LIBEL DEFENSE RESOURCE CENTER
2002 Annual Dinner

In the Trenches: War Reporting and the First Amendment

November 13, 2002
MS. ROBIN BIERSTEDT: Hello, good evening. I am Robin Bierstedt of Time, Inc., and it is my privilege to be here tonight as the Chair of the Libel Defense Resource Center, newly renamed the Media Law Resource Center, but what is in a name. Either way it is an organization devoted to the promotion and defense of the First Amendment.

We are here tonight, as you know, to honor war reporters; and with us is a group of distinguished journalists who have covered wars from Vietnam to the Middle East, Afghanistan to Iraq, and all the battles in between. One of our panelists experienced the Gulf War from inside an Iraqi prison.

War reporters have never had an easy relationship with the military. During the Civil War General Sherman believed that war correspondents were “spies and defamers with the impudence of Satan.” He wrote, “In giving intelligence to the enemy in sowing discord and discontent in an army, these men fulfill all the conditions of spies and have brought our country to the brink of ruin.”

Journalists who report on wars risk not just the usual slings and arrows of public opinion, they
risk their lives. Unlike other reporters who are simply reviled, war reporters are reviled and killed.

[LAUDATION]

MS. ROBIN BIERSTEDT: In the early months of war in Afghanistan more journalists than US troops have been killed by hostile fire. Reporting in a war zone has always been hazardous. It is still hazardous, but now there are other risks, risks that threaten First Amendment interests, denial of access, disinformation, and diabolical spin. Is war reporting becoming an oxymoron? It is not what it used to be when reporters joined soldiers in foxholes.

A government official was once asked how much information should the press be given about a war? His answer, “I tell them nothing ‘til it’s over, and then I tell them who won.” And that was said in the good old days of World War II when relations between the press and the military were relatively good.

In Vietnam, to quote Bob Simon, “You just go down the road wherever it took you to get the story.” The resulting coverage, of course, was not government sanctioned, and it ultimately had such a powerful effect on public opinion the US government was forced
to withdraw. The government did not make the same mistake in the Persian Gulf where access to troops was by guided tour.

As Walter Cronkite said in a speech recently, “We have no history now of the Persian Gulf War. We have only what the military reporters wrote and that is what their bosses told them.” In Afghanistan access was even more restricted. For a while in Afghanistan reporters could talk to members of the Taliban and the Northern Alliance but not US soldiers.

When a group of reports and photographers tried to reach victims of friendly fire near Kandahar last December, they were actually held captive by US commanders in a military warehouse. The Pentagon itself is controlling information more tightly than ever. Donald Rumsfeld joked that his daily briefing was, “hollow and empty.” But no information is perhaps preferable to bad information.

After a bid raid near Kandahar last fall the general in charge reported that the attack overall was successful. But when Seymour Hersh did some real reporting on the incident, his sources said that the mission had been a “total goat fuck.”
MS. ROBIN BIERSTEDT: I guess that is what the military says when things do not turn out so well.

[LAUGHTER]

MS. ROBIN BIERSTEDT: The public apparently does not care. In a public relations war, Rumsfeld and Company are winning handily with an approval rating that is about double that of the press. Over the past year newspapers have actually been condemned by their readers for revealing too much information about operations in Afghanistan. And executives of major news organizations have acknowledged that they are increasingly making decisions based on public approval.

Well it is time for the panel and some real war stories. Ted Koppel is Anchor and Managing Editor of ABC News Nightline. He joined ABC News 39 years ago and has been Nightline’s anchor since 1980 when the program debuted during the hostage crisis in Iran.

The Iranian Hostage Crisis made Jimmy Carter a one-time President, but it made Ted Koppel the permanent icon of broadcast news. He has won every major broadcast award including 33 Emmys. He even beats Letterman in the ratings.
[LAUGHTER]

[APPLAUSE]

MS. ROBIN BIERSTEDT: Before Nightline, Mr. Koppel was ABC’s Chief Diplomatic Correspondent. This assignment included coverage of and travels with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. He was also ABC News’ Hong Kong Bureau Chief where he covered the Vietnam War.

To his left John Kifner joined The New York Times in 1963. Whatever it took, he always found the action, from the Kent State shooting where he was the only reporter, to the US assault on the caves of Tora Bora. He was a Times Bureau Chief in Warsaw, Beirut, and Cairo. He went to the Gulf region in 1979 and from there parachuted into all the trouble spots — Iran, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Afghanistan. His colleagues called him Kifner of Arabia.

Mr. Kifner was expelled from Iran along with other American journalists during the Iranian Hostage Crisis. Apparently the Iranian government does not like reporters either, but he fought his way back through the Iranian bureaucracy and was the first American newspaper man to return. Named the
Metropolitan Reporter for the Times in 1988, Mr. Kifner continues to travel the world to cover breaking stories.

To his left Bob Simon joined CBS in 1967 and is currently a regular contributor to 60 Minutes and a correspondent for 60 Minutes II. He has roamed the world covering wars and conflicts including Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Sarajevo, Tiananmen Square, the Falklands, Northern Ireland, and the Middle East to name just a few. He can say the words “don’t shoot” in eight languages.

[LAUGHTER]

MS. ROBIN BIERSTEDT: Covering the early days of the Gulf War, Mr. Simon was frustrated by the restrictions imposed on the press by The Pentagon, so he and his team made an unauthorized trip to Saudi Kuwaiti border and got a view of the war that was definitely too close for comfort.

They were captured by Iraqi forces and spent 40 days in Iraqi prisons. Suspected of spying, Mr. Simon was interrogated, beaten, confined to a pitch black cell and nearly starved. Undaunted, two months after
his release he returned to Baghdad to do a documentary about his experience.

And finally, Seymour Hersh is one of the country’s top investigative reporters. In 1969 he broke the story of the My Lai Massacre in South Vietnam for which he won a Pulitzer Prize but was vilified by US servicemen. Since then he has taken on the CIA, Henry Kissinger, and JFK among others.

His book about the downing of Korean Airlines Flight 007 caused CIA Director William Casey to threaten him with prosecution if it revealed classified information. Mr. Hersh who had deleted some sensitive material from the book on his own initiative said, “I guarantee that we in the press have as good a sense of what is important and what is good for America as the people in the CIA.”

Mr. Hersh wrote for The New York Times in 1970s. Now writing for The New Yorker he has been covering the politics of the Middle East, and South Asia, and the lapses in US national security both before and after 9/11.

[APPLAUSE]
MR. TED KOPPEL: Robin thank you very much.

Let me just make sure if all of our microphones are working. Can you all hear me?

ALL VOICES: Yes.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Can you hear me?

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Is this working all right?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Bob?

MR. BOB SIMON: Well I had mine put on by a professional.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Excellent.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Here I go.

MR. TED KOPPEL: All right. I am so glad that we have our motto for the evening, which I propose to you is goat fuck exactly.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: Some years ago the late American author James Michener received a phone call at home from someone who said congratulations Mr. Michener, but our organization, then he gave the name of the organization, has voted you the greatest living American author; and we would like you to come to an event, and he named a time and a place, to accept
the award. Michener said, “Well let me go consult my calendar,” and he did, and he came back a couple of moments later and said, “I’m dreadfully sorry, but I already have a prior engagement on that date, and I absolutely cannot make it.” There was a long pause at the other end of the phone and then the caller said, “Well can you think of another greatest living American author?”

