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BRIAN WILLIAMS: If we can get our next session started and a few points of personal privileges-- As they say in Washington, I have a few matters of business to get through. It was suggested by a nice woman in the audience, who brought her nice dad who is a member of what a friend of mine called the greatest generation, that because of obvious undercurrent and title of this gathering we take a moment and ask all the veterans in the audience to stand and accept our thanks and applause, if you would.

[Applause]

WILLIAMS: Thank you. As the son of an 88-year old captain, personally responsible for the fact that Germans never made it to Arkansas, it was important for me to do that. And thank you.

Number two, I've been asked to repeat, it was so big a part of our first session, the questions from the audience, they were superb. They were on point. They were thought provoking. It can easily be said I think we heard some responses from Secretary Kissinger we hadn't heard on the record before. And thank you. And keep them coming. I believe you all have index cards.

To my fellow journalists, I know there are glaring follow-up opportunities up here that I'm not taking advantages of. The premium, the organizers tell me, is getting through the number of questions and, as you know, keeping

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these things moving. When it crosses from glaring to egregious, I do jump in. But, boy, that was a tough one for the first round.

And, finally, any panel on new media coverage and the Vietnam War would not be complete, absent the participation and the very minimum the mention of David Halberstam. Were he not last night's keynoter, he would be up here with us today. He, of course, joins us today, David Halberstam.

[Applause]

WILLIAMS: As we gather today, my colleague Bob Woodruff is recovering in Bethesda. And having been to cover this current war, had several trips to Iraq. With that as the background, knowing the conditions over there, also as a journalist and as a consumer or journalism, I would also be remiss if I didn't note the presence with us today (and never tried this phrase before) a man who is emerging as the Halberstam of this conflict, John Burns of *The New York Times* is with us.

[Applause]

So with that, again, the warning that the bios of the people next to me are in your booklets. They are all known well to you. And I think what we should do for a first round is set the scene. Reporting today is quite different from the way it was done back in the Vietnam War. We mentioned catching rides

on outgoing choppers. That still happens to a very few lucky ones in the Iraq conflict.

But I think we will go in chronological order, time spent in country. And I think, Frances, you were there first. So start us off with the differences in doing our jobs, then versus now.

FRANCES FITZGERALD: Vietnam, as you know, was the first televised war and our first living room war, as Michael Arlen once put it. The televised reports gave the war an immediacy that all the documentaries from Korea and World War II couldn't give it. But when you say the word "immediacy" and you consider what happens today versus then, it wasn't quite so immediate then. I mean, today we have satellite hookups, cell phones, e-mails and so forth.

Then television reporters used to have to send their film canisters out in bags, put them on the helicopter, then get them on the airplanes from Saigon to probably Hong Kong. This thing would take a very long time. Steve can talk about this better than I can. As for print reporters, we had to-- The newspapers and news magazines had to go file by telex, a long walk down Tu Do Street, usually at night after curfew.

And as for myself, a magazine reporter, I used to file them by putting the story in an envelope with a stamp on it. We had Lettera 22's. We practically had trench coats only it was too hot for them. We would have

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had them otherwise. But let me tell you, the distance from our editors wasn't so bad at all. They had a very tough time getting hold of us when we didn't want them to get a hold of us. And there was no such thing as what my husband, Jim Sterba who was also a correspondent there, calls designer news. Meaning news that is actually designed in New York or Washington or wherever, by the editors--

We hadn't heard of that then. It hadn't been invented yet. So for that we are most grateful.

Well, two other points mainly. One was that as is very different in Iraq today, Saigon was a safe place. It was almost always safe except during the Tet offensive. It was quite comfortable. There were good restaurants. There were colonial hotels and so forth and so on.

So when you got back from a trip, grimy and sweating and so on, it was-- It seemed a good life. There was a problem involved with that, too, which is the editors and the distinguished columnists used to come to visit us quite a bit. And they would get their helicopter rides with generals, get briefings with the ambassador and so forth and go away as instant experts. Where we, of course, knew better.

The other thing is that a war like that goes-- For those of us who spent a considerable amount of time there, it was total immersion in the sense that finally the outside world just didn't exist anymore. I mean you were in the

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war. You thought about nothing else. It was very hard to leave. And if you left and came back, you came back into a different war because it changed all the time.

WILLIAMS: And around the midpoint of the war there arrived a young man from Texas named Dan Rather.

DAN RATHER: Thank you Brian. And good afternoon everyone.

Television news changed dramatically about the time the Vietnam War was starting. And any understanding of television in the Vietnam War, which is part of the overall subject of media and the war, I think needs to at least footnote jet travel. Videotape, and satellites were just coming in to what I will call common use in television as the Vietnam War was beginning.

And as the war dragged on through the years, they became bigger factors. When I came to Saigon in 1965 (Let me just speak for myself.) I was unprepared to cover the war. It was my impression that an awful lot of reporters, not confined to television reporters, were also not prepared to cover it. But one did get kind of-- It is not kind of, it was a total immersion once you were there because as Frankie has mentioned, if you were willing to do so-- And in the case of television you had to be willing to do so. Because in television there was no staying in Saigon to listen to the so-called Five O'clock Follies. The best of the print reporters didn't stay there either. In television you have to have the pictures. So you have to get out. You have to travel.

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This was not a problem. To be a television correspondent in Vietnam was to be basically a hitchhiker. You could very successfully hitchhike virtually anywhere you wanted to go. You would go out and ask, in many cases, "Where are you going?" The helicopter would tell you where he was going. You made a choice. You hopped aboard and you went.

One reason I mention it is because we may want to get into the contrast of covering, say, the Iraq War now and the Vietnam War. So at that time, if you were willing to go out in the field, you could go just about anywhere you wanted to go. Until roughly 1970 nearly all television footage was shot on film. You have to keep in mind here that portable videotape did not exist in any form that we could use during the war at that time.

Computers that were mobile did not exist. Computers themselves barely existed. Cell phones did not exist. Again, Frankie makes a very good point. What this resulted in is that the reporting from Vietnam, television and otherwise, was bottom up, which is to say (and to give the personal pronoun) I decided what it was we were going to cover, where we were going to go. And the routine-- This sounds like something out of the Napoleonic campaigns given the kind of live nanosecond by nanosecond coverage available today.

But with a camera crew, which basically was one cameraman and sometimes a soundman, although frequently it was just a cameraman and I would run

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the sound myself. We would get aboard the helicopter and we would stay out sometimes for as much as six or nine weeks at a time. And understand-- How did we get the film back? Remember, this is film that has to be processed.

There is no satellite capacity. Nobody has any. The routine is you have to get the film back to Saigon. The film has to be put aboard aircraft, usually a commercial plane, and flown to Tokyo, which had a fairly new capacity to put things up on a satellite. But satellite time was so expensive, that by and large what you did-- You might shoot something in the field in ICORE, up around Danang. You would take the film, go to the military installation, give it to the helicopter pilot and say, "Can you get this to my office in Saigon?" Imagine this. Imagine anybody trying this today. He would say, "Well, I can't guarantee it will get there but I will do the best I can, Dan."

