

COMMUNICATING THE WAR ON TERROR
A two-day conference held in London on 5 and 6 June 2003

Organised by the **Centre for Defence Studies** at King's College, London

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Summary and proceedings authored by:
Bill Durodié and Brendan O'Neill

Communicating the War on Terror

What should governments tell the public about terror threats? How much information should the authorities communicate and by what means? Do official warnings make the public feel more secure, or more scared? How should governments and other official bodies strike a balance between warning us and worrying us? And what is the role of the media in the war on terror -- how should we define the responsibilities of increasingly influential reporters in a time of conflict?

These questions and more were addressed at an ambitious two-day conference at the Royal Institution in London on 5 and 6 June 2003. "Communicating the War on Terror" was organised by the Centre for Defence Studies at King's College London in association with the Royal Institution, and sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council. It brought together journalists, government representatives, scientists, emergency services experts and academics from across Britain -- and from as far afield as the United States of America and Israel -- to interrogate and debate the war on terror thus far.

The conference was split into two blocks. Day one focused on the question "What should governments tell the public about terror threats?", raising issues relating to the nature and timing of warnings, the extent of the terror threat, the impact of terrorism on individuals and communities, and the efficacy of certain biological and chemical weapons. Day two posed the question: "What is the role of the media in the war on terror?" In light of claims that the media is more influential than ever -- as journalists are cultivated by governments and the media becomes a player in its own right in public debates -- day two brought together prominent editors and journalists to assess the success or otherwise of the media's coverage of the war on terror, and whether journalists have special responsibilities in times of war.

The conference was one of the first to cover the war on terror in such depth and from such varied viewpoints. The following summary of the proceedings and debates gives an insight into the level of debate that was achieved and the varied, diverse conclusions that were arrived at.

-- DAY ONE: WHAT SHOULD GOVERNMENTS TELL THE PUBLIC ABOUT TERROR THREATS?

The US Department for Homeland Security has a Terrorist Threat Warning System, while the UK Home Office issues advice on what to do in the event of a terrorist assault. But are governments doing enough to warn us of terrorist threat -- or are they being complacent? Some argue that governments give too many warnings, leading to cynicism about the terrorist threat among the general public. What balance should governments strike between warning us and worrying us....? The opening day examined

governments' role and responsibilities in relation to terror and terror warnings.

-- OPENING REMARKS

In the opening session the conference organiser, Bill Durodié, and the Right Honourable Nick Raynsford MP, Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions and head of the London Resilience Forum, outlined some areas of discussion for the forthcoming day of debate on terror warnings. Both speakers articulated what they considered to be the themes and areas relevant for the first day of debate.

Bill Durodié opened the conference with the words: "Our chairs have got a simple job..." According to Durodié, "There is only really one question that we want to address: are we getting the balance right? This is the fundamental question that will be addressed within a range of different issues and from many different angles and perspectives."

Durodié indicated that the two days of discussion would raise sometimes difficult and awkward issues for those present -- many of whom invest time, energy and their expertise into trying to stop, combat or deal with the effects of terrorism. But he argued that such issues had to be broached in order fully to understand and appraise the execution of the war on terror to date.

"We're not in a position to address the issue of the existence of weapons of mass destruction", said Durodié, the conference having taken place at the height of the controversy over Britain and America's failure to uncover WMD in postwar Iraq; "but we might for instance question their potency -- or indeed the potency of al-Qaeda."

Durodié continued: "There are some uncomfortable questions for policymakers, government and emergency planners to address in this debate. Despite all good intentions to act only on pieces of specific evidence, there is, I think, a tendency and a proclivity to imagine the worst and to end up erring on the side of caution -- which means taking actions which sometimes some people might think are a bit extreme."

This theme of caution -- and whether there is too much of it in relation to terror warnings and anti-terror operations -- would be a recurring theme of the conference, predicted Durodié.

"There are instances where caution itself can become a real barrier to what we are trying to achieve in the war on terror", he argued. For Durodié, one of the central themes of the debate about terror and terror warnings, in relation to questions of caution and precaution, was whether government action has the effect of undermining solidarity between people, rather than strengthening it. "Barriers between human beings, putting concrete blocks up, asking for greater surveillance and all other manner of gadgets -- these

may end up eroding social bonds that we need to rely upon if resilience is ultimately to be called upon”, he said.

Alongside raising what he considered to be one of the central themes of the two days, Durodié spelled out the breadth of the conference: “Beyond that, we are discussing a range of other issues -- to do with trust and the public perception of the debate. And on day two, we will be examining in some detail the role and responsibilities of the media -- whether it’s all spin and hype, or whether maybe the media are filling the vacuum abdicated by other experts who ought to be speaking up at such a time.”

“I think government is acutely conscious of the need to regain people’s trust in the current climate”, summarised Durodié. “And in my mind, it may well be the battle against cynicism at home which turns out to be the biggest one of all in the war on terror.”

Durodié’s opening remarks were followed by those of Nick Raynsford MP. Raynsford is a key British government figure in relation to the issue of terrorism, how to fight it, and how effectively to engage the public in taking a stand against the threat of terror. As well as being Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions, Raynsford chairs the London Resilience Forum.

This was set up in the aftermath of the 11th of September attacks on New York and Washington, DC in the United States of America in 2001. It is an interagency team, with experts from the emergency services, transport operators, utilities, National Health Service (NHS) and local government, and was commissioned to review London’s preparedness for dealing with a potential terror assault.

The Forum has many sub-committees and working groups, each of which concentrates on a particular aspect of London’s preparedness. These individual groups include: the Blue Lights Sub-Committee (dealing with matters related to the emergency services); the Utilities Sub-Committee (dealing with matters affecting the key utilities such as water, gas and telecommunications); the Business Sub-Committee (representing the general business community); the Health Sub-Committee; the Transport Sub-Committee; the Communications Sub-Committee (tasked with ensuring arrangements for warning and informing the public); and the Local Authorities Sub-Committee. Together, these committees and working groups seek to evaluate and improve London’s ability to deal with a major catastrophe or terror assault, and its ability to warn citizens of an imminent attack.

Raynsford began by describing the origins of his role at the London Resilience Forum, “a body which has evolved as a result of the decision taken immediately after the 11th of September by the Home Secretary, who asked me to undertake a review of London’s readiness and resilience, its ability to cope with catastrophic incidents, and indeed its capability to respond to any significant threat.”

"To meet that responsibility I established a team of experts, and they came from a range of different bodies", explained Raynsford. "One of the key characteristics was that the team was dependent on individuals from a wide variety of different organisations, and that, in my judgement, has proved extremely valuable in getting a sense of working together, and a sense of common ownership for the work of the London Resilience Team." The theme of bringing together experts from different fields was a recurring one in Raynsford's opening remarks, and indeed during the rest of the day's discussion. Questions of a multiagency approach to terror, the pooling of resources and the improvement of communication between organisations were raised many times by speakers and discussants.

Raynsford continued: "The amount of ground covered in the past 18 months has been enormous, looking across the board at a range of different areas, different institutions, and different potential threats and risks, and trying to ensure all those involved are themselves aware of not just the individual risks that they potentially face but above all the inter-relationship -- because in a sophisticated modern society it is the inter-relationship between a range of different organisations that is critical to resilience and making sure that that works is one of the biggest challenges that we face."

One of Raynsford's other key themes was communication -- and the difficulty with striking a balance between providing the public with necessary information in the event of a potential attack and not frightening people into acting in a detrimental fashion:

"The issue of communications is one that the London Mayor [Ken Livingstone] and I have recognised as being central to resilience. At the same time, we know that it poses very, very significant challenges, both in terms of what gets said in anticipation of potential catastrophic incidents, and also in terms of in what way the information is imparted to all concerned in the event of an incident.