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: And Michener said, “Yeah, well what about Mailer or Vonnegut?” And the guy said, “No, we already tried them. They couldn’t make it either.”

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: So I do not know who your first choice was for moderator this evening, but you clearly have your first choices for a panel. Oh one other thing just in the interest of complete clarity of where I come from. I am married to a lawyer. I actually sent my wife to law school 25 years ago so that I could finally do to one of them what they have been doing to me all of my life.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: All right.
MR. TED KOPPEL: Let me tell you what the program is.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: We have spent eight or ten seconds discussing what we were going to do here this evening, zero, if that. But have no fear you have before you at least three very experienced war correspondents and more to the point very thoughtful journalists.

Three of us here deal in sort of secondary journalism. You can tell The New York Times reporter by the bowtie.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: We are going to begin with me asking a few questions and then once the ball gets rolling, I suspect we will just be engaging in sort of multifaceted dialogue up here. But after we have done about 25 or 30 minutes, I am hoping that you will become involved. And what I would like you to do is to start thinking of areas that you would like to talk about.
I do not think we have any microphones down there, but it is not that huge a room. If you get up and yell the question, if others cannot hear it, I will repeat for you.

Let me begin by asking and Sy, I am going to start with you. How do you feel about censorship in wartime conditions?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: It does not matter. I mean it is total. It is to the point I was just -- we were talking at dinner. Somebody asked me what I thought was going to happen; and I said, you know, I got to tell you. I have not been this afraid probably since I, you know, saw the Wizard of Oz when I was eight.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: It is scary. I have been in this town, in Washington since the middle ’60s. I have less contact. I have friends, obviously I have been around a long time. I know people in the community. I know people in The Pentagon where most of my friends described -- the word we use for Donald Rumsfeld is Woody Allen. You know he is so funny -- ha, ha, ha.

[LAUGHTER]
MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: But I have never had less of a pulse. Do I know what this President is going to do? Does he want to go to Iraq? Is he perfectly content to operate within the UN? Do they want to go to Iran next, or is North Korea next, or is it China? You can read in the various papers of the neo-conservatives, you know, they have all said, you know, the Wolfowitzs, etc. that you read about. I will tell you what bothers me the most right now. I have a sense that what is going to happen in this second term is really going to be very hard for us to cope with.

We do not have access particularly. We can see him. We can watch him get interviewed, but we really do not know what they are thinking about. My hunch is you are going to see ethnic cleansing on the inside. You are going to see people who think the way some of the people -- the Cheneys and the Rumsfelds -- think are going to make it and people who think the other way are going to get lost. I am already seeing it in some very sensitive places, places you would not notice it, little, little small offices. People lose their job and they are replaced by somebody who maybe work, you know, for Jesse Helms or something.
I think what scares me is I honestly do not think some of those people represent either conservatism or any of the strains of Republican life and thought that we know. We have all been talking about the war, about intelligence, about whether there is a connection between Al Qaeda and Iraq, et cetera, et cetera. What it really boils down to is a nasty little ugly struggle in which some of the people in The Pentagon and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and some of the people in The White House, wanted the head of the CIA, George Tenet, who I am not a fan of, but they wanted him very much to start cooking, and he would not do it, to his credit. I think that is one of the real stories that has been happening in the last month.

He is standing up to them. I do not know how long he can last. I do not know how long . . . I think it is really going to be hard to watch these guys. They are very tough. I have never been so worried about a government in my life. I don't know what the hell they are thinking of.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Let me tighten up the question, if I may, a little bit.
MR. TED KOPPEL: And John maybe, maybe you would like to take a crack at it. Are there any circumstances under which you as a lifelong journalist think that censorship would be a good idea?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: No.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Oh, I didn’t ask you.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. JOHN KIFNER: That’s all right.

MR. TED KOPPEL: I am asking him.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: I will stand up . . . he is my pal. I will stand up for him.

MR. TED KOPPEL: No circumstances?

MR. JOHN KIFNER: You know you have the reasonable thing, which we had in the Gulf War when I was with the 101st Airborne. You are not going to broadcast their plans, you are not going to write what it is they are intending to do. Now this is also journalistically sound because you know it is going to get changed 16 times before they do it. So the principle of not endangering lives, yeah okay, that is reasonably sensible.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Okay.
MR. JOHN KIFNER: I do not think you go beyond that.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Bob?

MR. BOB SIMON: In the proper tradition of a panel, I will comment on what Sy had to say.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BOB SIMON: Which is . . . and I am not accustomed to blowing smoke, but Sy is one of the few, in fact he is just about the only Washington journalist I know who is not part of the problem; and when Sy talks about how this administration scares him, I am also frightened. And the point is that the Washington press corp is complicit. When Sy speaks of Rumsfeld as being a funny man, Rumsfeld among the leading members of the Administration does the best human being imitation.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BOB SIMON: I do not spend that much time in the States, but when I was here a few weeks ago, I just happened to be channel surfing and there was a Rumsfeld briefing, and he stood up and said something incredibly clever. I think it was, “I am going to say something Rumsfeldian.” And the entire room of
journalists of hard hitting Washington journalists was atwitter, giggling and showing their appreciation.

And the game that is played in Washington, and it always has been played this way but it is even tighter now, is that, is the tradeoff of access for patrons. And if you agree to sing their song, you will be invited for an audience. This has happened to somebody at CBS I can think of, somebody at NBC, somebody at The Washington Post. Of course I would not name names, but the point is they go easy on The President and his people, and they keep on getting invited back and keep on getting more access and print and broadcast reports that seem to be like journalism if you are not really paying attention. It seems as if you are getting information, but you are not getting information. You are getting spin.

One of the things that frightens me enormously, just one of the specific things, is that I saw a poll recently that showed that 60 percent of the American people believe that Saddam Hussein had something to do with September 11th. Now I am not a fan of Saddam Hussein, but the Administration has yet to provide a shred of evidence that the Iraqis had anything to do
with September 11th and yet 60 percent of the American people believe it.

Why? This is something which we could probably discuss for weeks and not come any closer to an answer. But the Administration’s manipulation of the media is not so much, frankly, the manipulation of the organizations which are sitting up here tonight because I think that this Administration and its predecessors decided that The New York Times and The New Yorker, and ABC and CBS, at least the Nightline part of ABC and the 60 Minutes part of CBS, do not matter that much, that what you want to do is to get simple one sentence messages across and repeated, repeated and repeated and repeated on radio, on local TV all the time -- Saddam is evil, Saddam is evil, Saddam is evil, we are good, we are good, we are good -- and apparently it sinks in. This is not a new media manipulation method. It has been used by other people in other countries in the 20th Century, but I think that is what is happening now. It is the only way, frankly, that I can even make any sense of so many people believing that Saddam had anything to do with September 11th. And I think censorship is bad.
MR. TED KOPPEL: I will tell you what.

[APPLAUSE]

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Could I just . . . I was just looking at a very interesting piece in last month’s Columbia Journalism Review which pointed out that in Rumsfeld’s briefings not a single one of the major developments through the war in Afghanistan, not the station of troops in Uzbekistan, not the firing of missile, the drones, nothing was ever, ever came out at the press conferences.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Because it was not raised or because it was not addressed?