And he would throw it in the back of the helicopter. And almost, without exception, that would get to the CBS news office in the Caravel Hotel. And someone would say, "Thank you very much." And then it would be put aboard a commercial flight to go to Tokyo. And, generally speaking, because satellite time was so expensive, the film then was shipped back to the States.

It would fly into Chicago and then be transshipped from Chicago to New York. It always astonished me how very little footage we lost. But that was the system. That being the system, most of the things people saw about the

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war on television were at least two, three, four days old. And in many cases a week or more. So when we talk about Vietnam being the first television war-- And in many ways I think that is an apt description although there was some film in the Korean War-- the first television war, it is light years away from what you now know as television coverage of places such as Iraq or, for the matter, even Afghanistan. The other point that I want to underscore is now, with-- We didn't have regular telephone service in our bureau. We communicated primarily by telex, which is an ancient piece of equipment, probably in a museum somewhere. Telephone calls were expensive and they were hard to get through. At that time they were working on transoceanic cable telephone systems.

The point being is that today, every television reporter, including this one, when you go to Iraq you are on a very short string to the home office. And it is not unusual-- there is no pride in saying this-- it is not unusual that you get a call from the home office saying, "Listen. I've read this story from John Burns of *The New York Times*. I read this story on AP or Reuters and this is what we want you to do." In the Vietnam era, this was virtually unheard of.

Occasionally, someone might see a magazine article, which they would ship to you or put on the telex. But I can't emphasize too much, the correspondent decided what the correspondent was going to cover. And you wrote in the field. Today, you know, you can write it on your computer. You can send it to New York almost instantly. There was none of that.

Most of the things that I wrote and most of the things that other correspondents wrote in the field were either written by hand or on a portable typewriter.

And you didn't have the capacity to see where you were, the videotape you had just shot. Remember, we were not on videotape. You shoot film. You don't see the film because the film is not yet processed. So you write a script of what you remember seeing that the cameraman saw. And that script goes back to New York and in New York they put it together.

The biggest differences were these. First of all, it was bottom-up reporting rather than top-down reporting as we have so much of now. Very little home office involvement. Second, and these are in no particular order or priority, the military, particularly below the rank of flag rank, but even including flag rank, to a remarkable degree looking back at it-- They were very cooperative with reporters and journalists.

I want to echo what David Halberstam said yesterday, that in the field-- I never had a captain or a sergeant lie to me. When you talk about the lying machine, which David referred to, which did exist and in many ways still exists. In some ways of greater potency now than it was then. But the lying machine was not of the men and women (and in those days it was mostly men) who fought the war. They leveled with you.

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They knew what was going on. For example (And excuse my reporter's French if necessary.) it was not uncommon for you to crawl into someplace with the captain of the line and say, "What's happening?" And the captain would say, "We are getting our ass handed to us." And you try to reflect that in your reporting. That reporting would hit the wall in Washington because the Washington view was that we were handing them their backsides. They were not handing us ours.

So, those are some major differences. And Steve Bell who came and served for a long time and in such a distinguished fashion came on later. And if Brian turns it over to him, when we talk about the war, I think it is important to understand that the nature of the war changed, not the overarching nature, but much about the war changed over the years. And I encourage you when you think about the Vietnam War not to think about it as one monolithic entity.

Things changed. The war was different in the period 1962 or '63 to the big build up in '65. It was again different beginning in certainly no later than the Tet offensive. It is different yet again during the 1970 period. And the other is that the US Army that was in Vietnam in the period when I was there the longest-- I was there for roughly almost a year in 1965 and '66-- was a first-class army by anybody's definition. This was a great army.

You say, "Well, if it was so great, why was it having so much difficulty?" Well, we heard any number of people discuss that early on. But let me just

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go out on this, that (And I feel very strongly about this.) there is so much discussion of the Vietnam War. It's almost anybody associated with the war, politicians, public servants at every level, people in the army, people in the fighting forces.

It may have been the wrong war. But the people who fought it went there for the right reason and that is, they loved their country. And I think it is a great mistake, particularly for those who were not alive or at memory age at the time, or even those who were, whose memories got jaded by-- In some cases not jaded, were so emotionally influenced by the disaster the war turned out to be, to forget that those who fought it were there because we sent them there.

They went there for the right reason. And the Army was a first class army for a long period in Vietnam. It was the grinding nature of the war and what happened politically at home began to decimate the army in very important ways. And, again, David Halbertsam made a very important point last night. Our country came out of the Korean War with a stronger army than we went into it with. We came out of the Vietnam War with an army that was only a shadow, a pale shadow of what it had been when the Vietnam War started. Thank you.

[Applause]

WILLIAMS: We mentioned earlier it's been 30 years but in a lot of ways it was a day ago. Because it still puts a lump in the throat of any patriot, anyone who has watched and loved American fighting soldiers. Steve Bell, you arrived if I am correct, in 1970.

STEVE BELL: Right. And it had become a very different war by then although we were still using film out in the field. My students at Ball State can't believe that I still have not seen a majority of the stories that I sent from Vietnam or elsewhere overseas. Because you literally wrote the script on the blind. The cameramen would keep what they called a dope sheet. And it was a sheet on which they would write down every scene they had shot.

And you could be there in combat and you would see your cameraman lying there on his back in a rice paddy with a dope sheet out putting down the latest three or four shots that he had taken. Then, after it was all over, and you would get out of the trouble area and you would get back to a tree stump somewhere, you would sit down. And I would take his dope sheet and remember what I had and go over my notes.

And most of us had symbols that you would use. Here is a particularly good sound bite that you will want to have in the piece. And here is a particularly good bit of nat sound that you will want in the piece. And so you would put it together and you would somehow get it back to Saigon, somehow get it

back to the States. There were pigeons and there were super pigeons. A pigeon was somebody you didn't know, didn't really have any contact with.

Let's say that you have just flown in by helicopter from the field to Saigon. And here is the Air France plane, the last plane of the evening out of Saigon headed for Hong Kong. So you would go up, you could do it in those days, on the tarmac, usually to a member of the flight crew. And you would offer them 20 dollars and hand them a bag of film that had the network logo on it, and ask them to deliver it to somebody in Hong Kong, who would be standing there holding up a similar bag with a similar logo.

High tech in the Vietnam War-- This example from the Laos operation. This is as high tech as it got. Laos operations up in the very northwestern tip of South Vietnam, a long way from Saigon. So the networks had a charter plane that came up and sat every day until one o'clock because that is how soon it has to leave in order to get back for the last flight out of Saigon.

So if you could get out in the field, over the Annamite mountains to the border area, by helicopter, hitchhiking, get a story, hitchhike back to the airport Quan-Tri, you could hand the bag of film, after your script was written and tracked, to the charter pilot who would carry it back. A producer would get it aboard the aircraft. It would go to Hong Kong or Bangkok where it would be processed in the middle of the night and fed to New York at four o'clock the next morning, which is four o'clock the previous night in New York.

