FIGHTING WORDS

HOW ARAB AND AMERICAN JOURNALISTS CAN BREAK THROUGH TO BETTER COVERAGE

By Lisa Schnellinger and Mohannad Khatib
Produced by the International Center for Journalists

"Arabs are violent, religious extremists unwilling to consider any point of view that conflicts with their fundamentalist convictions."

"Americans are hedonistic imperialists who have no values and insist on imposing their materialistic culture all over the world."

No doubt many people in the United States and in Arab countries – including many of their leaders – believe these stereotypes. They help widen a dangerous schism between the two worlds that seems unbridgeable. But where do these stereotypes come from? How much responsibility do media in each region have for promoting them?

In late 2005, two dozen Arab and American journalists gathered in Wisconsin to talk about how they cover each other's worlds, and how they can do it better. Over three days, they discussed such topics as using loaded words like "terrorist" and "jihad," showing provocative images, covering sensitive issues of religion, and handling pressure from governments and advertisers.

This manual is an outgrowth of that conference. Written by an American and an Arab who participated in the discussions, it is designed to help journalists in both worlds think about how they can help minimize the misunderstandings between cultures that perpetuate conflict.

The conference and the manual were made possible by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Johnson Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Thomas S. Ewing and the Saudi Committee for the Development of International Trade.

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(Bruce Dale)

"There is a need to make more effort from both sides to understand each other. … Maybe a lot of you feel there is a need for change in the Arab world, but also there is a need for change in the West and the way [Westerners] understand Arabs."

– Shireen Abu Aqleh
Jerusalem correspondent for Al Jazeera and
Wingspread conference participant

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About the Authors

Lisa Schnellinger has been a media trainer since 1996, teaching journalism in 17 countries and managing training projects in Egypt, Afghanistan, Cambodia and Armenia. Her career as a reporter, editor and essay writer spans 26 years, including 14 years with the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, where she was a news editor and foreign desk editor, and a year as an editor with *China Daily* in Beijing. Based in Dubai, UAE, she recently managed ICFJ's "Citizen Voices" project in Egypt to train journalists on election coverage. For the previous two years, she headed the launch of Afghanistan's first independent news agency and trained a team of Afghan journalism trainers. Other training assignments have sent her to Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, the Caucasus and the Balkans, and she has traveled extensively in Africa and the Middle East. Schnellinger has authored three previous journalism manuals, including ICFJ's "Free and Fair: A Journalist's Guide to Improved Election Reporting" for reporters in emerging democracies, which has been translated into nine languages and used worldwide.

Mohannad Khatib is currently the managing director of ATV, the first privately-owned independent TV station in Jordan, which is to be launched in summer 2006. Prior to that he was a senior news anchor and program host at Al Arabiya News Channel in Dubai, UAE. From 1988-1999, Khatib was based in Washington, D.C., where he was the correspondent for Dubai TV and was a founder and partner in Interlink, an Arabic-language TV production house. In 1999 he served as a communication officer at UNICEF's Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa. In 2001 Khatib joined MBC TV as a current affairs program host based in Beirut, Lebanon, and was assigned back to Washington in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11.

Preface

This manual is the product of an extraordinary gathering of American and Arab journalists that took place in late 2005. Nearly two dozen journalists – print, radio, television and online – spent three days at the conference, titled "Bina'a A'-Jusour – Bridging the Gap: Misunderstandings and Misinformation in the Arab and U.S. Media."

The meeting was held at the Wingspread conference facility, a pastoral retreat designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Racine, Wis., a short walk from the shores of Lake Michigan. Wingspread is operated by the Johnson Foundation, which makes it available to organizations like the International Center for Journalists for "small meetings of thoughtful inquiry convened in an atmosphere of candor and purpose."

It would be hard to imagine that a group could be more united in "candor and purpose" than this one. For three days, the participants – guided by moderators Serge Schmemann of the *International Herald Tribune* and Hisham Melhem of Lebanon's *An Nahar* – discussed the wide and dangerous gap that exists between the United States and Arab countries, and what role journalism has played in maintaining or even widening the gap. More importantly, they discussed what they can do to bridge it. How can journalists, through more accurate and sensitive coverage, help reduce the misconceptions that Americans have about the Arab world and that Arabs have about the United States? (See page 124 for a list of participants.)

This manual is not designed simply to relay or summarize the points made at the conference. Rather, it is meant to advance the debate by examining in greater detail a whole range of issues – from stereotypes to religion, images to political pressure – that were discussed in Wisconsin. Published in English and Arabic, it will be distributed free to news media, journalists' associations, universities and other organizations in both parts of the world.

The conference, and this manual, would not have been possible without the generous support of our funders, especially the primary sponsor, Carnegie Corporation of New York. Carnegie's Susan King – a highly regarded former journalist in her own right – enthusiastically supported the conference and participated in it as an observer. She also provided valuable input for this manual, which is primarily funded by Carnegie Corporation, and which under the leadership of

Vartan Gregorian, has focused on Islam – its growth in America and its role in the world.

The Johnson Foundation not only made the beautiful Wingspread facilities available, but it also contributed financial support. Staff members of both the Johnson Foundation and the Wingspread facility could not have been more accommodating, providing everything we asked for and much that we never thought to ask for, and the participants' evaluations of the facilities and staff were unanimously positive. Special thanks must be given to Theresa Henige Oland, director of communications at the Johnson Foundation, who worked tirelessly to make the conference a success. We're also grateful to Foundation President Boyd H. Gibbons III and program assistant Linda Stengel.

Thomas S. Ewing, whose father, Jim Ewing, was one of ICFJ's founders, also contributed support for the conference, as did the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Further funding came from the Saudi Committee for the Development of International Trade, and we're grateful to Jamal Khashoggi for his help in making that connection and for his support of efforts to bring together Arab and U.S. media. The Knight International Press Fellowship Program, funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, contributed in myriad ways to the success of this project.

This manual was written by two seasoned journalists who were also Wingspread participants. An American and an Arab, each of the journalists has extensive experience in both the United States and the Arab World. Their biographies are on page 4.

Lisa Schnellinger wrote the bulk of the manual, with Mohannad Khatib contributing chapters on "Loaded Words" and "Images," as well as participating in the conception and editing of the manual. Invaluable help was given by other Wingspread participants who read chapters and contributed advice. Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi worked with the authors throughout the writing of the manual, and participants and speakers Walid Al-Saqaf, James Breckenridge, Stephen Franklin and Kinda Kanbar also offered advice.

The manual was edited by myself and ICFJ Senior Program Director Vjollca Shtylla, who expertly shepherded the entire project from start to finish. Other ICFJ staff members played important roles: Marwan Sadiq

(Bruce Dale)

Conference participants enjoyed the chance to talk informally, often late into the night, debating issues and getting to know one another better.

helped in ways too numerous to count throughout the project, Dawn Arteaga helped organize the conference, Joseph Corcoran provided editorial assistance, Debbie Hodges oversaw the design and production of the manual and Bob Tinsley copy-edited it.

Thanks also to Atef Hassan, John Smock, Ali Ahmed and Abdelhakim Kabbaj, who either shot cover photographs or allowed themselves to be photographed while working. Bruce Dale took the photographs from the Wingspread conference.

This manual is not the end of an effort; it's the start of a new one. The discussions continue in an online forum that has now been opened to interested parties who did not participate in Wingspread. Go to www.ijnet.org/interchange to join in the debate. In the "Recommendations" chapter of this manual, you'll see what Wingspread participants thought should now happen to keep the momentum going. They have given us a ringing challenge, and we at the International Center for Journalists are eager to keep working. We welcome all the help you can offer.

Patrick Butler
Senior Vice President-Programs
International Center for Journalists

"I found that there is a lot more that unites us than divides us … There really is a bond that's very strong and very heartening. We all have many of the same problems and the same challenges … and we all have the same sins: stereotyping, self-censorship, ignorance, haste."

– Serge Schmemann, editorial page editor, *International Herald Tribune*

"I often say that the American media gets it right – the problem is that the American media rarely gets it right at the right time. … [But] in the Arab world we don't have investigative journalism … because we don't have rule of law [or] democratic institutions."

– Hisham Melhem, Washington, D.C., bureau chief
for the Lebanese daily *An Nahar*

"I think the most useful thing I can do is be honest about my own biases … If I could confront them – actually if we all could confront our biases – maybe we can use that as a starting point for a dialogue."

– Alan Elsner, national correspondent, Reuters

"We All Have the Same Sins"

The setting in Racine, Wisconsin, was peaceful and rural, but the conference at the Wingspread center had an ambitious and worldly agenda, as its title announced: "Bina'a A'-Jusour – Bridging the Gap: Misunderstandings and Misinformation in the Arab and U.S. Media."

Being journalists – realistic, a bit cynical – the 22 Arab and American participants had few illusions about what they could accomplish. Talk about our differences and the bias and problems with our coverage? Yes, we are pretty good at talking. Within three days, come up with practical solutions to improve how we do our jobs? Well, we'll take a stab at it.

The Wingspread conference, like other efforts to cross cultural barriers, had the potential to be contentious and unproductive. But there was little acrimony, perhaps because most of the participants were willing to admit the failures of their own side. And, as journalists, they united over their common commitment to professional standards.

Sessions were aimed at tackling all the bones of contention: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stereotyping, religion, patriotism, loaded words and pressure from government and business. During the discussions and presentations, journalists spoke honestly about their own barriers to good coverage. They admitted that deadlines and limits on space and air time often force them to oversimplify and prevent them from telling the fullest truth of a story. They acknowledged their own personal biases, which can get in the way of seeing a situation accurately. And they spoke with anger and sorrow about the straitjacket of press laws, the lack of support from editors and colleagues, and the pressure to make money or be "patriotic."

Yet there were also points of pride: Arab journalists showed clips with footage that any journalist would envy, obtained despite extreme danger. And Americans noted that substantial efforts have

been made, particularly since Sept. 11, 2001, to educate themselves and the public about Islam and other issues.

The urgency of improving our methods and our communication was clear to all. Co-moderator Serge Schmemann, editorial page editor for the *International Herald Tribune*, summarized: "The Middle East and the United States' role in it today is probably the most important international story, and it's going to be with us for a long time."

"I believe that to begin building up a bridge of mutual understanding we need to admit that the truth is many-sided. We also need to look for the common ground in language and in concepts – so the question is: What are the common truths that we share?"

– Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi, director and producer, Egypt Satellite Channels

Most of us hope to contribute to a better world; we keep ourselves going by remembering the importance of our role in social and political change.

The name of the conference assumed that there is a gap, and that it can be bridged. The participants readily acknowledged that the gap is there, and focused on some of the key causes for it: The ignorance runs deep on the American side, in terms of lack of knowledge about Arab countries and in particular about Islam. The need for reform is evident on the Arab side. And above all, both sides need to do more to bridge the gap.

Shireen Abu Aqleh, Jerusalem correspondent for Al Jazeera, said, "There is a need to make more effort from both sides to understand each other. … Maybe a lot of you feel there is a need for change in the Arab world, but also there is a need to change in the West and the way [Westerners] understand Arabs."

At times during the conference, some participants wondered if it were really possible to cross such a wide gulf. Whether because of the difficulties they face, or because of the lack of awareness of their American colleagues, Arab journalists were more skeptical about the possibilities for closing the gap: "I don't think we can bridge that in three days – it could take three millennia," said one.

Americans tended to dominate in many of the discussions. (The sessions were taped, and a tabulation afterward showed that the Americans overall spoke twice as often as their Arab colleagues, and often spoke twice as long.) In the wrap-up session, Schmemann apologized for the American side: "In gatherings like these there's a tendency to be patronizing. We feel that we come from a profound and grand tradition and we get a little pedantic sometimes." But, he added, "If we do that, it's with the best of intentions."

Participants said afterward that the American dominance was at least partly due to the fact that the conference was held in English. While all the Arab participants were fluent in English, it isn't their first language (for some it is their third or even fourth language).

But there were other dynamics at work, too. One was that the American journalists mostly viewed themselves as more experienced and more knowledgeable about the standards of the profession. In turn, some Arab journalists felt that the quality of their work was underestimated because most of the Americans didn't know Arabic, and that Americans didn't realize the difficulties Arab journalists face.

(Bruce Dale)

Terrorist or Martyr? – A heated discussion on use of terms in a special session devoted to this topic.

Another dynamic was, of course, cultural differences. American culture emphasizes the individual and puts the highest value on what an individual does. Arab culture (as well as many others around the world) places a higher value on the group identity.

Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East Program for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said afterward he was not surprised that the Americans spoke more than the Arabs: "We are raised from a young age to think everyone's individual views are important. They have often been raised with the instruction that the most important thing they can do is indicate solidarity with their group. The U.S. university model of touchy-feely seminars is different from the rote memorization they have often known.

"At core, as well, is Arabs' greater willingness to sit and listen to someone in authority talk. It is something that is often inculcated at an early age. Americans quickly complain if they have to listen to others talk at length. U.S.-educated Arabs are certainly more open to active seminar participation, but it still takes more effort to overcome many years of experience."

Despite these differences, the participants all seemed to genuinely enjoy the chance to meet and speak informally with their colleagues. At meals, during hospitality hours and late into the night, clusters of participants told stories, laughed and debated issues.

There was general agreement that the most valuable part of the conference was the one-on-one interaction – an enjoyable as well as educational way to build trust. And that, the participants said, is the best way to start bridging any gap.

Walid Al-Saqaf, senior writer for the *Yemen Times*, wrote in his evaluation of the conference: "We have a long way to go. There are many misconceptions in the Arab-Western relations in the media. But we're on the right path. I realized that there are many common grounds between reporters. I saw the potential in harnessing this for the better of us all."

Mark Hyman, vice president of corporate relations for Sinclair Broadcast Group, said he'd been worried that the conference would have a doom-and-gloom mentality, but he was pleasantly surprised by the

energy and devotion of the participants: "I leave here more upbeat than when I came in."

Journalists gained a mutual respect by sharing their work. Watching footage from Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera, with translation, helped to break down some of the barriers.

"I personally have been truly and enormously impressed with what I've seen, in the integrity, the dedication, the quality of the work and, above all, the courage that people in the Arab world show," said Schmemann. "We [American foreign correspondents] did it for a year, two, three. You have to do it day in and day out, with the threat hanging over you."

(Bruce Dale)

Mohammad Abdul-Jabbar from Iraq shares his experience on covering religion in Baghdad.

Others spoke of the common bond, the mutual willingness to reach across the gap. That sense of discovery was energizing for many of the participants, and they said they wanted more such conferences.

"There is ignorance on both sides of the Arab-Western divide, and more events like this need to take place, to break down those barriers," one participant wrote in the evaluation.

In 2005, two other groups of Arab and American journalists held gatherings similar to the Wingspread conference. A seminar in Salzburg, Austria, in February, sponsored by CSIS, brought together 25 Arab and Western broadcast journalists for three days of discussions. The Aspen Institute, an international nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., in December held the third in a series of forums that gathered

American and Arab editors and reporters for several days of meetings. As with Wingspread, the journalists said they found they have a great deal in common, and wanted to have a means to continue the exchange of ideas and a healthy debate.

In the United Arab Emirates, the annual Arab and World Media Forum for 2005 was expanded to include more than 1,000 participants. At the December gathering in Dubai, panelists from multiple countries debated news judgment, standards, political Islam and current events.

(Bruce Dale)

Participants, including Matt Dolan of the *Baltimore Sun* (above), shared and encouraged "best practices" and good examples throughout the conference.

In addition to their enthusiasm for more conferences, participants from all the gatherings came up with similar recommendations in many areas. An overview of these recommendations is summarized in the next chapter. In the subsequent chapters, we elaborate on the issues, the discussions and the recommendations about the key topics.

We offer this as a practical guide for journalists, with advice from colleagues on how to think about and handle coverage of important events and trends. Throughout, we have tried to maintain a tone of shared responsibility and collegial desire to improve, which reflects the spirit of the Wingspread conference. We believe that our faults are not as great as our ability to overcome them – especially if we work together through the common ground of our profession.

"There are a lot of journalists who would say … 'Rigorously doing my job is what being patriotic is all about, because it's really adhering to the values upon which the country was built: democracy, free speech, free expression. The press is a vibrant part of that democracy, and a voice for people, and a check and balance on power.'"

– Eileen O'Connor, former ICFJ president and CNN foreign correspondent

"The market is really small to sustain media in the Arab world. How can you consider media and stations independent, when they keep losing millions and millions? Al Jazeera has lost $50 million a year, yet they continue to be sustained. … And this is a major hindrance for us, for independent media. How can I compete against these channels? … I'm competing against countries, not companies!"

– Mohamad Alayyan, Publisher and Chairman of *Al Ghad* and CEO of ATV, Jordan

What Journalists Can Do

The recommendations that follow represent a comprehensive list of the suggestions and advice emerging from the discussions of Arab and American journalists in 2005. We have grouped the recommendations according to the level of action: What we can do by ourselves; what we can do within our newsrooms; what we can do in cooperation with colleagues; and what we can do through organizations.

Each recommendation includes a reference to the chapter in this book where it is discussed in greater detail.

Wingspread participants made personal commitments to help make these changes happen: They said they will start discussions about "loaded words" in their newsrooms, organize future conferences, become journalism trainers or establish organizations devoted to independent media. And they invite other colleagues to join them – not only in discussions, but in taking direct personal action.

As individual journalists, each of us can find a way to start taking action in our own lives on at least a few of these recommendations. Our profession is depending on us.

What we can do ourselves

➡ *Keep a careful watch on our use of adjectives.*

Adjectives are a quick and easy way to describe things, but they are inherently subjective and often imprecise. Our writing would be dry without any adjectives at all, but when we use adjectives we should ask ourselves: Is this word supported by the facts? Would everyone in the room who saw this scene use the same adjective? Is there a more exact way to show the reader what happened, rather than just telling them my personal assessment? [See Chapter 9: Standards]

➡ *Include both details and context in stories, which helps avoid stereotypes and sensationalism.*

A good story is like a well-photographed feature film. It sets the scene, gives us the big picture – the camera zooms out and pans, so that the audience gets a sense of time and place. Then it cuts to close-ups, portraits – the camera zooms in and focuses on small details that are significant, memorable or emotive.

We can't all make documentaries out of news stories. But we can use the cinema-

tographer's technique to make our stories fuller, richer and consequently more accurate. [See Chapter 5: Interest]

➡ *Educate ourselves about culture and religion and how it affects our societies.*

Participants at Wingspread greatly emphasized the need for self-education about culture and religion. The depth of ignorance about religion, in particular – of journalists worldwide, about their own nation's religions as well as less familiar ones – was a point of strong agreement.

We can educate ourselves on the Internet, in the classroom and in discussions with others. [See Chapter 8: Religion] For Americans, since it's easier to travel, it's best to see and understand diverse places firsthand. But perhaps most important is that we have an attitude of learning, a humility about what we don't know and a willingness to be open to another way of living and perceiving.

➡ *Hold religious leaders accountable for their statements and opinions, and separate religion from politics.*

In discussions about terrorism, war and ethnic conflicts, participants agreed that it is essential to hold all actors accountable as political leaders when they use religion for political goals. Journalists are obliged to lift the curtain of religion that protects political action from scrutiny – particularly when religion is used to promote or condone violence. Our job is to inform.

To get the information that our audiences need, we have to question people who claim to have authority in matters of religion. That can be scary, especially when questioning is seen as challenging the representatives of God. But even in places where it's a crime to insult Islam, we can ask neutral, non-confrontational questions with respect, just as we would question an expert in any field. [See Chapter 8: Religion]

➡ *Make the effort to include a range of voices, especially in polarized issues such as suicide bombings and religion.*

Not all Palestinians support suicide bombings. Not all American soldiers in Iraq support the war. Not all Islamic scholars are preaching violent jihad or issuing fatwas against music festivals.

We owe it to our audiences to show them the range of opinions and viewpoints, to listen to voices that speak more quietly, to find ideas that are not the extreme as well as ideas that are not the mainstream. [See Chapter 8: Religion and Chapter 6: Conflict]

➡ *Be aware of and honest about our own biases in coverage, so that we can watch out and, when possible, correct them.*

We have to know what our biases are and why we see things the way we do. To know yourself is to understand better how your perceptions are distorted.

In turn, this helps you understand how

other people think and see things. That is a valuable skill for a reporter to have. [See Chapter 6: Conflict and Chapter 9: Standards]

If you believe that your audience deserves the best information available, then you have to remove any obstacles to getting that information – including your own biases. We have to make an extra effort to stop ourselves from interfering with reality, but that's what our job is. This means interviewing sources that you strongly disagree with, including a range of views in your story and keeping your own opinions out of it.

➡ *Understand why stereotyping and negative thinking happens.*

Many journalists are disturbed by how easily stereotypes can creep into our coverage or how negative we tend to be. It may comfort you to know that we're actually hardwired to stereotype groups of people and to put more credibility on negative information.

It has to do with our primal instinct to survive,and our attentiveness to threats. When we understand our physiology, we can better evaluate how to balance our coverage. [See Chapter 2: Stereotypes]

➡ *Make important stories interesting: connect with the audience by showing the story's relevance; humanizing the groups of people involved; and presenting good news, profiles and features about culture.*

Many journalists subscribe to a macho tribal culture, one that values being fastest, toughest and hardest. We assume that soft news is boring and that the stories we "should" do are dull as dirt.

Sometimes they are. More often it's a result of malnourished reporting or writing. Good journalism is hard work, but it is our job to make important stories interesting to our audience. [See Chapter 5: Interest]

➡ *Remember that "Everybody Knows" is not the name of a person. Information has to come from reliable sources.*

Accuracy, probably the top universal goal of professional journalists, requires that we don't assume something is general knowledge – or that because we "know" our audience is confident in the information. We have to also tell them how we got the information, and why that source is reliable.

Take the time to go through your stories or scripts, line by line, and ask yourself: Exactly how do I know this? Why should the reader or viewer believe this? Could there be a dispute about whether this is true? If so, have I presented another source's perspective? [See Chapter 9: Standards]

What we can do within our newsrooms

➡ *Agree on our mission, professional standards and ethics in reporting and writing and use them consistently.*

Media outlets will have different missions, depending on their audience, their culture, and the restrictions that limit them. But in order to serve our own audience – whether local or international – we must think about how best to serve them, and be clear about our goals. [See Chapter 9: Standards]

➡ *Set and keep guidelines for images, and review these guidelines periodically.*

Community standards of what is in good taste and what is offensive change over time. We should set guidelines for use of images – photographs, videos, illustrations and cartoons – and review them from time to time. [See Chapter 4: Images]

➡ *Define loaded words and set policies for using them.*

Some words may be too emotionally loaded to ever be used by the media. Other words have to be handled with care, like explosive chemicals. And some words can be used if we define them clearly and use them consistently. Examples include terrorism, jihad and crusade. [See Chapter 3: Loaded Words] As participants at the Aspen Institute's most recent forum concluded, we should report on what people do – not what they are.

➡ *Explain to our audiences what we are doing and why.*

As we develop standards and policies, we have to let the audience know what we're doing. Transparency – letting them see how we do what we do – is a part of trust and credibility. We can do that through our Web sites, through community forums, in the pages of our publications and on promotional airtime. [See Chapter 3: Loaded Words]

➡ *Guard against the dehumanizing of victims that leads to moral disengagement and justification for more violence.*

In genocides and other violence that is based on stereotypes, the victims are dehumanized as part of a process of "moral disengagement." If we in the media want to alert our audience to such violence, part of our role is also to engage the reader or viewer. Some in our audience will be moved to act. But at the very least, we can show them that the victims are human beings. [See Chapter 6: Conflict]

➡ *Resist "group think" and "herd mentality" that leads to insufficient or sensational coverage. Do not underestimate our audience in our news judgment.*

Among the many kinds of pressure that journalists fall under, the "group think" of following what other media outlets are doing is one that we can most easily resist. Audiences are different; *The New York Times*' audience is not the same as that of *The Seattle Times* or the *Chillicothe* [Ohio] *Times* or *The* [New Orleans] *Times-Picayune*. Arabs in Egypt are not necessarily interested in the same things as Saudis or Yemenis, and even within Cairo, the audience for *Al-Ahram* is very different

from the audience for *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. The transnational audience for Al Jazeera or CNN wants and needs a great range of coverage. So, airing sensational footage or carrying an inflammatory story "because the competition has it" is not a good enough reason. [See Chapter 7: Pressure]

➡ *Require safety training, equipment and insurance for all war-zone or conflict reporters.*

As of May 2006, 92 journalists and media support workers have been killed in Iraq in the last three years alone, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The majority were Iraqis. Many of those who died were freelancers, who had no safety training in how to work in a war environment. Some had no safety equipment or insurance. Responsible news organizations should not hire a freelancer or send staff to work in a conflict zone unprepared. News organizations and nonprofit media associations should demand investigations into the killing of journalists by military forces. [See Chapter 6: Conflict]

➡ *Diversify newsrooms so that our staffs are a better reflection of our audience.*

Reporters and editors often are better-educated, more urban and more secular than their audiences. They are sometimes better-paid as well. Newsroom staffs rarely reflect a proportion of minorities or balance of gender that is comparable to their area of coverage. While a diverse newsroom does not automatically do a better job of covering the news, a homogenous newsroom that is a warped reflection of society will have a harder time understanding and reaching its audience. [See Chapter 8: Religion]

➡ *Understand and explain to our audiences some possible answers to the rhetorical "Why do they hate us?"*

Participants in a small group session on war coverage and patriotism agreed that it was important for Americans to confront the issues that surround Arab objections. They summarized the issues as covering four areas:

- Palestine
- the forces of globalization that contribute to global hegemony of the U.S.
- past U.S. support for authoritarian governments in the Arab world
- spreading democracy through a double standard, as in Iraq – "having a ballot box on one street, and Abu Ghraib down the block."

Without that understanding, the U.S. won't be of much help in reform in the Arab world. As Al Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Aqleh said, "It's right that we need the reform, we need this change, but because it's coming from the Western world, people just reject it … You don't just dictate democracy, you teach people how they can benefit."