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Because it was not addressed. And it is difficult to raise it for a reporter if you do not have some inkling of it. It certainly never, never came out of the press conferences.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Right. If I understand you all correctly, I have got two votes against censorship and one sort of qualified vote against it but under certain circumstances you understand it. Is that correct? I mean under limited, very limited
circumstances you go along? Fair enough? Oh go ahead, just help me a little bit.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Well no I don't even think that is censorship, that sort of comment.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Okay.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: That is just sort of common sense.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Common sense. Let me then try and make the argument for censorship, all right? We are going to have in Iraq, if we go to war, probably a press corp. I mean it depends on how many they allow in in the first place, but I would be shocked if it was fewer than 3,000 reporters, maybe closer to five. Many of those reporters, those who represent Bob’s trade and mine, will be traveling with videophones, portable satellite dishes.

In other words, the capacity when Bob and I were in Vietnam 30 years ago you know we would shoot our stories in the field on film, then it would have to be carted back to Saigon, then it would be put on a plane usually the next morning from Saigon to Tokyo, then from Tokyo to Los Angeles, then Los Angeles to New York, then a motorcycle courier would bring it in to
the studio, then it would be processed, then it would be edited, and the story that we did would be on the air two and a half a days we did it Bob? Is that about right?

MR. BOB SIMON: That’s about right. Yes.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Two and a half days. My daughter who works for CBS, I mean who works for CNN is on the air instantly at any given time. I don't know when the hell she has time to report because she is manacled to a live camera position.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: Not allowed to leave it. When CNN or MSNBC or Fox News go over to Iraq, they will have, if the military allows them to bring those pieces of equipment with them, they will have the kind of equipment with them that will permit them to broadcast a war live.

Now failure to permit that I think amounts to a form of censorship. But I am going to make the argument that that kind of censorship is not only okay, it would be almost criminal not to engage in that kind of censorship? Sy?
MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: What do you mean by that kind of censorship? I do not quite know what you mean.

MR. TED KOPPEL: What I am saying is if I am running a war and I have got representatives of ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, BBC, Deutschewelle, whatever the hell it is right, they are all out there with my troops, and they have all got the technical capacity to feed back what is happening live, so that folks who are sitting in Baghdad have only to turn on their set to CNN and they can see what is happening on the frontlines from the American vantage point, I am saying it would be criminal to permit that.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: You have an assumption built into that question that I am not sure is valid.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Go ahead.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: How may crews were with our special forces in Afghanistan?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Oh, no, no. I am, I am saying --

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: [Interposing] You are assuming that you are going to get . . . you know the thing that is so amazing to me about the war in Afghanistan, this victory we had over the Taliban --
MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] Right.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: -- was in 1991 when there was, when censorship was imposed in the news organizations, I don't remember. John? The networks -- I remember Hao raids . . . everybody was very upset about the fact that we could not go to the field. And as you know, that is how Bob got in trouble there. And there was almost no outcry when there were no reporters at all allowed into the field at all in Afghanistan. I do not know why you think it is even going to be an issue. I do not think . . . I know they are talking good talk about having all sorts of access --

MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] You are misinterpreting my question or my premise. I am saying they are not going to allow it.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: You bet.

MR. TED KOPPEL: But I am making the argument to piss you off --

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Okay.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: -- that it would be almost criminal if they were to permit all of us with our equipment and our capacity to broadcast live to do so,
and I am waiting for you to make a good argument

MR. BOB SIMON: I will argue with your premise.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Go ahead.

MR. BOB SIMON: I think the biggest difference between Vietnam and today is not the fact of we are in immediate communication today, which we are, and back then it took two and a half days which is also true, but the fact that back then the two parties were separate. The government/military was waging a war in Vietnam and we would go up and down roads and cover it. And the military did not really have much of a media strategy. And that media strategy has been developing since Vietnam because the military and the Administrations, various Administrations still believe that we lost the war for them.

And now I hear more and more talk of not just war planning but hard war planning and soft war planning. And the media planning of the war is studied just as carefully and planned just as fastidiously if not more fastidiously than the hard war, than the actual troops and tanks and firepower. Indeed it was no accident that in Afghanistan you did not have any
reporters with the troops, and that was part of the planning of the war to do it in such a way that reporters could not be there.

And I will bet any sum of money that whatever happens in Iraq if there will be a war in Iraq, and I think there will be, is going to be very similar. It will be lightening fast, and it will be special forces coordinating aircraft. It is not going to be large divisions and brigades moving laboriously across the sands of Iraq. The problems that used to exist about access just will not exist. It will all be happening before we know when or where it is happening and the reporters will all be mesmerized at the briefings in Qatar down the road from Al Jazeera, and that will be it. It will be total information management and some very brave and lucky souls will get some access and be able to do some reporting. But the real reporting will be done in Washington, not on the battlefield.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Yes, but one of you, one of you help me out.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: That will not be real reporting either --

MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] Hold, hold --
LIBEL DEFENSE RESOURCE CENTER
In the Trenches
11/13/02
MR. JOHN KIFNER: -- if it is done from Washington.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Hold on just one second John. At least address, hypothetical though it may be, and even if you are correct as I believe you are, that the early stages -- I mean they probably have special forces, A teams in Iraq already, and God knows we are not there anymore than we went with those special forces, A teams into North Vietnam, or into Cambodia when that was happening. But let’s say for the sake of argument that it does begin that way in coordination with a heavy air assault. We just had two major stories leaked parenthetically by the Vice President of the United States and the Defense Secretary of the United States in The New York Times and The Washington Post last weekend suggesting that ultimately we are going to have 200, 250 thousand ground forces, right, in Iraq.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: But was it illegal or was it disinformation?

MR. TED KOPPEL: No it . . . leaks. Where is it where it written that a leak has to be accurate?

[LAUGHTER]
MR. TED KOPPEL: A leak is simply something that is deliberately put out into the press. Sometimes it is true and sometimes it is a lie. Probably more often than not it is meant to mislead rather than to enlighten. My point is once they get those ground troops in there, once they have 200 or 250 thousand troops on the ground and a press corp that is bursting at the seams that wants to get in there, I am asking each of you, you are now, you know, if something terrible happened to you, lightening struck and you are now the head of Public Affairs for the Defense Department, are you going to allow the networks in with that live equipment?

MR. BOB SIMON: I would permit my favorite reporter from each network in with a crew and my favorite reporter if I could find one from The New York Times and The Washington Post --

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BOB SIMON: -- and perhaps AP. Al Jazeera can stay in the dunes.

MR. TED KOPPEL: I am not asking you whom you are letting in. I am asking you are you going to let them in with live equipment --
MR. BOB SIMON: [Interposing] Oh but that is precisely it.

MR. TED KOPPEL: You are going to let them in with live equipment?

MR. BOB SIMON: Indeed because I will know the guys I am letting in. You are asking me to play devil’s advocate.

MR. TED KOPPEL: That is fine.

MR. BOB SIMON: And I am playing it.

MR. TED KOPPEL: That is fine.

MR. BOB SIMON: If I was the Public Relations Officer for an American division, I would let in reporters I knew I could tame, reports I knew I could control and we all know that these guys exist. They exist in our own organizations.