So that you could cover a story in the field on Tuesday morning and get it on the air Tuesday night, thanks to the 12-hour time change. But I think maybe the important thing to add is, that we didn't have live television and we didn't have the burdens and responsibility. Indeed, the albatross of live television. And we did what were called shelf pieces, where you literally knew when you went out into the field that the story you were covering was not going to be on the air for days, maybe weeks.

And therefore, you tended to write sidebars. Why is this story happening? What is going on here? What is the meaning of this? What is the context for it? And you would send it back to the states where it would sit until there was a peg, a similar story, same subject. And that would be, "Oh, bring off Bell's piece from last week." And so your story would play then.

And I have often times thought, we were probably better reporters because of the lack of today's technology. You were not tied to a satellite truck. You were not tied to a live site. You were out in the field slogging. As Dan referred to it, it was bottom up. No one could tell you how to do the stories. If you didn't like what you were hearing on the other end of the occasional telephone call, you could say, "Operator. Operator. I can't hear New York anymore. If New York is still on the line would you please tell them I am going to do what I proposed and I will be back in touch in three days."

And you could still hear on the other end, “No! No! No!” That was the golden age of journalism. [Laughter]

[Applause]

WILLIAMS: By the way, if one of you had not declared yourself a better reporter, I would have asked for my money back today. A quick story that may sound like a story but it is actually a thinly veiled question to one of our participants. This past war was underway and American forces were getting close to Baghdad. I drove out one night to Ali al Salim airbase in Kuwait. I was a unilateral. It said so on my press pass.

As opposed to being imbedded, like my late colleague David Bloom was, who did such historic reporting, at the other end of our modern spectrum, talking as he was going at 45 miles an hour across the battlefield. It was just remarkable television. I was traveling with a retired special forces general and we had lock-cinch assurance we were going to get an airlift on a Special Forces flight of some sort in Baghdad.

We were told it would be a night mission, night landing. No lights, terrain following radar. That we would have to put up with whoever else was onboard. And we were willing to make that deal because it was going to get us into Baghdad and we had an exclusive ride into Baghdad. And I went back to our vehicle and I shut the door. And I realized this flight was hours away. And I looked to my left and saw, illuminated under a dome light, Dan

Rather. He was in the suburban next to ours and had, apparently, secured the same deal. [Laughter]

So competition hasn't changed. As it turned out, the C-130 never materialized. He went by land and I went by air. We got there approximately the same time. That is to say, this embedding versus unilateral. And, Dan, we will start with you. Is it not true that you were de facto imbedded when, with a unit, the understanding was, "Look, kid, we can't guarantee your safety. But stay with us and stay down and don't do anything stupid," was that era's version of embedding.

RATHER: Yes. I think-- In fact, I'm sure that the Pentagon would argue with this, but basically, in a broad general way that all reporters are imbedded now. It is certainly true that there are differences of being officially imbedded. But it is critical to understand, when you talk about the difference of the coverage of the Iraq War today and the Vietnam War, that it's virtually impossible to move from unit to unit, place to place in Iraq, even if you are willing to take the risks.

And they are tremendous risks, greater in Iraq than in Vietnam. But even if you are willing to take the risks, it is just the control is so much greater on reporters now (That is by design.) that there is almost no comparison with Vietnam. In Vietnam you could go any place that you felt big enough to go, you wanted to go. You could get in there, you could get out. People would

talk to you. They were not under any strict orders, in fact any orders at all, not to talk to reporters.

The policy in Vietnam, for better or worse, the military would argue for worse, was to talk to reporters. But the answer to your question is yes. But in one way or another, nearly every reporter now is an imbed of sorts. Now, it is certainly true that if you are very determined and very lucky-- We are talking now about television reporters. Remember, you have to have a crew with you. It is somewhat different than print reporters, but not a lot, I think.

That you can, with great determination, some luck and God's grace, perhaps move out of Baghdad and go to Fallujah to name a place, but it is extremely difficult. Basically, the imbedded program, which was an improvement over what we had in Gulf War I, is not to be compared to the kind of freedom that reporters had during the Vietnam War. There is absolutely no comparison.

WILLIAMS: Steven.

BELL: By the seventies, you often time had military escort officers who were trying to travel with you sometimes. There were lots of times when you were still out in the field and you were hitchhiking and you were alone. But especially as the problems of morale and drug use and fragging became stories of the day. And the military people knew you were coming up to the 101st Airborne or wherever you were going.

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So you had a minder that was there and trying their best, on the one hand, to be helpful. On the other hand, the story that left the AO was not going to get them a rocket from DOD, which was their ultimate fear by that stage of the war. And, for instance, we had a game. We had one American cameraman at ABC's bureau. The others were all Asians. So I would take him with me when I knew I was going to do a story, where I was trying to get what was really going on with the grunts and get around the IO's.

So I would send Tony off in the evening to be with the grunts and do what the grunts did in those days. And I would go off with the information officer and spend the evening. And the next day when we got back together, I would have Tony select my interviews for me. And that was the way you had to try and cover that kind of a story. So, there was a degree of military control that you often times didn't have.

The Laos operation-- A big operation like that with so many helicopters coming and going, we literally were free. The military had no idea where we were. But sometimes you needed their help to get where you wanted to go. And you had to arrange it ahead of time. And there was no interference to speak of. It was logistical help.

But there were other times when there was oversight. But it all boiled down to personal relationships. It is just like reporting anything else. I've heard so much about if you are embedded you are in bed with. Well, come on, you have political reporters who go out covering candidates every four years and

lived day and night with the staff and the other reporters that are involved.

And they still cover what they need to cover if they are journalists.

And the same happens with embedded reporters, whether it is Vietnam or today's era, whether it's Vietnam or today's era. And I have had a chance to have a discussion the Ted Koppel on this subject. We were out in Vietnam together. And today, yes, I think the thing that is different about embedding today is the difference in the kind of reporting you get, is that you become more of a home town reporter.

You are with a unit for a prolonged period. So, if bad things happen that the military and the government would just assume were not on the air, you cover it and it goes on the air. But on days when nothing else is happening, you find that human interest story of the guy whose brother is in another unit 50 miles away or something else. And so you do tend to get a broader range of covering if you're embedded and staying with the same troops, learning people's names, their backgrounds.

You are more like a hometown reporter than like the run and gun, in and out, reporting that is so often typical of the network.

WILLIAMS: Frances, I want to get you on the record on this embedding. I flew back from the war via Cairo with a *New York Times* reporter who said, "I'm going home because I started to love the life. I'm a father of two from Montclair, New Jersey and I started to love the life of this unit." There is no

question but that some of the journalism from the embedded journalists was just fantastic. You know, I'm thinking of Rick Atkinson and Michael Kelly's piece on the cigar-chomping "Rock" Marccone and the Karbala Gap.

Do you have concerns about a kind of Stockholm syndrome and contrast it to your experience in Vietnam.

FITZGERALD: Well, sure I do. But for me it is a bit abstract and because the fact is, I didn't do much combat reporting when I was in Vietnam. My interest was in the Vietnamese. And I tended to stay away from large, American units because that made my life more difficult, honestly. So, you know, whatever I would say about being embedded or not is just from a viewer's perspective. But it does seem to me that if you really want to try and understand where you are, that you must be able to get out of the unit.