Arab journalists also need to seek out

American voices and perspectives. The fear and anger that Americans feel can help Arab readers and listeners better understand the perceptions that affect how the United States operates in the world. Soliciting a wide diversity of American voices can combat the myths.

➡ *Enhance the diversity of how we cover culture, even if we're news reporters.*

Too often, we see each other in terms of conflict – especially in how the American media covers the Arab world. And American culture is too often misperceived as being simply Hollywood films and hip-hop music, when there is much more to the diversity of American culture. Some Arab visitors to the United States, for example, have said that they are surprised at how religious the average American is. [See Chapter 2: Stereotypes]

Abu Aqleh said she intends to try to "persuade people around me, with my work and stories, that it's not a sin to open up to the West. And personally I would like to read more about American media concerns and interests, in a way that I can understand better how the Western world is regarding us." [See Chapter 5: Interest]

What we can do in cooperation with colleagues

➡ *Create a forum for publishing alternative viewpoints – by setting up exchanges of footage and written articles between stations and publications, but also by helping to publish online what would be dangerous to publish or censored in the journalists' home countries.*

Arab reporters can often get interviews and footage that Western reporters can't, or that would be extremely dangerous for Western reporters to get. Articles explaining the complexities of the United States are very hard for Arab journalists to report – they often can't even get a visa to go there.

Several journalists at Wingspread wanted to help arrange exchanges of footage or print stories between stations and publications. Especially in op-ed pages, but also in news and features, these exchanges could bring interesting and provocative material to audiences. And often all it takes is the personal introduction.

"I'd like to see some creative thinking about how big companies can work with each other," said Stephen Franklin of the *Chicago Tribune*. "My newspaper has 26 TV stations, maybe there's a place … to do an exchange of stories."

➡ *Smaller newspapers – where the mainstream populace is perhaps furthest away from the reality of "the other side" – are important venues for features that tell a different story.*

In small towns of America, news about Palestine or Iraq seems even further away than it does from cosmopolitan cities like New York or Los Angeles. Yet that makes it all the more important for people who

live there to get news about real people to whom they can relate. The reporters in these towns also may need an education – and something as simple as covering an Arabic-language class at the local high school, or a traditional wedding of Jordanians, may bridge a gap in a hometown way.

For Arab countries, the alternative point of view is offered in independent newspapers and opposition publications, which tend to be smaller, or online publications, despite a low percentage of Internet users. These outlets may have small circulations, but they can have a profound impact when they arouse their audiences through thought-provoking coverage.

Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi, director and producer of Egypt Satellite Channels, makes an argument for advocacy and opinion in these smaller publications: "It is OK to be critical and opinionated as long as you go ahead and admit that this is your view. In our world and in Egypt we have these little wonderful publications that call themselves 'opposition journals.' They are accurate in relating the news or covering an event but certainly not balanced in their criticism of corruption or government politics. If for any reason we condemn this style of journalism, we would in our world be the losers because this is a wonderful example of freedom of expression that needs to be empowered, not silenced."

➡ *Offer assistance to colleagues visiting our countries, to help them get below the surface.*

A foreign correspondent who has to parachute in to cover a news event might appreciate being led behind the scenes to meet ordinary families or to interview dissident voices. Newsrooms can offer access to their libraries or source databases. For longer-term visitors, a roundtable discussion with local journalists is very educational. [See Chapter 6: Conflict]

➡ *Hold ourselves accountable through more monitoring of the media's adherence to professional standards and a nonpartisan international committee of ethics.*

The reputation of journalism has fallen to such a low status that it needs an international body to clean it up, argues Mirette Mabrouk of IBA Media in Cairo. "An ethics/accountability committee would be a nonpartisan international tool," she recommended, after the Aspen Institute's second Arab-U.S. Media Forum gathering.

"Such a body composed of Arab and U.S. journalists might wield real power because policymakers (and media owners) realize that the media are plugged in to average voters. That connection translates into power that, in turn, translates into leverage for the ethics body to do its job – to wit, ensuring balanced, culturally relevant and responsible reporting."

➡ *Support each other to resist self-censorship and to be brave in the face of obstacles.*

At gatherings like the Wingspread conference, journalists might feel a bit braver, and a bit more open, when encouraged by the group's support. That kind of support has to continue over time and distance in order to really make a difference in how we do our jobs day to day.

It's easy for us to forget our colleagues on the other side of the country – let alone on the other side of the world. But one of the most important functions of that tribe called journalists is to take care of each other – wherever we are.

➡ *Share and encourage "best practices" and good examples.*

Competition leads us to bash what other media outlets are doing. But when any one outlet does a poor job, the media as a whole suffers.

We don't need to wait for the annual awards ceremonies to pat each other on the back. When a colleague writes a particularly insightful news story, or takes the time and effort to debunk a stereotype – write them an e-mail, give them a phone call and send the article to your colleagues. There are many Web sites from professional organizations that give examples of best practices and journalistic standards. We may also find it humbling and educational to read the blogs and sites that offer fair criticism of the media and suggestions on correcting problems. [See Appendix A: Resources]

➡ *Fight for better access to information for the entire profession, and help our colleagues when they face obstacles – particularly regarding oppressive media laws.*

When we fight for ourselves, we're fighting for the whole profession – and vice versa. This especially applies to press laws and access to information. [See Chapter 7: Pressure]

Most Arab journalists have to work under the threat of laws that make nearly any offense a crime – and the offenses can be as vague as "insulting a public official." Americans can't change those laws – but they can support and help build capacity in the Arab organizations that are working to change those laws. [See Appendix A: Resources]

Access to information is important to all of us, and we have to keep raising that standard. If we don't have access to information, we can't do our jobs. Freedom of information should apply to all journalists – from Arabs covering how ruling families spend oil revenues, to Americans covering how public funds for international assistance are spent overseas.

➡ *Set up a Web site and other means for online sharing of information, ideas, references, a glossary of terms, contacts, style guides and examples of good work.*

Good news! This recommendation is partially completed already. The Interna-

tional Center for Journalists has created a separate page on its journalism web site, IJNet (at www.ijnet.org/interchange), specifically for Arab-U.S. coverage and the topics discussed at Wingspread.

What we can do through organizations

➡ *More frequent gatherings of journalists of different cultures.*

Many of the other recommendations rest upon this foundation of personal contact that builds communication and trust. The experiences of professional journalists can forge a very close bond that transcends our differences and helps us to learn about each other's cultures.

The amounts of time and money needed to arrange conferences or informal gatherings are an investment that can have long-term payoffs – for individuals, for their publications and stations, for the profession as a whole, and ultimately for our nations.

In planning such meetings, the organizers need to take care to give equal roles to Arabs and Americans, and to allow for as much time in small or informal sessions as possible. That will maximize the benefits and give everyone a chance to be heard. [See Introduction]

➡ *Support independent media, both individuals and organizations – including training in business management.*

In Arab countries, small independent media have a special struggle – having to compete against outlets that are subsidized by the government or by wealthy individuals. In addition, freelance journalists and reporters who want to work independently have great difficulty supporting themselves financially. [See Chapter 7: Pressure]

Nonprofits that specifically encourage independent journalists are important, and journalists in all countries can support them.

➡ *Work together across borders in partnerships that help build local capacity.*

"You can provide us with fish – but teach us how to fish," said Walid Al-Saqaf of the *Yemen Times*. "Realize that [the] next generation of the Arab world will change the face of the planet in many ways." Things are moving in Arab media organizations, but there's a lack of institutional capacity, he pointed out.

International NGOs should reach out to local associations to find out what they need, rather than coming in with a set agenda. It's better to support local organizations than to establish competing organizations directed from abroad, because the local organizations know the needs and can be more effective and efficient.

➡ *Start projects that bring colleagues from different countries to work together on stories for publication or broadcast.*

In 2005, Reuters Foundation, with funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), developed an online news-exchange called "Voices of Iraq," (www.aswataliraq.info) to give Iraqi freelancers a place to share their stories. International trainers held workshops for Iraqi journalists and then worked with them on stories. Publishing more than 600 news items a month from 30 stringer correspondents and a group of contributing media organizations, the Aswat al-Iraq site serves the Iraqi and international press.

At *Syria Today*, Kinda Kanbar runs a magazine where journalists from Syria and from the West work together and learn from each other. She highly recommends this as a model for other countries.

"Make it large scale and long term, to spend time there, not just three days," in order to make the learning experience complete, she said.

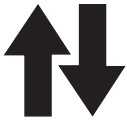
The same recommendation came out of the Aspen Institute forum. Mohamed Salmawy of *Al-Ahram's* French-language weekly *Hebdo* suggested a jointly produced product that would be distributed in both the United States and Arab countries. Several participants then came up with joint investigative reporting ideas.

What will you do to take up their challenge?

Facts and Demons

"Stereotypes – we all have them. There are reasons in the way our brain is structured and how it works. … This can be a very automatic process; it happens in microseconds, so that you're not even aware of it."

– James Breckenridge, associate director, Center for Interdisciplinary Policy, Research and Education on Terrorism (CIPERT), Stanford University



"In the Arab media, you can read an article that starts like this: 'Since the United States is a negative power in the world…' I mean, it's a given, in the Arab world today. Just as some people in [the U.S.] demonize Arabs and Muslims, we have our own version of demonizing the United States."

– Hisham Melhem, Washington, D.C., bureau chief for the Lebanese daily *An Nahar*

In our race to meet deadlines and squeeze information into limited column inches or air time, journalists summarize and simplify. This makes us especially prone to use examples and descriptions in a way that leans on – or fortifies – stereotypes. And we see it everywhere – "Muslim terrorist" and "American imperialist" – so often that we start to see generalization as fact.

Sometimes, too, we are ignorant ourselves, and don't even realize that we are fueling a myth or misconception. In other situations, we don't take the time to verify

facts, and instead rely on what "everybody knows," or on our own experience and opinion.

Arab and U.S. journalists at Wingspread discussed stereotypes throughout the conference. They acknowledged that stereotypes and myths can have a basis in reality – that's why they are powerful and enduring.

It's also easier to write about stereotypes than the truth – it is less work to simplify and judge than to do the work of reporting to show a range of realities.

But the conference participants agreed that a responsible journalist makes the effort to portray the world as it really is, rather than as a stereotypical caricature.

So what is our defense against oversimplifying?

Understanding why it happens

We all use stereotypes – we do it automatically. Some of the generalization happens because the world is complicated, and our brains need a way to process a lot of information quickly. That helps us function, and it's driven by a biological urge to survive. In other words, stereotypes provide an advantage to adapt in a complex world, allowing us to deal with many people, situations, roles and concepts by using time-saving, simplified – sometimes grossly oversimplified – intuitive "prototypes" as a substitute for extensive experience and critical analysis.

At the Wingspread conference, journalists were intrigued by the insights from Stanford psychology professor James Breckenridge, who gave an overview of the ways that the brain's normal function contributes to negative stereotyping.

Every time something new happens, Breckenridge explained, there is part of your brain that is automatically assigning a value of positive or negative to the event. The assessment of "Is it a threat or help?" is beyond your control. As long as we are conscious, this monitoring process is going on. The perceived negative quality or threat doesn't have to be real – the brain treats real and imagined threats the same. In other words, the brain's special attention to the negative or threatening aspect of situations applies to both real world observations and mediated experiences, such as movies and news broadcasts.

Negative events arouse the brain more easily than positive ones and so have much more power. Arousal heightens vigilance, and its effects are cumulative. More importantly, information that is negative is reliably seen as more credible than positive information – probably because we have a built-in vigilance to a threat. This is one reason why negative political campaigns have such a powerful impact on public perceptions of politicians. Negative information is given more weight in our decisions about risk. We are more likely to strongly avoid potentially risky (negative) consequences than we are to seek

positive gains.

Events perceived as negative can distort memory, too. When there is a negative action or a threat, you shift your focus to it, and that changes your experience of reality. You forget what happened before the event, and remember clearly what happens after it.

All of these processes, Breckenridge explained, are unconscious. Their automatic nature represents an information-processing advantage for brains, because we can make decisions quickly without the distraction of prolonged analyses and the bother of sorting through pros and cons, and examples that contradict our stereotypes. The price we (and society) pay for this evolutionary advantage, however, is that we are unaware of our biases. For example, in studies of negative political campaigns a majority express strong displeasure with negative ads, deny that the ads have had any influence, but nevertheless view the targeted candidate more unfavorably than people exposed to fewer negative messages.

The brain does quick-sorts on people, too. When you see one of a "type," such as "Muslim," you automatically begin to develop a prototype of "Muslim." It happens in microseconds, so that you're not even aware of it, and it happens despite whatever good intentions you have. This reflex helps you organize your thinking – it's a kind of cognitive shorthand. It is also part of the "deep need to be part of the group that we live in," Breckenridge noted.

Our brain structures and processes evolved in an era when physical survival in a hostile world depended on an intense and quicker reaction to threats: The person who didn't have it got eaten.

Those traits of our brain are good news for survival of the species, but make it a bit more difficult for journalists who want to report good news. Positive stories don't arouse us (or our audiences), and don't have as much impact as negative ones, because we're wired that way. Negative stereotypes – threats coming from particular groups – stick with us more readily.

But that doesn't mean we can't change

"Muslim is a simple word that describes a group of people who share a certain belief; however, adding this word to other words, or using it in a certain context – for instance, [in headlines such as] 'The Muslims are coming' – loads it up with other, underlying shades of meaning."

– Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi, director and producer, Egypt Satellite Channels

stereotypes, Breckenridge said. "The automatic vigilance is hard-wired, the tendency for us to find negative information more credible is probably hard-wired. But the rest of the brain doesn't shut off… We are not totally determined by our past, we can still think and feel and work things out. It makes the hill steeper but it doesn't make it insurmountable."

Once we understand the source of stereotyping and the interest in bad news, we can correct it. We don't have to go along with our reflexive, survivalist responses. We can choose to overrule them, and give our audiences a fuller picture of the world.

It's called debiasing, Breckenridge said: "Keep showing the other side, exposing people to other things, and the stereotypes can fall apart."

Awareness

To reduce stereotyping in journalism, we first have to know what the stereotypes are.

Wingspread participants came up with a list of common myths and stereotypes that seep into media coverage.

American stereotypes of Arabs:

- Arabs are violent.
- Muslims believe Osama bin Laden is their hero.
- Al Jazeera is a terrorist mouthpiece network.
- Arabs are living in brutal and corrupt regimes and Israel is the only true democracy in the region.
- Terrorist is interchangeable with Islamist.
- Islam makes women powerless and oppressed.
- The priority for Arabs is to destroy Israel.
- Arabs are rich, lazy people who always complain of being Israel's victims.

Arab stereotypes of Americans:

- Americans are immoral oppressors.
- America is a godless place.
- American women are sluts and American teenagers are on drugs.
- Americans are fat consumers who don't know a thing about the rest of the world.
- All Jews are power-mongers and America (and its media) is run by Jews.
- Americans support everything Israel does and they are against all Muslim countries.
- CNN is a U.S. government-controlled TV network.
- America's foreign policy is meant to eradicate Islam and wipe out Muslims.

While these sweeping statements might make us squirm, we also might be saying to ourselves, "But, isn't there some truth behind these?"

Mass-audience misperceptions usually come from somewhere: an event, a historic pattern or even a cultural impact

from movies, music and other fiction. There also may be specific examples that place an individual within the stereotype – an American who thinks all foreign countries are dangerous, a Muslim who thinks women shouldn't work outside the home.

But, that doesn't mean the generalized statement is itself a fact. One example does not make a case.

At the same time, we want to report truthfully but fairly when the facts do play into the stereotypes.

Says one U.S. newspaper editor who asked not to be identified: "I really get tired of this idea that 'reducing bias' should be merely a matter of saying nice things about Islam. The idea seems to be that if journalists are reporting or commenting negatively on this or that aspect of Islam, the criticism and negativity is a prima facie sign of bias.

"Here at my paper, I am personally aware of stories I've been involved in, in which the newsroom refused to report critically on worrisome things the local mosques were doing, because they thought to do so might stoke anti-Muslim bias."

Sometimes in Arab media, the negative coverage of American actions and policy in the Middle East is a reaction to years of domination by the West. Walid Al-Saqaf of the *Yemen Times* says: "We continue to face the dilemma of gaining the trust of viewers/readers but at the same time being fair and objective. On many occasions, giving 'the other side of the story' would enrage and anger some viewers, who think that the channel needs to be sympathetic towards the Arab/Muslim world rather than neutral… The [biased] approach makes stories more 'interesting' to viewers in the Arab world, giving it an edge."

The main defense against stereotypes is not to be "politically correct" or to pander to noisy or powerful groups. Journalists at Wingspread agreed that we all need to do more to educate ourselves in general, and to apply professional standards of accuracy and fairness about specifics.

Educate yourself

Journalists are perpetual students – we learn about something new every time we do a story. When we're assigned to a new beat, we have to hit the books and educate ourselves in depth about the topic. We do this over and over again.

The importance of the relations between the United States and the Middle East should inspire all of us to learn more about each other. [See Chapter 8: Religion]

For example, it's a surprisingly common misperception in the United States that all Muslims are Arabs, and all Arabs are Muslims.

You might scoff and say, "Well of course I know that this is not true." But by using these terms interchangeably – using "the Islamic world" to refer to Muslims in the

Middle East, or by quoting only Arabs in a story about Islam – we perpetuate that ignorance.

Here are some facts to inspire self-education about Muslims. (Arab journalists can use these facts, too, when reporting on Islam.)

- Less than one quarter of Muslims are Arabs.
- Of the seven countries with the largest Muslim populations, only one, Egypt, is Arab.
- There are more Muslims in China than in Iraq and more than twice as many in India as in Egypt, the most populous Arab country.
- There are at least 45 countries that have a majority Muslim population, and at least 70 countries with populations of more than 10 percent Muslims.

Although the majority of Arabs are Muslims, there is an average of at least 10 percent Christians throughout the region of Arabic-speaking countries. In particular, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria have between 5 and 20 percent Christian populations.

If we cover only the Muslims in those countries, we are ignoring a significant part of the population. But that doesn't mean that we should write only about conflicts between Christians and Muslims, or write one story every Christmas featuring the community of Christians. The idea is not to highlight Christians as being outside the norm. It is to integrate them into our normal coverage.

The same could be said for how American journalists cover Christians, Muslims and all other religions in their own country.

Serge Schmemann, editorial page editor of the *International Herald Tribune*, acknowledges that American journalists haven't done a good job of covering religion at home or abroad. The Western media "simply does not appreciate the power of religion," he said. "It's not covered as a power in people's lives. [We] have not fully appreciated what's happening in our own country, it's not something we understand."

At the same time, Arab journalists admit they know surprisingly little about the role that religion plays in the United States. Maybe that's part of the reason that the stereotype "America is a godless country" has persisted.

According to a Gallup opinion survey, 88 percent of Americans believe in God – even though some of them do not belong to any organized religion. According to census data and surveys, only 10 percent of the U.S. population says "none" when asked about their religion.

Approximately 75 percent of the U.S. population is Christian, and Jews and Muslims make up approximately 2-3 percent of the American population (about 6 million to 7 million people). About 10 percent of Americans indicate they follow "other religions."

Many conservative Christians would not accept Catholics or other denominations as Christian because they believe that a person must be "born again" in order to be a true Christian. In addition, some denominations believe that theirs is the only true Christian faith.

Hisham Melhem, who has lived in the United States for about 30 years and covers the country for the Lebanese daily *An Nahar*, says, "When I tell Arabs that of all the democracies, [America] is the most religious, they are shocked. To them it's a soulless country, it's a materialistic country, it's a hedonistic country."

Melhem has tried to combat that stereotype by going out into the ordinary communities of the U.S. – but sometimes his editors aren't interested. He describes a common problem among journalists: "We don't do a good job of covering America – we cover Washington, we don't go beyond Washington." That syndrome of focusing only on the capital, or the big cities, is a serious distortion that journalists can fall prey to.

Roaming far and wide – experiencing the reality of a place and its people on the ground – does a lot to rid reporters of stereotypes and biases, foreign correspondents agree.

In a documentary series about Islam, PBS traveled to a half dozen countries and spoke to ordinary Muslims. In the U.S., they interviewed people who were trying to bridge the gap – like Safaa Zarzour, the former principal at Universal School in Bridgeview, Ill.

Zarzour said of his students, "We teach them what Islam stands for as a religion, the way… the average Muslim around the world practices it. We show them, within the American society, those beautiful things that are at the heart of Islam and … how there is no contradiction in essence. I see more Islamic values in this country than I see in some of the so-called Islamic countries. You know, at the heart of it is justice and fairness and the rule of law and equality before the law and those things."

Don't Trust – Verify

An important part of being accurate means to verify the information you use. We don't assume that something is true just because one person said it, or because it's a widespread and oft-repeated rumor. This applies to sweeping generalizations that support stereotypes, too.

As journalists we need to take a careful, disciplined view of what the facts are. "You have to examine your own knowledge, and figure out what you really know and how you know it," says veteran foreign correspondent and journalism trainer Arnold Isaacs. "Which of course leads to a more disciplined understanding of what you don't know, as well."

Isaacs always teaches a quote from

Confucius: "'To know a thing and know that you know it, and not know a thing and know that you do not know it – that is knowledge.' It's the best rule for journalists I know of," he says.

This involves analyzing what's in your notebook and in your head, and then identifying and separating fact, firsthand knowledge, secondhand information, assumption and "common knowledge."

Once we are clear about how we are thinking, we may also have a better idea how others think.

For Arab journalists, support of the nation and the causes of Arab people can at times become the highest loyalty. But accuracy has long been held a value as well. According to the 2004 Code of Ethics of the Federation of Arab Journalists, "The pursuit of the foremost duty of the journalist … is to seek the truth, confirm its accuracy, bear the responsibility of the true mission of the media and faithfully uphold the dignity and integrity of his profession in accordance with the Arab Journalistic Charter of Honour, the rule of his professional conscience and the customs and ethics of sound journalism."

"Facts only are the basic ammunition to a free and effective media; freedom must come first, not the freedom of false accusations or hopes," says Mohammad Jabir Al-Anssari, a Bahraini writer and intellectual, in an article published in the Qatar-based *Al-Sharq* on November 21, 2002.[1] "But freedom of exchanging the absolute truth, sweet or bitter, with us or against us. Truth can't be fractured, because half of the truth is an absolute lie."

The Project for Excellence in Journalism, a research and training institute that is part of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, attempted to find the essentials of journalism by studying the profession and interviewing working journalists. Among the nine principles of journalism that this study featured, one is especially applicable to stereotypes: "[Journalism's] essence is a discipline of verification."

That discipline involves careful examination of every sentence in a story. Ask yourself: How do I know this? How can I be sure it is true?

The Project's Web site describes this discipline as "the same principle that governs scientific method: explain how you learned something and why you believe it – so the audience can do the same.

"In science, the reliability of an experiment, or its objectivity, is defined by whether someone else could replicate the experiment. In journalism, only by explaining how we know what we know can we approximate this idea of people being able, if they were of a mind to, to replicate the reporting. This is what is meant by objectivity of method in science, or in journalism."

Journalists make mistakes when they as-

sume they understand more than they do.

"Journalists should not only be skeptical of what they see and hear, but also of their ability to know what it really means," the Project's Web site says. "In other words, journalists need to recognize their own fallibility, the limitations of their knowledge. … They should acknowledge to themselves what they are unsure of, or only think they understand – and then check it out." [2]

The Al Jazeera code of ethics subscribes to the same principles:

"Adhere to the journalistic values of honesty, courage, fairness, balance, independence, credibility and diversity, giving no priority to commercial or political considerations over professional ones."

"Endeavour to get to the truth and declare it in our dispatches, programmes and news bulletins unequivocally in a manner which leaves no doubt about its validity and accuracy."

Pin Down the Details

Another part of accuracy is detail – the specific information that is more accurate than general statements.

Isn't it more accurate, and fair, to say that Hamas is "known by Israelis for terror but by Palestinians for charity" [as *The New York Times* did] than to refer to it as "the Islamic terrorist group Hamas"?[3] Isn't the first a description that would be considered factual and accurate by both sides?

Facts are more useful than labels, because they convey information.

As Poynter Institute faculty member Keith M. Woods notes, it is also the responsibility of the reporter to challenge sources who make generalizations: "Demand more from the people who give vague, meaningless descriptions, just as you do whenever a politician gives vague or meaningless information. Ask, 'What do you mean?' when someone speaks in euphemisms, just as you do when doctors or rocket scientists lapse into jargon. ... Say what you mean and say it clearly."

The basics of good journalism are all useful in eliminating stereotype and bias from reporting, Woods explains: accuracy, precision, context, relevance, fairness, comprehensiveness, independence, giving voice to the voiceless, holding the powerful accountable, informing, educating, taking people where they can't or won't go.

"The craft of reporting and writing is at its best," Woods says, "when stories are rich in vibrant details, meaningful quotes and sound bites, strong active verbs, spare, purposeful adjectives, three-dimensional characters, clear sentences, logical transitions, a sense of place, surprising, thought-provoking twists. In those ways and more, reporting on race and ethnicity is the same as any other storytelling."[4]

Nasir Al-Sharouf of the Arabic Service of

Deutsche Welle, makes the point about Arab coverage of Iraq: "How many reports have we seen on the military operations in Iraq? And how many reports have we seen on government performance, construction efforts or the economic situation of the people since the collapse of the regime? The more Western media commit the mistake of picturing the Arab world and the Islamic East through this negative stereotypical picture based on judgments that don't reflect objectivity or reality, the more Arab media commit the same mistake by considering the West as one entity responsible for all disasters and problems the Arabs have.

"It's impossible to illustrate the image of the West in the pictures of Abu Ghraib jail, and it's impossible to consider the Prophet Mohammad cartoons as an expression of the West's general view of Islam and its prophet. We should not forget that the biggest anti-Iraq war demonstrations and protests were in London, Rome and Madrid."