MR. TED KOPPEL: All right look, unfortunately, and I did the math before; among the four of us we have about 160 years of experience. I want one of you guys to tell me the last time, other than Vietnam ironically where we had a pretty free reign, when was the last war you can remember when in fact that was not the case? When commanders or generals from Patton on down through the years did not take their favorite reporters and
leak stuff to them and keep everybody else out? When was this halcyon age in which reporters could go out, cover the war, write anything they damn well pleased and ship it back without censorship? When did that happen? I must have . . . I missed that war.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Well I have got to say that maybe it is because I am a New Yorker, a conniver and . . . I have had very good experiences on the street with the military, but it was basically because the guys that I was with broke all of the rules and took care of me. So in the Gulf War when the ground war started and the Defense Department put a 48 hour embargo on everything, I was pooled with the 101st Airborne.

They drove me 50 miles -- first they flew us out in the first wave in helicopters to the two air assaults that they did, flew us back into file, I connived the second one. I mean I told the guy the Marines had been filing for two days.

MR. TED KOPPEL: That will do it every time.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: It did. It did, there was a guy who, the guy was out of the hooch in 30 seconds. They had medivacs coming in a few minutes to get there.
But these guys broke the embargo. I mean they drove me 50 miles to paid phones to file in defiance of the embargo. In Haiti we were on the Eisenhower. They promised it was going to be a pool operation. They canceled the pool. We had already made friends with one company from the 10th, and we bought these like stupid black jackets from some war surplus store downtown.

So all of these guys got around us and they said Navy Seals, Navy Seals and got us on the helicopter and piled on top of us so nobody could see us.

MR. TED KOPPEL: That is no small act of imagination to see you as a Navy Seal.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. JOHN KIFNER: I was.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. JOHN KIFNER: You should have seen the photographer.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. JOHN KIFNER: He was a Puerto Rican with granny glasses like this and a ponytail, and he weighed about 240 pounds.
MR. JOHN KIFNER: But all of this was basically personal relations that, you know, if you did it the official way you would never do anything.

MR. TED KOPPEL: My question though, and look the fact of the matter is I have nothing but the highest regard, first of all, for all of these three guys; but particularly for Bob who during Desert Storm when everybody else, almost everybody else was staying back and waiting for the US military to escort them, Bob put himself and his camera crew at risk and indeed paid the price for it to get the story to circumvent. There are always going to be courageous men and women who do that.

And for as far back as I can remember, the way you got stories when you are not supposed to is you cultivate sources, you make relationships, you build a relationship with a unit, and you stay with the unit. Some of the best television reporting that was ever done out of Vietnam was done by my old friend Jack Lawrence who was working for CBS in those days.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Sure, Charlie Company.
MR. TED KOPPEL: And the way Jack did it was to spend ten days, two weeks, three weeks with the unit. The rest of us were going out, we would spend two days with the unit, we would fly back to Saigon again or fly back to the Da Nong again. That has always been the case.

My question is one of you tell me when the powers that be in Washington did not try to control the output of the press in covering a war? When did that happen?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: The problem with your story is that, with your hypothetical is, that these are different powers that be. And I do not know it seems sort of silly to be saying it. We are talking about a boogieman that may not exist or maybe it exists in some of our minds more, there is some palpable difference between now and then. And of course you are right. Of course people can get around personal, you know, people like John can do what he does, get out and get around; and will get stories on the edge.

I think this group, I think even the notion that there is going to be any access -- I am telling you Ted, this crowd has the utmost contempt for us.
They really do. They really do not care about us.

They really do have us figured out. You are talking about whether those leaks are leaks. Washington has become . . . it is so hard to know what they are doing. Sometimes I think this is . . . we are going to look back at this as strategic deception on an order that we cannot believe, that this has been a lot more clever than we think, that there are people here thinking deeply, you know.

If you remember Rummy, Rumsfeld, Woody Allen was going to start the Office of Strategic Deception. Remember that? He shut down the office when it hit The New York Times and other papers and the media, but he did not fire the people. Rendon is still there. I notice John Poindexter. Do you remember the famous one who thought the way to avoid secrecy in the Reagan years was to put things in e-mail rather than put them on paper.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: He is now back running --

MR. JOHN KIFNER: [Interposing] He is back, yes.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: -- you know, Security now.
MR. JOHN KIFNER: Sy, and they have just sent a
guy from The White House --

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: [Interposing] Over to be
Frank’s guy.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: -- to be Frank’s guy.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: And I do not think that is
about . . . well that is not about planning for the
war. I have never seen a military . . . I have never
seen the military take it in the chops quite as much as
this military is taking it. You know we have got a
Chairman, the Chairman Myers, you know, he is what two
view graphs deep is what they say basically. He is the
House organ. You know I have never seen anything like
it.

I have never seen a group this methodical, this
tough, this ruthless. People tell me bout somebody
wanting to be assigned to the J-3 Staff and Rummy
objecting, and you know saying this officer will not
serve there. It is just amazing. I don't know how you
could pose a hypothetical because you are assuming, you
are assuming a sense of democracy; and I am telling you
I am not sure it is there.
MR. TED KOPPEL: No, I am assuming something totally different, and I am assuming what I take to be the majority view in the United States today. In the post 9/11 era I think most people take the view take care of my security first, worry about those assholes in the media later. And this Administration has done a particularly skillful job --

MR. JOHN KIFNER: [Interposing] That is right.

MR. TED KOPPEL: -- at capitalizing on that view. But I am not going to just slough if off with that line. I want the three of you to explain to these nice people here why there is anything wrong with that. It is in fact the first responsibility of government to be concerned about the security of the people.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Oh come on. Alexander Bikel in the Pentagon Papers case, you remember he was the lawyer out of Yale Law School for, you know, argued the case for The New York Times and the Supreme Court. It came up in ’71 I guess, or maybe it was Burger or somebody who asked him well isn't there a time, isn't there some time we need prior restraint? And Bikel conceded an inch. He said what about . . . I think the question was what do you know about a troop ship
sailing? And you know you are *The New York Times* and you have information about a ship full of dough boys that is 1915 sailing out of the harbor and we know the Nazi U-boats are out there, would that be a time for prior restraint and he said yes.

I thought it was the dumbest thing I have ever heard. You publish it and let the, let the military . . . if you learn about it, it is leaked out, and presumably you could make the argument that maybe the bad guys know about it too, publish it and let them set a new date and keep it secret. I would argue that way. I think you have to be absolutely pure about it. We should be in the business of thinking of ways to help them do some -- I know you are not, you are playing devil’s advocate. I do not think it is our job at all to have meetings with them. We shouldn’t be insisting on total complete access.

We do not even begin to insist on that. We are so beaten up. We are so cowardly in our profession right now, we just generally are. We get a piece here and we get a piece there. We get a briefing there and we run with it. There is no systematic . . . this guy is --
MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] I am, I am --

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: -- this guy is tough. This guy is tough --

MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] I am not going to let you get away that easily, but before I come back at you, let me ask you why do you think that is? There are more of us than there have ever been before. There are more outlets and there is more competition. It was supposed to be that there would be all these niche groups of journalism that would be covering all kinds of things that were not covered before. What the hell went wrong?