You must be able to go behind it to see what's happened after a battle. If you are lucky, you get there ahead of time. But you must be able to get out into the society in which you are. And this is what the embedding really prevents.

WILLIAMS: I have got a question here about the Five O'clock Follies. And for any of you who were there when the briefers were confronted with the reality in the field. This question has to do with how did they react? And any of you can take it.

RATHER: Well, they stayed on message. Which is, everybody understood, the journalists understood that the briefer was doing what he was told to do. And there has been a lot said and much written about the hostile attitudes that developed with the press and the briefers in Saigon. But just to cut through, there may have been exceptions. But, if so, I know of none.

But anyone who stayed in Saigon and depended on the Five O'clock Follies to find out what was going on was, in my judgment, foolish. Usually they lost the respect of their peers very quickly. And part of what happened that may be worth mentioning, the business of the differences between the journalists who were covering the war and those in Washington who were trying to mold public opinion.

I remember first going-- When I first arrived in Saigon I was told, "You should go by the Five O'clock Follies, just to see what they are like." And one glance told you immediately what they were like. And it was part of what David Halberstam has called the lying machine.

And what would happen with reporters, happened with this one and happened with everyone that is worthy of the name that I know. You went out in the field. You spent time, yes, up close and personal with combat units. And you come back to Saigon and you say, "What are they saying at the Five O'clock Follies." And it was in such direct contrast, so directly opposed to what you knew was happening.

And for that matter, what everybody who was actually fighting the war knew what was happening. Although there did grow a disdain for the Five O'clock Follies, even greater disdain for what was being said in Washington.

A quick anecdote and then we will move on. But when I came back from Vietnam, the first time I was there-- I had been the White House correspondent before I went and was shifted to London and wound up in Vietnam.

But when I came back I was the White House correspondent. And I was selected for a special briefing in the bowels of the White House in the National Security Council room, by a very high-ranking member of the Johnson administration, who had a presentation. And he had the map. And he pointed to a place on the map where I'd actually been, which was on the Cambodian border. It later became known as the Hook.

That was much later. But I had been there with American combat units. And it was as much of Vietnam was. It was a green jungle hell. And it was in a low area. And the point being, it was muddy, terrifically muddy. And anyway, the briefer was talking about it. He said, "You know, we are having very effective operations in this area. We are using our armor."

And I'm saying to myself, "Armor? Armor?" As far as I could make out there wasn't any armor within 50 to 75 miles of the place. And if it had

been, it would have been bogged down in these tremendous bogs. And I said something. I said, "You know, I was in that area recently and there must be some mistake because there is no armor in there." He looked at me with the coldest eyes and said, "Well, you just don't know what you are talking about."

Now, a great deal of the difficulty of the press and those who were trying to manipulate public opinion at the time can be encapsulated in that.

Journalists went out, you saw what was happening. The soldiers that were fighting the war told you what was happening and you came back. And you got a load of what was mostly fantasy. And one definition of a reporter is one who tries to separate brass tacks from bull shine.

And if you went in the field you knew what the brass tacks were and you knew what the other were.

WILLIAMS: You will leave here today with your own Rather-isms to speak to your friends. And we have already had two. This is fantastic. Frances and then Steve.

FITZGERALD: --Talk to this point. Dan and I were talking yesterday about this, about the main problem being in Washington. Well, let me preface this by saying there were a lot of people at the time, in the seventies and eighties who were saying, "The press is losing the war," or "The press has lost the war for us because all they do is report the bad news," and so

forth. “And they are turning the American public against the war and that is what is losing the war.”

On the other hand there has always been a tendency to make the press or the media into these heroes who simply destroyed the lying machine. And who, by their intrepid reporting, stopped the war. I think neither one is the case. And it's not because there were not brave reporters in Vietnam and brave ones and ones that went into the field. But the problem really lay in Washington where this machine had an extremely loud voice and one which carried often into the editorial rooms of the newspapers, the news magazines, the television studios and so forth.

Given a choice between authoritative sources in Washington and the almost necessarily anecdotal stories of those in the field, the editor or publisher might well choose the authoritative sources. But even if they didn't, it was seen as a necessity on the part of all the news media to nonetheless cover what the White House or the Pentagon was saying at the time.

And even the Five O'clock Follies had to be reported by AP, UPI and would turn up in the *New York Times* certainly at least once a week, usually Mondays because soldiers tended to take vacations over the weekends like everybody else. And so did reporters. So that would be the Monday story. But the point is that this was, this voice was omnipresent.

And, on the whole, I think that it won up until-- There were crises in which it didn't. Obviously, the fall of the Diem regime, the Tet offensive, and so on where the realities of the war just broke through. And so, in a way, with all the effort that we all made out there to show the realities, I'm not sure we really, totally succeeded. Just because there was so much volume all around us.

WILLIAMS: Steve.

BELL: Let me give an example, what I've come to call siege mentality. There was an enormous pressure being felt by military personnel in Vietnam by the seventies, not to have bad news coming out of their AO. And there was also this commitment that Dan has already mentioned that, if you're the briefer, you stick with the briefing points that you are given.

I was in Cambodia covering the Cambodian troops in their fight against the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. And it was just after American troops had left, pulled out of the country. You may remember President Nixon's speech after Kent State, "That we will withdraw from Cambodia on X-date." And for some reason he dropped a paragraph in there where he said, "And after we withdraw our troops, we will no longer fly direct support for the Cambodian troops that remain behind. We will only fly interdiction missions over Cambodia."

Well, we are out in the field with the Cambodian troops filming them coordinating with French-speaking American pilots who are flying direct support. There was one day when they didn't have good radio control and they took the equivalent of a bed sheet and tore it like an arrow and four, poor little Cambodians had to crawl up the road ahead of everyone else so the arrow was pointing out where they wanted the incoming fire from the plane.

This film is being sent back. It is playing on American television. And yet, every day at the Five O'clock Follies, which were by that time three o'clock in the afternoon, every day, "Today over Cambodia, interdiction, nine flights; direct support zero." And that went on for weeks when it was absolutely clear that it was not true and everybody knew that it was not true. And yet, the system didn't change.

And I am a great admirer of the military and most people I've known in the military. But there was a period there when military people, in order to have a career, were under enormous pressure to go with the flow when it came to this subject.

WILLIAMS: By the way, talk about full circle. When, in Iraq, the retired General I was with, wounded three times during the Vietnam War-- He said-- We were in a Chinook, flying. And he said, "See that shell bag. It is underneath the door guns. It catches the shells from the bullets." And we looked at it and it was Vietnam-era shell bag. But more than the Vietnam-

era airframe. We looked at the manufacture date. And the general said, "There is a very good chance as a much younger man I was on this aircraft in the Vietnam War."

A lot of our Chinooks and those twin-rotor choppers are the very same ones we came to love in the Vietnam War. Dan, this is a great one. The questions, by the way are fantastic. They are coming in by the dozens. Had this war not been televised, would there still have been the same lack of public support back home?