"We recognise that a balance has to be achieved. This is pretty fundamental, and it's best characterised by the phrase, 'alert but not alarmed'. Obviously, a huge amount of work has got to go into ensuring that that balance is kept right, and that we continue to put significant effort into this area -- keeping our arrangements and policies under constant review and committing ourselves to achieving, to the best of our abilities, that very difficult balance.

"Our first and highest priority is public safety, and public safety -- the protection of the public -- conditions our whole approach. The government and the police will not hesitate to issue public warnings, if they think this is the best way to protect against a specific threat. But our view is that that is the only good reason for issuing information associated with intelligence. We are not in the business of educating terrorists, jeopardising intelligence operations, or causing disruption to normal life and unnecessary alarm."

Raynsford spelled out some of the problems the authorities have had over the past two years in striking a balance between alertness and alarm, and in convincing the public that terror threats are real, and that information should be acted upon sensibly. One problem for the London Resilience Forum, argued Raynsford, was that warnings were often hyped up to such an extent that two things tended to occur -- the public have adopted a cynical approach to warnings, and could potentially feel themselves excluded from real discussions and debates about terror and how to fight it.

“A measured approach to communicating the level of threat is important, as is communicating the degree of risk posed by these threats”, said Raynsford. “But as everyone knows from experience -- and you only have to mention incidents such as the threat at Heathrow a few months ago -- as soon as an issue of that nature is highlighted, there is enormous scope for interpretation and for the issue to be hyped up in a way that does not necessarily present a truly accurate picture of the reality. So this is a very difficult area, where a great deal of care has to be taken to ensure that one is communicating the degree of risk, the level of threat -- but in a way that doesn't lend itself to potential misinterpretation.”

In terms of bringing the public on board in discussions about the terror threat, an issue outlined by Durodié in his opening remarks to the conference, Raynsford said: “We must also ensure that we don't forget to communicate to the public about the role that they can play, in being vigilant and alert.

“It is important both in terms of their own safety, but also in enhancing the resilience of the whole of society against specific threats. In relation to vigilance, we ensure that the profile of the threat is conveyed to the public; we elicit their help in fighting terrorism. A good example is the recent campaign run by the Metropolitan Police, to raise awareness and provide advice to members of the public.”

Raynsford also touched upon what proved to be another central and recurring theme of the day -- the difficult question of whether terror warnings sometimes end up doing the terrorists' job for them. He recognised that, as the aim of terror is to spread fear, it was crucial that governments did not themselves spread fear as part of their efforts to combat terrorism and accordingly dull the impact of key messages on communities. “Today's conference is about how we communicate the war on terror”, he said, “and we must always be mindful that the overall aim of terrorism is very much to communicate fear, alarm and the experience of terror. Risk communication is an opportunity for terrorists to achieve their objectives -- we must not be their agents.”

Continuing on the theme of risk communication of terror threats, and the need to get the balance right, Raynsford said: “In reading through the suggested material in the run-up to this event, I noted a key message, contained within the document on 'Risk Communication Guidelines for

Public Officials'. Like the guiding principles of the medical profession it emphasises that first we 'must do no harm'.

"That I believe must be uppermost in our minds at all times. We're all aware that there are difficulties and challenges when communicating on these very difficult issues. There are many questions and not always a single, clear, direct answer -- and I am pleased to find many of the principles that we're applying in our strategy on this contained within the literature that is supporting the thinking here at this event.

"One key issue, and an obviously difficult one, is the amount of information that should be made available to the public. If we overwhelm people with information they may become confused about which aspects are relevant to which circumstances, and they may in response react inappropriately to certain types of incident. But there's also the risk that they may become subject to a law of diminishing returns; when there is a real threat which requires the public's focus, this may be more difficult to achieve. The child crying wolf syndrome is very obviously relevant."

Raynsford raised two further issues that had preoccupied the London Resilience Forum in its debates about London's preparedness for attack: the issue of intelligence, and of maintaining good community relations. "Most people here today will be aware of the reality of the quantity of intelligence information that exists", he said. "There's a vast amount of intelligence, that is received on a daily basis, much of which has successfully resulted in action leading to the prevention of incidents, and arrests.

"It's fair to say, however, that it comes from many sources, is of varied quality, and often not specific about a target or time. There are also very sensitive issues regarding community relations. Certain types of publicity contend to reinforce stereotypes, and foster crude associations between particular ethnic, religious or cultural groups and the threats posed by terrorism. We have no wish to undermine good community relations or unnecessarily or disproportionately disrupt daily life. Nor do we intend to make it easier for the terrorists to achieve their aims -- through spreading fear, anxiety and worry, and conflict between different communities. Yet at the same time we must not be complacent."

"When it comes to giving advice and communicating to the public in order to alert them", concluded Raynsford, "we must give the right information to the right people at the right time.

"No method of communication, of course, is going to be perfect. We cannot reach one hundred per cent of the people one hundred per cent of the time. But the advice we give must be of help and it must be relevant -- and it must not be either too complex or too specific on the one side, or too bland and too general on the other.... There is no shortage of determination here in the UK -- and we take that spirit into our work on prevention, on preparedness, on response and on recovery from the challenges we face.

“Effective communication at every stage is vital if we are to achieve the right outcome. Public safety is, of course, our number one priority.”

-- OPENING PLENARY: WARNINGS

There have been numerous warnings about terror issued since the events of 11 September 2001 -- but what is the role of the modern terror warning? Has it gone beyond giving the public practical information to help us avoid being harmed or killed, towards something else? Do warnings bring people together against a common threat -- or further atomise us by heightening our sense of fear? This opening plenary brought together speakers from universities, and from political organisations and civil liberties groups, to interrogate both the efficacy and ethics of the attempts to deal with the terror threat.

Professor Lawrence Freedman was first to speak. Freedman has been Professor of War Studies at King’s College, London since 1982, and in 2002 he became Head of the School of Social Sciences and Public Policy at King’s College. He was appointed Official Historian of the Falklands Campaign in 1997. Freedman examined whether it was reasonable to expect us to understand and prepare for new forms of terrorism, when such terrorist action often appears more unpredictable and apolitical than the terrorism of earlier periods.

Following on from the morning’s opening remarks, Freedman commented: “We’re not just searching for a balance between panic and complacency in the question of warnings, but a number of the competing policy objectives. I want to talk about the strategic aspects of this -- to give warnings a strategic context, going beyond the public service approach which obviously starts with needing to mitigate the risks of a terrorist attack and the need to protect life and property.”

By broadening out the question of terror warnings to incorporate questions of strategy and politics, Freedman added a further dimension to the conference proceedings -- beyond the practical question of how to deal with terrorism and into the realm of international and power relations: “The strategic approach is going to be concerned in particular with the relationships between the government and the terrorists, the government and the protagonists, and possibly also the relationships with other governments who might suffer from terrorist activities in their territories.”

Freedman made clear, however, that strategic issues and public safety could not simply be separated in a mechanical way; he argued that, indeed, there was a close relationship between the two: “The warnings, therefore, are geared towards reshaping strategic relationships, and in doing that, of course, it is impossible for governments not to think about the effects on public attitudes and behaviour. Apart from anything else there are legal insurance issues, particularly in relation to foreign travel.

"It's often also very difficult to be specific enough with any of these warnings in order to be helpful to the public but cause them to alter their behaviour too much. The alternative dangers include describing the threat in such lurid ways that they become dysfunctional and cause the very effect on society that we're trying to avoid. If you look at the evidence from the United States of America and elsewhere, the real effects on behaviour come, not from statements from government, but from the actual experience of incidents, of knowing that something has happened, where people cancel flights or stay at home -- whereas if they're given a vague warning beforehand, they might behave otherwise."

