

5. Does Assange's personal character matter in how a journalist or new organization should evaluate his actions?

Macro Issues

1. What role do organizations such as Wikileaks fulfill in democratic societies? How is that role like and unlike that of news organizations?
2. Governments frequently claim that some of what they do needs to remain secret to be effective. Evaluate this claim from the perspective of a citizen, a journalist, and a diplomat.

CASE 6-E

CONTROL ROOM: DO CULTURE AND HISTORY MATTER IN REPORTING THE NEWS?

LEE WILKINS

*Wayne State University
University of Missouri*

Almost a decade before the 2011 Arab Spring, there was Al-Jazeera, a fledgling Middle Eastern television network with 40 million viewers predominantly in that region. (Currently, Al-Jazeera includes a staff in Washington, DC, and the network itself is available worldwide including a strong cable and internet presence.)

Journalists routinely cite the expression that “truth is the first casualty of war,” but those in charge of Al-Jazeera also know that modern war cannot be waged without an intense propaganda effort on all sides of the conflict. Thus, when the United States was getting ready to invade Baghdad, director Jehane Noujaim requested and received permission to film the work of Al-Jazeera journalists as they covered the conflict. The 86-minute film, *Control Room*, won numerous awards.

Noujaim said that his goal was to produce a documentary about how truth is gathered, delivered, and ultimately created by those who deliver it. By telling the story of the coverage of the Iraqi invasion through the eyes of Arab journalists—many of whom had worked for news organizations such as the BBC before they worked for Al-Jazeera—the documentary provides an insider's view of how journalists report a

complicated story, often questioning the conventional wisdom of one of both sides involved.

One focus of the film is Captain Josh Rushing, a military public information officer, who is shown trying to explain the American side of the story to the Al-Jazeera journalists. Rushing maintains that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, that the Iraq invasion was not an attempt by the United States to capture oil resources, and to—from his point of view—provide a truthful account of these early days of the conflict. The film also shows the journalists questioning Rushing's facts, asking him to provide proof of what he says. For his part, Rushing says that he believes that the Al-Jazeera journalists are biased toward the regime of Saddam Hussein, noting that Al-Jazeera did not document the atrocities that regime perpetrated on Iraqi citizens.

Other elements of the film are tough to watch. They include footage of injured and dead Iraqis who died as the result of US bombing. Also included are images of US prisoners of war as they are questioned by Iraqi troops. Journalists working for Al-Jazeera are shown debating what they should show in terms of gory images. And, the journalists from Al-Jazeera are also shown discussing their personal opinions of American foreign policy that led to the invasion—they opposed it—and their belief that the American public will demand that the US government embark on a course other than invasion. The impact of images is also debated in the film—particularly the colliding of images about Israel with public opinion in the Middle East and how the images of Israeli aggression are linked to US foreign policy and this particular decision to invade Iraq.

The film also shows US officials, from the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to former vice president Dick Cheney, claiming that Al-Jazeera journalists were lying and their network's coverage was entirely propagandistic. These segments are juxtaposed against Al-Jazeera journalists saying that they define their role as showing the human side of war. Interspersed are actual images from Al-Jazeera broadcasts that include interviews and press conference footage from former president George W. Bush—coverage the network broadcast that was vociferously criticized by Middle Eastern governments. The network was equally harshly criticized—predominantly by American officials—for broadcasting the images of American POWs. Journalists from Al-Jazeera are asked if they can be objective about the conflict; those same journalists ask American correspondents the same question. Rushing himself notes that Al-Jazeera's coverage is powerful precisely because US news organizations were not showing these images domestically.

The film also shows the shock of the Al-Jazeera journalists as Baghdad is overthrown. And, the biggest emotional punch of the film comes when

one Al-Jazeera journalist who elected to stay in Baghdad to report on the invasion is killed in a US airstrike on the hotel in which hundreds of journalists were staying. The United States says the airstrike was a mistake; journalists from many nations disputed this claim. Through it all, the film documents the journalists doing what they believe is their job under difficult physical and emotional conditions.

Micro Issues

1. How do you think the journalists working for Al-Jazeera define their jobs? Is their definition of journalism different from your own?
2. How do you think the public information office for the military defines its role? How do you see its role as supporting or impeding the work of gathering the news? Would you say the same thing about the public information officer for your local police department or public health department?
3. Contrast the public statements by government officials about Al-Jazeera during this era of history with the statements made about the network during the Arab Spring. What do you think has led to this change in public perception about the network?

Midrange Issues

1. Should US television networks have shown the same sort of footage about the invasion as Al-Jazeera? Justify your decision in terms of the institutional role of the media in a democracy.
2. Al-Jazeera journalists were not embedded with US troops during the invasion. How might the process of embedding have changed coverage, both for embedded and non-embedded journalists?
3. The head of Al-Jazeera says, "I have plans for my children. I will send them to America to study, and they will stay there." Rushing says that he believes his role is to promote understanding between the Western and the Arab cultures. Evaluate both these statements in light of ethical theory.

Macro Issues

1. What is the difference between propaganda and news in war time?
2. Are there certain journalistic values that cross culture and language?
3. What are common frustrations—regardless of employer—that the journalists in the film appear to share?

4. You are being asked to evaluate this film more than a decade after it was first produced. Knowing what you now know about recent political history, evaluate the job that Al-Jazeera did in covering the Iraq invasion. Evaluate the job that American journalists did.

CASE 6-F

VICTIMS AND THE PRESS

ROBERT LOGAN

National Institute of Medicine, Washington, DC

Alice Waters' daughter, Julie, 7, has leukemia. Her illness was diagnosed in its early stages in March 2000. Julie's physicians believe her condition can be successfully treated.

Ms. Waters, 37, lives in a mobile home in an unincorporated area a few miles from Metroplex, a city of 1.5 million. Ms. Waters' street is the only residential section in the area. At the north end of the street—which has 12 mobile homes on each side facing one another—are four large gas stations that catch traffic off the interstate that runs a quarter mile away to the west. At the south end of the street (about a quarter mile away) are two large tanks that are a relatively small storage facility for Big Oil, Inc. Next to this—starting almost in her backyard—is the boundary of a successful, 700-acre grapefruit orchard, which borders on a municipal landfill. About a quarter mile away are large well fields that are the principal source of drinking water for Metroplex.

In July 1999, a 6-year-old boy in the household two doors down from Ms. Waters was diagnosed as having leukemia. He was not as lucky as Julie; his diagnosis was late in the progression of his disease, and he died in December 2000. In 2001, an infant girl became the second baby born with birth defects in the neighborhood within seven years. Both families moved before Ms. Waters came to the neighborhood in 1999. Internal medicine specialists Dr. Earnest and Dr. Sincere met Julie soon after she was admitted to the hospital in October 2000. They were instrumental in getting funding for Julie's care when her mother was unable to pay. They are members of Worried M.D.s for Social Responsibility, a self-proclaimed liberal, national public interest group that gets actively involved in national political issues.

The physicians told Ms. Waters that they were suspicious about the causes of Julie's illness. Three cancer and birth-defect incidents on the same street, the physicians said, were not a coincidence.