RATHER: Yes. I recognize that honest, decent intending people can differ on this. But I think it would have been. Television does have great power including in some ways the power to persuade. But I think television's power in this instance is vastly overstated. What turned Americans against the war, those who were against it-- it wasn't television. It was the flag-draped caskets that started coming home. It was the kid down the street who two years ago was the quarterback or the point guard on the basketball team comes back without his legs or his eyes.

Now, before the casualties began to mount, before the reality of the war began to permeate in each and every neighborhood in the ways I just described, not coming through the television tube, that's when people began questioning the war and questioning it seriously. And that began roughly late '66, no later than mid-1967. Which is to say in the early stages of the

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war when there were fewer troops and fewer casualties, it was easier for the leadership to fool the led about what the war was and what it wasn't.

And even when television coverage began to accelerate and in some ways, I wouldn't say dominate, become such a large faction covering the war, public opinion stayed behind the war. It wasn't until the casualties started to mount, the wounded began coming back-- And more and more of those who came back from the war, who had fought the war, while very supportive of their units, supportive of the country, supportive of their president began telling their stories of what the war was-- Really as opposed to what the leadership wanted people wanted to people to believe it to be. I think that's when public opinion turned against the war.

Let me say, we should let Frances talk more, in my opinion because she is obviously the most intelligent person up here-- That television is tremendous. It is terrific in something like covering a war. What television does best it take you there. It is a kind of magic carpet that can transport you there in a way that the best writer, even the best fiction writer, cannot put you there, put you on scene the same way television does.

But television has difficulty with depth and perspective. There is a flat quality, not just to the screen but also to the coverage. And it's my opinion, humbly submitted that, yes, there was a lot of television coverage on the war, increasingly so. And, by the way, the number of minutes spent on your

average newscast with international coverage as a whole, including the war, was so much greater then than it is now.

Another subject for another day but you just may want to note it. It was anecdotal coverage and there was this, what I call flat quality to it, which didn't really give you the sense of what the war was really like in some important ways. I've said it before and say it again, war is absolute hell. It is a murderous thing. And war is real mud, real blood, real screams of the wounded and moans of the dying. You don't get that quality coming off the television screen.

Where you get that is where you attend the funeral of the kid who comes back in a casket or where you start talking to that lad I described before. That's when public opinion started turning against the war. And that is the reason the leadership of the country couldn't maintain support of the war behind them. Because as the casualties mounted, people found out what the reality was as opposed to what they were being told.

WILLIAMS: And Frances, I suppose we shouldn't-- We are forgetting, it strikes me, four or more things, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life* and *Look*. Color is color. Moving pictures are impactful, yes. But when those magazines arrives, as Henry Luce like to have it in American homes in great numbers in the sixties, this was conflict in color. And that was red American blood people were seeing

FITZGERALD: It certainly was. And I do think it brought home the reality of what was happening to American troops much better than it had before. I mean the World War II films were very sanitized compared to this. So while Dan is right to admit to this flat quality, it nonetheless was-- The television correspondents were able to show the horrors that were going on in the battlefields.

The issue I wanted to bring up is just sort of to the side of this one, which is that-- And this was true not just of television correspondents but of print correspondents as well, and those people who were doing the color in *Time* and *Newsweek* and so forth. There were totally understandable pressures on them to spend a great deal of time with American combat troops. That's what the American public wanted to see and hear. They wanted to know what was happening to their troops, of course.

It was also on the other side of it a sense that American troops were so powerful. Here is the mightiest army in the world coming into a small, poor country, fighting a guerilla army with relatively small armaments. And so it came to seem, for both reasons, both because there was such a lot of coverage for American troops and because it was always from the perspective necessarily-- You have somebody standing behind American troops filming it.

That it was-- The American troops had the war to win or lose. And to me this is the great fallacy of the whole war. I mean it was a political war. It

was war for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese as American officials often used to say. But they couldn't do much about it, in fact, nothing about it. American troops did not lose that war. It was lost because there was never any political alternative to Vietnamese Communists.

And so, you know, when you were there in the seventies, the South was almost so-called pacified. I mean you could drive around in most places. And I did in busses and taxis and I did all over the place. But it didn't make any real difference to the outcome. The outcome was always going to be the way it was. And the French found this out as well.

And it's terrible thing to say. This is really the hardest thing to say, which is that for all their sacrifices, the American troops were almost finally irrelevant to it. And we didn't see this. We couldn't see this at the time. It was too hard to film.

WILLIAMS: Steve.

BELL: If I could go back to the whole idea of the impact of television. I have a feeling that it's gotten politicized. I do not believe that the media lost the war. I know very few people who believe the media lost the war. On the other hand I think there has been so much concern that people are going to write off Vietnam as the war the media lost, that we tend to underplay the impact that television had or *Life* and *Look*.

I asked Jack Valenti last night, “How did you guys feel about the media coverage?” And he said, “We were scared to death of the images.” If you think back, what are your images of Vietnam? The little napalm girl, the police chief with the pistol, the burning monks? You know, you can pick out the My Lai pictures. These images have to have-- Why do people spend tens and maybe hundreds of thousands of dollars for product placements in movies if it doesn't make a difference?

So I believe that you have to say, “Hey, television had an impact. Pictures, stories had an impact.” It did make a difference. There were plenty of other reasons for losing the war. There were plenty of other reasons for losing the war. And Frances brings up probably the most important point at all. But I don't think when you are talking about American public opinion to write-off television as some scholars, whose work I read do. That doesn't make any sense to me.

I think we had a cumulative effect. When people at home watched a new group of American young men fighting over the same ground that had been fought over X-years before and suffering the same kinds of casualties, that had a cumulative effect. And it was, in fact, the first television war.

WILLIAMS: And Dan, you came home and had, if memory serves, an audience with President Johnson. Did you not during the Vietnam War? Didn't you have time with LBJ?

RATHER: Yes. Nearly every reporter who covered the White House had a lot of time with President Johnson.

WILLIAMS: Did you speak, as they say, truth to power on this subject?

RATHER: Yes. I tried to speak truth to power, which ...(inaudible) particularly when I first came back. He asked to see me. I mean that in no self-serving way. But he asked to see me and I saw him. And he asked a few questions. But I'm not one of those who see President Johnson, now or then, as the personification of all evil.

However, in that session I had the feeling it was the dialogue of the deaf. That he wasn't really listening. There was once that I used first person pronoun, which is always the television person's first call. But I suggested to a member of his staff that it was so increasingly apparent that what he was saying about the war was demonstrably untrue on that ground.

I just said, "Did anybody ever think about loading up a big C-141 and take line captains and sergeants, who are the people who really know what is going on in the war. Fly them back in here. Fly them to the White House. Put them in the East Room or put them somewhere with the President and let them tell him what is really going on." And the answer was pretty much what you expect, "Well, Dan, you understand it doesn't work that way."

We saw President Johnson often and interviewed him often. And you can go back to the record. He was asked a lot of the right questions, not by me so much but by people-- He was asked a lot of the right questions. But my late father-in-law once had a sign up in his den that said, "Don't bother me with the facts, I've already got my mind made up." And in some ways that's pretty much where President Johnson was, particularly in the period 1966 to when he left office.