The same is true in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where coverage tends to lose sight of ordinary people. What about the many Israelis and Jewish-Americans who are working to support Palestinian causes? What about the Arab citizens who stay because they feel their life is better in Israel than it would be elsewhere?

To give the full picture we have to take a close look – and that gets us past the stereotypes.

"Can there be a reasonable, logical and constructive dialogue between Arabs and Americans? I believe there can. …The Arabs must admit that the Americans are not infidels or their enemies, that they are decent, God-fearing and sincere people. … The Americans must think of the Arabs as people with important values who aim for significant political goals."

– Hussein Shobokshi, columnist in *Arab News* and owner of multiple Saudi businesses

You Say Terrorist, I Say Martyr

"We do not distinguish properly between resistance and insurgency."

– Mohammad Alayyan, publisher and chairman of *Al Ghad* and CEO of ATV, Jordan

"There's no doubt, the Palestinians get mad because we don't call suicide bombers 'martyrs' and the Israelis get mad because we don't call all suicide bombers 'terrorists.'"

– Eason Jordan, former president of CNN

The words journalists choose to tell their stories play an important role in defining messages, and in shaping opinions and perspectives. Almost always, the words we select reflect a certain judgment, particularly when these words are "loaded."

Words are described as "loaded" when they carry meaning beyond their strict definition. According to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, loaded words evoke strongly positive or negative reactions, and calling someone's words "loaded" implies an "accusation of demagoguery or of pandering to the audience." [1]

The term "loaded language" is often used to describe spin, euphemisms and doublespeak. Such language is used in politics to serve the purpose of propaganda. As journalists, we can't stop politicians or activists from using such terms. But we can decide whether or how we will use such terms ourselves – and then how we can explain our decisions to our audiences.

As participants at the Aspen Institute's most recent forum concluded, we should report on what people do – not what they are.

The "T" word

Words such as "terrorist," "insurgent," "torture" and "fundamentalist" are being used all over print and broadcast media, often repeated as easy clichés and stereotypes. But each of these terms, and many others like them, carry loaded connotations used strategically by politicians, journalists and ordinary citizens alike.

Editors and writers struggle daily to find the best language or to avoid the use of certain terms, and almost all news organizations have developed some guidelines regulating the use of particular terms. At Wingspread, participants debated whether there can be universal standards for those loaded words, especially the most relevant to this discussion – "terrorist" and "terrorism" (and their Arabic equivalents).

Who is a terrorist? Can a state, as opposed to an individual or a non-state group, commit an act of terrorism? Do motives matter? Do we use the term equally whether we agree or disagree with the goals of the perpetrator? Can we eliminate our use of the word altogether to avoid bias, or would that be tossing away a perfectly valid word with a specific definition, all for the sake of political correctness?

"Terrorism" was first used to describe the "Reign of Terror" in France during that country's revolution of 1789-99. The party in power governed by threats and executions, and the term eventually came to mean using terror to get one's way, especially by hurting or killing innocent people.

While some journalists believe that the best rule of thumb regarding these words is simply to avoid using them whenever possible, a breakout group of Arabs and Americans at Wingspread suggested that these and other "loaded" words can be used if they are:

1) Defined specifically;
2) Used consistently;
3) Used only when they apply;
4) Not used as a substitute for facts.

The group attempted to come up with a valid definition of "terrorism" that can be used universally. Its choice: "An act of violence against civilians intended to make society at large afraid and to achieve a specific goal."

In order to come to such an agreement, the working group first had to decide "Who owns the language?" said Andrew Mosher, deputy foreign editor of *The Washington Post*. "And we decided essentially that we do."

Then, he said, if you define the word, how do you know that your readers or your audience agree with the definition? "We decided that we have to define it specifically and use it consistently," he said.

The next question was how a media outlet should communicate that decision to its audience – an audience that will not hesitate to call or write if it disagrees with the definition.

Several participants thought it impractical to tell the audience what the definition is and said that "if you are consistent, it will come across anyhow." Others, including Mosher and Camille Elhassani, deputy program editor of Al Jazeera International, disagreed. They said that if you define a term, you have to share with your readers, listeners or viewers what the definition is, why you chose it, and how you will be using it in your newspaper or broadcast report. The media outlet's Web site, they pointed out, is a perfect place to do that.

Explaining the decision to the audience "certainly helps your credibility," Mosher said. "The more you can make the public aware of the fact that these debates go on, to the extent that they do, I think the better."

The more difficult – and unresolved – question among the working group was whether states can commit terrorist acts. To be specific: A Palestinian who blows himself up in a Tel Aviv shopping center, killing and maiming several Israelis, is often called a terrorist. But what about an Israeli soldier who, with the backing of his government, shells a West Bank residential area, killing and maiming Palestinian civilians? (Each of the two could claim that he is retaliating against the other's acts.)

Hisham Melhem, one of the conference's co-moderators, does include state actors in his own definition of terrorism: "A deliberate act of violence or a serious threat of violence directed at civilian targets, by states and non-state actors to achieve a political objective, even if the political objective is ambiguous or outlandish."

Lawrence Pintak, a former CBS Middle East correspondent who now runs the Adham Center for Electronic Journalism at The American University in Cairo, says in his book "Reflections in a Bloodshot Lens: America, Islam & the War of Ideas," that "the failure to leave space for the idea that some acts carried out by governments can be considered terrorism embodies the very essence of the difference in worldviews. To much of the globe, state-sponsored terrorism is a far greater threat than terrorism carried out by individuals or loose-knit organizations. … This difference in definition sparks a cascade of other questions: Who is a 'terrorist' and who is a 'martyr'? When does a 'martyr' become a 'terrorist'?"[2]

No matter what definition is used by a media outlet, someone in its audience will disagree. So using the words "terrorism/terrorist" should not be a substitute for describing facts. Wingspread participants agreed that journalists should not hang their story on the use of the term or make the term the pivotal information they try to convey. The facts are always going to be more useful than the labels. Mosher believes that any definition of the term should deal with the act of terrorism, and not with who is a terrorist.

Another term that involves the "T" word and has been in heavy use particularly since 9/11 is the phrase "war on terror-

ism" – another term freighted with political significance that has been the subject of considerable debate. If we can't come to a common definition of what "terrorism" is, how can we accurately portray a war on it? Some argue that terrorism is a tactic, and you cannot wage a war on a tactic. Furthermore, many believe that declaring war on an abstract concept naively implies that the concept can be defeated, just as a country can be.

If journalists use the term "war on terrorism," (or "terror") in contexts other than direct quotes, are they conferring legitimacy on the term? Are they implying that such a "war" can be won? And perhaps more importantly, are they allowing themselves to become a participant in a U.S. government propaganda effort?

Melhem, for one, argues that journalists need to challenge the Bush administration's "inability to make a distinction" between what might be called "nihilistic" terrorism (the anarchists of 19th century Europe), political-national terrorism (Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestine, Northern Ireland, etc.), and Osama bin Laden's version of terrorism, which seeks not to achieve a specific political objective (releasing prisoners, or forcing the enemy to negotiate or compromise) but to destroy "the State" or the "Great Satan."

Ultimately, Mosher believes it's important to continue using words that politicians and demagogues have attempted to co-opt – as long as they're used carefully, in specific circumstances determined by journalists rather than by those attempting to use journalism for their own ends.

"In Israel, everything up to and including jaywalking is terrorism, same in Iraq," he said. "It's a word that has come to mean nothing because it's come to mean everything. But at the same time, are you going to concede the language to the politicians? It's an important concept and an important word. If there's a global 'war on terrorism' and you're not using it, you're going to look like you're not covering the story."

"Suicide bomber" or "martyr"?

Another controversial debate in recent years is "suicide bombing/bomber" versus "martyr." "Suicide bomber" is used primarily by Western media to describe people who strap explosives to their bodies or drive explosives-laden vehicles into a "target." Other comparable terms are also being used in some Arab and Muslim media, while others use the Arabic version of "martyr operation," which carries a positive connotation. Others prefer the term "guerrilla operation."

Zeeshan Hasan, the creator of liberalislam.net argues that from a psychological health perspective, "suicide is a symptom of a pathological condition such as depression" and once a person accepts this "simple fact," it might change how one views suicide bombing. Anyone who commits suicide is not completely rational,

he argues, so the logical connection of the act to Islam or to political goals disappears.

Suicide bombers do justify their actions as being politically or religiously motivated. However, people – and journalists in particular – cannot take this rationalization at face value, any more than they should accept the rationalizations of governments to commit violent acts.

The U.S.-based Fox News Channel goes further than other Western media, calling people who blow themselves up to kill others "homicide bombers." The goal is to take the focus off the killer and put it onto the victim. Fox News (and the *New York Post*) picked up on the term after it was used in public by White House spokesman Ari Fleischer. CNN and the news divisions of ABC, CBS and NBC continue to use "suicide bombing" and "suicide bomber."

On the other hand, some Arab news agencies use the loaded term "martyr" to describe a person who blows himself up. Some organizations, such as Al Jazeera, use this term consistently to describe Palestinians killed by Israelis or to describe Palestinians who carry out bombing operations against Israeli targets.

But Al Jazeera does not use the term "martyr" when describing Iraqis who are killed by bombing attacks. It also uses the term "suicide bomber" and not "martyr" when describing an event taking place in Iraq.

Other organizations, such as Al Arabiya TV, refrain from using the term "martyr" altogether, regardless of the place or nationality of the victims or perpetrators. Even when the term "martyr operation" is quoted, it is put clearly in quotation marks.

Ironically, the two channels (Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera) simultaneously ran "urgent" news flashes across the screen on the morning of Feb. 23, 2006, after the killing of Al Arabiya's correspondent, Atwar Bahjat, and two of her assistants in Iraq. It is interesting to note the difference in the terminology used:

Al Arabiya: "Al Arabiya's correspondent Atwar Bahjat and two of her colleagues *assassinated*."

Al Jazeera: "Atwar Bahjat and two other colleagues in Iraq *fall martyrs*."

Whichever description the journalist uses, the reader or listener will no doubt infer a certain connotation or spin, and will probably learn more about the journalist's or the media organization's political inclination rather than the facts of the story. Instead of using terms like "homicide bomber" or "martyr," journalists can best serve the audience by saying specifically what happened.

"Settlements" or "neighborhoods"?

The trickle-down effect of language, which often begins with a government and ends up seeping into the media, is also

seen in the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The "road map" peace plan sponsored by the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations specifically calls for Israel to freeze "all settlement activity." But over time, this word has been watered down in the media, and instead of describing Jewish housing compounds in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as "settlements," some media have begun using more benign words like "housing" or "neighborhood." This is what Robert Fisk describes as the "semantic iceberg that has crashed into American journalism in the Middle East."

In an article in the *Los Angeles Times* (Dec. 29, 2005) titled "Telling It Like It Isn't," Fisk goes on to say: "Illegal Jewish settlements for Jews and Jews only on Arab land are clearly 'colonies,' and we used to call them that. I cannot trace the moment when we started using the word 'settlements.' But I can remember the moment around two years ago when the word 'settlements' was replaced by 'Jewish neighborhoods' – or even, in some cases, 'outposts.'"[3]

Although it is true that some journalists use these terms interchangeably, others recognize that they mean different things. While settlements are legal under Israeli law, they are built on occupied Arab land for the use of Jews only. Most importantly, they are illegal from the point of view of international law.[4]

Still, some pro-Israel media prefer the term "neighborhood," which carries a milder and more positive connotation. More importantly, referring to these Jewish settlements as "neighborhoods" implies that Palestinians who attack them must be carrying out acts of terrorism.

Fence vs. wall vs. barrier

A similar problem has arisen in writing about the structure Israel is building between its territory and parts of the West Bank. According to Israeli authorities, the purpose of this structure is to prevent Palestinians from attacking Israelis. The structure, however, cuts deeply into Arab land and does not follow the 1967 borders.

Israeli officials and some in the media tend to favor the word "fence" or "security barrier" to describe what is being constructed. The word "fence" brings to mind the fence around a garden or the gate at the entrance to a private housing complex: a positive connotation that does not justify any form of protest by the Palestinians.

Palestinian and Arab officials and media, on the other hand, use the more evocative "wall." Those who favor "fence" note that in many places, the structure is not a concrete and immovable wall. But in other places, the concrete and steel barrier that runs east of Jerusalem is higher than the old Berlin Wall and just as impassable.

It is obvious that each side of the conflict has an agenda it is trying to push, and it is up to journalists to correctly describe what

is being built. Most Western media outlets appear to have settled on the phrase "separation barrier" in describing the construction. It casts neither a positive nor negative light on either side and simply conveys what is being built on the land. Describing the controversy surrounding the structure helps to keep "separation barrier" in context, without favoring either side's agenda.

These examples demonstrate that reporters should follow the basic rule of describing what is happening, rather than adopting one side or the other's terminology for the event.

But we should recognize that choosing neutral terms will not satisfy those who prefer the "loaded" terms exactly because they do have a strong positive or negative connotation. Ethan Bronner, deputy foreign editor of *The New York Times* and a former Jerusalem correspondent, told NPR's "On the Media" that "the word 'barrier' doesn't so much anger people, but the failure to call it something else does seem to bother people, particularly from the left, the failure to call it a 'wall.'" But not just the left – he then went on to describe giving a speech to a conservative Jewish group in the United States after which a woman told him, "You're talking to a fence person now! Call it a fence."

"Jihad" and "crusade"

Journalists should understand the language, the history and the culture of the people and issues they cover. Bad intentions may not always lie behind distorted reporting, whether in the West or in the Arab and Muslim world. This can often be the result of a lack of familiarity, insensitivity or simply ignorance on the part of reporters.

In covering sensitive, nuance-ridden subjects such as the Arab-Israeli conflict or Islam, journalists should be careful in using terms they may not understand. One very popular cliché that has been parroted by journalists on all sides is the term "jihad."

The Arabic noun jihad is used to refer to the concept of the struggle to do good. In particular situations, that can include a war in the name of religion, or what has been referred to as "holy war." Western media almost exclusively use the latter interpretation in a negative context. When journalists use the word jihad it is crucial to keep in mind that there is no such thing as "holy war" in Islam. Neither the Quran nor the Hadith (the Prophet Mohammad's teachings and sayings) mentions this concept, which has been abused today by Arabs and Muslims as well as non-Muslims.

"You're not talking about [how to interpret the Quran] – that's not the issue," Melhem noted at Wingspread during the discussion about the use of the term jihad. "Political culture uses religion. People are glorifying a culture of death. There is something obscene about this. It's not about the Israelis,

it's about my culture."

Some religious experts argue that the word jihad, which means "effort" or "endeavor," refers to defending the land and religion, as well as struggling to improve the living conditions of the Ummah (the People). In that sense, jihad in Islam is the struggle against human weaknesses and foibles – including the struggle within one's own self.

Although some of these scholars concede that jihad can also mean an active campaign against any unjust government, they insist that such a war can be waged only against political entities and leaders, not innocent people. In that sense it is not much different from a "just war," a Christian concept that refers to fighting tyranny or oppression.

But it is equally important to recognize that some radical Islamic elements believe that jihad can include other activities such as kidnapping, hijacking and murdering civilians. These radical elements believe that nothing is off limits when it comes to jihad.

Conversely, the term "crusade," when used by modern-day politicians and journalists in the West, rings alarm bells and evokes images of Christian brutality. In the Middle Ages this word was used to describe a war justified by religious considerations. Today its use raises fears of a "clash of civilizations" between Christians and Muslims. However, some say that the modern-day use of the word crusade carries a different connotation, which is not understood by some Arabs and Muslims. They argue that the word has come to mean only in a metaphorical sense a battle for justice, not a Christian struggle against believers of another faith.

Contemporary use of the word crusade often refers to a great war. (General Dwight Eisenhower wrote a book called *Crusade In Europe*, referring to the battle against the Nazis.) In recent decades various American administrations have waged "crusades" against poverty, drugs, crime, and HIV and AIDS.

A more recent example that highlights the use – or misuse – of the word crusade is evident in a headline of the Qatari daily, *The Peninsula*, following the outrage among Arabs and Muslims over the publication of cartoons that were deemed blasphemous to the Prophet Mohammed. *The Peninsula*'s front page headline on Feb. 2, 2006 read: "Europe Joins 'Crusade.'"[5]

Journalists should use the word crusade sparingly, keeping in mind that it has strongly negative connotations in the Arab world.

Other examples

There are many other words and phrases that are abundantly used today by journalists – and politicians – liberally and uncritically. These include:

Mujahideen: A term derived from the word Jihad. When the Afghan mujahideen were battling the Soviet army, the Western

"This [Iraq] war was built on big lies – the lie that Osama bin Laden had connections with Saddam Hussein and a second big lie that Iraq had nuclear weapons threatening the West. Everybody now knows these were very big lies. Western media supported these lies and bought them. … I think yes, the Arab media maybe has so many shortcomings and misgivings, but still Western media cannot lecture them and they do not have the moral high ground to give lessons to our media."

– Khaled Hroub, host of a weekly program on Al Jazeera and the director of the Cambridge Arab Media Project

media often referred to them as "freedom fighters." But once the Soviets withdrew, they were referred to as guerrillas and, subsequently, as outlaws.

Extremist: A person who by definition holds extreme views or advocates or carries out extreme measures. Such a person need not be violent, but the term is often used to convey that meaning.

Fundamentalist and Militant: These words have become negatively distorted. They take on an even more pejorative slant when preceded by "Islamic." In that context "Islamic fundamentalist" suggests that violence is somehow a fundamental part of Islam. Osama bin Laden and his followers are often described as "Muslim extremists," or "Muslim fanatics," whereas fighters of the Irish Republican Army are rarely called "Catholic" extremists or fanatics. The same goes for the Ulster Freedom Fighters who are not referred to in the media as "Protestant" extremists.

Torture vs. Abuse: The word abuse is a "neutral" term used by U.S. officials to describe practices that took place at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. This word evokes different reactions than the word torture, which may be a more accurate description of what actually took place.

Targeted Killings: A term used by the Israelis to describe assassination attacks against leaders of Palestinian groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The term is designed to carry a softer effect than assassination.

Regime: This term has come to carry a negative image of an oppressive or

unfriendly government. We often read and hear about the "Saddam regime" or the "Assad regime," but how many times have we come across phrases such as the "Blair regime" or the "Chirac regime"?

Rogue States: Another term used by various U.S. administrations to describe governments accused of sponsoring terrorism or carrying out policies that differ with those of the United States.

The Will of the International Community: American officials often refer to their policy preferences as the will of the international community. Journalists uncritically repeat this term, including those in the Arab and Muslim world.

The trickle-down effect

A reporter's job is to be neutral, to describe an event and provide it in context for readers or viewers to draw their own conclusions. The journalist is expected to give an accurate account of events, and to avoid using loaded language that tells more about the journalist than it does about the news. Sometimes this is difficult to do.

In Iraq, for example, the security situation often makes it very difficult for journalists of all nationalities to move about the country to do their own news-gathering. Much of the information about military operations, therefore, comes from the U.S. military or Iraqi officials. This information is usually formulated and filtered to carry a particular "spin." Reporters must be vigilant not to parrot them, particularly when the language is loaded.

U.S. military press releases from the coalition press center in Baghdad often omit the word "suspected" preceding "terrorist" or "insurgent," especially after U.S. airstrikes on buildings the military deems "safe houses." Journalists, even those who are highly trained and experienced, often repeat this language verbatim with little or no examination, inadvertently influencing their audience to a certain perspective.

Sensationalism ... or Reality?

"It seems to me pictures are a way to build the solidarity [among audience members in the Arab world.]"

– Jon Alterman, director, Middle East program, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

"The magnitude of coverage, particularly in some instances, 24 hours of pain and suffering and helplessness on the ground has left a collective scar in the Arab world."

– Shibley Telhami, the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland

In March 2006, *The Sacramento Bee* ran a picture on its front page so disturbing that few other American newspapers ran it anywhere in their pages.

It showed three dead Iraqi children lying in the bed of a pickup truck with dried blood in their hair and faces, a group of men standing over them in mourning. They were innocent victims of a firefight north of Baghdad between the U.S. military and suspected Iraqi insurgents.

The Bee, a mid-sized American newspaper in the heart of California, usually takes a very conservative view about images of violence and death. In a column explaining why the *Bee* decided to run the disturbing photo, public editor Armando Acuña said that he had been urging the paper to run more graphic – and thus more realistic – pictures from the war in Iraq.

"The news value of the story was very important," the *Bee*'s managing editor, Joyce Terhaar, said in Acuña's column. "I understand that some people are upset

(Associated Press)

The Sacramento Bee published this photo in March 2006, while few other newspapers did.

because it's kids, but it's because they are kids that the photo is important.

"Because they are kids in a house one minute, and the next minute they are bodies in the back of a pickup truck."

Newspapers and broadcast outlets in the United States and the Arab world wrestle with this dilemma all the time in their coverage of war and other violent stories. How graphic should the images we present be? Is a bloody image base sensationalism, or is it a realistic and necessary depiction of the horrors of war? Does it matter whether the dead people shown in the photo or TV image are from the country where the images are shown – people our readers or viewers might know? And are there different standards of taste in the United States than in Arab countries?

Other questions about the use of images during conflict go beyond whether to run pictures of dead bodies. Should we show images of hostages or prisoners of war? Does it matter if they are high profile prisoners, such as Saddam Hussein? What if the images are necessary to show a bigger problem – such as with the Abu Ghraib prisoner photos? How can we avoid being manipulated by governments to advance their point of view through the use of images?

Because images are very powerful and often dramatic, we should always exercise careful judgment in deciding which images to show and which images to hold from the public, how often to show these images, and how to explain to our audiences why we made the decisions that we did.

Video images and still photographs can provide a lot of information and shed light on important issues and grievances. They can also promote greater understanding and cooperation between peoples and societies, and can be a source of inspiration. Images can also play a major role in galvanizing public opinion, as in the United States during the Vietnam War.

On the other hand, images can cause great harm and inflame sensitivities if they are offensive or intrusive. This was evident

in the controversy sparked by the Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed that were deemed blasphemous.

In using images – whether televised or printed – we should give a fair and accurate portrayal of events without exaggeration or manipulation. After all, these images – unlike, usually, the words that accompany them – are likely to stay with us for a very long time. So choosing these images must be done with the utmost care.

Arab vs. Western media

Media in the Arab world have taken dramatic steps in the last 15 years or so since the launch of the first satellite television station – MBC. The subsequent launch of Al Jazeera and other dedicated news channels set new benchmarks for Arab TV journalism. The same can be said about print journalism, particularly Arabic-language newspapers and magazines that are published abroad, and their Web sites. Today, Arab audiences can choose from various satellite services that provide up-to-the-minute coverage of major conflicts and developments, and are no longer limited to state-controlled media that for years provided little useful information.

But it is important to keep in mind that there is no such a thing as "Arab media" just as there is no "Arab audience." The coverage by Arab media is far from monolithic. Each media outlet in the Arab world – just as in the West – has its own inclinations, style, language and sometimes its own agenda; and what viewers or readers are exposed to can vary dramatically from one outlet to another.

More important, perhaps, are the differences between the way the Arab media report on various events and the way the same events are handled by Western media organizations. This is evident in the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq and many other major developments. These differences can be clearly noticed in the language used as well as in the footage and images shown on television broadcasts or printed in newspapers.

Are these differences proper? Or should media – regardless of origin – adhere to the same principles and standards?

When it comes to images, Arab media tend to use more explicit and graphic images of civilian casualties, bodies of soldiers, and bombed-out buildings and homes. Al Jazeera, for example, was one of the first to broadcast images of the extent of destruction to cities and villages after the U.S. war in Afghanistan; it also was one of the first to show American prisoners of war in Iraq, which was highly criticized by U.S. government officials.

U.S. media have been much more reticent to show such images, as evidenced by the reluctance of American media to use the photo of child victims discussed earlier in this chapter. In both cases, the media

are accused of making their decisions to serve a political purpose. U.S. officials and others have roundly criticized Al Jazeera and other Arabic media for using an overly negative portrayal of the war, focusing on gruesome images of innocent victims, to rally the Arab world against the U.S. effort in Iraq.

On the other hand, critics accuse the mainstream Western media of allowing itself to become, intentionally or unintentionally, a tool in the hands of the U.S. administration for winning public support for its war in Iraq. The showing of "positive" images of the "War of Liberation" while avoiding images of civilian casualties, they say, is nothing less than propaganda during a war campaign.

There is some validity to both points of view. The difficult question for journalists in both regions is how to ensure that the decisions they make on coverage and the use of images are influenced as little as possible by the political goals of their countries' leaders.

Disturbing images

Some in the news business argue that what people do not see or hear is often more important than what they do. Arab media organizations, particularly broadcasters, are often accused of showing images that are unnecessarily graphic and gruesome or that incite violence. The same images are often withheld from the public in the West as being too disturbing. These images include dead or mutilated bodies, civilian casualties, destruction and devastation caused by war and many other examples. They also include anti-Western protests from various countries in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

The question is, as Lillian Thomas of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* put it in a story about the use of graphic images: "How do we – as journalists – decide whether these images are in fact 'examples of stomach-turning excess or honest depictions of a disturbing world?' More importantly, how do we make sure that such images are in fact newsworthy and do not overwhelm the news message to become themselves the news? And if 'mainstream' media choose not to display these images, can we prevent them from finding their way to the Internet?"

The questions that haunt Western media when dealing with such images have to do with two basic issues: 1) Consideration for the viewer's taste and feelings; 2) Considerations for the families of the dead. However, as we will see later, media organizations sometimes exercise a kind of censorship in the name of sanitizing the audience.

Showing graphic images is not a phenomenon limited to Arab media. Many Western – non-American – media also show more graphic images. The British newspaper *The Guardian*, like many of its counterparts in Europe, has published photos of death during recent conflicts

around the world. The paper's photo editor, Eamon McCabe, explains the rationale behind it in an article titled, "Why we must show the dead."