In developing the discussion of terror warnings within a strategic context, Freedman drew a striking contrast between Britain's experience of the Provisional Irish Republican Army's violent campaign in the 1970s and 80s (and the ways in which different political and emergency service organisations dealt with those attacks and threats), and the more amorphous threat posed by "new terrorist movements" such as al-Qaeda today.

"One of the conclusions one might draw is that warnings have their greatest effect in very particular strategic contexts", Freedman argued. "I want to go back to the campaign we often refer to when showing how experienced we are in all this -- the Provisional IRA's campaign in mainland Britain from the 1970s through to the 1990s, when Londoners became very familiar with terrorist threats."

Freedman continued: "That terror campaign took many unexpected and varied terms, and by and large a degree of understanding developed. Those most in danger were politicians and military personnel who might be attacked without warning. The ordinary public could expect to be inconvenienced, but they would be very unlucky to be hurt or maimed themselves. Of course, some were.

"For detection there were certain rules to follow -- such as don't leave bags unattended, checking under cars and looking for wires protruding out of packages. The best advice, however, for the general public, was to do what the police asked you to do. There were many false alarms of course, but there were sufficient real explosions for people to stay clear when told to do so. This meant that by and large, and with some terrible exceptions, people did get timely warnings. The point was that the timely warnings came from the terrorists themselves.

"The warnings were given through coded messages, usually one hour before the timed explosion. To gain credibility these codes were correct enough to require notice, and for the IRA they had a number of advantages -- they could demonstrate that the campaign was against physical targets or the military or politicians but not against ordinary civilians. The IRA could maintain some control -- if things went wrong the police could be blamed for not responding quickly enough, or for evacuating people from the wrong location or even in the wrong direction."

Freedman pointed out how, in the case of the IRA's campaign on mainland Britain, organised and coherent warnings played an important role for the IRA itself, beyond the desire to avoid civilian casualties and highlight the military nature of the conflict. Terror warnings served an actual strategic purpose for the terrorists themselves. "Warnings were another weapon in the armoury -- they could be used to add to the disruption, either by being non-specific or simply mischievous, when warnings were given but nothing would be found.

"In fact, the IRA tended to get two bangs for their bucks by following real attacks with hoax warnings. So here we have an example of strategic warning, except that it served the terrorists' strategy in a campaign designed to cause disruption over an extended period -- small incidents, reinforced by hoax warnings, could do as much as a single big hit."

Also, Freedman continued, the political nature of the IRA's warnings and campaigns, giving rise to an element of certainty or predictability in relation to the IRA's violent acts, allowed the authorities to deal with the IRA attacks fairly well. "While at times the actions of the Provisionals were curious, at the peak of their campaigning they were understood well enough for the emergency services and the police to have to be able to adjust to and work around attacks."

"But now compare that with al-Qaeda terrorism", Freedman continued, "where the public is the target." In contrast to other commentators, many of whom argue that al-Qaeda and other new terrorist networks have no political agenda but are merely interested in killing huge numbers of innocents, Freedman sought to place al-Qaeda's terrorist actions within some kind of strategic framework -- however much it might differ from the relative predictability of the IRA's campaign.

"There is the question of whether targeting the public reflects a strategy -- it may be the case that death and destruction are sought for their own sake, a sort of act of cleansing or retribution. But it's not really terrorism unless it has some sort of political purpose, and we have to assume that the aim is to cause such strain in the system that it leads at the very least to changes in foreign policy.

"If the objective is mass destruction, it requires surprise. To achieve this, terrorists can benefit from a wide range of choices of target, weapon and location. They need never claim responsibility, unlike the Provisionals. Their organisation is known to be loose, so that they can take responsibility for almost anything that happens even if they are not directly responsible.

"It's also a campaign with very few incidents, in contrast to the regular activities of the IRA. Al-Qaeda's activities are extremely geographically dispersed across continents -- and as long as they keep their warnings to generalities, they can issue the direst of threats. If nothing happens, of

course, they risk losing their credibility. The severity of any actual action of course, means that the risk of future attacks cannot be readily dismissed.”

Freedman articulated one particular difficulty that faces political authorities and emergency services seeking to counter and deal with such an amorphous campaign: “It’s extremely hard for anybody to learn from a campaign like this -- because of the sheer variety that is possible in the nature of the attacks.” He argued that, as a result of the nature of al-Qaeda terrorism (anonymous, loose, ill-defined), warnings by their nature would have to originate from the authorities. “Any warnings are not going to come from the terrorists -- therefore they have to come from the government. And they have to address the problem locally and globally. As we saw with the Bali bombing, even when the attack is in another country, a government can still get the blame for failing to give the population adequate warning.”

Picking up on Durodié’s and Raynsford’s opening comments in relation to potential problems caused by overreaction and caution, Freedman argued: “Lives cannot be lived in a heightened state of alert -- and enormous economic damage can be caused if people attempt to do so. If the precautionary principle is followed rigidly, then airlines go bust, tourist destinations collapse, and city centres gradually become deserted. There’s a benefit for al-Qaeda here -- the more it warns, the greater the potential economic damage. But the more it fails to warn and something happens, the greater the actual political and economic damage.” In both scenarios, argued Freedman, the warning plays a specific and sometimes fruitful role for terrorist movements.

“It is often said that terrorists can’t be deterred, because of the current lots’ suicidal and homicidal nature”, concluded Freedman. “But this comes back to the question of strategic purpose. Obviously if they have no purpose other than causing death and destruction, then the failure to produce advantageous political effects may not bother them.

“But it does seem to me that if their actions appear futile and possibly counterproductive over time, then it will eventually lead to a reduced commitment, fewer recruits and so on. So it may well be that one reason we haven’t had a major terrorist incident, despite regular scares, is at least in part because of this deterrent effect. The terrorists have been scared away, knowing there is a greater risk of deterrence and capture.”

“If it’s the case that there are multiple audiences for these communications and terrorism-related messages, does it make sense to have the public as the first addressee?” asked Freedman, taking up Raynsford’s earlier comments on first and foremost informing the public and encouraging a culture of public safety.

“In some ways I would suggest almost the opposite. It’s difficult to calibrate the language, and get the effects right from complacency to panic. And no government is ever going to move down from amber to green, or say it’s completely safe -- that is asking for trouble.”

Patrick Mercer followed Freedman. Mercer is Member of Parliament for Newark and Retford, sits on the Defence Select Committee and is Conservative Shadow Minister for Homeland Security. He has served in the military, including a spell in Uganda and nine tours of Northern Ireland, during which time he achieved the rank of Colonel. He obtained an OBE in 1997 for services in Bosnia, having previously been Mentioned in Despatches, received a Gallantry commendation and been awarded an MBE. He has worked as an Instructor for the Army Staff College, lectured at Cranfield University and been a member of the King's College London team tasked with the design of government policy for East Timor in 2000.

Mercer outlined the challenges facing modern governments making warnings about potential terror attacks: "We have to prove to the public exactly where the threat lies -- and think very carefully about how we expect them to respond to the threat, and how terrified or otherwise we, as I hope a responsible government and politicians, choose to make them."

As an aside, Mercer even suggested that terrorists could assist in getting the public to take seriously the threat posed by terror: "The terrorists *can* help in a certain way. Regular bangs, regular assassinations, as long as they are not too nasty or too dreadful, can be thoroughly helpful -- in terms of warning the population that they should take care."