He was tormented about it. And to be in this building and Kennedy Library-- There is still, in my judgment, a lot of work to be done on what President Johnson wanted to do, what the effect of the Kennedy assassination had on him and his decisions having to do with the war. There's been a great deal written about that. But there is no question that it wasn't the only thing in his mind.

But there is no question that he felt strongly that this was something that President Kennedy had felt strongly about, making the commitment to stop Communism, quote-unquote, there. And as the un-elected successor to President Kennedy, as he was before the election in 1964, he felt an obligation to carry that forward. Make no mistake, he was agonized about it. That he went through very dark periods. Again, particularly after about the middle of 1966, he began to have very dark periods about the war.

It was my impression that he knew somewhere down in his head that the war was going, not just badly, but extremely badly but he just couldn't figure out what to do about it.

WILLIAMS: Frances Fitzgerald, a question for you. Here it is. Any comments on Jane Fonda's visit to Hanoi and how it was covered?

FITZGERALD: It was a mistake. No, not the visit to Hanoi but getting photographed on that artillery piece. That was definitely a terrible mistake. No, I think, in retrospect, I think I didn't think so at the time. That a lot of the anti-war movement did not help persuade the country to be against the war. I mean I think that in a way, that-- There is a sociologist who has done a whole study on this, actually. But a lot of it just got people's backs up.

But people were so outraged by this lying machine and by the deaths of so many American troops that it was hard to control one's anger. There was so much anger around that, you know, in a way to criticize the anti-war movement seems sort of stupid next to what the kind of horrors that went on in Vietnam, we have yet to talk about. The things that we reporters didn't cover so well--

But certainly one of them was the extraordinary extent of this techno war and the amount of casualties it created. And I think that Americans, perhaps because of our fault in this, didn't quite get it. I think some of the anti-war people did get it. And that made them angry.

WILLIAMS: One of the things you will be reading about in the next few days, the new book by Michael Gordon of *The New York Times*, and General Bernard Trainor. Kind of an investigation of the Iraq War thus far. In it-- There's a lot in it. And one of the things is the name, publicly revealed for the first time of a computer program designed for all the right reasons to try and figure out if the US drops a piece of ordnance on a target in Baghdad, what the civilian casualties would be.

It is a risk avoidance tool. It is known in the trade as Bug Splat. That's the term of ours for this software to decide radius of blast. And it's an interesting book. Tim Russert is going to debut the authors on *Meet the Press* and then we will do it on *NBC Nightly News* next week.

So many question here-- Dan Rather, this is a big one. And I will ask it of all of you. When did you realize the war was lost?

RATHER: At or about the time the Tet offensive happened and sort of washed through. Up to and including that time, I felt the war was basically a stalemate. Which is to say I wasn't sure that it could be won, quote-unquote. But I doubted that in the end it was going to go into the historical lost column. After the Tet offensive, I began to think in those terms.

Let me say, one talks about-- When you asked, "When did you think the war was lost," one of the great difficulties of the Vietnam War, for

journalists covering it, for those who fought and I think the public at large, and it may be worth taking into consideration now is that, we know that in a country such as ours there has to be high degree of communicable trust between the leadership and the led.

And that got broken during the Vietnam War partly because no one, including the president could answer the question, for what? When do we know that we have won? What is the definition of “win?” The troops would ask this constantly. So when you say, “When did you realize that the war was going to be lost?” it was always in the back of your head, what was this about? When do we know that it is going to be won?

We knew in World War II, unconditional surrender, when the Japanese and the Germans signed an unconditional surrender. Nobody ever said that in the Vietnam War. There are echoes of that in Iraq now. That when you get into a discussion of war, insofar as the current leadership has difficulty with the led, I think it is somewhat the same area of, “Well, how do we know we have won?” This is in the same area, for what? So when you talk about won and lost, I think it is in that same context.

WILLIAMS: And there is also the Cronkite moment. Do you think that has taken on too much significance? There are two subsets to this question it seems to me. Number one, why is the popular perception that the Tet offensive was a sweeping defeat for American forces? And, number two, have we romanticized and made too much of the fact that, in quotes,

“Cronkite turns against the war,” the famous quote from LBJ that, “If I’ve lost him, I’ve lost middle America?”

RATHER: Well, Brian, I think you know me well enough to know you are not going to hear any criticism of Walter Cronkite out of my mouth.

WILLIAMS: That makes two of us.

RATHER: --Now or ever.

WILLIAMS: That makes two of us.

RATHER: But going beyond that, I’m a bad one to ask in that sense. No, I don’t think so. I don’t think it has been too romanticized. I don’t think too much has been made of it. That it is true from a narrow, military definition, battlefield definition, Tet was, if you like, and I always want to put it in quotation marks, a defeat for the military forces.

This was, as Frankie as-- It was a political war from the beginning. War has many aspects. Breaking the will of the enemy is one. And in terms of world public opinion, in terms of support for the war at home from a political, what Dr. Henry Kissinger may call the geopolitical, standpoint. It was, without question, a tremendous victory for the North Vietnamese and their allies in the south.

When I say after the Tet offensive, at least I can be dumb as a brick wall about a lot of things, but at least I was smart enough to know that in terms of number of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces killed on the battlefield, that it could be classified as a military victory. But after that I said it is going to be very, very hard to hold public opinion behind this war and even harder to hold world opinion behind it.

WILLIAMS: We will pose this same question about Tet, too. Messers. Clark, Peterson, and Hagel who I see have arrived. Frances, same-- I know the clues are embedded throughout *Fire in the Lake*. But your answer to the question, when did you know the war was lost, if it is answerable.

FITZGERALD: Well, I think that Dan is right to broaden the subject here because if you ask about winning and losing, really what he is saying, which I think is quite right, is that it is when did the American public change its mind. It is not about the battlefield. It is about the American public. So then you have a different idea about winning and losing.

And you are right. Walter Cronkite says, "We are not winning," and that makes a huge difference and the Tet offensive does, too. You know, the war wasn't ours to win or lose. So, from the point of view of Vietnam, the question doesn't really make that much sense.

WILLIAMS: Steve.

BELL: You know, it was harder in some ways to make that assessment from Vietnam than it was to be back home. Being there in the early seventies, I suppose I'm going to get laughed down by half the audience. But militarily, we were not losing the war in '70 and '71 in terms of battles fought. You didn't see it in Vietnam. The Laos operation certainly had a major impact on my thinking about the war.

But I think it was easier to detect the "we weren't going to win" if you were back home and living with the public response to the war, than if you were over there.

WILLIAMS: Question from David Kaiser that is addressed to Dan and Steve and I want to make a 20-second glancing blow, shot at this. It sounds as though in those days reporters had to think, underlined. Now, they aren't allowed to. Comment, question mark.

I would only react to the story you opened with, Dan, about there being in the ragged edge of the countryside in Vietnam no home office and no wire services to go on. I mean that situation in our lives is still part of our reality. If I spend a day as I did, my last visit with General Casey and our day goes from Baghdad, change planes halfway, go up to Mosul. And in all places it's hot. There is firing going on. Come back to Baghdad and getting in and out of Bradleys and briefings and all of that.