We have more journalists out there than we have ever had, and we are getting less news than I think the American public has ever seen. Now why is that?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: These guys are good. They are better than we think they are.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: You mean it is going to get worse?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Oh I think they are good. I think they are good. I did not think so. I thought,
you know, this guy is just an ape you know he is Mali

MR. TED KOPPEL: Who is this?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Our President.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: He may be --look, it is not
a question of how much he knows. There is a lot, there
is a lot of feral cunning in that place. They rode
9/11 beautifully. I do not think the Democrats had a
change no matter what they did. I mean they, you know,
they are sitting on a policy right now. They want to
go to war with everybody in the world. It is an
American empire. They are basically just sort of, just
flouncing around the world making enemies every minute,
you know, totally contrary to what they should be
doing, not called on it, up in the poll, what are you
going to do with these guys?

You know Pinter I have . . . I got a

. . . Harold Pinter, I carry this with me. It is
something I always read. He gave a speech at the House
of Commons a couple of weeks ago and he began by
saying, “There is an old story,” I will read you this,
the few lines an old story about Oliver Cromwell after
he had taken the town of Drogheda. The citizens were brought to the main square and Cromwell, a British General, announced to his lieutenants, right, kill all the women and rape all the men. One of his aides said excuse me General, isn't it the other way around? And a voice in the crowd called out, Mr. Cromwell knows what he is doing.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. SEYMOUR HERSHEY: That unfortunately is us. We are in that boat. That is us.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: I am supposed to get you out of here at 10 o'clock. And that means we have got a half hour left. Bob what I would like you to do is whoever has a question or so, and usually --

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: You are ahead of me sir, but I will come to you in just a moment. Bob, why don't you address the issue of why it is in a time of greater media existence than ever before, when indeed any 17 year old with a video camera can go out and shoot a story and edit it on his Apple and put it on the Net and be in a sense a network all by himself, why are we
not seeing more of the kind of reporting that if I hear
the three of you correctly, you are all bemoaning does
not exist anymore or barely exists?

MR. BOB SIMON: Well it is from back at our
freshman college philosophy class, a difference between
quantity and quality. And the fact that quantity is
burgeoning does not mean that the quality is getting
any better. In fact it is not. And what you have is
in size unfortunate but true words we are so beat up
that very few people have been questioning the premises
that are being put forward.

You pose the question as a good devil’s
advocate, shouldn’t the American people be concerned
with security and shouldn’t the Administration be
providing security above everything else? Well the
obvious answer is yes, but we all know that the deeper
answer is that you can dress up anything in the guise
of security. What the Administration has been doing
this past year is calling anything it wants to do in
its main agenda or in any one of its many sub agendas
cloaking it in security.

The War on Terror. We were hit by Al Qaeda.
The trouble with Al Qaeda was that it failed us as an
enemy. It just did not come up to scratch. We could not find them.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BOB SIMON: And it was in fact I think in a way similar to what happened in Vietnam. We went to Vietnam to battle the Viet Cong, but they kept on disappearing into the jungle, so we bombed Hanoi. Hanoi we could find. Now we cannot find Al Qaeda so we are going to war against Baghdad. And the Administration never really found the need to provide us with a segue. How did we get from Al Qaeda to Baghdad? As I say, they have not provided a shred of evidence about any links because they have not been able to find them; and we know the CIA came under such pressure to find links and failed, that The Pentagon now has established its own intelligence agency so it can produce the intelligence that the Administration requires.

The other great argument of the Administration, and Bush -- and I was shocked -- Blair, came out together and talked about an IA/EA report, in the International Atomic Agency report six months ago, that talked about Saddam being six months away from
getting a nuclear weapon. That report never existed.

In fact what should have been pounced on by a vigilant press corp that night, what report are they talking about? It took days for that to come out.

These guys have learned that by manipulating the hourly media, by feeding very simple stories to all of the quantity of outlets that Ted is referring to, they can ignore the few people who are going to look a little bit deeper because nobody reads them anyway.

MR. TED KOPPEL: And parenthetically let me add to what Bob said before. He was exactly right. The Administration, I say this just having had Secretary Powell on the program last night, but by and large the Administration really does take exactly the position that Bob has enunciated. They do not want to come on 60 Minutes, they do not want to come on Nightline because they say we are not really looking for your audience. They really do not want our audience. They want to be able to take it in small bite size chunks and put it on CNN and Fox and MSNBC where there is such a voracious appetite for information that news becomes, the definition of news becomes not what is most important but what is most recent.
Now go ahead sir and ask your question please.

I am sorry --

MR. JOHN KIFNER: [Interposing] And they certainly honed that during the gulf war when you had this succession of press conferences whether it be a press conference in Tehran during the day and then you would have --

MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] The Pentagon.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: --The Pentagon on a six or seven hour different cycle. So they get like the rough story going in Tehran, and then polish it in time when editors would hear it as well as when it was on Time in New York. And you had, you know, very neat, plausible guys, Marine generals, players, good uniforms. And you know this unruly, you know, band of people shouting rude questions and many of them being very ignorant and it created this dichotomy where here were these people who were in control and saying reasonable things and this other shouting band of irresponsible people.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Saturday Night Live did a famous parody of a press conference at The Pentagon which I am told has been shown not once, not ten times, but hundreds of times at The Pentagon. They love it.
I mean it is all of these reporters asking the most idiotic questions in the world, you know, why can't you tell us when you are going to attack, where you are going to attack, how you are going to attack; why don't you get us started sir, go ahead.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: [interposing] And this goes also to the question about the proliferation of the media in a sense that a lot of it has no experience and no sense. I am sorry. Go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am not a lawyer; and my most success as a journalist was in the college newspaper. I am an entrepreneur so I am coming a little bit as an outsider. I agree with Ted. I am here to help you out.

MR. TED KOPPEL: I am not sure I want your help, but go ahead.

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Censorship is good in certain circumstances. In March 1991 when CNN went live with photographs and journalists do not have to be with the Delta Force or with the special forces to break news that is possibly detrimental.
March 1991 CNN released video footage of where the scud missiles were landing in Israel, and it is well known that Saddam Hussein’s best reconnaissance about where those missiles were landing was coming from CNN. And that was potentially damaging their position. You are nodding your head.

MR. KIFNER: No, I’m not...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [Interposing] --at the time.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: ...It does not make any difference. You cannot aim a scud missile.

MR. BOB SIMON: That is right. It is wrong. I cover Israel and...

MR. JOHN KIFNER: I was, I was there when the scud missiles were dropping. You cannot aim them. It is just they drop in a 50 mile radius.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well you do not have to be with the A Team for that information to be censored.

I think that the real point is that in today’s day and age it is impossible to control with the videophones and the cell phones, it is impossible.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Oh you can keep us out.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well the question is, the real question is you said where is it written that a
leak has to be true? My question to you, to the whole panel where should it be written? Who should be the arbiter? On the government’s side it is obvious it is controlled, it is centralized. They know who is supposed to control it. They are supposed to control it. On the media side who should be the arbiter? Who should be setting the standard for what is right and what is wrong, the educational system? When you have television news anchors that do not require high school degrees to get prime time spots, and you do not have the licenses being required to get to a certain level of journalism, who should be the arbiter?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Well actually you have raised a wonderful question. I often do this when we are having this kind of discussion in a group, and I will sort of skip to the main point right away because you have raised it in an interesting fashion. What does it take to be a journalist in the United States of America? And I get all kinds of wonderful answers to that, but the real answer is nothing. This is supposed to be a conversation about war coverage and the First Amendment.
What the First Amendment does sir, as you know, is it enables anyone in this room to call himself or herself a journalist. There is no such thing as a license for journalism, you are absolutely correct. There is no test. If I want to go fishing in a certain area, I may have to get a license. If I want to drive a motorcycle or a car, I have to get a license; but you do not have to have a license to be a journalist. The assumption is that somehow the battle between good information and bad information is ultimately going to work its way out in favor of the good information. When you come up with a better system, let us know.