"Every time there is a tragedy or a war, an outcry follows about why newspapers choose to publish photographs of dead bodies," he said. "And yet tragedies need bodies. … How can you not have photographs of dead bodies during a war?"

Camille Elhassani of Al Jazeera argued at Wingspread that the same standards should apply when it comes to showing American and non-American deaths. She stressed that "the [U.S.] news won't show dead American soldiers, but we have no problem showing dead Iraqis."

Mohannad Khatib, a news anchor at the Dubai-based Al Arabiya at the time, agreed. During the Wingspread discussions, he said that he has "no problem with showing dead bodies," however, he drew a line when it comes to showing mutilated bodies and "half bodies." He went on to say that killing and death is part of a war story, and "if people are being slaughtered…it has to be shown."

Alan Elsner of Reuters, however, suggested a more cautious approach. He argued that journalists too often pile on "gory image after image in a gratuitous way that is designed to evoke a purely emotional response from viewers rather than inform them." Doing so may turn the reporter into a kind of propagandist, and then the reporter becomes part of the story. But Elsner agreed that there are many instances in which provocative images are necessary.

In the past, U.S. media had little problem showing images of death on the military front and at home. The images from Vietnam and Somalia are still vivid in people's memories and were credited with changing domestic opinion about the presence of U.S. troops in those countries.

But few would argue that U.S. media apply the same standards when dealing with images of dead Americans at home or in combat abroad as they do for dead people of another country. And yet those images that are not shown on Western media will almost certainly find their way to Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya or other media outlets in the region, as well as Internet sites in the United States.

American journalists were faced with hard decisions when the Sept. 11 attacks took place. Suddenly the "catastrophe" hit home, and the tough question was: How much do we show?

Serge Schmemann of the *International Herald Tribune* and formerly of *The New York Times* acknowledged during the Wingspread discussions that the *Times* "would not show pictures of caskets in the 1950s, let alone dead bodies ... but the main thing for us was photos of people jumping from the World Trade Center." He raised the question of whether "the horror

of this has any news value? Or are we just feeding some kind of prurient interests?" He argued that "We're not going to run the picture if it's simply gruesome."

There were several controversial images captured that day and the days to follow. Univision aired a video – in slow motion – of a person falling from a high floor of the World Trade Center. The video did not show the body hitting the ground because another building blocked the view.

The *New York Daily News* published this image captured by photographer Susan Watts. These photos drew a great deal of criticism. Ed Kosner, the paper's editor-in-chief, defended the decision to publish these photographs by saying: "You can't do the story without doing the story. It's no time to be squeamish."

(New York Daily News)

Photo of Sept. 11 in the *New York Daily News*

Eric Meskauskas, the director of photography at the paper, says: "Indeed, we did know that our images would disturb people. …If we are afraid to use them now, when will we ever do so? This kind of war is the beginning of something new for America. Maybe it's time to begin to show harsh reality."

There are many other cases in which American media decided that the newsworthiness of a disturbing photo justified running it: the grieving woman next to a Vietnam War protester killed by National Guard troops at Kent State University in 1970 or the mass suicide by the (mostly U.S.) members of the People's Temple cult in Guyana in 1978. Were the images an essential part to telling the story? Were these photos newsworthy or did they overwhelm the story?

These are some of the questions that journalists need to answer when deciding to publish such photographs.

Among the graphic images that have generated the most debate were pictures of the bodies of American soldiers being dragged in the streets of the Somalian capital, Mogadishu, in 1993. Many news organizations chose to publish these disturbing images – which told the story with far greater impact than words could have. Their impact was so strong that many would argue that the pictures alone were responsible for the Clinton administration's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Somalia – a country that remains basically lawless in 2006.

Was there a good journalistic reason for exposing the public to such images? Did these images contain vital information that was needed for the story or could the public have been just as well informed by descriptions of the carnage?

(Note from the editor of *The Virginian-Pilot* on Oct. 5, 1993, explaining the reasons for publishing the photos of the dead American soldiers in Somalia.)

A note to the readers from the managing editor

Today's *Virginian-Pilot* includes a photograph of jubilant Somalis dragging the body of a U.S. soldier killed in action Monday. The photograph is difficult to look at. It was difficult for us to publish. We decided to do so only after a long discussion involving many voices in our newsroom. There was no unanimity. There was no consensus.

It is painful to publish this photograph in a community in which so many people are connected to the military. More than 125 troops from Fort Eustis are in Somalia, although none of them was among those injured on Monday. We can see in this fallen soldier members of our own families. We worry that the indignity imposed by the Somalis is compounded by the publication of the photograph.

In the end, this photograph portrays an outrage against a U.S. soldier in a powerful, profound way that words alone cannot convey. In an era of instant, worldwide visual communication, images such as this one shape the reaction of policymakers as well as the public. We could not deny people so closely linked to events so far away the fullest understanding of what is happening and what others are seeing and reacting to.

– Cole C. Campbell
Managing Editor


The Virginian-Pilot

Yeltsin takes control in Moscow

12 Americans killed in combat

Cheering mob drags body of soldier through streets

U.S. beefs up forces, threatens captors

A Fort Eustis-based soldier writes home: 'I try not to meet the evil eyes'

The hard part comes next: rebuilding a ruined country shattered by internal chaos

(*The Virginian-Pilot*)

The Virginian-Pilot published a photo of Somalis dragging the body of a U.S. soldier in Mogadishu (Oct. 5, 1993).

In a note to the readers, Cole C. Campbell, the managing editor of *The Virginian-Pilot*, acknowledged that the decision to publish this photo – on the front page – was a difficult one. He added that there was no consensus within the newsroom on the decision to publish. He said: "In the end this photograph portrays an outrage against a U.S. soldier in a powerful, profound way that words alone cannot convey…Images such as this one shape the reaction of policymakers as well as the public."

This is one of many cases in which media that have published or aired controversial photos have explained to their audiences why they decided to do so. Many also open up a public forum in which read-

ers or viewers can offer opinions on that decision.

More recently, many Western media published the grisly pictures of burned and mutilated bodies of American military contractors hanging from a bridge in Fallujah, Iraq, in March 2004.

While many media organizations refrained from publishing many graphic images of the Iraq war, others, including *The New York Times*, decided to show them. These were not American soldiers but rather American civilians so they were not "protected" by various rules and regulations. Others, such as Jim Lewis of Slate.com, believe that the support for the war was waning, and "we're approaching a moment of transition, so it's more in keeping with the public mood, and more revealing of the problems that lie ahead, to show evidence that things aren't going well."

What is the news value that these pictures offer? Did these pictures become themselves the news?

Sometimes publishing a photo is the only way to prove that a certain event actually took place. The U.S.-led civil authority in Iraq published pictures of Saddam Hussein's sons Uday and Qusay after they had been killed in a battle in the Iraqi city of Mosul. Journalists were invited to film the "reconstructed" bodies to dispel any doubts that the two were killed. U.S. authorities have stated that by showing the pictures, they were hoping to undermine guerrilla groups committed to restoring the old regime.

Nevertheless, the decision to release the photographs of the bodies of Uday and Qusay is a controversial one: the U.S. military was outraged when Arab television channels broadcast pictures of dead and captured U.S. soldiers during the war.

(Reuters)

The bodies of Saddam's sons, Uday and Qusay, on display.

Is it hypocritical for it to then encourage publishing pictures of dead Iraqi officials?

Whatever the decision is with regard to these images, we should avoid rushing to automatically show them, or automatically withhold them. Displaying some of these graphic images may be important to explain what has happened. Once the initial decision to show the image is made, more decisions await: How many times should the image be shown? Repeated viewings of disturbing images, such as the bodies being dragged through Mogadishu, can have an outsized impact on public opinion.

In deciding whether or not to display graphic images, we should consider some of the following questions and concerns:

1) Can the sources of these images be verified? Are they credible?
2) What purpose would these images serve, and how would they explain/enhance/supplement the story?
3) Will such images help the audience better understand the event?
4) How often do we replay or rerun these images? What is the purpose of replaying them?
5) What are the possible ramifications of showing these images? Do the benefits of showing them justify the costs?
6) What are the motives of those who want us to use the images – or not use them? Can we be sure that we are not being manipulated to further someone's agenda?
7) Can we explain to our readers or viewers why we decided to use the images?

Moreover, the audience's cultural and religious sensitivities should be respected when selecting still photographs or video clips. "Good taste" should always be a consideration. Our goal is to inform, not offend. Pictures can still be dramatic and moving without being humiliating to the subject or shocking to the audience. Graphic images, whenever they are deemed necessary to the story, should be preceded by an advisory or a warning.

Images of hostages and POWs

Another issue that caused great debate was the airing of images of prisoners of war in Iraq. A few days into the war, Al Iraqi TV and other Arabic broadcasters including Al Jazeera TV aired a video provided by the Iraqi government, showing bodies of U.S. service members killed during the battle for the southern Iraqi town of Nasiriyeh. The video also showed several dazed, and in some cases bloodied, American prisoners of war. They were being "interviewed" with questions like: "Why did you come here to kill Iraqis?" Many Western broadcasters made references to the footage, but showed only short segments after having the faces of the prisoners pixilated.

(Al Jazeera)

American POW in Iraq

Almost all U.S. TV networks agreed they would not show footage of what was described as American bodies at an Iraqi morgue. They said the video material had no news value and that broadcasting it would be in poor taste and violate the sensibilities of the soldiers' families. However, both CNN and NBC aired still images of bodies that could not be identified.

Al Jazeera's decision to air the video was widely criticized by many in the West. MSNBC anchor John Siegenthaler said: "They are horrifying pictures, and we are not showing them on MSNBC. …Why

would Al Jazeera put them on television?"

ABC News president David Westin said that his network decided against showing the video even before the Pentagon requested that it not do so. He justified the decision by saying: "I didn't see the showing of actual bodies as necessary or newsworthy. …It was clearly done for the purpose of disturbing and enraging people." But he said he would air the footage of the prisoners of war once their relatives had been notified. CBS spokeswoman Sandra Genelius said her network also would make "judicious and tasteful" use of the POW footage after the Pentagon notification.

The airing of such images was an apparent violation of Article 13 of the Geneva Convention, which stipulates that prisoners should be protected at all times, "particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity."

Jihad Ballout, an Al Jazeera spokesman, explained the rationale behind airing these images: "It was footage and it was real, so we ran it. …It was horrible today. But it was horrible yesterday as well. War is horrible. …It's like everybody forgot that war creates death."

In April 2004, the revelation of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal shocked the world. The story of Iraqi prisoners being subjected to humiliation at the hands of American military personnel would certainly not

A photo of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib

have had such a profound impact in West if it had not been accompanied by photographs illustrating the abuse. But again, questions were raised about whether showing pictures that humiliated their subjects was ethical and whether it violated the Geneva Conventions.

In May 2005, the British tabloid, *The Sun*, printed photos of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in his underwear in his U.S.-guarded prison cell. U.S. officials quickly denied having leaked the pictures, which also showed Hussein doing his laundry and sleeping, and said they believed their publication was a breach of the Geneva Convention on the humane treatment of prisoners of war. Regardless, the photos were broadcast across much of the world.

Finally, the publishing of photos of Al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners at the U.S.-run detention facility at Guantanamo Bay also appears to violate the Geneva Convention on treatment of prisoners. Published

photos showed a group of prisoners kneeling, with their arms shackled and wearing large black goggles and ear cups. The International Committee of the Red Cross said the United States may have violated the Third Geneva Convention by releasing those photographs, as it could expose the prisoners "to public curiosity." The Bush administration has denied mistreating prisoners and says the Geneva Conventions, which lay out the rights of prisoners and the obligations of their captors, do not apply to Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters.

And some of those who favored publication of photos of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo have argued that while the publication may violate individuals' rights, it is necessary to show the world how those prisoners are being treated. If the media hadn't shown photos of the shocking mistreatment of Abu Ghraib prisoners – even if they violated the Geneva Convention – there would never have been such an outcry to end the abuse.

Prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay

Another issue debated by media has been the use of photographs and video that show Western hostages kidnapped by extremists in Iraq, Pakistan and other countries. In addition to the questions about sensitivity and taste (especially when images show hostages being abused or even killed), journalists must also question whether showing those images helps the kidnappers' cause. One of their motives, after all, is to get more attention.

The airing of video segments showing *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl just before his murder by his captors in May 2002 in Pakistan created a big controversy for CBS. The U.S. network showed the footage despite requests from the U.S. State and Justice departments not to do so out of consideration for the reporter's family. CBS contacted *The Wall Street Journal* before airing the video so Pearl's colleagues and family would not be caught by surprise. While CBS did not show the execution itself, the video inevitably made its way to the Internet, where viewers could see it in its entirety.

CBS anchorman Dan Rather told viewers on the nightly news on May 14 that "We are about to show you edited portions of it so that you can see and judge for yourself the kind of propaganda terrorists are using in their war against the United States."

In a statement explaining its decision, CBS said: "While we understand and recognize the sorrow of the Pearl family, last night we reported important and newsworthy information to the American public. The report was sound and responsible journalism, sensitively presented and showed the audience an example of the very real threat the free world faces in its war on

terrorism. Ignoring these kinds of stories not only doesn't serve the public and runs counter to our mission as journalists, but can lead to an uninformed – and vulnerable – nation."

The same kind of decision faced many news organizations after they learned of the kidnapping of *The Christian Science Monitor* stringer Jill Carroll in Baghdad on Jan. 7, 2006. Managing Editor Marshall Ingwerson sent an e-mail requesting "off the record, that all media please honor a news blackout on the kidnapping of a freelance journalist earlier today pending further notice. We ask this out of respect to the journalist and the ongoing, intensive effort to free her."

The blackout was lifted by the *Monitor* a couple of days later, and news of the kidnapping had already hit the wires and found its way to several media, including CNN.

Al Jazeera showed footage of Carroll it obtained from the kidnappers while she was being held – and, Egyptian journalist and columnist Mona Eltahawy said at a recent debate in Doha, that it was objectionable: "When I turned on the television and I saw Jill Carroll sobbing in front of a camera, forced to wear a headscarf, I saw no context in that. It was an awful message to send out. And for me, as an Arab and a Muslim, it's a terrible thing to watch, and … completely unnecessary."

In cases like this, journalists face serious and hard questions, including:

- Should a fellow reporter be treated differently than a kidnapped non-reporter?
- Could publishing any information jeopardize efforts to save the hostage's life?
- If there is a blackout, how long should it be observed?
- Does showing the video or publishing photos play into the hands of the kidnappers? Does it give them a platform to air their messages?
- Could the news of the abduction help to alert the community to this crime and perhaps provide certain clues? Could it help in galvanizing public opinion against the kidnappers? Could it send a message to the kidnappers that the person, in Carroll's case, is in fact a journalist and not affiliated with any other group?
- Should there be guidelines or a code that journalists adhere to when it comes to covering kidnappings? Or should these cases be treated on an individual basis?

At Wingspread, Eileen O'Connor, at the time ICFJ's president and a former CNN correspondent, raised the issue of whether television can act as an "enabler" for "terrorists" and hostage takers by showing footage of beheadings or other video related to kidnappings.

Airing Osama's messages

Another issue that faced Western media in particular was the airing of messages from

Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and some of his deputies following the attack on Afghanistan in October 2001. In these messages bin Laden and his representatives appealed to Muslims to overthrow their U.S.-allied governments. The tapes were aired on Al Jazeera TV.

Suspicious that bin Laden was using American TV to send certain "coded messages," the White House asked the major U.S. networks to carefully examine these tapes before airing them. Several networks including ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN and Fox agreed to screen these tapes and possibly edit them before putting them on the air.

Fox News said in a statement: "We believe a free press must and can bear responsibility not to be used by those who want to destroy America and endanger the lives of its citizens."

The New York Times, however, criticized the administration's request, saying that the White House had also suggested that print media might be asked not to publish complete transcripts of these messages.

"The American people should have unfettered access to information about the terrorist leader and his views," the *Times* said. "We trust the White House does not believe that his venomous propaganda will turn the country in his favor."

Carolyn Marvin of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication believes the American people have the right to hear what bin Laden is saying, and they deserve to evaluate for themselves the nature of what they are up against. She said: "I don't think [then National Security Advisor] Condoleeza Rice should be the news director for the American press."

While some argue that media organizations have the right – and responsibility – to tell the whole story, they have to stop short of glorifying the killers by airing their images and messages.

Is this an example of the media acting responsibly? Or is it an example of succumbing to government pressure and censorship? How does the relationship between the media and the government change during wartime, or should it change at all?

Patriotic images/icons

At a time of war or national catastrophe, viewers and readers are exposed to a different kind of journalism. Images that accompany this kind of coverage often tend to be nationalistic, patriotic and full of symbols and icons. Many of these images become a part of the collective memory of the people.

During the war in Iraq, the U.S. military allowed reporters, photographers and videographers to be "embedded" with U.S. troops. This practice inevitably results in images that will be for the most part, patriotic views of what the troops are doing without any indication of what is happening on the other side.

Gen. Tommy Franks, who led the invasion of Iraq in 2003, believes that embedding reporters permitted "the viewership and the listenership and the readership of the various countries on this planet to be able to get a sense, to be able to get a take of what's going on on this battlefield."

But some journalists, including many who were embedded, worried that, in fact, audiences – especially television audiences – got a one-sided view of the war. NBC correspondent Ashleigh Banfield accused the networks of painting a "glorious, wonderful picture" of the war through footage provided by embedded journalists.

She added: "You didn't see what happened when the mortar landed. A puff of smoke is not what a mortar looks like when it explodes, believe me. There are horrors that were completely left out of this war…We got rid of a dictator, we got rid of a monster, but we didn't see what it took to do that."

Many U.S. networks did not limit the use of patriotic images to those that came from the field. Many – Fox is the most prominent example – used images and graphics of the American flag and other symbols of patriotism across their screen during their non-stop coverage.

Other "patriotic" images that were shown on TV were videos of U.S. troops in Iraq or Afghanistan helping ordinary people and playing with children.

The debate in this case is not whether to

U.S Army Maj. Brian Ryder hands out school supplies to young Afghan girls during a humanitarian mission in Charikar village (May 9, 2005).

run such pictures at all – media should attempt to show everything that is happening in Iraq, the positive, the negative and everything in between. The question is how to ensure that the media is not allowing itself to be used by one side or the other. It is impossible to completely avoid being used during wartime, but by striving for balance, media organizations can ensure that their overall reporting serves the needs and interests of the audience, not the actors.

In the end, many of the questions about using images in the media come down to the fundamental question of journalism: What is our role? For some, publishing or airing volatile images serves a higher goal: changing the tide of public opinion against a certain issue and raising public consciousness. In the case of war, the argument is that such images expose the real and ferocious damage that combat does to cultures and to human beings. Others may argue that their purpose in showing more "positive" images is to show support for the troops or the new Iraqi government by

focusing on what's going right.

The Gulf War of 1991 and the crisis in Somalia were covered mostly by CNN. The coverage of those situations showed that the media can play an important role in affecting government policies (the "CNN effect"). The current war on Iraq was opened to many media outlets including those from the Arab and Muslim worlds.

During the Wingspread discussion, O'Connor pointed to images of starving children in Ethiopia and kids covered in flies that were shown on CNN and other networks in the 1980s. She acknowledged that some editors were arguing against showing such images particularly around dinner time.

"'You'll completely put them off,' they claimed. I said, 'Good. I hope they stop eating dinner and pull their checkbook out to [donate to] Oxfam or something.' I was trying to arouse somebody to do something." She had the same view about showing gruesome scenes during the war in Bosnia – using images that people could not turn away from forced them to do something about the massacre of innocent people.

Others believe that journalists have only one duty to fulfill: to report the news. Terence Smith, correspondent for "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer" on PBS addresses this issue in particular while talking about shocking photos.

"What we're trying to do is report the news and what's going on, not affect the war effort one way or another," he said. "And it would be very hard to decide what the ultimate impact of these photos will be."

Finally, there's another reason media organizations are being forced to make decisions about images that they might not have made before: the Internet. Whatever images news media decide should not be seen in the newspapers or on the nightly news can easily be found on the Web, from uncensored photos of physical and sexual abuse of Abu Ghraib prisoners to the full video of Daniel Pearl's execution.

Vaughn Ververs, editor of The Hotline, *National Journal*'s online newsletter, argues that people are turning to the Internet in order to get the full story – including the images. Mainstream media, he said, are "no longer the gatekeepers of what Americans see and don't see."

"They're at risk of losing their audience to a large extent."

If you want to help shape the debate

Several journalist societies have proposed developing ethical guidelines that help journalists and news organizations decide how to use images. It is worth reviewing some of these. The Society for News Design is developing such a code and can be found at: http://snd.org/about/organization_ethics.html

Sure, It's Important – But So What?

"In their core political and commercial values, the new Arab media are something like a wedding between Madonna and Osama bin Laden. They bring together the worst traditions of Western television (titillating entertainment) and the worst political legacy of the Arab world (endless ideological argument, self-flagellation and blaming others for our ills)."

– Rami Khouri, columnist and editor at large for Lebanon's *The Daily Star*[1]

"In newsrooms we, editors in particular, have something analogous to donor fatigue, where after a while you get tired of starving children, and we do lose the sense of what these stories are about and the kind of impact they have. … We lose sight of the fact that they really do touch nerves and they do speak to the larger issues that we're trying to get at with our news stories, too."

– Andrew Mosher, deputy foreign editor, *The Washington Post*

One of the major tensions in making news judgments is choosing between what is important and what is interesting. Too often those two qualities are cast as enemies, in opposition to each other. Put another way – do we give the audience what they want, or what they need to know?

But can't we do both? Or are we doomed to follow old patterns?

The "new Arab media" offer plenty of emotional and nationalistic reporting that satisfies their audience's need for a connection with the larger group. However, this may only be a continuation of the old ways of the Arab establishment, which allows them to "safely channel their emotions" without demanding real change, writes columnist Rami Khouri.

He says the Arab satellite television media "totally avoid examining the two primary sources of power that define Arab or any society – money and guns. Until they seriously report on and debate public expenditures of Arab states and their defense and security policies, these new media will remain in an old mold, agreeing to rules set by state authorities."

In America, a brief surge of serious, informative reporting after September 11 has fallen back into bad habits of chasing after viewers. "We're defining news by what consumers say they want, which is a package that looks like entertainment," said Pat Mitchell, former PBS president and CEO. "Rather than leading our audience, we are responding to them. We're letting them stupefy themselves."[2]

A stupefied audience is not an informed audience. Neither is an audience that is merely emotionally sated. If our audiences are not informed, we've failed in our role as journalists.

We can serve our audiences by giving them information they need but presented in a way that they want.

The important stories are not always those that qualify as breaking news. The "so what?" of a story does not always have to be death and danger. The interesting stories are often those that go behind the scenes, that explain why the news happens, or that make people stop and think.

Many times these are simply "human interest" stories. They focus on the exception to the stereotype, the good news of progress, a slow shift in the culture or the individual quietly working for the rule of law. They offer those details that bring two-dimensional reporting closer to reality. All are necessary to improve coverage in a way that we agree needs to happen.

"This is one part of our coverage that is really missing, most of the time, the human stories," said Shireen Abu Aqleh of Al Jazeera. "Because this is what interests people more than just to read information that we're reading every day – the body counts and the protocol news."

In the context of covering Arab and American issues, especially, we want to break down stereotypes, and look deeply at the causes of problems – rather than superficial reporting on groups and fighting.

At Wingspread, the participants grappled repeatedly with the interest versus importance dichotomy, and how to balance it out. The issues ran through many of the

sessions like a long, thick thread – connecting cultural differences and coverage problems.

Assumptions

We base our decisions about what stories to cover, and how to play stories, on assumptions that may or may not be valid. Editors in different places may put more or less weight on these assumptions.

Jon Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies showed the journalists at Wingspread two Al Jazeera stories, one of them an intensely human piece about an Israeli attack that referred to the victims as "butchered" and "martyrs," and the other a straight protocol piece about the peace process. Then Alterman asked a series of provocative questions to get people to think about the differences among media outlets and about the role of a journalist:

"Is it important that you convey to your audience a sense of responsibility for what's happening? If you're a Western reporter in Iraq, should you be reporting in such a way that Americans say, 'This actually has something to do with me'? If you're an Arab reporter reporting this, is it important that people feel a sense of solidarity?"

Is it part of the responsibility of the journalist to elicit a response in the audience? Are you doing your job as a journalist, Alterman asked, if people in your audience don't feel a personal connection with what's happening on the ground?

Alterman's questions brought nods of agreement from the Arab journalists, but elicited some confusion among the Americans.

Quil Lawrence, who covers Iraq for "The World," a co-production of the BBC and Public Radio International, said, "It's not our job to show the connection to responsibility. It's our job to show the relevance of something, to have the 'So what?' jump out, but not necessarily to take it a step farther and say 'Here's how you should feel about it.'"

Reuters correspondent Alan Elsner said, "What you have to ask yourself is, am I going to be a participant in this story, or am I going to explain the story? And by using these arousal terms and pictures, you basically become a participant."

But, Alterman responded, there could be so much context in a story, as with the protocol story, that it doesn't have enough detail to have any emotional impact and therefore interest. At the same time – how do you avoid having all-negative emotions elicited by stories, thereby fueling stereotypes by arousing the perception of threat?

The journalists at Wingspread generally agreed that the best story has details that give dimension and humanity to the news, which catches the reader's interest and has context from describing preceding events and social influences.

For example, a story about an Israeli attack on a Palestinian village needs to have not only the voices of innocent bystanders who were hurt in the attack and pictures of their destroyed homes, but also the fact that the attack was retaliation for a suicide bombing, carried out by two people from the village, that killed 30 people in a Tel Aviv shopping mall.