That story at the end of that day, there is no Associated Press with me. There is no other version. That is what I choose to write up at the end of the day and put on *NBC Nightly News*. So that kind of individual journalism goes on and is our stock and trade. I think where we are maybe getting involved in this debate currently about opinion in the news and commenting.

So the Walter Cronkite moments where an anchorman who enjoyed the share of the audience he enjoyed back then, in a nation where, remember, that was the gateway to the American evening. We gathered in homes and watched the evening newscast. You only have one of those per career, where you decide to put your credibility on the line in a manner such as that. Dan.

RATHER: Forgive me. I've lost my concentration what the question was.

WILLIAMS: I don't blame you. It sounds in those days reporters had to think but now you aren't allowed to, says Mr. Kaiser whose home address--

RATHER: Well, reporters think. I hope I appreciate this question because it indicates to me that I didn't give a fully accurate answer. Make no mistake. There are so many good, young reporters, particularly in Iraq now. The military, General Clark would say so, has a saying, "You lose many of your best people in the early hours of battle or war because your best people want to be up front."

And so it is with reporters. Some of the best reporters I've ever seen are younger reporters in Iraq now. Yes, I know they are all younger now.

[Laughter] Younger reporters--

WILLIAMS: You noticed that.

RATHER: --In Iraq. And, in general, better educated, better schooled, better informed, smarter and, yes, they think. What I was referring to before and about this perhaps we can agree to disagree. But I don't think so. That the same tools that give you much greater immediacy with the war today make it more difficult for a thinking reporter to do what thinking reporters do best.

Because you can get up at any time on the satellite, reporters, television reporters are frequently stuck at a base camp, whether it be a hotel or wherever the transmission truck is. This is more true for people in cable because I have seen it and I have great respect for reporters in cable, but-- Because they have a deadline every nanosecond. Frequently what happens is they get to a location and they say, "That is a great shot. Just stand there with a microphone and every ten minutes we are going to come to you."

Well, if you do that, the best reporter in the world is chained. He can't get away from it. And the versions of that with the over-the-airways networks, as well, that you have morning news. You have affiliate feeds. You have evening news that is you don't, if you aren't careful, you can't get out very

much and there is much more direction from home offices today than there was during the Vietnam War.

There certainly are exceptions to this. I suspect there is a version of this in print, given the instantaneous communications that everybody in journalism has now.

WILLIAMS: Steve.

BELL: Reporters have less time to think. The constant deadline that you have now, the capability, the minute you put the word “live” in, you do two things. One is you cut down the mobility and the ability of the reporter to get out and report. And number two, you eliminate anything resembling an editorial meeting, to do some thinking about what is actually going to be written or said.

You constantly are under this enormous pressure to get more information out as fast as you can, and that has undercut the ability to give the amount of time that you wish you could give to the subject matter.

WILLIAMS: Frances Fitzgerald, Secretary Haig said earlier today in no uncertain terms he believes as do many, the war could have been won with a different mindset in the United States. Do you share that belief?

FITZGERALD: Sorry?

WILLIAMS: The war could have been won with a different mindset back here. You touched on this earlier. Do you share that belief?

FITZGERALD: I do not. And I found myself very puzzled by his explanation of this because to say that the Christmas bombing brought the North Vietnamese to their knees seems to me to be a gross exaggeration. You know, the negotiations were going on, that is true, and various points were taken and given away. And let me tell you they were given away by the United States as well at the negotiating table.

But the idea that the North Vietnamese army was any greater or any lesser as a result of the Christmas bombing seems to me to be an extraordinary idea. When I say the war was for the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people, I mean the whole Vietnamese people, not just in the south but in the north as well.

Because this whole strategy of attrition, the notion that we could kill more people than could possibly get, stand up and come down the Ho Chi Minh trail-- Or that we would destroy the morale of the North Vietnamese was a key to the war strategy for a long time. And it simply didn't work because their morale remained as high as ever. So, what would winning the war mean? I mean paving the country over, literally?

WILLIAMS: That word was used.

FITZGERALD: A nuclear weapon, an occupation forever, what?

RATHER: If I may, it may be worth noting that a rough form of this debate is alive and well with the US military to this day. Which is, let me set the Christmas bombing aside. And a particular period to which Dr. Kissinger was referring aside. But many of the people who fought the Vietnam War, and don't try to defend the political decisions, do take the view to this day. And it is at least worth considering. And to put it forward is not to say that I agree with it.

The view that the mistake in the Vietnam War was not to go totally to war. In a society such as ours, when you go it needs to be total war. And there was not a sense of shared sacrifice, no tax increase to pay for the war in 1966. Not everybody's son had to go given the deferment picture. There is and there continues to be resonance and echo.

The question that if we were going to go to war in Vietnam, it should have been total, complete mobilization of the country, make it the number one priority. And if we had done that, the Vietnam War might have been, quote, won. Now, you hear echoes of it today with-- It became known as incrementalism, is what I've heard military people refer to it as.

It is my understanding that General Secretary of State Powell was a great believer, "Never again should we go with incrementalism." Now where

there are echoes of it today is there are many people in the military who say, “Listen, we are making the same mistake we made with the Vietnam War. If we are going to go it needs to be total war for total victory. And, instead what we have done is engage in incrementalism.”

Now to lay out the outlines of that debate is not to say that I agree with it or tell you where I come out. But I think it is a frame of reference that can be worth considering.

WILLIAMS: I just received-- I thought of something earlier. I should have gone with my gut. And I've just received a second request from the audience to do something. It requires the permission of this panel and one man in the audience. John Burns, it seems to me you've told the story of this war currently underway. The elephant in this room as we talk about Vietnam in such superb terms-- If you wouldn't mind coming here for five--

He is just back from Baghdad. He is here to talk to Neiman fellows. Could I ask you five minutes, tell us what it is like on the ground?

[Applause]

WILLIAMS: As I say it is not often you get someone of this caliber to visit us. So thank you to my fellow panelists. John, I think we would love an after-action report as our military friends say and any wisdom you have to tie it into the subject at hand.

JOHN BURNS: Well, the first thing I would like to say is that coming back to the United States for the first time in two years, that after 48 hours, it's probably the most valuable single thing I've done for many, many months. To discover the power of doubt, skepticism, in this country about the war, is a very informing thing for me. To read about it is one thing. To experience it directly is another.

By chance, by hazard, I ran into David Halberstam in the hotel the night before last. He suggested I come with him here. This has been an extremely informing experience for me to listen to the officials who made, if you will, the war in Vietnam, the journalists who covered it. And to realize the accumulating analogies. There are many things that are dissimilar but other things that are similar.

And, of course, the first among those would be the eroding public support for the war here in the United States. My sense is that, as we meet here, a critical moment has been arrived at in the war in Iraq. The two leading generals Abizaid and Casey have been in Washington the last few days. I think they are still there. And the issue before them is the question whether they proceed with the first real troop drawdown in the spring, aiming at bringing troops down to 100 thousand by the end of the year.