Mercer spoke of some of the current difficulties in getting people to take on board terror warnings, and to act accordingly. "It has been extremely hard to persuade the public that we narrowly avoided a biological attack at Christmas", he said. "There could have been dozens of casualties in north London, following a ricin attack -- the first that we would ever have seen in this country. These are just some of the instances that we in the public, from open sources, get to know about.

"It is extremely hard, also, to convince people that there is a threat lurking -- not only lurking but perhaps ready to stand up and bite us in a serious way. We're not strangers in this country to terrorism. There was an understanding of terrorism from Victorian society through to Edwardian society through to modern society, about how terrorism could and could not work.

"The aim of terror is to terrorise -- and that need not necessarily be done by the terrorists. It could just as effectively be done by the government or its officers, as by the terrorists themselves. What should we do?"

Addressing the complex issue of how to warn without worrying, while getting the public to act quickly and sensibly in response to such warnings, Mercer outlined government's three options:

"First, we could ignore this thing completely, and fall straight into the camp of complacency. Second, we absolutely scare people rigid and have what I saw in February in Washington, which was missile batteries deployed in the

centre of the town, ourselves as the UK Defence Committee moved from place to place by armoured Humvee and by policemen carrying their respirators in the ready position. The third option is somewhere between the two: to come to terms with threat as it really exists.”

Taking up some of Freedman’s themes, Mercer continued: “During the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the terrorists actually obliged us; they helped us, by carrying out a low-level terrorist campaign, which because of public alerts we were able to come to terms with and to control and contain.

“If you went shopping in the centre of Belfast, you understood that your car was going to be searched, you knew that you were going to be stopped at the security gates, you knew you were going to be frisked, you knew that you couldn’t park next to certain buildings. You knew that a soldier in full fighting gear would be standing outside your door at certain times of the day. And more importantly, you knew that your police force would be heavily armed.”

Mercer concluded by praising some of the steps taken by the government, while flagging up a few problems that remain around the preparedness of the emergency services. “I believe that the Joint Terrorist Assessment Centre, which has just been formed, is an extremely sensible move by the government”, he said. “I believe that the Civil Contingencies Bill is a good and sensible thing. But if you talk to firemen, policemen and ambulance men about how ready they are to deal with a weapon of mass destruction -- the answer, I’m afraid, is that they are not.”

John Wadham was the final speaker on the subject of ‘Warnings’. As Director of Liberty (formerly the National Council for Civil Liberties) since 1995, Wadham swiftly moved the debate from Freedman’s territory of strategy and international relations, and Mercer’s questions about whether we are ready to withstand an attack, into the difficult area of civil liberties. What will be the impact on individuals’ freedom and liberty of moves to permanently protect against potential attacks? Would we have a repeat of what happened during successive governments’ stand against the Irish Republican Army, when many innocent members of the public were arrested, interrogated and sometimes detained?

Wadham has acted for large numbers of applicants in cases before the Commission and Court of Human Rights. He is also editor of *Your Rights: The Liberty Guide*, the civil liberties section of the *Penguin Guide to the Law*, the case law reports for the *European Human Rights Law Review*, and authored *Blackstone’s Guide to the Human Rights Act 1998* and *Blackstone’s Guide to the Freedom of Information Act 2000*.

“I want to talk about this balancing exercise and the extent to which we have got it right”, started Wadham. “We have a history of terrorism in this country, and we do not always respond to it appropriately. Liberty, then the National Council for Civil Liberties was set up in 1934 -- by 1936 we had

written our first report on the Special Powers Act in Ireland, and I think the situation has not got any better.”

Wadham outlined some already existing problems with the British authorities' responses to terrorism, and outlined how things could get even worse following the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the sporadic rise in instances of Islamic fundamentalist attacks. “Currently we have the most draconian and most comprehensive anti-terrorism legislation probably in Europe and possibly in the rest of the world -- and that was already the case before 11 September. One of the things it is important to realise is what happens with terrorism legislation and what takes place when there are warnings and incidents -- a significant number of innocent people get caught up in the process.”

He went on to argue that there was a “missing toll” in the discussion about warnings and how to brace ourselves for terror attacks -- a toll that could be measured in rising numbers of laws, rising numbers of people arrested and interrogated, and in falling numbers of civil liberties and rights. According to Wadham, the problems that arise when we debate our responses to terrorism but fail to address how to uphold civil liberties simultaneously could best be seen in an example already used by Freedman and Mercer -- the British response to the IRA's campaign.

“Between 1974 and 1992, in Britain, excluding Northern Ireland, there were something like 7,000 people detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act”, he said; “and only a very tiny fraction of those people were ever charged with any offence, and in most cases they were charged with relatively trivial things, nothing to do with terrorism.”

Wadham continued: “What we produced in relation to that legislation, as one author put it, was a ‘suspect community’. People who were Irish and in this country felt that they were suspects and not citizens. What they felt was that when they were in the presence of police officers, of security services, they were more likely to be interviewed as a suspect than as a witness, as a suspect rather than as a victim.

“The PTA of 1974 was rushed through parliament. It was supposed to be in existence for only six months. It was draconian, as admitted by the home secretary of the time. It was renewed of course, after six months -- and it was renewed and renewed and renewed and extended and extended and extended. It was in existence right up to 2000, when it was extended again - - and we now have permanent anti-terrorism legislation.”

Wadham argued that the “new but not improved” anti-terror legislation had effectively criminalised certain kinds of political action. “People who are involved in political activities, and it is suspected that those activities are criminal, have less rights than those who are involved in criminal activities based on greed or rage.

“What happened after 11 September is that the government put through another bill. About 75 per cent of that anti-terrorism bill had nothing to do with anti-terrorism. It was a bill that was on the Home Office’s shelves and it was dumped into that bill and passed. There’s a real danger that, in responding to the threat of terrorism in this consistently draconian way, we distort our criminal justice system, we distort our constitution, we damage our human rights, by always rushing to change the law.”

Finally, said Wadham, the consequences of an overblown and inappropriate response to the attacks of 11 September, and subsequent talk of attacks in Britain, could be seen in the mistreatment of suspects. “The primary weapon in the anti-terrorism act is a provision bringing back internment”, he said. “We already have a number of people who are detained for up to 18 months, who have not been told the details of the allegations against them, who are not going to be tried in a criminal court, who are not going to have the privileges of the presumption of innocence, or the privilege of the case having to be proved beyond reasonable doubt; they’re not going to be tried by a jury.

“And of course they’re going to be tried on the basis of secret material -- which they will not be allowed to see, and they won’t be present when the court decides whether they should be detained further. That is a violation of human rights.” For Wadham, this undermining of individuals’ rights represents an “attack on all our freedoms”, and was the hidden price of failing to balance safety from terrorism with concern for freedom and liberty.

In the discussion that followed Freedman’s, Mercer’s and Wadham’s introductory comments, one audience member argued that the reason we find it so difficult to respond cogently to terrorism today is not so much because the terrorists have changed, but because we have changed. It is because we are fighting a confused war against a concept - terrorism -- rather than against a recognisable state or a group of human beings that we flail and find it increasingly impossible to say what we are for, what the principles are that we are defending. Consequently, the public is “entitled to be disorientated” -- not only because the terror threat is more amorphous today, but because the authorities themselves cannot explain what the war is for or against.

Others asked how we should best balance keeping ourselves primed for and protected against terror, while safeguarding liberties. It was put to John Wadham that sometimes civil liberties would have to take a backseat in a time of crisis. Wadham rejected such a suggestion, arguing that “you do not combat terror by attacking your own populations’ human rights.”