Context is part of fairness, and that is an essential part of trust. A survey of American audiences in 2005 by the Pew Research Center found that 60 percent "see news organizations as politically biased" and that 72 percent "say news organizations tend to favor one side, rather than treat all sides fairly; that is the largest number ever expressing that view." By more than three-to-one (73%-21%), "the public feels that news organizations are "often influenced by powerful people and organizations," rather than "pretty independent." And "most Americans agree that news organizations, when deciding what stories to report, care more about attracting the biggest audience rather than about keeping the public informed."[3]

So how do we make the important stories interesting – without being sensationalistic?

"It's an interesting challenge," Alterman mused. "How do you think about enlarging the 'So what'?"

Mark Hyman, vice president of corporate relations for Sinclair Broadcast Group, put it this way: "If I can't tell the story because, frankly, some focus group says people don't care, how do I tell that story in such a fashion that they should care? Because we think that it is an important story to be told?"

Here are some other assumptions behind the news that may need to be rethought.

➡ *Fast comes first.*
Journalists cover news. That's the most basic definition of our job. Breaking stories, deadlines, beating the competition, live coverage on the scene – that is the breathless excitement of the business. So the assumption evolves that whatever is the latest news is the most important news.

But most news outlets already feel that our staffs are far too small to cover all the news. If we always make breaking news the priority, we are always chasing stories – reacting to events. And we will never have enough reporters to cover all the events, which leaves no one to explain events.

As *New York Times* columnist Max Frankel wrote, "We are wallowing in information – but we are starved for understanding."[4]

We have to make careful, intelligent choices about what to cover. Sometimes that will mean ignoring the breaking news unless it is truly important. Maybe we don't need yet another 10 briefs with the casualties from the latest world conflicts, and we can run that human interest story instead.

"It's me who tells the story. I am the journalist. If I'm not telling it right, not telling it in a way that it is interesting, it means I am not a good journalist, because I don't know how to relate to them what is really important."

– Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi, director and producer, Egypt Satellite Channels

Will anyone in our audience complain if we use a wire service story about the latest press conference or today's shooting – or even if we don't cover it at all? Probably not. But readers and listeners rightly complain that we offer too much "news" and very little explanation.

➡ *If it bleeds, it leads.*
Death and destruction have always been a priority for journalists. Probably that's because of the physiological survival mechanism, hard-wired into us, to pay attention to anything that might be a threat.

But the effect does wear off if it's repeated too often. How many readers see yet another story about bombings in Iraq – and, shuddering, turn the page? How many viewers see yet another building turned to rubble – and switch channels, even as they shake their heads in sorrow? Countless surveys have indicated that our audiences think news is too negative.

What is interesting is not always the number of victims and the sight of their bodies, but who the victims were as people, how they came to be victims, who is left behind to mourn the victims.

➡ *Good news isn't news.*
Even when audiences tell us that they'd like to see more positive news, we don't really believe them. How could good news be interesting, if there's no conflict, pain or death?

Newsworthy stories are about the unusual, the exceptional. A story is news if it surprises us. So, when most of the news out of a region or country is about death, violence, poverty or corruption – good news IS news. A success in the midst of failure is newsworthy. A profile about a person who succeeds in overcoming the odds is inherently interesting.

The drama from such stories comes from the obstacles that must be overcome. The conflict is about working for something positive in the face of huge negative forces. Instead of pain, we offer the audience a feeling of joy or hope. That's really something different.

Another form of interesting "good news" is busting a myth. Interest arises from the unexpected. If we carry around ideas in

our heads about how things work and how people act, it's surprising – and therefore interesting – to read about people or organizations who defy the myth, who are the opposite of the stereotype.

➡ *"Soft" stories are boring.*
Journalists make fun of "soft" stories – fuzzy kittens are for kids and little old ladies, right? Not for tough, brave, smart people like us.

We run on adrenaline so much that we tend to disregard anything that doesn't get our juices flowing. Nothing blowing up, nobody dead or injured, nobody famous dashing down the street? Yawn.

We have to remind ourselves that most ordinary people are nothing like us. They're not adrenaline freaks. They'd like to see something they can relate to – something that lets them feel good. For many of them, those human stories are interesting, and the ambulance chasing is boring.

As Andrew Mosher of *The Washington Post* points out, we're wrong when we turn off the soft stories. We get tired of those stories much more quickly than our audiences do. Whenever we run them, we get outpourings of response, because we are connecting people to the news in a very personal way.

Sometimes it only takes details to bring a news story to life. Think about the difference between a snapshot of an old building from a distance, and the close-up photo focused on the elaborate carvings on the building's wooden door. When we focus in on those details, people and events become meaningful: the intimate background and family life of a Palestinian who blows himself up on a bus in Tel Aviv, or a day in the life of an American Jew working to develop the Palestinian economy. The flat caricatures of news suddenly have color, dimension and life.

➡ *It's just too far away.*
Journalists often assume that readers are interested only in what's close to home. There is a bias toward the importance of "our own." That's why, for example, U.S. reporting of statistics on the Iraq war often include casualties only of Americans and not Iraqis, even though many times more Iraqis have been killed and injured.

Reliable statistics about Iraqi casualties are difficult to get, but that's no excuse for ignoring their deaths. Although editors may feel this particular bias is justified under the standard of "interest," it's debatable whether this creates a distorted picture of the war – and whether it implies that American lives are more valuable than Iraqi lives.

There is a similar bias in the reporting of American networks on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, said Abu Aqleh. Quoting statistics from the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem and a media analysis by "If Americans Knew," she said that in 2004, there were 22 times more Palestinian children (179) than Israeli children (8) killed – but ABC, NBC and CBS evening news

reported on the Israeli children who were killed nine to 12 times more often than they reported on the deaths of Palestinian children.[5]

Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi described her excitement at coming to the U.S.: "I thought I was coming to the Mecca of news." But then she discovered there was very little international news in American coverage: "I felt that I was taken away from the news." She realized that one of the causes of cultural bias in the U.S. is that journalists cover only what they think Americans will be interested in – which isn't much, from her perspective.

One example of American "shortsightedness" is in coverage of the genocide in Darfur, Sudan, which got only a few minutes of air time in all of 2005 – only 18 minutes. This was down from 26 minutes in 2004, according to the Tyndall Report, which analyzes the content of the major network evening newscasts. However, the Michael Jackson trial got 84 minutes in 2005, and Martha Stewart warranted 130 minutes in 2004.[7] [Arab commentators and NGOs have also criticized their regional media for paying scant attention to this crisis in their midst.]

What is far away doesn't have to be meaningless. The human appeal of hundreds of individual stories from the tsunami of December 2004 is a clear example. Drama can be a simple story of one person caught up in a major event, and how that person dealt with it. Those stories are always close to home – no matter what country they happen in.

➡ *We have to compete with new media.*

The proliferation of blogs has created a whole new competition for traditional media. News junkies and people who are concerned about a particular issue will spend hours digging around for primary source material that they can't get in their newspaper. Others tailor their news intake through RSS feeds or the Yahoo home page, to get only the news that they are already interested in.

"We must do a much better job explaining ourselves to readers, who are increasingly sophisticated as consumers of media and increasingly skeptical of big institutions," says the credibility report of Knight Ridder (2003).[8] Bloggers and Internet news feeds can give those consumers a different line of information; it's up to journalists to explain why our product is better and how we produce it.

Many journalists believe that this splitting and diverging of our audiences makes it impossible to do coverage in the same way.

But it's possible to expand our coverage through the Internet – the competition enriches our audiences. Most newspapers and broadcast stations have their own Web sites now. Some of them already offer links to original documents, behind-the-scenes pieces by reporters on how the

story was done, and special features with additional material that goes into greater depth.

➡ *Audiences have a short attention span and very little time for us.*
It's true that in many countries, modern life has put more demands on people's time. Newspaper subscriptions have dropped across the United States; the large number of satellite channels means that people surf for information.

And television itself is a medium of short stories – 30 to 90 seconds. As Al Jazeera's Camille Elhassani said, "We only have a minute and 20 [seconds] for Iraq; if we do the soft story, how have we educated them" about what is going on?

But other journalists argued that we underestimate our audience. Instead of giving them less, we should give them more.

People will find time for quality journalism that draws them in and makes them care about the issue. They don't have time for superficial reporting that only tells the same story over and over.

➡ *Journalism is about hard facts, not squishy feelings.*
While it's true that we have a standard of keeping our opinions out of the stories, that doesn't mean we have to act like fact-collecting robots.

"I think a lot of reporters don't get to the story because they put a wall up between them and the people that they're writing about – whether that's through class or race or other things," said Susan Cooper Eastman, an award-winning reporter for an alternative weekly newspaper in Florida. "They cling to the world that they come from, and they're not willing to let that go to enter into other people's worlds and try to understand where somebody else is coming from, how somebody else lives, and what their lives are about."[9]

Too often, we see each other in terms of conflict – especially in how the American media covers the Arab world. While American culture bombards the world, it can drown out other cultures – and it can be dismissed as being simply Hollywood films and hip-hop music, when there is much more to the diversity of American culture.

And American journalists need to explore more of the positive aspects of Arab culture – even if they don't work for the arts section. "We don't rule popular culture, but we influence it," noted Columbia University adjunct professor Anne Nelson at the Wingspread conference. "And I think everybody should go back to their newsrooms, and go to the book review sections and the film review section and the home decoration sections, and say, 'Hey, there's this big beautiful world out there, why don't we cover it?'"

Nelson said she'd like to see American journalists be a little more vocal about getting the Arab world out of the "conflict"

pages and allowing it "to permeate into the culture in a way of learning and understanding and treasuring it."

➡ *This is a business. We are most concerned about the bottom line, what sells.* Many things will sell: Reports of aliens from Mars landing on earth, photos of movie stars, gory photos. But quality journalism is a money-maker: *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* didn't amass huge circulations by resorting to aliens and celebrities. What sells, to their audiences, is trustworthy information.

Relying on "what sells" is risky business, Joyce Purnick, metropolitan editor at *The New York Times*, told a forum of journalists at an Aspen Institute gathering several years ago. It creates a conflict "between what we should be doing – good journalism – and what the public wants. Audience research is a slippery slope – first of all, because the public is fickle. Journalism must be impelled by a sense of sovereign values. What is the right thing to be doing? The idea that we're here to cater to the public gets us in trouble."[10]

In Jordan, Mohamad Alayyan found the same formula of interesting, quality journalism worked at his newspaper, *Al Ghad*, where he is publisher and chairman. He is strictly a businessman, and he figured it this way: "Daily newspapers owned by the government don't circulate a lot, they distribute 45,000 copies in a population of 5.5 million, yet they have amazing amounts of profit. So if I can have an independent media, young, different, that can reach the people and do something which is new, which is subscription-based…"

Well, the newspaper was profitable in its first year, with 32,000 subscribers and another 8,000 to 10,000 in street sales – "which is very close to the No. 1 newspaper that has been in the market for 40 years," Alayyan said.

"And because we had the reach, advertisements came and are now sustaining our business."

The Firing Line

"We had no hesitation in calling the deliberate targeting of journalists in the attack of the Palestine hotel in Baghdad a 'war crime.' We said, 'The bombing of hotels where journalists are staying and targeting of Arab media are particularly shocking events in a war which is being fought in the name of democracy. Those who are responsible must be brought to justice.'"

– Jim Boumelha, executive committee member, International Federation of Journalists, speaking in Cairo at an international workshop on ethics

"There is a difference between covering internal affairs and international affairs. The journalist involved in covering a conflict has to be aware that his coverage plays a political and not only an informative role. He has to be aware of the implications of publishing or not publishing a certain statement or news."

– Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi, director and producer, Egypt Satellite Channels

The last three years have been the deadliest for journalists: 144 have died doing their jobs in 2003, 2004 and 2005, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.[1] Iraq accounted for 60 deaths of journalists over the past decade, more than twice that of any other country; by mid-May, 12 more journalists had been

killed in Iraq in 2006 alone.

Journalists have always risked life and limb to cover wars. In order to bear witness in the most direct way, we must be as close as possible to the events. We must talk to the people conducting, and affected by, the war. We sometimes are perceived to be on one side or another of the conflict – and in fact, at times journalists are. It is difficult to do a job so stressful, where your life is in danger and you are surrounded by suffering, and at the same time to balance your humanity and your sanity.

Emotional involvement

With all the circumstances of covering violent conflict, it's easy for reporters to become emotionally involved. Wingspread participants talked about the issues surrounding how a reporter can do his or her job, keep the standards of fairness and accuracy – but still remain a sane human being – in the heat of the battle. They also discussed whether journalists can contribute to preventing or resolving conflicts.

One of the biggest questions was whether the standards are different for Arab journalists covering deeply rooted conflict in their own part of the world than for journalists who come from somewhere else.

When the conflict is in an Arab country, it is harder for Arab journalists to not take sides, said Abeer Mishkhas from Saudi Arabia. In most Arab media outlets, "there is a degree of involvement on the ground. The broadcasters are so much involved with what's happening," she said. "They are part of the struggle that's happening or they just feel it." The clash of two identities – as a professional, and as an Arab – can literally tear a journalist in two, adding to the trauma of witnessing violence and death.

In fact, that type of involvement is expected of them from their audience, Walid Al-Saqaf of Yemen argued. "I think the audience would like to have a bond, a connection to the suffering."

Others said that capitalizing on that suffering is going too far. "Some Arab journalists try to score points sometimes in terms of popularity – when you do a very nationalistic piece, showing suffering, showing people as martyrs," said Mohannad Khatib of ATV, Jordan. "Some of them believe that this would score high in terms of opinions of the viewers. I think this is very wrong, I think we have to have a very clear line between opinion and fact."

Ibrahim Nawar, head of the Arab Press Freedom Watch, said in "About the Truth" that he agrees that sensationalism "is dangerous as it destroys the credibility of the press. Reporters' duties include making sure that the story they are running is not a sensational one, but true, factual and as objective as it could possibly be. In such a way journalists can maintain strong values and ethics in the way they report a war, a tragic event in human history that sometimes can't be avoided."[2]

But, he notes, there are major obstacles to being fair, "as each side in the war, very often applies restrictions on the way the war is reported from their side. It is also difficult to be 100 percent accurate, given the fact that war itself imposes its own restrictions on access to information. Physical movements may be restricted and different kinds of dangers may threaten lives of journalists trying to cross war zones. Honest reporting requires journalists to state the circumstances surrounding their reports and perhaps refer to possible missing pieces of the truth."

American reporters are not exempt from emotional involvement, of course. "It's a fiction to believe we're not moved, we're not part of it," said Stephen Franklin, who has covered Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Iraq for *The Chicago Tribune*. But the key is for the reporter to be honest about those biases: "I think it's much better to be upfront with yourself … then you realize that this is in the back of your mind."

Franklin said that he tried never to forget his audience – which was diverse and had many different viewpoints on the issues in the Middle East. He had to serve – and answer to – all of them.

"Remember that people are reading and they really care about it," Franklin said. "Having your emotions carry you will filter into your story if you're not on guard. And readers will get the impression that you are biased toward one side or the other."

Arnold Isaacs, former *Baltimore Sun* correspondent during the Vietnam War, says it was no different then – and neither were the standards: "By the time I went, the war had been a huge issue for years and of course I had views on it, fairly strong ones in fact. But I remember saying to myself, 'OK, I'm not going to forget my opinions or pretend I don't have them.' But what I can do is put them in a drawer, not let them predetermine what I learn when I get there. That means I have to look with fresh eyes … ask myself, 'What if I'm wrong?', deliberately look for things that would make me say, 'Gosh, I never knew that, or I never thought of it that way.'"

Shireen Abu Aqleh follows in those journalistic footsteps, covering Palestine for Al Jazeera: "I go and cover stories, human stories, but I don't put my own emotions in it. I never cried when I was in the field. I've seen dead bodies, and I never went on air and felt that I wanted to cry, I just kept quiet, calm … without being emotional." But holding in the emotions can also have long-term effects, veteran journalists say. Post-traumatic stress disorder and severe depression have affected many reporters who covered conflicts.

The reporter's religion and ethnic identity can sometimes color how they feel about a story – and also, how the people they cover perceive them.

Reporters working in the Middle East who are Jewish, even if only by ethnicity, often feel obliged to conceal their identity. They

"More often than not, my colleagues and I cross that line from safety to risk. Every photographer has his or her own reasons for crossing this line. It's a personal choice based on an obligation to serve as a witness for others. … When I see and hear the response to a photo, I know that I have fulfilled my obligation to inform, educate and possibly change things for the better. And in that instant, crossing the line was worth it."

– Ron Haviv, photojournalist with Agency VII,
in *Dangerous Assignments* (Committee to Protect Journalists)

might know that their Jewish ancestry has little bearing on their coverage because it has little to do with who they feel they really are – but it can influence how others view them, and even can put them at risk of violence.

"At first it was painful," says a Jewish reporter who almost always concealed his ethnic background, even though he is an atheist. "Then I said it's the only way I can get my job done. I don't want to become part of the story."

One Jewish value he did retain "is to speak for justice, to speak for tolerance. Those are Jewish values – fighting against discrimination and prejudice," he said. And, he notes, that sense of justice is also a strong value in Islam.

"My life has been protected by Arab Muslims who work with me or for me, again and again – by people who know I'm Jewish. They would go to the greatest lengths to protect me – and I would do the same for them."

Embedded too deep?

Another kind of bias can come into play when journalists are embedded with troops – or with insurgents. The advantage of having a front-line story is almost irresistible to many journalists. But we also have a narrowed field of vision from being limited to the group of soldiers we are assigned to. And journalists can come to feel some loyalty to those with whom we face danger – or who wield the weapons that protect our lives.

Quil Lawrence of the BBC noted that as violence grew worse, the only way he could report in the field was to be embedded with U.S. troops. The Pentagon policy of having reporters embedded with troops was "a catastrophic success," he said. "Embedding allows for excellent reporting

on the conflict from the side of the coalition troops, but only from their side."

"You are instantly brainwashed when you embed," he said at a Washington forum on the media in Iraq. "It's impossible not to take the side of the people who are trying to kill the people trying to kill you."

In addition, he said, embedding makes it almost impossible to produce a well-rounded report even when he tries diligently to talk to Iraqis. "How can you get people to talk to you openly when you say, 'I'm not really associated with these guys with guns who are searching through your underwear drawer?'"

Some embedded reporters also had a tendency to use "we" when describing their actions and positions – which blurs the distinction between reporter and military, implying that the reporter is one with the military.

Arab journalists covering the Iraqi conflict have a different problem, noted Naseer Nouri, an Iraqi who works for *The Washington Post*. Some Arab journalists have been arrested by the U.S. military or Iraqi police after interviewing insurgents or leaving areas of insurgent activity, the journalists suspected of being insurgents themselves.

And for Arab journalists, getting "frontline" coverage may be easier than for U.S. journalists, but runs the same risks of distorting their viewpoint. "Does hanging out with insurgents cloud your view?" mused one. "Patriotism is not the issue, but there's another kind of loyalty to other Arabs, and other Muslims, who have been invaded. That is there all the time."

The need to humanize

Trying to keep your own emotions from directing the story does not mean stories should be free of emotion. Reporters on both sides know that the important story of a war or conflict cannot be told through cold statistics alone. Our audiences, wherever they may be, want the stories of the ordinary people whose lives are touched – on both sides.

"There is a danger if you cover this constantly, that you'll lose a certain sensitiv-

"The only way Palestine is reported in the Arab world is purely political. We do not cover Palestine in the Arab world as a human issue, we cover it as a political issue and while politics are important, we don't know the day-to-day lives of Palestinians."

– Mona Eltahawy, Egyptian journalist and columnist

ity," said Franklin. He stressed the need to do journalism "that brings you right to the scene and says, 'Here is how someone feels when they have to pay $6 at a checkpoint.' You ask yourself, how can I make this personal?"

The most commonplace people can be unusual if a journalist sees them and tells their story in the right way. As Palestinian journalist Daoud Kuttab wrote in *The New York Times* during the withdrawal from Gaza, "Something strange happened last week: Israeli settlers and Jewish extremists appeared human on Arab TV. This is not to say that Arabs have suddenly become soft on their historical enemies. But hours and hours of watching – on all stations, including Al Jazeera – close-ups of mothers and babies, of young women and older men, visibly in anguish as they were forced out of their homes, had an emotional effect." [3]

The images were powerful, Kuttab said: "Irrespective of the facts that Jewish settlements are illegal and that the Palestinian refugee problem was created by Israeli military force, the human cost on both sides of the conflict is huge. While not agreeing with either the settlers or the actions of Palestinian militants, the rest of us must start understanding and respecting them as humans. And it would help if the international news media began portraying ordinary Palestinians, too, with a touch of humanity."

Arab journalists also discovered this when they covered stories outside their own immediate region. LBCI TV reporter and correspondent Tania Mehanna, who has covered the Levant extensively, found herself deeply affected by coverage of fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan. "Man's suffering from wars isn't limited to one country," she told a conference while showing tape of fleeing refugees.[4]

To personalize the story is a significant role of journalists, but one that we too often forget, said Abu Aqleh. She recalls seeing a small story in a newspaper about 81 Iraqis who were killed, "and I said, 'Oh my God, when did that happen?' It just passes by, and nobody really thinks about it. But if we made some stories about human beings, about their dreams, how was it made, how were they killed, I think we can draw the picture of the people."

Forgetting to personalize such stories can lead to stereotyping. There are serious consequences that go beyond just personal misunderstanding. Stereotypes can lead to institutionalized discrimination and can be used in violent ways to justify war, terrorism and genocide.

The Wingspread participants learned that psychology professor Albert Bandura outlined how humans use four types of moral disengagement in order to justify violence against a group.

- *Moral rationalization*: "We are saviors battling a great evil."
- *Displacement of responsibility*: "We

are only following orders or doing what other group members are doing."

- *Minimize or ignore the suffering of victims*: Group members try not to be firsthand witnesses; focus on potential retaliation from security forces.
- *Dehumanize victims (and elevate the group)*: "They are infidels; we are mujahideen." Or, "They are violent and repressive; we are peaceful and embrace freedom."

Understanding this process can help us as journalists to avoid promoting disengagement through use of stereotypes and other generalizations.

The last two ways, in particular, are relevant to our work as journalists. If we keep them in mind when covering conflicts, we can do purposeful, professional journalism – stories that are factual and objective without falling into the trap of moral disengagement.

We can act as firsthand witnesses so that the suffering of real people (as opposed to the "enemy group") is not ignored or underplayed.

And we can humanize the victims, on both sides of a conflict, by allowing them to speak and telling their personal stories.

But it's just as important that we have an attitude of learning, a humility about what we don't know and a willingness to be open to another way of living and perceiving. "Sometimes," said Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi, "we move from one place to another physically but we do not move emotionally, and we do not really relate to the other person's culture."

Journalists in danger

The physical risks of covering a war or armed conflict may seem inevitable, but the risks could be minimized much more than they are. From "hostile environments" training to body armor, to demanding investigations of journalists shot by soldiers under questionable circumstances, the profession still has much to do in terms of improving safety.

Jim Boumelha, a member of IFJ's executive committee, told the opening session of an international ethics workshop in Cairo, "Thousands of our members risk their lives each year because there is a great hunger for news, as the events in Palestine or the invasion of Iraq have shown. But information comes at too high a price when it leads to the death and injury of unarmed media staff."[5]

Iraq is the most dangerous place for reporters right now because it is chaotic, "with its multiple insurgencies, power struggles between militia groups, and nascent army and police forces (which sometimes are infiltrated by insurgents)," reported *The Christian Science Monitor,* which saw one of its reporters kidnapped in Iraq in January 2006.[6]

"When Bob Woodruff was out with Iraqi security forces and he was injured, the first thing that people were asking was, 'Oh, was he being responsible by placing himself in this position with Iraqi forces?' And they started to question his responsibility and integrity as a journalist. I mean, we just can't win. I think it's an outrage to point the finger at journalists and say that this is our fault. I really do. And I think it shows an abject lack of respect for any journalist that's prepared to come to this country and risk their lives."

– Lara Logan, CBS correspondent, on CNN's "Reliable Sources"

Iraq holds special dangers for local journalists, who are in any conflict the most vulnerable: "… as security has deteriorated, foreign journalists have become more dependent on their Iraqi counterparts to provide firsthand accounts of suicide and car bombings. … Because Iraqi society is complex, native news-gatherers are sometimes accused of belonging to one faction or another and, as a result, have become targets of both insurgents and the U.S. Army."

But foreign journalists are also in great danger, the *Monitor* notes: "To some attackers, who are accustomed to a government-controlled press, foreign journalists are symbols of their home governments rather than independent, objective news gatherers – targets or political pawns rather than information providers."

U.S. troops have killed about a dozen local journalists – sometimes in crossfire, sometimes when they were mistakenly perceived as a threat.

"There is no special status for journalists, other than noncombatant status. They get the same protections as other civilian persons in a time a war," Lt. Col. Barry Venable, a Defense Department spokesman, told the *Monitor*.

But journalism groups were not satisfied with the investigations by the U.S. military.

"The responsibility of the international community toward the protection of journalists in war zones should include the enforcement of an independent investigation in order to establish the reason of death and the responsibility of the military or the authorities of the country in question,"

said Ibrahim Nawar, head of the Arab Press Freedom Watch, in its report of April 2005. "It is a real joke to ask the accused to investigate their actions!"[7]

Whatever their cause of death or injury, journalists are owed all the protection their supervisors have available, says the Committee to Protect Journalists in "On Assignment: A Guide to Reporting in Dangerous Situations."

"For managers, the safety of their journalists should be paramount. This means discouraging unwarranted risk-taking, making assignments to war zones or other hostile environments voluntary, and providing proper training and equipment. … CPJ recognizes that the journalists who are most at risk are often local reporters. They, and their news companies, often cannot afford body armor or expensive training courses. Some of them live with daily risks. Some of them are also employed by foreign media companies. CPJ strongly urges all news organizations to ensure that journalists and others working for them (including local freelancers, stringers, and fixers) are properly equipped, trained, and insured."