This will be-- When I say a real troop drawdown because the troops went up to about 160 thousand in December and are back down to about 133

thousand now. But that was because they over held units that were due to rotate out for the elections. Now the crunch comes. As you know, this moment has arrived just in the wake or probably the most single important attack of the entire war on the Samarra Mosque two weeks ago, maybe three weeks ago, now. Which exposed as almost nothing else has done in this war, just how wide the political divide in Iraq is. There really is nothing approaching a consensus in the political class about what kind of a state Iraq is to be.

America has now, in my view, in Iraq, a very good team in Ambassador Khalilzad, in General Casey, General Abizaid. And if a soft landing can be achieved out of this, if anything like a satisfactory outcome is available, I think these are the people, these are the Americans who will be able to do it. Many mistakes have been made. But when all is said and done I think that the present policies, military and political, are the ones that will bring us to successful conclusion if anything ever could have done.

I want to say one other thing, by the way, which echoes what my colleagues here have said about the US forces in Vietnam. Every American soldier in Iraq and every Marine has an arrow in his back from what occurred at Abu Ghraib. But I want to say that I think it is true that countries get the government they deserve, by and large. And they certainly get the armies they deserve. And the United States has a magnificent army--

[Applause]

--And Marine corps. To be amongst the officers and the men fighting this war is to be reminded what this country is really all about. To be sure, mistakes have been made and are still made. To be sure there is perhaps too high a reliance on high technology weaponry. But this citizens' army that the United States sends overseas, to be among them is to know that these people do understand the mission, have a real belief in what they are there to do.

And it is not to steal the oil and it is not to save Israel from a nuclear-armed Iraq. It is, I think, in the hearts and minds of the soldiers, it is to create something like a civil society in Iraq. And let's all hope and pray that they are able to do that. And that they will not have to bear the burden as many of you here have had to bear, coming home from a war in which the high hopes were ultimately deceived.

How it will come out? I was one of those people who believed strongly that if Saddam Hussein could be removed at an acceptably low cost, in terms of loss of life to the Iraqi people and to the coalition forces, it would be an unmitigated good for Iraq. I was never much concerned about the argument about weapons of mass destruction at the time. First of all peripheral to the job I doing reporting in Iraq.

But I think if I'm an expert in anything at all, it is in nasty places. And this was, in my experience, next only to North Korea, the nastiest, single place

on earth under Saddam Hussein. Anybody who doubts it should simply look at the trial and see through just the prism of the de-jao experience. The full brutality and nastiness of this man who will sit through hours of testimony about 11-year old boys being executed and women hung naked upside down and kicked in the chest by his half-brother and then complain about the abuse of human rights, because he was required to enter the building in shackles or because he hasn't had his lunch yet or whatever he may complain about.

Like most people who regarded what happened on April 9, 2003 as a liberation and saw it to be a liberation, it was. Whatever people may say now, they did throw flowers at the tanks. It was a wonderful thing to be in the streets of Baghdad on that first day. Not so wonderful in the days that followed with the looting. But like most of us who have been through the last three years, we have seen our hopes disappointed.

And I have to say that most of us now feel that the odds are heavily against a satisfactory, for the United States and for the Iraqi people, satisfactory outcome to this. And one thing that I listened with some care was the kind of accessibility that Dan and Frances and Steve had to American troops in Vietnam. And how they were able in talking to the GIs in the field to come to an appreciation of how the war was really going.

It is more difficult for us, not as difficult as it was a couple of years ago under General Casey. I'm not sure that it is entirely only because of General

Casey's presence there but we've been able to move around quite a lot more. But it is true that the restrictions on us are pretty extreme, brought about mainly I think by the degree of hazard. We can't go anywhere outside of Baghdad, in effect, except on US military helicopters or on fixed-wing aircraft and on embed.

We can, in some circumstances briefly dis-embed in Mosul, Bathra, certainly in Kurdistan. But, by and large, if we are going to see what is going on outside of Iraq, we do it in Humvees or in Black Hawks. We impute more than we can be sure that the generals are a good deal less hopeful about the likely outcome of this than what they say in public.

I want to be careful what I say about this because I think it is still possible-- And I think the generals believe it is still possible that with all the odds that are against it, that there can be an acceptable outcome to this. But there are signs, accumulating signs that they are somewhat more skeptical than the White House and the Pentagon would have us believe.

And I'm sorry, I've taken up more of your time than perhaps I should since I'm an interloper here. But I enormously appreciated being invited to come here. It meant a great deal.

[Applause]

WILLIAMS: Thank you. Lesson is, go with your gut. Thank you, John Burns. Let's have closing thoughts in order, Dan, Frances, Steve. Here we are, it strikes me, listening to John, a superb United States fighting force. And I've had the great good fortune to be with so many of them in this war. Learning how to deal with an insurgency, not the plan they had going in. Your comments.

RATHER: Well, I wish I had something wise and profound to say. I don't. It does occur to me to suggest for whatever it may be worth, and thinking about Vietnam as we have done today, go back over some of it and then be brought right up to the present moment by the incomparable John Burns, that Oscar Wilde once said in another context-- but based on my limited experience it applies especially towards times of war-- that the truth is rarely pure and never simple. So it was with Vietnam. So it is with Iraq now, in my humble opinion.

WILLIAMS: Frances.

FITZGERALD: It is a hard act to follow Dan. I guess I would like to leave on a note of some optimism about the press, which is our subject here. And that is that, you know, what I think we came ill prepared for in Vietnam and really never learned until perhaps the last moment was how important Vietnamese history and culture were to the war. Essential. Essential. And yet we didn't get it. I mean we were there, most of us were one or two years

at the time. Nobody was educated in advance. Nobody spoke the language and so forth and so on.

I think we are getting better at that now. It think there was a total blinder there, a blind notion that American power could do anything. It seems to me that in the Iraq War and certainly in, and in the Yugoslav war that preceded it, that reporters are paying much more attention to local history and culture. I mean we knew immediately from television reporters what the meaning of that mosque in Samarra was.

If not everything about it at least enough to educate the American public about why this was so important. So, on the whole, lessons have been learned and we are getting better at that.

WILLIAMS: Steve.

BELL: This whole two-day conference has just left me with the feeling, what a remarkable society we live in, where we have a free press, where we have the opportunity to get together and disagree, where Henry Kissinger would show up and feel he had an obligation to come here and take it on the chin from many of the people who are in this audience. This has been a reaffirmation for me and having John come up and be included reaffirms my faith in the people who are working today in an environment that is more dangerous than anything we faced on a day-to-day basis in Vietnam. I've always thought that the time I spent in Cambodia was as dangerous a time

for Western journalists as we've had in recent history and I certainly don't recommend it. But what's going on in Iraq today and many troubled spots in the world requires courageous, thoughtful reporting at a time when it is difficult, at least to think as much as you should. But I just feel very blessed to have been at this conference and all it represents to me.

WILLIAMS: And I say this knowing that we have Wesley Clark, Chuck Hagel, Bob Herbert, and Pete Peterson about to come up here-- I think the first panel and now this one, we have truly witnessed something extraordinary here today. It goes on after the break. Join me in thanking our panel.

[APPLAUSE]