In the discussion that followed, an audience member said: “The exaggeration of the terror warnings seems to me to be in the same category as the exaggeration of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

"There is an element of ignoring the roots of terrorism, which are in frustration. Communication of terrorism warnings often looks like communication of suspicion, where the Muslim communities are looked upon as dangerous."

Another audience member asked: "Surely if we sacrifice liberty for security, we deserve neither?"

One said: "I would like a clearer definition of weapons of mass destruction. This category never previously included chemical and biological weapons, which were terribly unsuccessful at causing mass destruction. Why has the definition now been broadened so?"

Others asked about the definition of the war on terrorism: what was it, who was it for, and what was it against?

Lawrence Freedman responded: "I have never liked the phrase war on terrorism, because it is difficult to declare war on a tactic. But that doesn't mean to say that there is nothing there.

"As we have heard, there is a very important political debate going on -- largely within the Islamic community. The point about the dangers of stereotyping are well taken, because if you're not careful with these debates you could actually increase the distance between sections of the community rather than finding ways of bridging those.

"I think it is always dangerous with something like terrorism to say that we have to go to the roots rather than deal with the symptoms. The roots are considerably in dispute. In terms of what causes it, what kind of people do it, why they do it, and so on.

"The progress that has been made on the Arab/Israeli dispute will inflame many terrorists rather than calm them down, because on both sides there will be people who see it as a sell-out. Think we have to be very careful about assuming that there is a political solution to this."

Patrick Mercer's closing comments in response to audience questions were: "Of course we need to adapt. The threat is not as it was originally during the Second World War or indeed as it was during the IRA campaign. We adapted to the Cold War, with organisations specially made, because the threat was real and we had to be ready for it. We had to be able to spot downwind hazards and the like.

"Also, I do believe that the nation does need to be aware of the threat. Maybe we do need to be turned into a nation of terrorism-spotters; if we are then maybe we will be able to stand well against terrorism."

John Wadham said: "When I was talking before about how the Irish were a 'suspect community' in the 1970s and 80s, I was saying that my concern now is that we have turned Arabs into a new suspect community.

"I think if we are going to build a new society we need to make sure that we are treating people equally, and the fact that someone's a Muslim doesn't automatically make them a suspect.

"The second point, and I disagree with Nick Raynsford on this, the government seems to think that information belongs to them and they can give it a bit of a spin and then they can deliver it to the public and then the public is able to use it.

"The truth of the matter is that we pay our taxes and the information belongs to us; if they have information they should give it to us.

"There are a few circumstances where it might be justified to not give that information out; but for Blair or Raynsford or anybody else to say we have got this information but we're not going to give it out, because we think it is in the public's best interests that they don't know, I think that is fundamentally wrong."

-- CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS - ANTHRAX AND RICIN

Since the post-9/11 anthrax attacks in America and the purported discovery of ricin in a flat in north London in late 2002, many in the Western world have expressed fear of such potential weapons. While some scientists argue that anthrax and ricin are not effective as weapons of mass destruction, others claim that they are ideal weapons for modern terrorists. How should governments, and the media, respond?

In this session, chaired by Branwen Morgan, who helped coordinate the conference for King's College, speakers from the fields of weapons science, international security and emergency response outlined the history of, and debated the efficacy or otherwise of, two variants of chemical/biological weapons -- anthrax and ricin.

Malcolm Dando opened. Dando is co-director of the Department of Peace Studies project on strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), at Bradford University in England. He has also conducted a study for the Ministry of Defence on 'The impact of the use of chemical or biological weapons and agents on the ability of British forces to carry out military operations in the period 2000-2020'. He was the expert advisor for the Equinox TV programme *Deadly Code*, and is the author of a book entitled, *New Biological Weapons: Threat, Proliferation and Control*.

Dando started with a potted history of the use of biological weapons. "For a former biologist like myself, having had an interest in arms control for the past 20 years, and particularly biological arms control for the last 10 years, it is better for me to try to sketch out some of the context in which we should try to understand these agents."

“There were uses of biological agents in antiquity and the Middle Ages”, said Dando, “and some of these are actually very well documented. For instance the use by the British of smallpox in the Indian wars in North America are historically recorded and quite clear. But what was not understood by the people who used those agents was quite how the agents worked; therefore, a scientific approach to biological warfare wasn’t possible until the back end of the nineteenth century, when people like Pasteur in France and Koch in Germany created what was called the Golden Age of bacteriology, where we actually understood how an agent like anthrax really works.”

Dando immediately pointed up the benefits of this Golden Age of bacteriology, in order to, in his words, “stave off any notion that bacteria are bad, bad, bad”. “At the back end of the nineteenth century we have the marvellous benign impact of this Golden Age”, he said, when “you see a tremendous decline in infant mortality and we finally get a grip on infectious diseases. This is the benign side to the story and that benign side runs all the way through -- we must always keep that in mind.”

“But on the other hand”, he said, “by the time of the First World War, both sides were using agents such as anthrax to attack the very valuable draught animal stocks of the other side.”

“Following the First World War we have a number of offensive biological weapons programmes investigated by major states in the interwar years”, Dando continued. “In particular, there was an absolutely massive Japanese effort to produce biological warfare agents and to use them. It’s often said that biological weapons have never been used -- that is untrue. They were used extensively by the Japanese against the Chinese, both Chinese civilians and the military.

“However, the Japanese programme, although massive and gruesome, was not very scientific. It was the British, at the beginning of the Second World War, who took a proper scientific approach to the problem. Because the British were concerned about the possibility of a German attack with biological agents, they produced what they called a ‘retaliatory agent’ -- five million anthrax-impregnated cattle cakes. The idea was that, if we were attacked with biological agents by Germany, we would drop this lot all over Germany, to wipe out the German cattle industry.”

Dando explained that it was through this process of developing retaliatory agents to protect against potential German use of agents, and subsequent investigations, that we discovered what were the most productive ways to use anthrax as a weapon. “We came to understand what has been the main theme of anti-personnel biological warfare since”, he said; “and that was to understand that the best way to attack people with these agents was to float the agent in the air in such a way that it would be breathed in by the intended victims and cause disease. So this is where we have the first evidence that, although in nature anthrax can be gastrointestinal, inhaled anthrax is the way in which a biological agent would best be used.”

After the Second World War, explained Dando, further discoveries about biological weapons and their potential uses were made. "The US programme in the initial stages of the Cold War was massive. It led to the weaponisation of what are called the traditional agents -- like anthrax, botulinum toxins, and agents that were used to attack plants, such as rice blast, wheat stem rust. The Americans did not bother to weaponise things with which to attack animals."

Dando concluded by arguing that, while agents had proven themselves effective as weapons over the previous 100 years, it remained uncertain whether they could be put to use by terrorist groups today. "From the history you can draw certain conclusions -- it is possible to use biological agents on different scales. You can use them for assassination, you can use them for terrorism, medium-scale, you can use them for strategic military use or as a weapon of mass destruction. You can use them against different targets -- against animals, against plants, against human beings, and you can use a very wide range of different agents. This suggests that such weaponised agents remain problematic -- though there is not a great deal to suggest that terrorists have thus far managed to weaponise these agents."

Dlawer Ala'Aldeen followed Dando. Ala'Aldeen is a Professor of Clinical Microbiology at the University of Nottingham and he also heads the Molecular Bacteriology and Immunology Group at Nottingham's University Hospital. His main area of research is the prevention of bacterial diseases by vaccines and improving our understanding of human response to infection. He has a long-standing academic and also personal interest in chemical and biological weapons disarmament; he was born in Kurdistan and his parents and siblings were among the victims of chemical weapons used there.