Terry Anderson, CPJ honorary co-chairman and former Associated Press Beirut bureau chief, who was held hostage for nearly seven years in Lebanon, has said that journalists must constantly evaluate risks and know when to back down. "Always, constantly, constantly, every minute, weigh the benefits against the risks. And as soon as you come to the point where you feel uncomfortable with that equation, get out, go, leave it. It's not worth it. There is no story worth getting killed for."[8]

The pressure to get the story comes into play in any kind of conflict coverage, and it means the reporter must take extra care not to let competition overtake common sense.

In its manual for Afghanistan, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting advises, "It is easy to get caught up in the adrenaline of a war situation and easy to be affected by what other people think about you. Suppose a group of soldiers are moving up to the front line and invite you to go with them. Never think about whether to accept or reject the invitation based on what they might think about you. Remember, if you feel yourself getting excited, you will not be thinking clearly.

"It is not a question of personal courage. Your job is different from theirs. Their job is to fight, and maybe to die, defending a piece of ground. Yours is to live, to report what you see back to the outside world."

Even reporters who are not on the front lines, or in immediate danger, can face another risk to their health from living in a conflict zone: Stress.

Journalists can themselves become victims when the stress of covering conflict for a long period takes its toll. Managers must be alert for signs of depression or battle fatigue in their reporters during their

term of coverage, and for post-traumatic stress disorder afterward, advises the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma.[9]

"Recognizing the need for a debriefing forum or the opportunity to articulate emotions in the aftermath of a schoolyard massacre or the World Trade Center attacks is not a sign of weakness, as too many journalists seem to think," Joe Hight and Frank Smyth write in the book "Tragedies and Journalists: A Guide for More Effective Coverage."

"Instead, when done successfully, debriefing fosters strength. The act of articulation – writing, drawing, painting, talking or crying – seems to change the way a traumatic memory is stored in the brain, as if it somehow moves the memory from one part of the hard drive to another."

Franklin says the stress can affect your reporting, too. The things that make better reporting also contribute to reducing the stress, he believes.

"The journalists who do better are the people able to say, 'I can put this aside,'" Franklin said. Sometimes that means getting away physically; sometimes it means just to have a good laugh.

"The other thing is to learn the humanity of it" – the conflict, and the place, Franklin said. "Listen to music, talk to people, get out and enjoy yourself. It's very helpful to have people to sit with and talk to. …

"The worst is a journalist who's very isolated from people, who goes back to the hotel room at the end of every day."

To lend a helping hand

Journalists on the battlefield see extreme suffering, and it is hard not to want to take personal action to save lives. How can we just stand by and take notes when people are dying?

Talal Abu-Rahma, a journalist for France 2 television, was filming in Gaza in October 2000 when a 12-year-old boy was shot dead in crossfire. He told NPR's Jacki Lyden, "I was very afraid. I was very sad. I was crying. And I was remembering my children. I was afraid to lose my life … I was afraid from the Israelis to see this camera, maybe they will think this is a weapon … I was in the most difficult situation in my life. A boy, I cannot save his life, and I want to protect myself."[10]

In *American Journalism Review*, managing editor Rachel Smolkin deliberated on the question of where the line is on helping the people that you are covering. She was initially surprised, in talking to a class of journalism students, that they had no hesitation to do so. After some debate, she says, she wishes she had told them:

"Follow your conscience. Your humanity – your ability to empathize with pain and suffering, and your desire to prevent it – does not conflict with your professional standards. Those impulses make you a better journalist, more attuned to

the stories you are tasked with telling. If you change an outcome through responsible and necessary intervention because there's no one else around to help, so be it. Tell your bosses, and when it's essential to a story, tell your readers and viewers, too.

"Remember, though, that your primary – and unique – role as a journalist is to bear witness. If you decide to act, do so quickly, then get out of the way. Leave the rescue work to first responders and relief workers whenever possible." [11]

Isaacs recalls life-and-death examples: "It never happened to me, but in the [Vietnam] war … reporters helped carry wounded soldiers off a battlefield. I, and I believe most of my colleagues, took for granted that in that situation, we would help if we could. It never occurred to me that I would do otherwise, in fact. In part this was simply a matter of acting like a human being."

Some practical advice

Over the past decade, a number of courses have been developed to train journalists in how to stay safe while covering a war or reporting in other "hostile environments." The courses are expensive, but most journalists find them valuable and even life-saving.

If you cannot afford to take the course, ask your news organization to cover it. If they won't, here are a few minimal pointers on reporting in the war zone. Other excellent resources are available online; see the Resources chapter at the end of this book.

- One of the key skills taught in the courses is awareness. Journalists need to constantly assess the situation around them. Losing that awareness of safety, by getting too involved in the story or worried about deadlines, can put you at risk. Keep in touch with other journalists on the ground – don't let competition blind you to good advice from a colleague.
- You can't blend in, but you cannot always assume that being a journalist is protection. There are no hard and fast rules about blending in, says Charles Hanley, special correspondent for the Associated Press, but "it seems best for a journalist to be quiet but not stealthy, to carry a notebook openly, and to not try to disguise the ultimately undisguiseable fact that he or she is there to observe, listen and record."
- Don't carry a weapon or travel with other journalists who do: "Doing so jeopardizes a journalist's status as a neutral observer and can make combatants view correspondents as legitimate military targets," CPJ says.
- A video camera, or a still camera with a large zoom lens, can look like a grenade launcher or other weapon – especially at a distance. Be careful in how you handle and display it.
- Keep in mind that, according to the World Health Organization, injury or death in a car accident is among the greatest risks to any traveler, including

war correspondents.
- Always travel with your journalist identification in plain sight; a first aid kit, medical identification health insurance information; contact information.
- You should know at least a bit of the local language – enough to say who you are and what you are doing.

What is our role?

A narrative by Gil Thelen, an editor in Tampa, Fla., written for the Project for Excellence in Journalism, was meant as a general guideline for journalists covering community events. It applies to covering conflict as well.

Thelen believes the journalist has a very specific role in society. He calls it the role of the "committed observer."

What he means by that, Thelen explains, is that the journalist is not removed from community. Journalists are "interdependent" with the needs of their fellow citizens. If there is a key issue in town that needs resolution and is being explored by local institutions, "we have a commitment to reporting on this process over the long term, as an observer." It would be irresponsible to cover the issue so haphazardly – perhaps because it seems dull or confusing – that citizens could not understand either the problem or the public discussion over how to solve it. The journalist should be committed to helping resolve the issue, Thelen argues, by playing the role of the responsible reporter.[12]

Journalists need to be clear about their role, both to themselves, and to the public. If they better understood their role as the committed observer, for instance, they could explain to people that they are not aloof from society. They are citizens. Even patriots. But journalists express their commitment, their citizenship, their patriotism, by performing the prescribed role of observer for society. By providing their fellow citizens with information those citizens need to understand and evaluate information for themselves.

Even in times of war, that means not only providing people with information they might find scary, but information that may be critical of the government. Information about how third-party countries might view our country. And even information to help us understand our nation's enemies.

Pushing Back

"Yes, we're all under pressure, some of us more than others. For most U.S. journalists, 'pressure' means advertising or accusations of low patriotism. At worst, they'd be looking for another job. No joke, I realize. In this part of the world, however, pressure can mean a knock on your door at 3 a.m., and then you disappear."

– Mirette Mabrouk, IBA Media, Cairo[1]

"Should a reporter wear a lapel pin with a flag [during war coverage]? In the U.S. it's seen as almost a qualification; the pressure comes from the public and from advertisers."

– Anne Nelson, adjunct professor, Columbia School of International and Public Affairs

Journalists the world over face pressure from three sides: the government, the public and business. All of these sources of pressure can benefit from what we do when we operate freely and independently – but that doesn't mean they will ever leave us alone to do our jobs as we see fit.

Pressure from the government is hardly surprising, as a key role of journalists is to be a watchdog [in Arabic: "sleepless eye"] on public officials and public spending. But that pressure can land a reporter or editor in jail.

The most apparent and severe pressure for Arab journalists comes from restrictive press laws, government harassment

or persecution, and lack of a tradition or belief in free speech. The majority of Arab journalists still work for government-owned stations and publications, which strictly control content and put them under threat of losing their jobs, or worse.

In some countries, notably Syria and Egypt, "emergency laws" supersede even the limited constitutional rights. "A journalist on the street doing his job might be taken to prison by any security people, without discussion," says Kinda Kanbar of *Syria Today*.

Western journalists also fight government pressure to reveal sources, downplay or censor negative stories, or to "be patriotic" in writing about military or homeland security actions. We know that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

The public, too, sometimes demands that journalists show support for their country in times of crisis, as in the aftermath of September 11, or during the invasion of Iraq. Or, in the case of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, public pressure pushed some editors not to republish the cartoons, even though their substance was the source of a worldwide storm of protest and controversy.

Special interest groups also can mount significant pressure. Journalists' work is scrutinized more than ever now, with the rise of the Internet and blogging. Interest groups may even count words or minutes of air time to see if coverage is balanced or if biased wording is used.

Public pressure sometimes feeds into government pressure – as with the editors in Yemen and Jordan who were jailed after publishing the cartoons – and sometimes into business pressure – as declining circulation numbers can lead to loss of advertising revenue.

On the business side, it's also not surprising that journalists would face pressure to write stories that "sell," or produce other content that makes money. After all, an independent newspaper or station in any country is usually a profit-making business. Even listener-supported radio or subsidized nonprofits can face pressure similar to for-profit companies. Ideally there is a wall between the business and editorial sides, but that wall can be paper-thin or nonexistent.

For the reporter, that can mean anything from doing stories based on the preferences of focus groups to submitting to a herd mentality of having to cover what the competition is covering. Commonly, it also means writing about pet projects of the publisher or funder, or not writing about his family's other businesses in a negative way. Or being told to promote movies or books published by another company in a multimedia conglomerate.

It is a threat of great concern to many journalists, and its influence can be just as harsh and insidious as threats of physical harm.

Jim Boumelha told his colleagues in Cairo at an ethics forum in 2003: "The future of journalism and democracy is in the balance when media organizations lose their sense of public mission and follow an agenda based exclusively upon the commercial exploitation of information."[2]

There are other pressures that can affect individuals, which come indirectly from the government, public or business.

In places where reporters are paid poorly and corruption is common, financial pressure can lead them to accept direct bribes. A 2002 "Cash for Editorial" study by the International Public Relations Association said that only 40 percent of the Middle East PR community agreed with the statement: "Editorial copy appears as a result of the editorial judgement of the journalists and editors involved, and not through any influence or payment by a third party."

Organizations or industry sectors often will offer cash prizes for the "best story" covering them in a positive light, which is simply a competitive, winner-take-all form of a bribe. The U.S. Department of Defense paid for the placement of positive stories in Iraqi media – not labeled as such – creating a storm of outrage over the double standard.

Taking care of business

As Arab media develops, so do the intrusions on independence for journalists – the commercial pressures that American colleagues regularly have had to cope with.

Before television, American newspapers were often owned by families who felt a responsibility to operate as a kind of public trust, albeit a profitable one. Gradually those newspapers became part of chains or part of media conglomerates, and the pressure on profits increased.

Television, in its early days, tended to absorb the costs of news programming and pay for it with other lucrative programs. In addition, U.S. federal laws acknowledged the power of electronic media in a situation of limited bandwidth, and required the broadcast industries of TV and radio to conduct their business "in the public interest" as a requirement of getting a license.

But, particularly after "60 Minutes" demonstrated that it was possible for news to make money, pressure rose to make even news segments profitable. The great TV news producer Fred Friendly said, "Television makes so much money doing its worst, it can't afford to do its best."

Profit margins in American media are huge – 20 to 50 percent, according to industry analysts. That alone should give journalists reason to push back when they are under pressure.

"It is time to hold the boards of directors of large media companies, be they Knight Ridder, Westinghouse, Tele-Communications Inc., or Disney, to a clearly defined standard of professional integrity," said

Ancel Martinez, a reporter for KQED, National Public Radio, in the Catto report on marketing journalism.[3]

In their presentations at the Wingspread conference, media business executives Mark Hyman and Mohamad Alayyan outlined a myriad of pressure points, both internal and external, that affect American and Arab journalists.

Hyman said internal influences that can affect a free press include personal bias of editors, a "group think" or herd mentality, the multiplicity of interests in corporate ownership and management, and the methods of newsroom management (such as offering awards to reporters for covering a particular issue favored by managers).

The herd mentality leads news editors to take their cues from *The New York Times* Page One list (distributed early and midday nationwide to subscribers), even if their readership bears no resemblance to that of *The New York Times*.

"The danger is, by following each other, we miss informing people about a lot of important stuff – especially in the middle of the country," said Eileen O'Connor. The East Coast bias also distorts the judgment of journalists around the country – and in turn, leaves journalists in Washington scratching their heads and saying, "Why do they think that way in Ohio?" O'Connor said.

The drive to be "patriotic" hit American journalists hard, especially after September 11. Television journalists wore flags on their lapels, and anchors had flags waving in the background. In some cases the "patriotic" surge distorted coverage, leading to a backlash against Muslims in America.

While the flag-waving seemed almost a neutral statement of sorrow and wounded pride after September 11, it took on a different meaning in the context of the U.S. invasion of Iraq – which many Americans opposed. In that context, wearing a flag seemed to be a statement of opinion that American action was justified.

In the Arab world, however, "patriotism" is a concept without clear boundaries. Arab journalists, and citizens, may feel little loyalty to the state, since it does not represent them through a formal process of elections and rule of law. They may feel greater loyalty to other Arabs who seem to be oppressed – giving great emotional weight to every news event in which Palestinians are hurt.

In either case, the question remains of what it means for journalists to be patriotic.

O'Connor spoke for Arab and American journalists in saying that doing our job is the ultimate patriotism. Whether or not we work in a strong democracy, journalists work to give voice to their people and to right the wrongs of their governments – a patriotism that transcends the borders of any one country.

O'Connor recalled that when she did some reports that were critical of the FBI immediately after September 11, "I was severely attacked by the FBI, and we got really bad mail from people saying 'You're unpatriotic, how can you be criticizing any U.S. institution at a time like this? We should be pulling ourselves together.'" She feels that such pressure to be "loyal" to American institutions contributed to the lack of rigor by journalists in examining the rationale for the Iraq war.

The squeeze to be more profitable has greatly hurt international coverage. American newspapers and networks have drastically cut the number of overseas bureaus and full-time foreign correspondents, instead relying on freelancers. When reporters do travel for their papers or stations, they are expected to produce volumes of material – at times forced to put quantity over quality.

"There's pressure from us as editors to get reporters to produce quickly because you're trying to justify the expense," *Sacramento Bee* executive editor Rick Rodriguez told the Poynter Institute, in an article on "parachute" journalism. "I hate to say it, but it's true. And that puts pressure on reporters."[4]

Cross-ownership by megacorporations – the AOL-Time Warner and GE-NBC conglomerates, to name two of the more prominent ones – continues to be an issue for American journalists.

"I put more faith in corporate leadership that understands that they have an equally solemn fiduciary obligation arising from their ownership of a news organization; that they hold a public trust that is a vital component of a free society," said Peter C. Goldmark, former chairman and CEO, *International Herald Tribune*, in his 2001 report for the Aspen Institute. "I put more faith in that than I do in whether the corporation is big or small."[5]

"When I covered the White House, every night at midnight, no matter what kind of enterprise reporting I had done that day, I got a call when *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* went on the Web. I was told to match every White House story in those two papers. … At times we would argue, 'Look, we have a better [enterprise] story.' But we'd be pulled off those stories to [match] *The New York Times*."

– Eileen O'Connor, former CNN White House correspondent and bureau chief

Although this problem is largely thought of as an American phenomenon, it also comes into play in the Arab world, especially in the oil-rich Gulf states, noted the annual report of the Arab Press Freedom Watch released in April 2005. "Commercial censorship poses an equal, if not greater, threat to press freedom in the UAE because prominent Emirate families are often involved in many areas of both politics and business," wrote Andrew Picken in "Sunshine and Censorship: Press Freedom in the UAE."[6] Similar problems exist in Kuwaiti, Egyptian and Saudi cross-ownership of business and media.

But pressure from regular advertisers is a problem everywhere. The nonprofit internet station AmmanNet cites this example, in its "Eye On Media" project: "500 employees of the biggest bank in Jordan, the Arab Bank, protested the management policies regarding salaries and firing hundreds of them. However, none of the Jordanian media outlets covered the event, except a Muslim party-backed weekly, *Al Sabeel* and non-profitable Internet-based radio AmmanNet, as well as two Arab satellite TV channels. The bank is a source of advertisements for most of the Jordanian media organizations. This is one example of the power of advertisers and their influence on the editorial policies and the media products. It shows how media have reconciled their autonomy and professional ethics with their economic needs." [7]

Government controls

Alayyan's perspective as the CEO of an independent media company is that media has not shaped Arab society – instead, it has been shaped by political, cultural, and economic forces.

Political forces include government ownership, which has been the rule; government withholding of information; and legislative obstacles that constrain media development.

Social restrictions regarding religion, traditions and cultural values combine with the habits of self-imposed censorship and red lines from previous eras.

On the economic side, lack of resources affects the type of journalists hired, broadcast quality and content style. Independent media have found it hard to develop financially because there is insufficient spending on advertising, Alayyan said – only $22 per capita, as compared to $500 per capita in the U.S. In addition, there is little independent auditing of television audience numbers or newspaper circulation, which makes it hard to convince advertisers to spend their money.

"All of these factors have led to various shortcomings, leading to a deficit in the credibility of local and regional media," he said.

But pressure can work in the media's favor, too. The forces of globalization and the

coverage and debate following September 11 brought new choices to the Arab world, as Alayyan noted.

Although Al Jazeera has been criticized for being sensational or nationalist, others believe that it provides an effective alternative which ignited debate and spurred improvement across the Arab world. Its audience is estimated at 30 million people in the region.

"Why? Because it is, to many, the only free station that reflects the Arab's point of view," Alayyan said.

That has spurred a move toward more independent media.

"Satellite television stations are encouraging a pluralist political culture, one in which individual voices can be heard, disagreements openly aired," Alayyan said in his slide presentation at the Wingspread conference. "Controversial programs of private satellite news channels are drawing millions of viewers away from conservative, state-run television stations, making it difficult for most Arab states to maintain control over the public sphere."

There are now more than 200 satellite stations in the region, most of them privately owned. A new openness has held up politics and society for scrutiny. Taboos have been exposed and red lines have shifted.

But some say that this "new" Arab media is just an old wolf in sheep's clothing.

"Our new media are bold, sexy, confrontational, loud and endlessly engaging," writes Rami Khouri, a columnist and editor for the *Daily Star* of Beirut. "Yet, ultimately, they have no measurable political impact, because their Arab viewers cannot go out regularly and vote for their governments or change their nation's political, fiscal or defense policies. The fare on our Arab screens has changed; the exercise of our Arab political authority has not. That makes new Arab media mainly entertainers rather than credible political actors."[8]

True independence has yet to be seen, Khouri writes: "Almost every new Arab media channel is funded directly by Arab governments or indirectly through the Arab political-commercial elite, who became wealthy through their association with state authorities. With the possible exception of Hezbollah's high-adrenaline channel from Lebanon, el-Manar, the new Arab media are appendages of the ruling political and economic order in the Arab world, not challenges to it."

Alayyan agrees. As a small private business, he has to compete with channels funded by the deep pockets of oil-rich governments (Qatar funds Al Jazeera) and wealthy individuals connected to governments (Al Arabiya is backed by money from a Saudi who married into the royal family).

Indeed, reporters at both those networks will acknowledge that they cannot give negative coverage to their sponsors' countries. In addition, Al Arabiya cannot violate

"The best of the Arab journalists are my heroes. They are risking imprisonment and death to tell the truth. At a time when U.S. media are having an identity crisis, they remind me what the news business is all about."

– David Ignatius, *The Washington Post*[9]

the restrictive press laws of the United Arab Emirates, where it is based – even though it is located in a "free zone." In Gulf countries, journalists who are on a work visa from elsewhere can quickly have their residence permits revoked – along with their jobs – for any offense.

In the end, Alayyan said, "Our job is to push governments. … We have laws that affect the media so much and that are a huge hindrance to us." Press laws in Arab countries prohibit any negative coverage of royal families, of public officials, of Islam; or any coverage that might negatively affect the relationships with a "friendly or neighboring country." Such coverage is a criminal offense, punishable by jail term – not only for the reporter but for the editor, manager, and publisher.

Understandably, such laws lead to self-imposed censorship. Journalists are afraid of even getting a phone call of complaint.

Alayyan's response to such fears is: "Who cares? We own this media. If we're not doing anything illegal, then let's publish it." Still, he said, the attitude of fear is "a major obstacle that I face every day, from the journalists themselves."

It isn't just the legal problems. Alayyan knows that the government is one of the largest advertisers, so they also have commercial clout. But he has foregone their ads in return for editorial freedom.

Journalists, publishers and legislators need to draft laws that protect the press's ability to cover government and other topics without fear of harassment.

In Jordan and the UAE, new press laws are in the process of being written or enacted, which will lessen the restrictions on journalists. Kuwait's new law, enacted in March this year, "prevents the detention of journalists and closure of newspapers without a court order," according to the Arab Press Network.[10] But there remains much work to be done.

UAE Information Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, told a gathering six years ago, "Media institutions that serve only to offer echoes of self-serving applause are of no value to government or to the people. I freely admit that such

an approach requires changes both in government attitudes and in those of the media institutions." UAE editors say that things are much more open than they were in 2000, and the UAE recently abolished its Information Ministry. But the most substantive changes are gradual.

As in many Arab countries, the aggressive coverage of Al Jazeera has led the way. "Governments in the region have been very conservative. There is little access to get the real news behind the announced news. But what happened with the rise of the satellite channels is that they gave us more access," said Mohamed Al-Mezel, assistant editor of *Gulf News*, at a conference in Dubai in March 2006. "Al Jazeera gives the news as it comes. That gives us the incentive to go to officials here and say, 'The news has been announced by Al Jazeera. You can confirm it or deny it but you can't change that fact.'"[11]

Pushing back

Any journalist can expect that these pressures will happen. The best defense is a good offense – to understand the sources of pressure, plan for their attacks, and take steps to ward them off in advance. Then, when the pressure is heaviest, you will be in a better position to fight back.

Societies change, and the role of journalism changes with them. When the changes affect people in power or ways of life, there will always be resistance. Government officials who are not accustomed to having problems exposed are not likely to readily accept public criticism. Even members of the public, the citizens we serve, may be uncomfortable with a greater flow of information – especially when it means they have to take greater responsibility for their country.

However, to push the red lines of censorship or to stand up to the government or other powerful forces – when you know it could result in losing your job, your freedom, or even your life – is an exceedingly difficult choice to make. It is a personal decision, and no one can make it for you. Only you can know what is right for you as an individual and for your time and place in society. If you are afraid to speak and act on behalf of your profession and your audience, journalism may not be a good career for you.

In any case, know that you are not alone, and that in resisting pressure you are following a long and honorable tradition. Many other journalists have withstood pressure, fought governments and business pressure, and won – without losing everything. The good news is that there are plenty of colleagues, and professional organizations, who stand ready to help you.

Here's the best of the advice that journalists have to offer:

➡ *Understand and expect that pressure comes with the job.*

Pressure from the government, or from the

public, probably means that you are doing a good job. Think: "What is the product we are really selling here?" What a credible news organization has to offer is the trustworthiness of its information.

Believe in the importance of what you are doing. And know what your own personal and professional limits are.

Editor John Greenman once told his staff that if he could, he'd require all of his reporters and editors to have savings equal to a year's salary in the bank. He knew this would help keep them honest – because they would have the financial security to make the right decisions, with less fear of being fired.

Many of us would find that hard to do. But the basic idea is the same, no matter what your circumstances: Prepare yourself for the worst case.

For example, you may be cut off from sources and documents if the government puts pressure on you. Your protection is to build a hefty database of sources, and knowing which sources really care about having the truth published.

➡ *Adopt and follow standards consistently.*

Professional standards of journalism are a good protection against complaints. If you are careful about your sources, if you verify your information, if you make the effort to really listen to and report all sides of the story, it is much harder for people to attack you.

If the public knows you work for their benefit, they will support you – but if you are sloppy and biased in your reporting, why should anyone defend you?

"If you do good journalism, you can get the news," Alayyan said. "You just have to stick it out. There are many, many tools they can fight you with, but if you're strong and if you have the readership base, they will respect you and say, 'Wow, this guy, he's too strong to be touched.' And this is what's happened. After reaching a readership base that is too big for them, they have to really respect you."

➡ *Practice speaking up, politely but firmly.*

Rehearse what you will say to government officials or corporate owners who try to intimidate you. Remember that at times you will have to educate them about the role of journalists.

You can tell government officials, "You and I both represent the public. You work for the public good and so do I, because I give citizens information about what the government is doing."

You might also point out: "These questions are not from me as an individual – I represent the citizens, and I am asking questions that they might ask. That is my job."

And finally, let them know what your professional standards are – accuracy, fairness – and that you follow them because you want your audience to trust you.

"When the government sees that you are confident, and responsible for every single word you print, you will have their respect," said Kanbar. "They will fear you, even. They will say, 'This lady knows what she is doing.'"

➡ *Know and use the law.*

American journalists enjoy great protections under the law, but these can be eroded quickly if they aren't used and defended. When "sunshine" open meetings laws were first enacted, many journalists carried a card with them that gave the wording to object to the illegal closure of a public meeting, and publications took government boards to court over it.

Arab journalists believe that the law is worthless when it is unevenly enforced or if corruption interferes with it. But that shouldn't prevent you from reading it and attempting to use it. The support of the law will also help you win the support of international organizations.

For *Syria Today*, Kanbar hired a lawyer who found a way to use the law allowing free zones to allow for her "foreign" publication. Using a lawyer can help to show the government that you are serious about working with the law but also that you're serious about your business.

➡ *Make personal connections within government bureaucracy.*

Even in governments that don't support press freedom, journalists can find allies in the bureaucracy if they really hunt – and if they consistently uphold professional standards.

