democratic process. Once we do that the rest will follow.⁴⁸

In the article Qassem, who has never publicly attacked his Syrian mother country, fails to admit that the station where he presents his own programme has done little to show the human face of Iraqis and is guilty of disproportionate coverage of Palestinian victims compared with that of Iraqi victims.

47 See <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=39439> (last visited 27 November 2007).

48 Ibid.

Conclusion

UNESCO's preamble stating that "wars are fought in the minds of men [and women]" is as true today as it was when its constitution was written shortly after the Second World War. The proliferation of the media, especially with the digital information revolution, requires the international community to take another look at what needs to be done about this important element, especially during times of war. Even though journalists can now beam words, photographs and moving pictures in real time from any spot in the world, little has changed since those words were spoken on the eve of the First World War.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states clearly the right of journalists and the public at large to information and ideas. It reads,

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Despite the strong words in this all-encompassing article, little has been done to translate them into laws, whether domestic or international. The war in Iraq has resulted in a bloodbath for journalists and a high level of injuries, kidnappings and deaths, and the suffering of Iraqi journalists has been far greater than that of their non-Iraqi colleagues. It is an accepted ideal that the job of journalists and the media they work for is to seek out and publish or broadcast the truth. This commodity, however, is often badly lacking in the media, and much more so in time of war. The effort to obtain the decision to go to war and to placate critics when the war started has resulted in wilful disregard for the truth and, more sadly, has led to a process of dehumanization of the very people that the war was allegedly fought to liberate.