Ala'Aldeen kicked off with some words of warning: "In answer to the question, 'what would make a good weapon for mass destruction or for terrorism?', I would say in simple terms: anything that harms the body can actually be used."

But, he continued, "in military terms, you don't have that many choices. One could be forgiven for wondering what makes countries like Russia get involved in this kind of potential weaponry, and invest in some ridiculous items that not only do not pose a threat to ordinary people, but not even to military machines."

Ala'Aldeen displayed a list of agents, including ricin and anthrax. "Of these only a few are actually effective weapons of terror", he said. "And even fewer would be effective weapons of mass destruction."

"So the question is: what would make a good weapon of mass destruction and what would make a good weapon of terror?" On this issue, Ala'Aldeen pointed up what would be a recurring theme in the discussion about chemical and biological weapons in this session and others -- whether their impact was in their ability to kill or rather in their ability to instil fear and

panic into populations already primed by the authorities about the dangers of such weapons and constantly bombarded with frightening information about deadly agents. "The answer to the question", said Ala'Aldeen, "is that if you want to kill a lot of people you need the special agents and you need a delivery system -- and if you want to terrify people you don't really need to kill a lot of people."

Ala'Aldeen displayed pictures of anthrax and ricin, raising the question "What makes these good weapons?" Taking anthrax first, he said, "on the issue of whether or not we can treat anthrax -- the answer is yes and no."

"You can treat all the mild forms of anthrax", he said, "and if you catch the patient early you can treat him with very simple, cheap and safe antibiotics like penicillin. Although we should remember that the Russians engineered penicillin-resistance into organisms. Is anthrax a good agent for mass destruction -- the answer is no, simply because terrorists could only kill one or two people before the whole state would become alert and quite straightforwardly deal with it. Killing mass numbers of people is not possible by terrorists using anthrax -- but terrifying a lot of people is. Anthrax is a *horror agent*, more than an effective weapon of mass destruction. Mostly, America and Britain's systems could deal with an anthrax attack."

On ricin, Ala'Aldeen again described the potential horrors caused by this agent -- but pointed to the difficulties in using it as a mass weapon. "Essentially, ricin is a poison that is a by-product of castor oil and it's not difficult to make", he said. "The substance is very stable so it can be weaponised, in the form of powder or mist or some other form. Depending on the preparation you can develop it for inhalation or ingestion or injection; and depending on the route of administration, the dose could be variable. But tiny amounts, less than the size of a chickpea, could kill a human being, especially if it's injected."

However, concluded Ala'Aldeen, "if it's to be powdered and dispersed you need a much larger quantity to kill somebody. The important thing is that ricin simply destroys cells. Wherever it is delivered to, ricin looks around and kills cells indiscriminately. The symptoms are variable, but the way it's delivered is the most important thing and determines whether or not it will be effective in visiting destruction on large numbers of people."

The final speaker was Gregory Saathoff. Saathoff is Associate Professor of Research in Psychiatric Medicine at the University of Virginia's School of Medicine, and Executive Director of the University of Virginia's Critical Incident Analysis Group. Since 1996, he has also served as the Conflict Resolution Specialist to the FBI's Critical Incident Response Group, where he consults with the Crisis Negotiation Unit and the National Centre for the Analysis of Violent Crime.

Saathoff spoke of the impact that wrongheaded reaction to a biological or chemical attack could have. He argued that biological attacks could potentially "spread both disease and fear, resulting in an equally dangerous

and contagious chain reaction of social disruption.” According to Saathoff, a serious danger is that fear could cloud people’s judgment, leading to paranoia and panic. The wrong response to a bioterrorist attack could well increase casualties and promote the terrorists’ cause, he argued. Saathoff returned to some of the themes raised by Ala’Aldeen, examining the extent to which anthrax and ricin are “horror agents”, the bringers of panic, rather than necessarily being able to cause a massive amount of damage on their own merits.

-- EMERGENCY PLANNING - ARE WE READY?

The UK Home Office has built a website to advise us on what to do in the event of a terrorist attack -- but is the government itself ready to deal with an assault? At the end of 2002, a National Audit Office report found that the National Health Service is unprepared for a terrorist attack ‘involving biological, chemical or radioactive weapons’. What’s the plan behind the ‘emergency planning’?

This session was chaired by Sir Timothy Garden, who retired from the RAF in 1996 as an Air Vice Marshal. Among other things, Sir Timothy flew strategic bombers and helicopters and served as Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff responsible for the defence programme. After retirement, Sir Timothy became Director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House and is now a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Defence Studies at King’s College.

Tim Fry, Senior Audit Manager at the National Audit Office, outlined the theme of the debate. Fry raised the problem of the emergency services “being excellent, but still not fully prepared for a terrible attack”.

In recent years Fry has concentrated on the health sector, investigating and writing high-profile reports on NHS waiting lists, hip replacements and emergency planning in the NHS. Tim has a particular interest in quality of service issues, on which he has been a consultant to the OECD and the World Bank. He is a frequent speaker at conferences on health, audit and quality of service subjects in the UK, Europe, the USA, Far East and Australia.

Fry argued that there should be “closer coordination” between the main emergency services, in order to “better prepare London and other major cities for dealing with any kind of terrorist attack, or indeed, any other kind of catastrophe.”

Sarah Norman also spoke in this session. Trained as a Registered Comprehensive Nurse, Norman completed a BSc (Hons) Development and Health in Disaster Management before travelling to Ethiopia to work as the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for Concern Worldwide during the most recent food crisis.

Following the tragic events of 9/11, she returned to university and completed an MSc (by research) in Disaster Management on 'Coordination of Emergency Management Strategies between First Responders in London and Central Government'. She is currently a Health Emergency Planning Adviser (HEPA) for the Health Protection Agency in London. Norman talked about the need to prioritise a "health-centric" response to threats, where keeping people safe from harm would take priority.

Giles York, a Detective Superintendent in the Intelligence and Investigation function at Kent Police, described how the police had a "special responsibility" to forge relations with other emergency services and to "communicate effectively and subtly" its intelligence and information relating to the threat of terrorism.

-- AFTERNOON PLENARY - TRUST, RUMOURS AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

How should governments engage the public? Does the public trust government enough to heed their terror warnings? Governments now talk up the possibility of issuing warnings through "grassroots organisations", by enlisting community groups and schools and colleges to help with communicating threats. Will this make warnings more effective?

This midday plenary was chaired by Bill Durodié. He set the tone by arguing that this would be "one of the most important sessions we will have today". Referencing his opening remarks given to the conference, Durodié said that the discussion on trust and public perception would tap into one of the most crucial questions surrounding the communication of the war on terror: "Have we moved into a time when healthy scepticism has been replaced by unhealthy cynicism?" The session's speakers were: Norman Solomon, Onora O'Neill and Frank Furedi.

Solomon is a journalist known for his strong stance against America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Based in America, where he is a syndicated columnist on media and politics, Solomon is founder and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, a national consortium of policy researchers and analysts. As well as being a prolific journalist, he has written several books assessing media spin and techniques of managing public perceptions. In 1999, a collection of his columns won the George Orwell Award for Distinguished Contributions to Honesty and Clarity in Public Language. His op-ed articles have appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsday*, *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Miami Herald*, *USA Today*, *International Herald Tribune* and the *Jordan Times*.

Solomon opened the session: "When we talk about public perception and trust, one of the speakers this morning was quite on point when he mentioned the importance of government having legitimacy in the eyes of the public. And rather than advocate cynicism, or rather than advocate undue scepticism, I would argue that we strive for what I would call a healthy realism."