Simply by making the effort to be accurate and fair, journalists can make friends. Truthfulness has fans everywhere.

"We try to understand the government's point of view, and they do appreciate that," said Kanbar. "I don't have to adopt this point of view, but I have to understand it."

Syria Today has an advisory board that includes journalists, government, and a businessperson – all with a variety of viewpoints and politics. The advisory board can hash out issues in private that the magazine wants to bring before the public.

The board is also a way to test the waters with the government and look for signals about that invisible red line, she said. It acts as a kind of compass to help navigate through tricky political situations.

➡ *In the Arabic-speaking world, English-language publications have more latitude and they can take advantage of that to push back a bit harder.*

Kanbar acknowledged that another reason *Syria Today* has leeway is that their content is aimed at ex-pats. With a circulation of about 7,000 copies, the perception is that "we do not really affect the Syrian street," she said. But that creates an opportunity to get information out – because

her magazine is under less pressure.

The situation is true even in Saudi Arabia: "As an English-language publication, we also enjoy a wider margin of freedom and, as such, tackle issues of great importance to Saudi readers," said Ahmed Al-Yusuf, then editor-in-chief, *The Saudi Gazette*, in an interview with the Arab Press Network/ World Association of Newspapers.[12]

"Newspapers should become catalysts for change by tackling issues that are ignored by other media, including an ever more active monitoring role that allows people insight into the truth, and detailed probing of issues of importance to society, be these political, economical, social or moral."

➡ *Seek support from colleagues and friends.*

Sometimes journalists are afraid to ask for help from their colleagues. But other journalists face the same problems at one time or another – they will be happy to help you.

Don't forget the support of your friends and family. They may not understand your job, or they may even be threatened by your work. Take the time to explain to them why you are a journalist and what you want to accomplish.

There are half a dozen international organizations that support journalists under pressure. Join them.

Start your own local organization to defend journalists, if there isn't one. It's easier for a group to stand up together than one individual. And organizations should be proactive – they should make the effort to educate politicians, the public, and other organizations about the role of journalism.

Be active in helping other journalists – and they will be there when you need help. Report your problems to the organizations. And share what works with other journalists.

"There are a lot more influences on our media than perhaps we feel comfortable admitting – internal and external."

– Mark Hyman, vice president of corporate relations for Sinclair Broadcast Group

Sacred rites, scared reporters

"We have failed our people miserably in the Arab world. … The local [Egyptian] media have done a terrible job of covering sectarian violence. … Pick up the average Arab newspaper and look for Shia opinion. Ask a Christian in Egypt how much access he or she has to the state media to get their points of view across."

– Mona Eltahawy, Egyptian journalist and columnist, at a recent debate in Doha, Qatar

"It's incumbent on us to explain the religion in context … separate the religion from who controls the religion and how it's practiced."

– Stephen Franklin, reporter, *Chicago Tribune*

Demonstrations by thousands of people, boycotts worth millions of dollars, riots that result in death and destruction – all have been prompted by the media's coverage of religion. Many of the greatest misunderstandings and conflicts between Americans and Arabs have been over religion – the controversy over the Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed being the latest and one of the most extreme examples.

In September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a set of editorial cartoons, most of which depicted the Prophet Mohammed. Over a period of several months, individual objections to the cartoons grew into large, staged protests, some of which turned violent. Journalists in more than 50 countries – including several Islamic countries – eventually decided to publish the cartoons, as part

of informing the public by showing the primary source of the controversy.

Although Islamic tradition opposes making images of the Prophet because of the Quran's injunction against idolatry, objections to the Danish cartoons came predominantly over their satirical nature and the association of Islam with terrorism (one cartoon depicted Mohammed with a bomb planted in his turban). Those who support publication of the cartoons say that they illustrate the issue of self-censorship and that all religions have been the target of satirical cartoons.

Earlier in 2005, a *Newsweek* article alleged the Quran had been desecrated in a toilet at Guantanamo Bay prison camp, which resulted in numerous demonstrations; Afghan protesters died in some that became riots. *Newsweek* later retracted parts of the story as inaccurate, stating "neither we nor the Pentagon had any idea it would lead to deadly riots."

Journalists who are careless, or even a bit hasty, in covering sacred topics put themselves in peril of massive public retribution. That's why reporters in both the United States and Arab countries tend to tiptoe around religion, to a degree that they admit is shirking their duty. Coverage of religion is a big downfall for journalists in most countries: It can be criticized as nonexistent or painfully superficial; timid, politically correct or state-sanctioned; or at worst, sensational and incendiary, bordering on hate speech.

A large part of that gap in coverage comes from our own ignorance of religion. But there's also at times a kind of snobbishness or condescension toward religious people. American journalists tend to be secular, or at least somewhat cynical about religious faith, and their lack of interest and knowledge shows in the stories they produce. Arab journalists may be more steeped in religion, and their work leads them to adopt a flexible attitude – but they may not be able to demonstrate their attitude in what they write because of the perceived taboos on public debate about religion.

For those journalists who have the interest, or for whom the news itself demands more attention to religion, there is another problem: negative reaction from all sides. And journalists in most Arab countries could face criminal prosecution if they offend Islam. Speaking out against anti-Semitism can also bring wrath on an Arab journalist, even if he isn't defending Israel itself.

Religion is difficult to cover, even for a well-versed reporter. The beliefs of individuals and their relationship with God can be as intimate as a marriage. Covering religion as an ordinary topic for public consumption seems to many in our audiences a violation of privacy, and disrespectful of the highest power.

How do we cover religion with more depth as well as fairness? Can we cover religion in the same way as we would any other

"[Questioning sharia] would result in an immediate fatwa against the journalist, so it's very critical that we know the consequence of what we write. That means that I'd rather avoid the whole topic from the very beginning. I know that the law won't protect me, and the community will be against me."

– Walid Al-Saqaf, editor, *Yemen Times*

topic of great importance?

In a separate small group discussion, Wingspread participants examined the issue in detail and came up with a long list of recommendations.

Chapter and sura

First and foremost, reporters and editors have to educate themselves about religion, just as they would about any other topic they cover. If you were assigned to the environment beat, you would brush up on basic chemistry; if you were assigned to cover an election, you'd get all the background on the candidates and issues. Religion is no different – except that it touches many beats, so reporters have the responsibility to educate themselves.

"We are enormously ignorant, and we need to do something about our ignorance," said Alan Elsner of Reuters. "We need to educate ourselves, and we need help to get educated on some of these basic things."

The conference participants heartily agreed that filling the great void of ignorance about religion should be a priority for journalists around the world. Muslim and non-Muslim reporters alike acknowledge that they know little about the Quran or the different interpretations of it, let alone the enormous body of scholarly work on Islam.

But they also profess ignorance about Christianity and Judaism, and how all religions play into the politics of their own countries.

To help reporters learn about the major religions, we've compiled a list of handbooks and Web sites, in the Resources chapter.

Arabs and Americans can educate each other, too. ICFJ operates a listserv, and IJNet offers materials updated from this manual (www.ijnet.org/interchange). It's easy enough to find a blog where others are debating religious issues, or to find a buddy to exchange ideas with. Participants also suggested bringing moderate Islamic scholars to the United States.

It's not the role of a journalist to settle issues of doctrine and dogma, participants at the Wingspread conference agreed. Not only because it would take a lifetime of study – but because journalists should be questioning the experts, not become the expert source (with a particular slant) themselves.

That's especially true for the outsider. "Even if I were to sit and read the Quran cover to cover, I would really understand nothing about Islam," Elsner said. That's because he would not be filtering his reading through a personal experience of Islam and its history.

"The commentary and historical experience is at least as important if not more important than the text itself," he said.

Religion behind the curtain

Religion gets tricky to cover exactly because it is so intertwined with so many areas – especially politics. Political aims are often behind actions that are given a religious intent, participants at Wingspread emphasized: "Lack of freedom forces people to choose between totalitarian regimes and Islamic ones," said Walid Al-Saqaf of the *Yemen Times*.

"Why are people more into religion now?" asked Kinda Kanbar. "Two reasons: The failure of secular parties; and, in support of those perceived to be oppressed." Although she was referring to Islam, the same might be said of Christian activists in America, or Jews who build illegal settlements in the West Bank.

"We have to find a way to build a new relation between Islam and the state in the Arab world," said Iraqi editor Mohammad Abdul-Jabbar, who has written a number of books on Islam and democracy. "Not a secular state, but not a religious state – it's something in between, which gives religion its role in building [the country]."

Christian fundamentalism is a growing force in American politics, and it has roots going back to the founding of the United States. A serious examination of the power and appeal of religion in America requires a greater depth of knowledge than many reporters now have, Wingspread journalists acknowledged.

In discussions about terrorism, war and ethnic conflicts, participants agreed that it is essential to hold all actors accountable as political leaders when they use religion for political goals. Journalists are obliged to lift the curtain of religion that protects political action from scrutiny – particularly when religion is used to promote or condone violence. Our job is to inform.

Upholding our standards

To get the information that our audiences need, we have to question people who claim to have authority in matters of religion. That can be scary, especially when questioning is seen as challenging the representatives of God.

Shireen Abu Aqleh of Al Jazeera offered an example from Palestine in which a mufti – an Islamic scholar who interprets Shari'a law – issued a fatwa against an arts festival, saying it was "against religion." Local journalists reported the story without questioning the mufti, asking about the reasons for his fatwa or offering any alternative religious opinions – because they were afraid of being called infidels, she said.

But even in places where it's a crime to insult Islam, we can ask neutral, non-confrontational questions with respect, just as we would question an expert in any field.

Ask: What is your academic background and your qualifications in this matter? What is the supporting documentation for your opinion – in the Quran / Bible / Torah? How do you answer religious scholars who have a different interpretation?

It might take some practice with a colleague to work out the right wording for the questions. And you might want to agree with other local journalists that you will all raise the questions – there is some safety in numbers.

Islam, in particular, has a strong foundation for questioning religious authorities and political leaders. Many scholars feel that Islam inherently supports free speech and democracy. If a Muslim scholar seems affronted that you are asking questions, keep in mind that Islam has no single, central ruling authority. As in any religion, all points are open to interpretation. A fatwa is an opinion, nothing more, and its authority is only as good as the reputation and scholarship of the one who issues it.

Reporters need to include a range of voices on religious issues, just as we would with political issues. We need to keep in mind that there is no absolute agreement on any religious issue, and that our job is to offer our audiences many different viewpoints and interpretations.

Sharing

Another way for journalists to educate themselves and support each other in upholding standards is through cross-cultural forums. You don't have to wait to be invited to a conference – there are existing groups online, or you can start one yourself.

The exchange of ideas could also take place through more conferences like Wingspread, through exchange programs for reporters to visit each other's countries, or by sharing contacts of sources who can offer a range of opinions about religious issues. Colleagues might also help each other by offering to set up interviews or even translate them.

Such exchange forums can also help to arrange publications of news, features and op-ed pieces to showcase alternative viewpoints. American editors can invite articles from Arab journalists on how the U.S. is perceived among Muslims, for

example; Arab editors could ask a Jewish journalist to write about his views on Palestine.

Changes in law and practice

Many Arab journalists work under especially difficult conditions, with the threat of being jailed, beaten or losing their job for "insulting Islam." Media laws punish some journalistic "offenses" with criminal penalties; judges sometimes overstep civil laws to retaliate against journalists. And public wrath can also be severe if a journalist is perceived to be undermining Islam by raising touchy issues.

There are other controls which vary from country to country. In Saudi Arabia, the guardian of the two holy places of Medina and Mecca, writing about the Quran is off-limits for anyone but religious scholars, and many things even peripherally related to religion are taboo: "You have to be careful what you say about crowd control in the Haj," or pilgrimage to Mecca, said Abeer Mishkas, a Saudi journalist.

Arab colleagues have asked for international help and support for their local organizations that are trying to change the press laws and work to protect journalists. Civil society and media organizations often lack the resources or professional capacity to put up a good fight for press freedom.

Our audiences, our staffs

The tendency of journalists to be cynical or uninformed about religion means we aren't representative of the populations as a whole – our audiences. Agnostics and secularists tend to look down on religious people as gullible, but religious ideas wield massive power and are a part of the daily lives of the majority of people on the planet.

Yet with the exception of religious magazines and newspapers, in the U.S. there are few devout reporters of any faith – and they tend to keep their beliefs to themselves for fear of ridicule. Very large newspapers may have a religion reporter, but that's the exception. Many reporters on other beats have to cover religion when it overlaps with politics, education, social issues and war.

Wingspread participants recommended that publications and stations recruit and add to the diversity of our newsrooms so that we reflect the diversity of the societies we're covering. "We need genuine people of faith in our newsrooms to educate us," said one.

A Tribe Called Journalists

"How much should we expect Arab news to look like Western news? If the audience has different interests, if the audience feels different things … then should we expect these news coverages to converge or not? The question that runs through your minds: Is my job to fill people with facts, or to make them come away with the right message?"

– Jon Alterman, director, Middle East program, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

"The government may think that they are the audience for TV. The journalist needs to realize that [government officials] are not the target audience, and the people who are going to complain the loudest are not the target audience. It's the viewer or reader, all of them."

– Camille Elhassani, deputy programme editor, Al Jazeera International, Washington, D.C.

In meetings of Arab and U.S. journalists, the common ground is our commitment to professional standards. Wingspread participants liked the idea that we are all part of a big tribe called Journalists. And like any tribe, we need a code of honor – a way of setting ourselves apart from others who may call themselves journalists but are only self-serving.

But there is always debate about what those standards are, what they mean in

actual practice – and who should enforce them.

American journalists tend to stress the role of neutral observer – that opinions and point of view must be strenuously avoided. The most strict reporters take this to the point where they do not vote, because they think it will influence their coverage of politics.

Some American journalists believe that these standards supersede culture. "It's not Western – it's a certain standard of reporting in which credibility and fairness is the key," said Serge Schmemann of the *International Herald Tribune*. "It is something that is universal."

Putting those values into practice in sensitive environments, however, can lead to clashes that are very hard to resolve, if not impossible. Neil MacDonald from CBC, Jerusalem, said: "I have given up even having a rational discussion with either friends of Israel or friends of Palestine. I just don't think that it's possible. I think that ethnic nationalism is a blinding influence and they are not going to understand us bringing to bear Western news values. So frankly I've decided that I'm not going to take any lessons from anybody that is not living here and living through this on how this should be covered."[1]

A good number of European journalists feel that American journalism takes an academic approach that is overly scientific. This approach is not only pretentious, but "dull as dishwater and ultimately false anyhow," in the words of one Brit. After all, the biggest newspapers in London are proudly partisan, and still are considered credible and professional by their audiences.

Other journalists, from Russia to South America, feel that fairness is important, but that advocacy for the right cause is the paramount duty of a journalist.

"I know what is right and wrong, and I see what is going on; why shouldn't I give my readers a strong position?" says an editor in Tbilisi, Georgia. Many readers enjoy the most opinionated writers – if they agree with them – because they see them as a personal advocate.

It's important to remember that any standards or ethics are interwoven with the larger system in which the journalist must operate. "A code of ethics only works well when there is a legal system in place to protect those who follow it," observed ICFJ trainer Carolyn Robinson, who is based in Amman. "In places where the legal system simply cannot or does not protect journalists very well, the decision about exactly what to print or broadcast on sensitive stories has to remain up to each individual journalist."

When journalists are advocates

Many American journalists would say that they still operate under the liberal principles articulated by Joseph Pulitzer:

"Always fight for progress and reform; never tolerate injustice or corruption. Never lack sympathy for the poor; always remain devoted to public welfare. Never be satisfied with merely printing the news. Always be drastically independent, and never be afraid to attack wrong."[2]

Some journalists would say that such "advocacy" journalism violates the standards of fairness and objective accuracy.

To media outlets who claim that they must stick to facts and strive only to report the truth, Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi of Egypt retorts: "But which truth should we believe – that of *The Washington Post* or that of *The Washington Times*? The CNN or Fox News? Or even is it the truth of Reuters, BBC, Agence France-Presse or Middle East News Agency or AP? They relate the same event with a great deal of variations. In fact the only ones who are really well informed are the journalists themselves, being able to receive the news from this multitude of resources.

"Does this mean that a journalist should not be balanced and fair? Of course not. Fairness and balance are not an end judgment on how professional the reporter is, but they are rather a personal commitment in order for the journalist himself to understand better what is happening. But the end result will always be his view of the event, and this should be OK. At least in our part of the world, we need to learn more how to express ourselves and free our minds from the everlasting practices of self-censorship."

In the United States, journalists operate on the assumption that our role is to assist citizens to participate in democracy. But without a valid democracy, how much power do people have to act on information from the media? In those countries, journalists can still offer information to their audiences and give them an outlet to be heard.

This is a valuable commodity in societies where voices have been stifled for decades – as Al Jazeera's popularity attests. The satellite network's motto is "The Opinion and the Other Opinion," and it mesmerized viewers from the beginning simply by airing debates on issues and interviews with different sides in conflicts. Activists hope that blossoming in speech will translate into greater freedom overall – that it will be a major force for reform from within, at least in some Arab countries.

Arab journalists also pointed out that they faced great obstacles in carrying out the standards promoted by Americans, even when they understand and agree with those standards. "The media cannot be freer than the country of coverage," said Mohannad Khatib of ATV in Jordan. "You cannot have free and progressive media that shows everything very accurate and objective when people cannot vote, women cannot drive. ... Keep that in mind when comparing Al Arabiya or Al Jazeera to CNN."

"A free press means something different in the Middle East. … We all agree that there should be a change in Arab media, but we don't want it to be a copy of the Western media."

– Marwan Sadiq, Middle East and North Africa associate editor, the International Journalists' Network

Walid Al-Saqaf of Yemen agrees that Arab journalism is in transformation and has made a lot of progress in recent years. He noted that Al Jazeera has led the way since 1996 with its approach of offering more than one point of view – because it was a major change from the way government-controlled media had dispensed propaganda.

Although Al Jazeera's take on the news is sometimes emotional or biased, that is a way in which it has gained the confidence of its audience, Al-Saqaf wrote after the conference.

"We continue to face the dilemma of gaining the trust of viewers/readers but at the same time being fair and objective. On many occasions, giving the 'other side of the story' would enrage and anger some viewers, who think that the channel – for example Al Jazeera – needs to be sympathetic toward the Arab or Muslim worlds rather than neutral.

"So then we have the issue of balancing between what the readers/viewers want and the standards that need to be met."

Jon Alterman, a veteran observer of media across the Arab world, added that a lack of standards was a symptom of the larger differences that other participants pointed to: "Arab media is not consistently outrageous – Arab media is consistently inconsistent. There's not as much of an editorial process enforcing the role of the journalist."

Al-Saqaf said, "We're not 100 percent the perfect journalism we'd like to be, but from 100 percent propaganda, I think we are almost halfway."

Panelists at the Dubai conference "Arab and World Media: Getting It Right" said that the profession needs to move more toward its role of social responsibility. "Our problems aren't limited to Palestine – we have our own problems," said Saad al-Ajmi, former Kuwaiti minister of information. Ali Al Ahmad, director general of Abu Dhabi TV, concurred: "We have to prove that we are brave enough to criticize ourselves."

Effects on all of us

Regardless of how it plays out, though, most journalists do set their sights on serving their audience. Even if only to win fame or to boost circulation, journalists keep in mind that the audience sits as

judge and jury.

The equation of audience expectations seems to apply in most cultures: When standards that match society's needs aren't set and met, trust in journalists decreases and the profession as a whole suffers.

"Promoting professionalism and a free media certainly help develop a 'virtuous society,'" says Sudanese journalist and trainer Elsadig Bakheit Elfaqih. "[We must] return to and retain professionalism in the workplace, and restore the ideals of integrity, objectivity, fairness, balanced reporting and the ultimate pursuit of truth to public life, which, in turn, bring back the trust, faith and confidence in the media."

"Our relationship with readers, viewers and online users is our single greatest asset," says Robert Decherd, chairman, president and chief executive officer of Belo Corp., which owns 19 television stations across the U.S. and newspapers with a circulation totaling more than 2 million, as well as local cable channels and Web sites. "The confidence and relationship with viewers, readers and users is something that we should not take for granted."

It is not only ideological, but a business issue, too, news executives say. "We're pragmatic about this alignment between journalistic quality and long-term value," said Dennis FitzSimons, president and chief operating officer of the Tribune Co., which owns the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and nine other daily newspapers, as well as 26 television stations. "Anything we might do to diminish the quality of that journalism would diminish the value of assets."[3]

Professional standards can support the underpinnings of a bridge that would close the gap between U.S. and Arab journalists – as long as they are tempered with a healthy dose of cultural education about each side. Our desire to understand and know are precepts we have in common, and we can work together on finding the best ways to inform the public, no matter what our beliefs, nationality or experiences are.

To whatever degree we can agree on what it means to be a member of this tribe, that's a starting point for improving the quality of journalism everywhere.

One attempt

At Wingspread, the participants talked about standards in all the sessions, and near the end of the conference looked at one possible set of standards to use as a basis. Afterward they continued the discussion long distance and asked other colleagues for their comments as well.

The standards outlined below have been used to train journalists worldwide, and professional journalists – Arab and American as well as many other nationalities – generally agree that these are the foundation of our work.

Of course, many times journalists will disagree about what these standards mean, or how to carry them out in a given situation. They should not be used as an absolute rule, or a measuring stick for sitting in judgment or controlling the media. They are more akin to goals – ideals that we aspire to, knowing that we may never perfectly attain them.

We try to offer here some guidelines for the underlying basis of these standards, and from that, how to think about and act upon them. Within each of these standards we refer back to the audience, and we offer some questions you can use when reporting and writing, to ensure you are serving the needs of your audience.

In addition to the standards, we've given a framework for a code of ethics – ways to think about ethical principles and apply them.

We also include other examples of professional principles, standards and codes of ethics. Further resources are in the Appendix.

Principles

The essential mission of professional journalists is to serve the people of the audience we reach – whether local or international – by providing information that they need and want, and by listening to and amplifying the voices of all people.

For journalists in a democracy, this relationship helps citizens to carry out their responsibilities and to hold government officials accountable.

Whether or not there is a full-fledged democracy, journalists can give their respective audiences a chance to be heard by their leaders, and a medium to communicate with and learn about each other. In this way we address the needs of the ordinary people who most depend on us.

The relationship that a media outlet has with its audience depends upon their trust. All our professional ethics and work standards flow from that foundation, from giving careful thought to how we earn and keep that trust over time.

Professional journalists know that our first priority is the audience we reach – the people who depend on us for reliable information. We do not strive to serve the interests of our sources, the government, the elite, or any political party or interest group, but instead do our best for the greater audience of the ordinary people.

As Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi pointed out, it is important to understand that the role and practices of a journalist who works for a multi-language wire service "who knows that his report will travel all over the world" will be different than one who works for a small opposition magazine, "who feels accountable only to the people in this particular geographic area."

In addition, she said, "most Western media speaks to Western audiences, with some repercussions in the Arab and Asian

worlds – while Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya speak to their Arab audiences, with some repercussions in the West. When either media amplify the voices of their people, the language and voices heard are very different. CNN and ABC are largely seen in the Arab world. Yet people in that world decode the news message differently in accordance to their understanding and views of the West."

We may work under various limits imposed by governments, or we may work for a state-owned publication or station. We may struggle with the constraints of working in a for-profit family business, or for a large corporate owner. We may serve a small town in a rural area, or we may work for an international network. These conditions can present obstacles, but we do our utmost to resist the pressures and carry out our mission.

When working on a story, we should ask ourselves, "Who does this story serve?"

As we develop standards and policies, we also have to let the audience know what we're doing. Transparency – letting them see how we do what we do – is a big part of trust. We can do that through our Web sites, through community forums and, of course, in the pages of our publications and on promotional airtime.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism offers a "Bill of Journalism Rights" for citizens, which lists six things that they should expect from the media: "truthfulness; proof that the journalists' first loyalty is to citizens; that journalists will maintain independence from those they cover; that journalists will monitor power and give voice to the voiceless; a forum for public criticism and problem solving; and news that is proportional and relevant."[4]

Standards

Standards should be viewed as goals or ideals – a way to consider what we do, and how we do it, within media that are imperfect. They are unlikely to ever reach a level of agreement that could be uniformly mandated, though some would like to try.

The two standards that are the most common to professional journalists, and that they usually put above all else, are accuracy and fairness. They include many elements, some of which could be consid-

"We have to hear voices who are maybe 'unacceptable,' voices that are difficult, voices that are also outraged, angry. And we have to help them raise their voices, because this is what we do for a living: let people say what they believe."

– Stephen Franklin, reporter, *Chicago Tribune*

ered standards in and of themselves.

The standards of accuracy and fairness are fundamental because they are the basis for the audience to trust us. If we consistently give them the factual truth, in all its complexity, with all its many facets, they know they can depend on us for something they can't get anywhere else.

Not surprisingly, accuracy and fairness are also the most difficult standards to achieve in practice.

➡ *Accuracy*

This standard demands that we make the effort to verify information, not just accept it from a single source. It also means we don't publish information that is rumor, or that is something "everybody knows," unless we can attribute it to credible sources. And if we print or broadcast something that isn't true, we correct it as soon as possible.

Part of accuracy is also to ensure the story is based on reliable sources – people who are qualified and appropriate to answer our questions, who have the expertise or firsthand knowledge to give reliable information. Documents are also sources of information – they must be produced by institutions or individuals who meet the same standards as people we interview.

The bottom line for accuracy is whether our audience is informed with correct information. To misinform or mislead our audience is to violate their trust in us. We are their representatives, and to act on their behalf, we must demand the best information available.

Accuracy includes *detail*, which means that general statements are supported with specific facts and description. Based on our story, the audience should be able to correctly visualize the events and clearly understand the issues. [See the chapter on Interest for more about humanizing stories.]