[APPLAUSE]

MR. TED KOPPEL: Now who else . . . I have a little trouble seeing back there. Sir, yes go ahead sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] Would there be a little bit in . . . here you guys are up there in essence what you do . . . I am hearing from you a certain inability to cover the story as it is about to happen. So what do we need to do?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: You are lawyers. Get an apartment in Paris. You have got the money.
MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: I have been looking.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Go ahead guys. It is a fair question.

MR. BOB SIMON: I think the whole point is that if you turn onto Nightline and read *The New York Times* read Sy in *The New Yorker*, and tune into occasional pieces on CBS, you have a certain amount of --

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BOB SIMON: -- information. But it does not mean anything because let’s face it, we are talking about a . . . not to mince words, we are talking about an elite here. And the majority of people are not getting their information from here.

You know Sy can, Sy might piss off people at The White House, but they know that they can override him because the people who read *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times* and Nightline and 60 Minutes are minuscule. They are politically insignificant. They are not going to make any difference.

So you can get information. There are good journalists out there, and things will be covered properly; but they are not going to be covered properly
by those organs that the Administration can count on to get the message that they want to get across, across to the majority of people who will back them up.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Look, Robin mentioned at the outset in her lovely introduction that more journalists died in the early days of the war in Afghanistan than military. There is a reason for that, and as tragic as the deaths of those men and women are, it is actually good news in terms of your question. There will always be -- usually younger men and women -- who are going to go out and who are going to find a way to cover the story. And the good news if you do not read it, it is because you are not looking for it.

At least in this country it is still available. It may not be available as ubiquitously as Sy Hersh would like to have it be available, but frankly it is my view that it never was. You have always had to look for it in special places, and it took Sy Hersh who back then . . . were you working full time for the *Times* when you did the My Lai story?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: No, freelancer.
MR. TED KOPPEL: You were a freelancer. Right?

It wasn’t any of the regular *The New York Times* reporters who found that story. It was a freelance.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: But Ted let me ask you something. Suppose five years ago, now this is what 9/11 is, this is how everything has changed. Suppose five years ago an American unmanned plane, whatever it was called then. The Israelis started this Predator business about 20 years ago, an unmanned plane was following somebody we thought was an enemy of our country and tracked it for a little while and fired a missile at it and killed six people in the plane, on the ground, in the car rather. They were tracking a car for hours. That is what happened a couple of weeks ago, it was two weeks ago. Five years ago would we have been much more worried collectively whether *The New York Times*, the USA Today or what . . . all of us had been much more worried about the legal implications of . . . imagine killing somebody in a country with which you are not at war not knowing whether the other people with this bad guy, and I am sure he is a bad guy, not knowing whether they were his children or maybe a soccer team he was taking someplace, not
calling out a helicopter to stop the plane. We had
helicopters in Yemen, not calling out a helicopter to
stop him and arrest him and seize him and prosecute
him, and if this happened five years ago, I would like
to think we would have gone to hell on that story.

MR. TED KOPPEL: No, you know what would have
happened five years ago? Five years ago the US
government, which after all released the pictures that
permit you to know about this story, five years ago the
US government would have denied that it happened.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Instead of boasting about
it you mean?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Instead of boasting about it,
exactly.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Not boasting about it,
maybe you are right. Yes right, because it would have
had some sense that the people would ask question they
do not want to be asked --

MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] Right.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: -- about what is the
authority, why is this Title X or why isn't it a
violation of the Executive Order? Why is it, you know,
why is it protected by the laws of war?
MR. TED KOPPEL: John you are shaking your head.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: No, go ahead. That is --

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: [Interposing] You are allowed to interrupt me.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: No, go ahead Sy. I am sorry.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: No I am just thinking it is just, it has been a sea change. You know me I was going batty about this story. Are you kidding? Who else was in the car? You know I just wanted to know who else was in the car. What did you know?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Are you stretching or asking? Go ahead.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] You suggested that 21 year old with a high 8 could go and cover the war in Afghanistan.

MR. TED KOPPEL: It is not quite what I said, but go ahead, yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] But it is possible isn't it?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] It takes tens of thousands of dollars to get into a country like that.
AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] If they have given more to get it back --

MR. JOHN KIFNER: [Interposing] That is what my expense account says.

MR. TED KOPPEL: No.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] The important question is how much has the concentration of ownership of the media curtailed your ability to report what you want in war zones? If you want to do a story from Afghanistan but it is jeopardizing the deal two companies made, is that a factor?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Yes. No I mean that is a perfectly reasonable question. I do not know if all of you could hear the question. It sort of began with a premise with which I disagree and that is that the 20 year old with a high 8 could not make it to Afghanistan because it cost $10,000 to get there. When you are 21, you can get there for a hell of a lot less than $10,000; and when I was 21 I did and I suspect so did everybody else on this panel. There are things you can do.
But the larger and the more important question that you pose is whether the consolidation of all of these media giants has not led to a point where there simply is not as much money left anymore for the kind of enterprise journalism to go cover foreign news that there was 15, 20, 30 years ago; and the honest answer to that is you are absolutely right. There isn't.

The consolidation theoretically was supposed to create far more money for this kind of enterprise. It has not. All of the news divisions now have fewer assets than they did five years ago. You know part of what happened is, and Bob's wonderful program 60 Minute is guilty. You know when I first joined ABC news almost 40 years ago, I think the whole News Division got about $5 million a year from the Entertainment Division and they said go, do not come back for anymore. But the beauty part was we could cover anything we damn well pleased. Nobody expected us to get ratings.

Then along came 60 Minutes, how long ago, 32 years ago?

MR. BOB SIMON: The story is so good, it should be a apocryful but it is true. When Don Hewitt two or
three years after 60 Minutes went on the air called everyone who worked at 60 Minutes together one Monday and said I have got good news and bad news. The good news is for the first time last night we made money. The bad news is for the first time last night we made money.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BOB SIMON: And that is the way it has been. And the other irony when you think about it, when 60 Minutes began, it was considered to be . . . I mean it was a novel idea and it, you know, titillated a lot of people enough so that it got on the air and it did not do very well for a while. But it was considered to be a light and fluffy news magazine. It was the first news magazine at the time. The heavy CBS news programs were CBS Reports, and the CBS Evening News, and the CBS Morning News which was a real news program at the time. And this was going to be a little light entertainment.

Well it turns out now that 60 Minutes is probably the most serious thing on CBS news. But it did not start out like that. It was not forever thus.
MR. TED KOPPEL: But I mean what happened is that 60 Minutes begat 20/20 and 20/20 begat Dateline, and Dateline begat Prime Time Live, and Prime Time Live begat and begat and begat; and the expectation, the reason there was all of this begatting going on is because these programs were making money. But they did not make money as Bob points out by covering hard news. They made money by covering what in those days were considered to be rather frivolous stories.