“In a democracy, leaders are supposed to earn the public’s trust”, said Solomon. “Now, no matter how loudly those leaders are proclaiming their dedication to fighting terrorism, it is our responsibility not to flinch from examining whether or to what extent those leaders are trustworthy. In broad strokes, to the extent that government is trustworthy then a lack of public trust would be a mistake; to the extent that government is not proven to be trustworthy, then trust would be a mistake.”

Solomon revisited some of America and Britain’s actions around the world since the events of 11 September 2001, arguing that the actions were taken in such a way as to necessarily undermine public trust. “Back on 9/11, one of the first statements to come from the government of my country was from US secretary of state Colin Powell who denounced ‘people who feel that with the destruction of buildings, with the murder of people, they can somehow achieve a political purpose’. That’s an interesting philosophical statement. How credible is the condemnation coming from that source? Is it conceivable that, being fair-minded, the US government has on occasion engaged in the destruction of a building or two; engaged in what some might consider to be the murder of people; for, using Colin Powell’s words, the purpose of ‘somehow achieving a political purpose’? Is that beyond the realm of possibility? Of course not.

“We need only remember the dozen years leading up to that statement by Powell: the invasion of Panama, which he spearheaded as head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the war on Iraq in 1991, the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, and subsequently we have had two major wars.”

Solomon soon moved on to more recent military engagements around the world, and the question of whether our governments deserved our trust and support for such engagements. “Let’s skip ahead to March of this year. On 17 March 2003, a statement made by President George W Bush declared: ‘Intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime does possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised.’ Then on 10 April this year, in a televised message to the people of Iraq, prime minister Tony Blair said: ‘We did not want this war. But in refusing to give up his weapons of mass destruction, Saddam gave us no choice but to act.’ Before and during the war on Iraq we heard a lot of similar statements from officials in London and Washington, statements that ostensibly justified that war.”

In terms of whether the public ought to trust Bush and Blair, Solomon raised the question of double standards in relation to the use of force. He pointed to the hypocrisy of American and British officials, who justified their invasion of Iraq in the name of disarming Saddam of “lethal weapons”, while using their own lethal weapons to do the job. Solomon said:

“Among the horrors of that war are weapons known as cluster bombs, which continue to explode in the hands of children who pick them up. Even on the terms of the war makers the use of those cluster bombs was gratuitous.

"Unfortunately, it is not the wanton cruelty or the magnitude of actions that determines condemnation, but rather the nationalistic and political context of those actions. I think it would be bad enough if the leaders of what we could call the Washington/London axis of anti-terrorism were merely duplicitous in their rationales for going to war; or it would be bad enough if they were honest in their reasons for going to war while ordering their own activities to terrorise civilians.

"But the flagrant dishonesty that this country and my own are now struggling with from the top of their own governments is integral to broader and deeper problems that have huge implications in relation to trust from the public. I would interject here that we talk about the public as if it was some single entity, but in fact in this country and in the USA and as a world there are many publics that need to be addressed and which respond differently."

Solomon argued that in matters relating to the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the British and American governments did not deserve public support or trust, and that their flagrant disregard for public attitudes had resulted in a postwar "mire". "These deep problems with basic policies involve the execution of foreign and domestic policies that tacitly distinguish between worthy and unworthy victims", he argued.

"For instance, you search in vain for statements from Washington condemning its ally Turkey while in recent years the Turkish have driven thousands of Kurds from their homes in Turkey. Where is the condemnation from Washington? They didn't have time -- they were too busy writing the cheques for Turkey's arms."

"Another example: the war on Iraq has been praised for closing down torture chambers in Iraq. Meanwhile billions of dollars continue to flow from Washington to the Egyptian government, which operates torture chambers for political prisoners. One might think that an appropriate way to oppose torture would be to stop paying for it."

Solomon concluded that "the world is now clearly shadowed by a special relationship between two governments -- a superpower and its enabler. In the name of moral leadership they utilise deception, in the name of peace they inflict war, in the name of fighting terrorism they engage in terrorism. Such policies demand trust, but they demand from us unyielding opposition."

After Solomon, Onora O'Neill spoke. Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve studied philosophy, psychology and physiology at Oxford, and went on to do a Harvard PhD. In 1992, she took up her current post as the Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge University. She writes on ethics and political philosophy, and questions of international justice. She is the author of numerous books including *Faces of Hunger: An Essay on Poverty, Development and Justice* (1986), *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of*

Kan's Practical Philosophy (1989), *Towards Justice and Virtue* (1996), *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics* (2002) and *A Question of Trust: The BBC Reith Lectures, 2002*.

O'Neill started: "Trust, rumours and public perception -- it's quite familiar to put these terms together, and I think that familiar conjunction perhaps crystallises the problem -- not because the solution would be anything to do with getting these three terms related in the right way; rather the assumption that these are the three terms that have to be connected seems to me to be mistaken."

O'Neill launched directly into an interrogation of what trust represents -- and whether trust is a passive or active declaration. "The undue prominence of those terms suggest certain things about trust that I think are somewhat misleading", she argued. "It suggests that it might be possible that if one got it right to have the public simply see things a certain way and then they would trust, as if it's a matter of achieving attitudes. I think trust is more active, as is mistrust -- it is ultimately a matter of placing or refusing trust.

"So perhaps there is a mistake in the very idea that trust is an attitude, a response or something based on perception, in which we are passive. Because it seems to me to suggest that everything could be controlled by others -- that we could, to put it crudely, make people trust us if we did it the right way, that we could control their trust. And then we object that this hasn't really worked because there has been a manipulation of news, and there have been people who have spread rumours."

O'Neill argued that "taking a passive view of trust as a matter of attitudes detaches it from an adequate conception of communication -- and that is happening because we have an inadequate concept of communication. How can I say that in the communication age, where we have supposedly more and more communication buzzing around the globe all the time?

"Consider how little of that communication is actually two-way communication, which is what we used to think of as communication, and how much of it is perhaps watching other people communicate. When we are in this passive role we don't always get the basis for a decision on which to place or refuse trust."

For O'Neill the question of communication -- what it consists of today, the undermining of communicative methods, and the tendency for the public to become the passive recipients of information rather than knowledge -- is key to issues of trust and public perception.

"What changes then if we were to remember that placing or refusing trust is a matter of judgement, and that it's active? If we fall into something that we still call communication, which regularly puts forward *untestable* evidence, we frustrate people's ability either to place or refuse trust with good reason -- and they're left having no more than an attitude, feeling vaguely comfortable or vaguely suspicious.

"I think it is easier to believe that we have no problem, because there seems to be so much of what's called communication, and we also have those new gods of 'accountability' and 'transparency'. Well, it's a very particular form of accountability, a form of top-down accountability that is designed to support control by funders, providers, governments, institutions, corporations. It is managerial control and accountability.

"And we have a form of transparency that indeed opposes secrecy, and I'm all for that. But I think it is an illusion to imagine that opposing secrecy achieves communication; in fact, it is often blind to issues of communication."

Indeed, O'Neill argued that the more accountability and transparency there is, the less proper engagement and trust exists across diverse sections of society. She claimed that after "20 years during which we have done a great deal to ratchet up managerial accountability and transparency", we have ended up with "declining attitudes of trust and with public perceptions that are more cynical. If the basis for placing trust or refusing to place it is being able to check things out, how poorly we are served. We get communiqués, we get statements, we get press releases, we get commentators, and it is very difficult, even for the conscientious individual, to check this all out. We end up wondering, rather wearily, which bit of the rumours are true, and who is trying to fix our perceptions."

She concluded by putting the case for more effective forms of communication, and with some advice for public figures seeking to win trust and support. "First of all, face up to the fact that communication is two-way, a matter of enabling, mutual testing, checking and correction. This gets much harder when rumours are got up as reports, and when reports are smoothed and glossed, which also look like rumours.