To be accurate includes admitting what we don't know. That's hard for journalists; we like to think of ourselves as experts in all the things we cover. But when you're tempted to fudge on the facts in your story, ask yourself: How do I feel when a source pretends he knows more than he does? Do I trust him?

As Jacki Lyden of National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" said during Wingspread: "You constantly as a journalist challenge yourself: Why do I think the way I think? How do I know what I know? Who is it that's telling me this?"

And in turn, you need to tell your audience how you know what you know: who your sources are, what position they hold, what qualifies them, what point of view they are coming from.

This kind of transparency is all about respecting your audience, the Project for Excellence in Journalism reminds us: "It allows the audience to judge the validity of the information, the process by which it was secured and the motives and biases

of the journalist providing it. This makes transparency the best protection against errors and deception by sources. If the best information a journalist has comes from a potentially biased source, naming the source will reveal to the audience the possible bias of information – and may inhibit the source from deceiving as well."

The pressures of daily journalism can take a toll on accuracy. Alan Elsner, who has worked for Reuters news agency for 26 years, says, "There's a conflict between timeliness and accuracy, and it swings like a pendulum. … We don't have enough time, none of us, to polish our stories into the finely faceted jewels that we know they could be, and it's always a compromise to some extent." But in the end, he says, "the most important thing is accuracy."

➡ *Fairness*

This standard is probably the most difficult to define; and even when we agree on what it means, fairness is the source of much disagreement in terms of how it's carried out. It encompasses the ideas of what are sometimes called balance, objectivity, impartiality and neutrality.

"Fairness is a mechanism for making the story credible," said Schmemann. "If you have an opinion, if you have an agenda, the whole thing is undermined."

The elements of this standard are that all sides of the story are told and treated fairly; that the reporter's opinion is kept out of the story; and that the story gives the audience all the information they need to understand what is happening and why. This means including the voices of those with whom they may not agree, those who are in the minority, or those who are controversial or unpleasant to hear.

Shireen Abu Aqleh, reporting in Palestine for Al Jazeera, routinely interviews Israelis – although she is often hit with heavy criticism for doing so. (Many Arab publications and stations do not interview or quote Israelis.)

"I have to show everyone what they feel like, and this is my job as a journalist," she said simply. "At least I make the effort to show what the other side thinks, what do the Israelis and what do the settlers think, and how do they feel about it."

Fairness is more than simple balance – telling one side, then telling the other. It isn't always fair to give exactly the same number of words to each side. Truth is sometimes weighted toward one of the sides by virtue of the total evidence.

Brian Whitaker, Middle East editor of *The Guardian*, says of objectivity, "…there's a danger of trying so hard to be fair to someone that you end up being dishonest. For example, it would be highly misleading to talk in a historical article about Germany's "animal-loving vegetarian leader, Adolf Hitler."

Truth is more complex than just two sides. Many elements come to play in an issue;

social groups are not monoliths. (No one person can speak for "the Arab world" or for "the Muslim community," or for "Americans" or "the Jewish community".)

Kevin Sites, who took part in the Aspen Institute discussions in 2005, wrote in his Yahoo blog on the Hot Zone site:

"Perhaps most striking for me were our discussions of how the voice of moderate Arabs and moderate Americans have been drowned out in both the American and Arab media: that our societies are only hearing what one participant termed 'the Bush or bin Laden' question, rather than all the voices in between.

"If there's hope for Arab and American societies to view each other again through a more balanced and representative prism, I think it's critical to give those voices a chance to be heard."

Reporters and editors should never assume that everyone in their audience thinks and believes as they do. Often people who work in newsrooms are very different from society as a whole – they tend to be better-educated, urban, middle-class, and liberal or idealistic. They usually don't have much if any representation of the minority ethnic or religious groups.

We must ask ourselves: Will everyone who reads this story trust me and trust my publication or station – even someone who comes from a very different background, or holds a completely different point of view?

It's important for us to understand that everyone has bias; it comes with being human. And being human is not a bad trait for a journalist – it helps us maintain feeling for our subjects and our audiences.

The first step in guarding our stories from being tainted by our personal biases is to be aware of what those biases are. Take the time to write down a list of your own beliefs. Then make a second list on the other half of the page – a list of the opposite beliefs. Your stories must satisfy readers and viewers on both sides of the page.

In order to satisfy your entire audience, you have to keep your opinions out of the story. What are a journalist's opinions worth? No more than anyone else's. Everyone on the planet has one.

Some journalists argue that their opinion is valuable because they know a lot about the subject. In that case – why aren't they sharing what they know with their audience? If you offer your opinion in place of real information, aren't you saying to your audience, "We don't think you are smart enough to form your own opinion"?[5]

There is a place for opinions – and it is to have them separated and clearly identified as such, preferably on a dedicated opinions and editorials page or program.

"Our problem in the Arab media is that we mix facts with opinions," said Kinda Kanbar of *Syria Today*, "and [readers] don't understand. 'What's the message?

Is he saying facts?' ... A point of view is a point of view, and a fact is a fact. We have to draw this line in order to address our issue, and we have to train our readers and our audience, too, about this new way of media."

Fairness is a twin of accuracy because they work together. Objectivity does not mean being an emotionless robot – it is, instead, a process of asking questions in a disciplined way, and publishing the results based on that process. Conceptually it is close to a scientific method of testing a hypothesis. While it is impossible to pin down reality with precision, we have to make the attempt to comprehend and report on points of view that differ from our own.

This standard requires that journalists ward off the tendency to get sucked into the most thrilling or sensational news. Panelists at the Arab and World Media Forum in Dubai, in December 2005, agreed that focusing just on excitement is not real journalism. "You have to try to have a maximum of objectivity to make an article really attractive," said Joseph Samaha, editor-in-chief of *Al Safeer* in Lebanon.

Fairness can also include the standard of providing context, which means giving both historical and social background information. This information puts an individual news event or issue into the bigger picture of society. Such information helps the audience understand the significance of the story and the reasons for the events. "News does not exist in a vacuum," wrote Mirette Mabrouk of IBA Media in Cairo, in an Aspen Institute publication. "It exists in context: social, cultural, domestic, economic, political. Journalists have traditionally been one of the best litmus paper indicators of public opinion and mood. The relationship is entirely symbiotic, and as such, journalists carry an enormous responsibility that I believe has been seriously abused over the past couple of decades."[6]

Another kind of context is to report good news. We tend to emphasize conflict and problems, but that isn't a proportional view of the real world. We need to show progress when there's progress, and to highlight individuals who are working for peace and justice in regions of war and corruption.

Remember: In a place where much is bad, good news is news. Good news stories are newsworthy because they are about change, or about what is unexpected. We have to report on violence, corruption and other problems, but if we ignore the positive stories we are giving a distorted view.

Other important standards that professional journalists adhere to are *interest*, *clarity* and *timeliness*.

➡ *Interest*

Journalism strives to be interesting to its audience, because if the information is important, it deserves to be heard or read. Journalism's primary goal is not to amuse,

distract or entertain – it is to inform. But if the story isn't interesting, no one will read it and be informed – so it is also the journalist's job to make an important story interesting. [See Chapter 4: Interest]

Part of what gives a story interest is the voices of ordinary people, and using a variety of sources. That's why some journalists would say that the use of quotes, or sound bites, is a professional standard. The key to this is that the audience can hear the voices of "real" people – and especially, people who mirror the audience, people that our readers and listeners can relate to.

➡ *Clarity*

The form and style may vary according to cultural norms and language – but professional journalism strives to give information in a way that is clear, straightforward, concise, logical and practical.

Stories should be written in words that ordinary people understand – eliminating academic, scientific or political jargon. Reporters should simplify complicated ideas so that anyone will be able to follow them. Our audiences have to be able to understand every part of a story, so that means the structure should also be logical.

➡ *Timeliness*

A limitation that journalists must work with is deadlines. Time constraints can sometimes limit our ability to meet other standards. Yet a story that's late doesn't make it on the air, or doesn't get printed. The audience needs to get information in time to respond, too. If citizens don't know about a problem while it is occurring, they can't demand a solution.

Ethics

Ethics are very closely related to standards, and in fact most codes of ethics describe some of the standards listed above. Like the standards, ethics are the foundation of our audience's trust in us. Ethics provide us with guidance when making difficult decisions. Even though we can never be perfect, ethics give us a framework.

So a code of ethics makes our responsibility to the audience clear. There are dozens of codes of ethics for journalists from many countries, in many languages. What follows is a summary of the key points about ethics, and the Resources chapter has examples to look at.

A code of ethics makes transparent the rules by which journalists are held accountable to the profession and to our colleagues. Ethical principles give us unity because they separate professional journalists from amateurs.

That accountability is crucial, because journalists also have the role of holding government and other institutions accountable to the people – and therefore, we ourselves have to be willing to have our actions scrutinized. If we hold ourselves accountable and we answer to the

public that we serve, we have a defense against governments that want to impose restrictions on media freedoms.

Because a journalist is obliged to uphold the standards of accuracy and fairness, ethics codes usually specify that a journalist will be fair to all sides of the story, avoid personal bias, not accept or offer bribes, and will not use his or her influence for personal gain in any other way.

Professional ethics also demand that journalists do not libel or defame anyone, plagiarize anyone else's work, or fabricate or embellish any information, people, events, quotes or details.

Codes of ethics usually also specify that journalists don't deceive or cheat their sources or audiences, manipulate anyone to get information, or betray promises of confidentiality.

However, there are strong cases to be made in favor of a reporter posing as someone else to get information, or accepting documents that were obtained illegally. The guidelines for discussing such ethical decisions include: Is the purpose of the story, such as exposing a wrongdoing, compelling or important enough for the public good to override the general rules? Can the information be obtained another way? Does getting the information this way distort it? Will the controversy about reporting methods overshadow the purpose?

Ethics are general principles, but applying them can be very difficult. If you're not sure what to do, think about what approach would best maintain the relationship of trust with your audience.

You might also ask yourself: What is the highest moral behavior – the most honest thing to do? What will do the most to provide the best information?

And a final test: How would I defend my actions to my editor and colleagues – and most importantly, to my audience?

The fine print

It's tough to be consistent, even for journalists who work in a very supportive environment.

For example, adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives are a quick and easy way to describe things, a shorthand for reporters and editors that save a lot of space and time. But they are inherently subjective and often imprecise. They can be the cause of many accusations of bias.

Our writing would be dry without any adjectives at all, so no one would argue that they should be eliminated. But when we use adjectives we should ask ourselves: Is this word supported by the facts? Would everyone in the room who saw this scene use the same adjective? Is there a more exact way to show the reader what happened, rather than just telling them how I saw it?

When we write, "He violently denied the

charge," what does it mean? Did he knock over furniture, break windows, shoot the reporter? Did he turn red and shake his fists in the air? Did he curse the reporter's family and ancestors and village? Any of those descriptions would be more exact and factual – and a lot more interesting to read, too.

If we say someone is "radical," not only is that a judgment but it conjures up very different pictures in the minds of different readers. In some cultures, being a radical is a form of praise; in others, it's akin to calling them a "godless communist who should be executed." Unless we know for certain that every potential member of our audience would agree with a label adjective, it's better to rely on a more factual description: "He advocates killing all those who do not attend his church."

But some journalists would scoff, and say that "everyone in my audience knows what radical means. It has a clear definition, and it's not an opinion or a judgment."

Consider adding this to the above: Naseer Nouri, an Iraqi who reports for *The Washington Post* in Baghdad and oversees other Iraqis working for the paper, describes how he learned to question his use of adjectives after attending an ICFJ training in Jordan. Now, Nouri teaches other Iraqi journalists to ask the same kinds of questions about their word choice.

When a reporter hands him a story that says that a man was "sick" after seeing a bombing in his neighborhood, Nouri asks, "How do you know he was sick? Was he throwing up? Was his face a different color? Was he unable to stand on his own?" Any of those descriptions, he tells the reporter, are more descriptive and more accurate than simply saying the man was "sick."

In making decisions about adjectives, consider: Is this adjective the best phrasing to serve the audience? Or does it just serve me?

Appendix A

Resources

This manual has attempted to outline basic tips and ways to think about the issues of good coverage for Arab and American journalists. However, it is only a small beginning. The real work of questioning, reading and communicating is up to each of us.

This list includes Web sites, online handbooks, blogs and a few articles that are meant to serve as starting points for research, or models of reporting and ethics to consider. Most of the Web sites have links to other good resources, and were chosen partially for that reason. However, since links frequently change, we have elected in most cases to cite only the home page URL.

In an effort to continue the discussions begun at Wingspread, and offer a more detailed and up-to-date list of resources, ICFJ has created a page on its Web site, IJNet: www.ijnet.org/interchange. Please check with this page for revisions to this chapter. IJNet is ICFJ's media development news Web site, in English, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese, which also contains a wealth of information and resources on journalism issues such as codes of ethics, media laws, training materials and discussion groups. One such group is the Interchange listserv, which invites journalists interested in U.S. and Arab coverage to discuss topics of common interest and share information.

Once you start to look, you may quickly get overwhelmed by the amount of material on certain subjects, such as Islam. Good information and debate on subjects such as religion, journalism standards or safety for war coverage is readily available via the Internet – but, unfortunately, so is unsubstantiated, biased or otherwise unhelpful information, and contentious or even immature discussion.

While every resource on this list was recommended by one or more participants at the conference, ICFJ cannot vouch for the accuracy or

impartiality of all the content on a recommended Web site or book.

The key is to read a lot, read widely and discuss what you read with knowledgeable sources. The rules of good journalism apply to both documents and human sources: Don't depend on just one source of information, particularly with complex subjects. Check out the background and motives of your sources. Use critical thinking to weigh what different sources have to offer. Finally, when in doubt, admit that there's no authoritative source – or that you simply don't know the definitive answer.

Journalism principles, best practices, media news

Al Bab (www.al-bab.com), a Web site maintained independently by a Middle East editor of the *Guardian* newspaper, calling itself "An open door to the Arab world." It offers links that give a comprehensive look at media issues such as press freedoms, regional news, copyright issues and international and regional codes of ethics. Mostly in English but with many key documents in Arabic.

AmmanNet (www.ammannet.net) is an independent Internet radio network in Arabic and English based in Jordan, which also tracks and critiques media coverage in Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon in an effort to raise standards.

Arab Press Freedom Watch, based in London, has excellent reports, speeches and news about the media in Arab countries. The site is in Arabic and English: http://www.apfw.org and http://www.apfw.org/indexarabic.asp

The Arab Press Network (www.arabpressnetwork.org), founded by the World Association of Newspapers in Paris, is an email-based network that supports the development of the independent press in the Arab world. It publishes an electronic weekly newsletter in English, Arabic and French.

The American Journalism Review (www.ajr.org), **Columbia Journalism Review** (www.cjr.org) and **USC Annenberg Online Journalism Review** (www.ojr.org) are American monthly magazines that discuss issues of news and media standards.

The Aspen Institute (www.aspeninstitute.org) has sponsored three meetings of the Arab-U.S. Media Forum, and its reports are included on the Web site. Aspen also sponsors numerous initiatives about the quality of journalism in the United States but its reports (English only) offer food for thought for journalists everywhere.

The Carnegie Foundation (www.carnegie.org) and the **Ford Foundation** (www.fordfound.org) regularly fund programs, reports and other activities that support journalism ethics and explore important news topics as part of their broader missions to support democratic and educational initiatives. See, for example, the Carnegie Reporter story on nonprofit journalism from its spring 2005 issue (Vol. 3, No. 3).

The Global Journalist (www.globaljournalist.org) covers issues and news for reporters and editors worldwide. The site is published in English by the International Press Institute (IPI) in Vienna, Austria.

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (www.knightfdn.org) is dedicated to raising the quality of journalism worldwide through numerous programs, including the Knight International Press Fellowships administered by ICFJ.

Two top American sources of practical tips and information geared to journalism standards, ethics and best practices are **The Poynter Institute** (www.poynter.org), a nonprofit journalism training institute in Florida, and the **Project for Excellence in Journalism** (www.journalism.org), a research and training institute at Columbia University. Both also offer reports on all aspects of journalism. Although dedicated to American journalism, their advice is useful to journalists everywhere. Poynter's site also offers a search function of 221 journalism sites.

The Web site of the **Independent Press Councils** (www.presscouncils.org) has a comprehensive list of more than 370 codes of ethics

worldwide, including outlets as well as organizations.

An outstanding dialogue about ethics and reality is **"Media Ethics & Journalism in the Arab World: Theory, Practice, & Challenges Ahead" (**http://ipj.lau.edu.lb). In Arabic and English (mixed), this transcript covers a conference held on June 9–11, 2004, at the Lebanese American University in Beirut by the Institute for Professional Journalists in cooperation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

The Detroit Free Press (http://freep.com/legacy/jobspage/arabs/index.htm) developed "100 Questions and Answers about Arab-Americans: A Journalist's Guide" and it is now widely available on the Internet.

Polls and surveys of attitudes about a variety of important issues, both in the U.S. and internationally, are done regularly by the **Pew Research Center** (http://people-press.org/). Pew also does useful studies of the relationship between the American public and journalists.

Transnational Broadcasting Studies (www.tbsjournal.com) is a journal published by the American University – Cairo in English with some articles also in Arabic. It includes debate on current issues and media standards.

Neutral research on American television networks news coverage has been carried on since 1987 and is summarized in the widely-cited **Tyndall Report** (www.tyndallreport.com).

Other sites for standards and codes of ethics in the Arab world, in Arabic only, include:

• An electronic journalism (radio, broadcast and online) code of ethics written by Amman Net: http://ammannet.net

• Definitions of the basic journalism terms including what is a news article, opinion, interview, report, media and independent media: http://www.elsohof.com/kamoos.html

• Two articles explain how to be a good journalist, what is an opinion and what is news, with background on how journalism started and its development:
http://www.arabrenewal.com/index.php?rd=AI&AI0=12303
http://www.rezgar.com/debat/show.art.asp?aid=9658

• A guide to more than 50 Arabic search engines:
http://www.arab.de/asearch.htm

Handbooks

There are many excellent journalism guides and handbooks available for free on the Internet. Below is just a sample.

The Net for Journalists: A practical guide to the Internet for journalists in developing countries
An easy-to-use basic handbook for using the Internet, written for journalists, in English: http://portal.unesco.org

Blogging guides
A general guide to blogging is offered in Arabic, Farsi, English, Chinese and French by **Reporters Sans Frontieres**: www.rsf.org

The **Anoniblogging Wiki (**http://anoniblog.pbwiki.com) is a guide to anonymous blogging in particularly oppressed countries, in Arabic, Farsi, English and Chinese.

Legal guides
A list of books and manuals published in **Arabic by the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists** includes a yellow pages guide for Jordanian journalists, legal protection for journalists and how to defend yourself as a journalist in court: http://cdfj.org/

Media terms in both Arabic and English
A glossary published by **Georgetown University**:
press.georgetown.edu

On Assignment: A Guide to Reporting in Dangerous Situations, published by the Committee to Protect Journalists, available in English and Arabic: www.cpj.org

Live News: A Survival Guide for Journalists, published by the International Federation of Journalists, March 2003, in English and Arabic: www.ifj.org

Media and Elections Handbook is produced by IMPACS in Arabic, English and French: www.i-m-s.dk

Journalism support organizations

The organizations below work to promote media freedom and protection of journalists, and most offer assistance and support for journalists. Although each has its own specialty, serious threats, arrests or violence against journalists should be reported to as many of them as possible.

Amnesty International (in English, Arabic, French and Spanish): www.amnesty.org
Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), Lebanon: www.arij.net
Article 19, UK: www.article19.org
Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists, Jordan: www.cdfj.org
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), USA: www.cpj.org
Federation of Arab Journalists, Egypt: www.faj.org.eg
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Belgium: www.ifj.org
International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), Canada: www.ifex.org
International Press Institute (IPI), Austria: www.freemedia.at
Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontieres), France: www.rsf.org
Unrestricted Writers Organization, Germany: www.kuttab.org/index.html
World Press Freedom Committee, USA: www.wpfc.org

General Middle East Web sites

A sample of what's available on the Middle East.

Bitterlemons (www.bitterlemons-international.org) is an online roundtable, a publication on the Middle East put out by Ghassan Khatib, a Palestinian sociologist and member of the Palestinian council and Yossi Alpher, a consultant on Israeli-related strategic issues.

Arab Decision is a database Web site in Arabic and English. It offers information on government and private organizations, contact information, Web sites, phone numbers, e-mails: www.arabdecision.org

The Middle East Network Information Center (http://menic.utexas.edu/menic) at the University of Texas at Austin has a myriad of sources of information about all countries in the region.

Al-Bab (www.al-bab.com) is a general portal for all things Arab, in English.

Religion

While there are a great deal of Web sites devoted to religion, finding those that are worthwhile can take some time. This is especially problematic with Christianity, with literally hundreds of sects disagreeing on all aspects of the meaning and practice of Christianity.

We offer here a few that seem straightforward, relatively mainstream and, at least, are a starting point that will lead you to other explorations.

Harvard Pluralism Project (www.pluralism.org/resources/tradition/index.php) is a site on all religions, with news, reference materials and links to other sources.

The Web site **adherents.com** has a neutral, academic approach to religion statistics, which are difficult to come by. It is a graphically simple site, but don't be deceived by appearances – there is a lot of research behind it.

Belief Net (www.beliefnet.com) is a fairly interactive site on religion, including a Belief-O-Matic test to help you decide what religion your beliefs most closely track with.

On Islam, two of our favorites are **www.jannah.org** – especially the resources section and 25 Questions – and **islam-usa.net**, which is a good general resource. For a good entry on jihad, see **www.dislam.org**. Also **http://islam.about.com/** is a good, basic overview.

This **PBS** documentary (www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims) featured interviews from Muslims from all around the world, including the United States.

The **Virtual Index** (www.virtualreligion.net/vri) at Rutgers University is a thorough, academic compilation of Web sites about religion.

PBS's news magazine **Religion & Ethics Newsweekly** (www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/) is a national television program devoted solely to issues of spirituality and religion. Its Web site gives information about the stories and people that appear in each week's broadcast, as well as news.

The Revealer (www.therevealer.org/talkingheads.php) is a "daily review of religion and the press" and has a page called Talking Heads that gives sources on religion for American reporters.

The Religion Source (religionsource.org) has a database of 5,000 scholars on religion with e-mails and other contact information.

Blogs

There are thousands of blogs, covering every topic imaginable, and a good search engine can help you find commentary on any and all subjects. While much of the reporting on blogs is amateur, they do offer personal insights that may otherwise be difficult to obtain. This is especially true in countries where freedom of speech is very limited.

A few blogs, such as Abu Aardvark, are done by professionals, and are both useful and reliable sources of information.

We offer here just a few blogs to get you started. Each of them has links to many other blogs recommended by the authors – and each of those blogs has a list of other blogs.

Arab media specialist Marc Lynch's blog, **Abu Aardvark (**abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/), is a lively but thoughtful and well-informed blog for and about Arab media.

www.egybloggers.com is a comprehensive site of Egyptian blogs, and it is indexed by category and language.

The Arabist (arabist.net), published and maintained by Issandr El Amrani, a Cairo-based journalist, focuses on Arab politics and culture and includes contributions from journalists and researchers working in the region.

Middle East news sources

The following are Arab news sources in English, for American readers who want to see the perspective of Arab journalists.

ASharq al-Awsat, in both English and Arabic: aawsat.com/english and aawsat.com
Al-Ahram Weekly, Egypt: weekly.ahram.org.eg/
Al Hayat (regional): english.daralhayat.com/
Arab News: Saudi Arabia: arabnews.com
Egypt Today: www.egypttoday.com
Gulf News, United Arab Emirates: www.gulfnews.com
Seven Days, United Arab Emirates: www.7days.ae
Syria Today: www.syria-today.com
The Daily Star, Lebanon: www.dailystar.com.lb
The Jordan Times, Jordan: www.jordantimes.com
Yemen Times, Yemen: yementimes.com
ArabicNews.com: www.arabicnews.com

Mona Eltahawy (monaeltahawy.com/) provides provocative commentary and insight as an Aspen Institute Arab – U.S. Media Forum participant.

Arabic Media Internet Network (www.amin.org/), a project of Internews Middle East, offers news of the region by Arab journalists in Arabic and English.

Reuters Voices of Iraq project offers daily coverage by Iraqi freelance journalists: English, www.aswataliraq.info/?newlang=eng
Arabic, www.aswataliraq.info

One Day in Iraq, (news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4613849.stm) is a BBC online project.

Appendix B

Wingspread Conference Participants

Bina'a A'-Jusour – Bridging the Gap: Misunderstandings and Misinformation in the Arab and U.S. Media

November 29 – December 2
Racine, Wis.

Moderators:

Hisham Melhem and Serge Schmemann

Participants:

Mohammad Abdul-Jabbar
Editor in Chief
Al Sabah
Baghdad, Iraq

Shireen Abu Aqleh
Al Jazeera Correspondent
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Walid Al-Saqaf
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Sana'a, Yemen

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Reporter
Chicago Tribune
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Hunt Valley, MD, USA

Kinda Kanbar
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Weekend All Things Considered
National Public Radio
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Hisham Melhem
Washington DC Bureau Chief
An Nahar
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(Lebanon)

Abeer Mishkhas
Editor
Asharq Al-Awsat, UK
(Saudi Arabia)

Andy Mosher
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Freelance Journalist
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Vermont, USA

Serge Schmemann
Editorial Page Editor
International Herald Tribune
Paris, France
(USA)

Lisa Schnellinger
Journalism Trainer
Formerly with the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
(USA)

Olfa Gamal El Din Tantawi
Director and Producer
Egypt Satellite Channels
Cairo, Egypt

Speakers:

Jon Alterman
Director, Middle East Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies
Washington, DC, USA

James N. Breckenridge
Associate Director of the Stanford Center for Interdisciplinary Policy, Research and Education on Terrorism (CIPERT)
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(Bruce Dale)

To continue the discussion started at Wingspread, please visit:

www.ijnet.org/interchange