Well the stories have gotten more and more frivolous, there is less and less hard news on the commercial television networks and very little hard news at all. And I have got to be careful in how I say this. On the cable networks because they are so concerned, as I said a few minutes ago, about having the latest news... I mean all you had to do was watch during the sniper story, you know. What they are giving you is what has happened in the last five minutes. God forbid they should break away from that story to cover something about a UN resolution in Iraq because they are watching on a minute by minute basis and their ratings go down because the people who are watching for the sniper story go over to MSNBC or Fox.
And that is the way it is being covered now.

So the fact that we started making money with these programs means that now these great corporations have come back to us and said we need you to make more money. But this is in a universe of fragmenting programs. We have fewer viewers now by far.

When Nightline began in 1980, The Tonight Show, whatever it was that CBS has back on in 1980, this was before Letterman and Nightline collectively had 70 percent of all the viewers watching television at 11:30 at night. These days among the three of us we have 30 percent. That 40 percent has gone . . . and in fact I just got news today that where Nightline has lost to the degree that we have lost viewers over the past year, most of them have gone to porn and violence which is on the cable networks at the same time.

Those are our competitors -- not Letterman, not The Tonight Show -- but some good decent hard sex and violence.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Now of course Nightline was on, if you remember, spawned really by the hostage crisis in Iran.
MR. JOHN KIFNER: And at that time, really was the Golden Age of foreign correspondents, 15 years -- bureaus everywhere.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Everywhere.

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Every network had a bureau in Beirut where I was. Tehran, ABC had a whole floor, rooms overnight for the drivers. It was, you know, it was a fantastic output of resources. And now you go, I mean the major networks will have somebody in London, maybe Moscow, maybe Tokyo.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Forget Moscow. We just closed our Moscow bureau. I think we now have, and frankly you know I think ABC is doing as well as CBS and NBC are. I do not think we have six foreign correspondents anymore.

MR. BOB SIMON: We are no longer a newsgathering organization.

MR. TED KOPPEL: That is correct. Let’s get a couple of more questions and then we have got about ten minutes before we have got to wrap this thing up. Anybody out there? Yes sir?
AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] You mentioned the technology, the satellite and the videophones. Is it possible that over the years your access has become and your demand for the type of equipment and the type of coverage that you want has become greater?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Oh I would not doubt that for a moment. I mean look, I was being . . . I was not just being a devil’s advocate. I was being quite serious when I said if I were a military commander, I would want to make damn sure that if I had a television crew with me that had a videophone and there was going to be shipping back -- I mean not shipping back, shipping back was okay -- it is going to be sending a live signal back that can be picked up by my enemies, I would be concerned about that.

I think that is in point of fact a legitimate concern. That does not mean that I believe, you know . . . and frankly in all the years that we were in Vietnam there were only two basic ground rules that I remember. Bob, sorry if you remember any others, John. It was if you were covering a battle, do not give the unit designation and do not give the location while the battle is going on; and that was even though the film
was going to go back and not go on the air for two
days. I am not aware of a single instance in which
that was violated.

Even when I have been in front of audiences of
military men who were in Vietnam, I say come on if
anyone of you here knows of an instance where somebody
violated that restriction, tell me about it; none, not
once. I think it would be a good idea to have certain
. . . I have got no objection to reasonable ground
rules. I think that would be a reasonable ground rule.
I do not think you can go out there and run a war if
all your enemy has to do is sit back in Baghdad in his
office and watch CNN and then phone directions to his
own commanders. I do not consider that to be
unreasonable censorship.

What these gentlemen have been talking about,
however, is a climate in Washington these days that
says in effect if we can get away with sharing nothing
unless it serves our immediate political purpose to
leak something that is what we are going to do. To a
certain degree I think that has always been the case in
Washington, but Sy is right, more so today.
MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: If no, if to take your point further, if you really take it to its logical end about the media and the access and the danger it poses, you are really making a great argument for the end of war. War cannot be very logical anymore really in a democratic society theoretically because that kind of access would make a very difficult to wage war. So I like it sort of. It is another nice way of thinking about it. Maybe we can make an argument for war because, you know, if you have to have, if you have to be a prolific society and have democracy and have to have cameras there, and they are going to betray . . . I think the answer is of course that all of us in the media use common sense. You do not need censorship.

We all live, have common sense. All the years at The New York Times, all the crazy editors John and I worked with, you know, there was one basic understanding. You really did not publish anything that common sense told you was going to be adverse to the national interest, and we all did that. There was an understanding. You are saying about inadvertent. I take it you are talking about just the access is so
total now with the kind of stuff that you have, it is inadvertent. There is no conscious . . . it is just the question . . . having stuff in the field that is so hot and so vibrant that just shipping it back exposes you. Is that your point?

MR. TED KOPPEL: Well you are not shipping it. You are putting it on the air live. I mean if, for example, Saddam Hussein could have a predator with cameras over a battlefield, that would be extremely useful information.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSHEY: If I were Saddam Hussein, I would not do anything. I would not move. He is covered. Saddam Hussein is pretty covered by us. He’s not got a lot of flexibility.

MR. TED KOPPEL: All right, let’s see if we can get a couple more questions in and then we are going to wrap it up. Way in the back.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] I have a question for Mr. Simon.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Are you way in the . . . well okay. Way in the back and then way, way in the back.

[LAUGHTER]
AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] Just following up on a concept that Mr. Simon mentioned a couple of times that I find very worrisome. It is the concept of journalists being used and fed information from the government. My question is as a foreign correspondent, how do you know the difference when you are between cultivating government sources and being used? And then the follow up question is are the people that you were talking about who are actually being used by the government and fed information know they are being used or do they think they are cultivating sources?

MR. BOB SIMON: The question posed the way you just have is an eternal question. It has always been like this and you always had that quandary when you are dealing with a government source. What is that particular person’s agenda in telling you this. But what I was referring to really is something which is new and far more ominous which is the drumbeat, the constant hourly drumbeat of frankly more than anything else of scare news -- Saddam nuclear, Saddam chemical, Saddam biological, Saddam will attack the United States. Well Saddam cannot even attack Iran.

[LAUGHTER]
MR. BOB SIMON: I mean the guy does not have anything. I mean of course he is a son of a bitch and of course he did not cooperate with UN resolutions. He is not the only guy who did not. But of course there is a weapons program, but the guy has been crippled. I mean . . . but this constant not feeding of individual journalists because once you are at a certain level of journalism, you sort of know what you are doing. I mean you have been around the block.

But I am talking about the way the Administration manipulates, more than anything else, local news and, as Ted was suggesting, cable news. You have got CNN and MSNBC in such ferocious competition, and they are competing not only in terms of immediacy, but look at their logos. Look at the way they are building up their music and their graphics, and it has nothing to do with news anymore. It has to do with getting something on every few minutes, and the Administration is perfectly happy to provide that and that is what it is doing.

The tactic . . . there is something I just . . . I am doing a story that this arose. I don't know if any of you remember the arrival of the victorious
American troops in Kuwait in 1991. I was just reminded of that recently looking at some footage which showed hundreds of Kuwaitis waiving American flags to greet the troops. Did anyone stop to think, where did these Kuwaitis who had been under Iraqi occupation for six months get hundreds of American flags?

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BOB SIMON: It was the guy that Sy mentioned earlier on, John Rendon. He was on contract for The Pentagon and the agency to make the information, make the war television friendly. He got those American flags to the Kuwaitis. That is how the game is played.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Way, way back.

[PAUSE]

MR. JOHN KIFNER: He is on [unintelligible] now for the Iraqi war.

MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] Sorry guys. John can you hold it for a second?

MR. JOHN KIFNER: I am sorry.

MR. TED KOPPEL: We can hear you if you could speak up a little bit please.
AUDIENCE MEMBER: [OFF MIKE] Okay

[unintelligible] --

MR. TED KOPPEL: Could you all hear the question? Fundamentally the question was do we . . . a great many members of the Administration come from oil background -- Dick Cheney, the President himself. Do we think that the war against Iraq was driven by the need or the desire for oil and has the media been doing an aggressive job of pursuing that?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: It seems like an eminently reasonable question.

MR. TED KOPPEL: It sure does.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: So what is the eminently reasonable answer?

[LAUGHTER]

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: It really has not been pursued. Iraq has the second largest proven reserves of oil, 112 billion barrels second only to Saudi Arabia. It is also the kind of oil that our . . . you know we are spoiled in America. We are used to the very light Arabian crude, and most of our reproduction
facilities are tiered, you know, our processing refineries are geared to it. So we need that oil.

Right now the United States through brokers, and steadily in the last ten years since the Gulf War, we are buying more oil, Iraqi oil through third parties not in violation of any embargos, this is UN approved. We are buying more Iraqi oil, that oil originated from Iraq, sold to brokers. Our companies are buying more than they did before the Gulf War, and again I can tell you this is the original sotte voce question in this town because nobody is going to talk about it, but you know it is the 800 pound elephant in the room. How important is the oil when it is the second largest reserve and you are dealing, as you said, with a lot of people that know a great deal about oil?

I would like to know, you know, what Exxon and Mobil and some of these companies are lobbying and what they are telling the Administration. But believe me “forget about it” as any cabby will tell you.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Let me toot Nightline’s horn a little bit here. About six months ago we did a three part series on precisely this and on the fact that there is a reason why the United States now has
military bases in places like Kazakhstan and Kurgyzstan. One of the great dreams for many years has been to bring a pipeline from the Caucuses through Afghanistan down through Pakistan and to warm water ports there. For the first time, maybe if you start to say wait a second, let me see if I get this. We have got troops in Georgia, we have got bases in Kurgyzstan and Kazakhstan, we now have troops and a presence in Afghanistan. Nothing would be . . . I mean nothing really would be nicer in terms of dealing with the Saudis than to be able to get some of that oil in the Caucuses which has always been there and has been the object of, you know, great battles since the beginning of the last century. Although those battles were between the Russians and the British, the problem has always been can we get them out.

And a pipeline through Afghanistan has always seemed just too fragile, too dangerous. Now for the first time it seems like a realistic possibility. At a time when we would like to be able to develop alternative suppliers to Saudi Arabia, can you imagine what would be more useful in addition to building that pipeline than to also being able to get, as Sy was
saying, access to the second largest reserves in the world in Iraq?

So the answer to your question is yes, there is every reason to ask those questions. There is every reason in fact to believe that that is a part of what we are about here. Let me just, at the risk of rambling on a little bit, let me add one further thing.

The charges that are currently being leveled against Iraq -- lousy humanitarian record, attacks his neighbors, brutalizes his own people, has used poison gas against his own people -- those things are all true. There is one interesting point, however, that the Administration fails to point out. They were all true in 1988 and ’89, and ’90 at a time when the US Congress in fact was trying to pass a resolution condemning Saddam Hussein for attacking his own people, really the Kurdish people, with poison gas in a town by the name of Halabja.

Do you know what happened to that resolution? The White House squashed it, would not let it come through. So all of these charges that are being made against Saddam Hussein, they are 14 years old. They are all . . . I mean not that they are not equally true
today. They are equally true today, but back then when it served American interests to have Saddam Hussein in power as a counter weight to the Iranians who we were more concerned about back then, it did not matter what he was doing to his own people. It did not matter if he was using poison gas. It did not matter if he was developing chemical weapons. Do you know where some of the equipment came from for those chemical weapons that he has developed, the good old US of A and Germany, and France, and Great Britain. That is where he got the equipment. Look it up.

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Right on Ted.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: All right.

[APPLAUSE]

MR. BOB SIMON: Absolutely.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Folks it is ten o’clock. It would only be fair for me to give each of my colleagues up here a chance to sort of wrap it up. John, do you want to start us?

MR. JOHN KIFNER: Well I think we are going to be in a very grim, manipulative information mode, that there will be very little real access. There will be
some kind of a fake cool of some kind and a very rigidly controlled set of information.

You know you saw Afghanistan, wow. You know we just, we hit this concentration of sinister bad people who were sitting around plotting. By the time people reached there, that is a front page story. It is the lead of the paper. By the time reporters get there two weeks later, it turns out it is a wedding party and this goes . . . this went on again and again. And even the secondary act of aborting it is going to be very diminished by the power of the primary sources in Washington and The Pentagon press control.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Bob?

MR. BOB SIMON: I think the scary thing, the scariest, and this has existed before but it is more intense now than it ever was, your question about how important is oil in the coming war. Well as you could tell from all of the answers from this platform, we do not know. We also do not know and incidentally something which has been forgotten, we still do not know because Vice President Cheney has not revealed who he met with during the formative days of the
Administration from the oil industry and what they talked about.

This was a very big issue before September 11th when the press was militant about finding out just who had been on the agenda. Who did Cheney meet with to talk about the energy policy which turned into a Congressional Bill and what they talked about? We still, he still has not revealed anything and we have sort of gone off of it. I guess we have just moved on to other things or gotten bored. And the Administration can always count on us eventually getting bored and losing interest and moving on to something else.

But any other question you ask, why are we planning to invade Iraq? We know what they say, and what they say does not hold water. If you investigate any of the reasons that the Administration is putting forth for invading Iraq, they just do not make any sense. As Ted just pointed out very eloquently, the whole bunch of humanitarian reasons were applicable when they were our best friends.

I do not know why they are about to attack Iraq. I have my own guesses, but the only way you
would find out, and the only way you would find out how important oil is would be to bug Bush’s phone, bug Cheney’s phone, bug Rumsfeld’s phone and boy that would be fascinating.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. BOB SIMON: Let’s hope for the sake of history that there is a tape rolling somewhere because we just do not have the slightest idea.

MR. TED KOPPEL: Brother Hersh, do you want to --

MR. TED KOPPEL: [Interposing] Oh yes.

MR. TED KOPPEL: -- sing us a lullaby?

MR. SEYMOUR HERSH: Real simple, get out of equities.

[LAUGHTER]

MR. TED KOPPEL: All right ladies and gentlemen. You have been a lovely audience.

[APPLAUSE]

MS. SANDY BARON: On behalf of LDRC about to be MLRC I cannot thank you enough gentlemen. This was a phenomenal panel. Thank you all. Good night, and we will be seeing you all I suspect at meetings over the next couple of days, but good night for now. Thanks.