"Remedies -- aim to make what we say accessible to intended audiences. Plain English helps, not assuming that all audiences are the same also helps. Aim for more than self-expression -- self-expression is the lowest form of freedom in matters of communication.

"Aim for narrative, differentiated narrative; aim for truth claims, rebuttable, testable, assessable narrative, which audiences can choose to judge and then place or refuse trust. Cut the focus on public perception, replace it with a focus on public judgement -- treat the public as grown-up."

Ironically, said O'Neill, public figures should "not aim for trust". She said: "Trust is not something you can make others do for you; it is something that they may choose to give to you or refuse to you. If you aim for trust, you are in a sense missing the entire point."

After O'Neill, Frank Furedi addressed the rise of rumours and the impact that such rumour-mongering was likely to have on public perception and

levels of trust. Furedi is Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent in Canterbury. Since 11 September, he has been exploring how the reaction to the terror attacks provides insights into the contemporary consciousness of risk. He has also worked on the role of rumours and their impact on public behaviour. His research is being further developed through a research project associated with the ESRC's 'The Domestic Management of Terrorist Attacks' programme. Furedi is also an author, with recent books including *The Culture of Fear*, *Paranoid Parenting*, and *The Therapeutic Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Anxious Age*.

Furedi began by calling for a fuller understanding of public perception, not as an abstract thing that can be moulded by one politician or another, but as an interactive process that requires engagement and debate. "It is important to realise that when we talk about public perception we are not talking about a static phenomenon", he said; "public perception ought to be understood as something that people do, actively. It actually involves a blending of known facts and judgements filtered through the prevailing cultural and social factors that influence our lives."

And for Furedi, one of the central problems today is the confusion and doubt about these "cultural and social" factors, about what society stands for and against; he argues that this "crisis of meaning" has resulted in declining levels of trust and a search for answers elsewhere, in stories and rumours that seek to make sense of seemingly senseless events.

"Most importantly, what we often overlook when we talk about public perception is that it is actually inseparable from people's continued search for answers and explanations", he argued. "Most of us ask questions about the so-called war on terrorism, questions like: how does this affect me, who can I rely on to tell the truth, who is to blame? All the time, as we develop our perceptions of particular events, there is a continuing demand for some kind of explanation.

"We also know from the experience of history that whenever we are confronted by major unexpected or unexplainable events, then the search for explanation becomes more intense and can become a process without limitations."

"One of the big problems that we face is that these days government ministers and officials and experts in risk management tend to confuse the demand for explanation with a demand for information", argued Furedi. Consequently, we often end up with "bizarre discussions about how much information should we give the public, what should they be allowed to know, and so on".

In reality, said Furedi, people are looking for something more than straightforward "info" -- and the authorities' failure to provide that something more has created a climate of mistrust and rumour-mongering. "Human beings do not desperately want more information, as politicians understand it. What they really want is an explanation for what is

happening. In other words, they are looking for meaning -- for meaning, rather than facts. And that is something that, all too often in discussions of communication, we fail to understand.

"People do not simply want to know what happened -- they also want to know why it happened. In many respects the why is more important than the what. What we are searching for when these events occur is not only the story, but the story behind the story. It seems to me that it is the failure to respond to people's quest for meaning that actually creates what is called, wrongly I think, disquiet and mistrust.

"If we simply get information, if we simply get this technical thing called communication, then basically we have people trying to make sense of events but without having available to them a clear system of meaning, through which they can interpret events that confront them. How information is processed and internalised ultimately depends on how meaningful it is to people's lives."

As an example, Furedi focused on "the current demands for an explanation about the war in Iraq." He argued that one reason why there was so much questioning of and seeming opposition to what America and Britain did in Iraq was not necessarily because there has been a growth in true anti-war sentiment, but because there is widespread confusion, from the top of society down, over what the war was for.

To illustrate this point, Furedi argued in response to Solomon that, in fact, there was nothing new in the dishonesty behind the war in Iraq. "I take the view, and call me old-fashioned and too realistic, that governments have always lied about why they go to war", he said. I cannot think of any incident from the past 150 years where a government has told the people the truth. Governments always invent, they always amplify the threat, they also talk things up and manipulate information -- that is part of warfare.

"There is nothing really new about the fact that governments tend to be dishonest during conflict. Therefore, the kind of statements that are being made about Bush and Blair governments over Iraq today cannot really be a response to the fact that this time Bush and Blair were uniquely dishonest, or that they were somehow in a category of their own. The very fact that so many people are talking about the government and trust suggests a naive view of what is talking place and about warfare."

So what lies behind the widespread cynicism and doubt about the war in Iraq? Furedi suggested, "The reason why we are reacting like this -- from ordinary individuals to some official inside the Bush and Blair administrations -- has got nothing to do with the unique character or reprehensible nature of this war. It's got to do with the fact that in today's circumstances we lack a system of meaning through which we can make sense of what is happening over Iraq.

"For example, who is the enemy? Is it Saddam Hussein? Or is it Saddam and the Republican Guards? Or is it maybe the Iraqi people? We're fighting a war against 'terrorism', an idea -- it could be anything or anybody, we're not really sure who the enemy is."

Furedi argued that there are other practical problems that have helped to spread fear and confusion about the war. "We're also not sure if the war is over", he said. "And we're not sure about who won this war. When we have a prime minister who lacks the moral fibre to hold a victory parade, we're not very sure what is really happening. If the war is won, why don't we say we won it? From a sociological view, what we have here is a serious inability to give a *sense of meaning* to these events."

"It isn't just bad information", said Furedi, "though that is a part of it. It is not only dishonesty, although Bush and Blair *have* been dishonest. It is something much more fundamental -- there is no common set of meanings through which we are able to make communications today about important, world-shaking events."

Furedi articulated that it is precisely at times of widespread confusion -- when governments fail to put forward convincing moral arguments for action or considered justifications for policy -- that unfounded stories, half-truths and suspicious theories can thrive:

"Whenever we lack a system of meaning, then rumours flourish and anything can happen. Conspiracy theories start to be believed as if they were official statements of truth. If someone says America is in Iraq for oil, that will appear plausible, just as it will the next day when someone tells us that the MMR vaccine causes autism, or when someone else says that Jews didn't show up to the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001, and so on. All of these appear equally truthful in today's climate, when you have no way of deciding which is right and which is wrong, no meaning through which to make sense of the events that give rise to these sentiments."

Furedi concluded by pointing out that, historically, there has always been an exponential rise in rumour-mongering at times of moral and political uncertainty -- however, he argued that today's rumours are of a different order entirely:

"These rumours are different to rumours in the past. Yesterday, rumours flourished because there was an absence of knowledge, and an absence of information. You cannot say that about today.

"In today's climate, rumours flourish because we live in an era where cultural authority has been lost; an era when legitimacy -- moral legitimacy in particular -- has a rather feeble character to it. We live in an era when legitimacy is continually questioned, and when knowledge claims are continually interrogated."

In the discussion that followed, an audience member from Leeds University asked what could be done to restore public trust -- could it be done through issuing more statements and enacting further transparency, or might that actually fuel distrust and suspicion.

Others asked the speakers further about Iraq and the reason for the general sense of scepticism about the war. One audience member challenged Furedi's notion that it was because there was "no story" on which the war could be sold, but rather it was a result of "blatant lying" on the part of the authorities.

O'Neill said that trust could not be "magicked up". "The authorities want it", she said, "but by chasing it, by seeking it, they ensure that they will not get it. What we need are clearer and more specific political debates, which allow the public to judge whether or not to give trust. If we attempt to win their trust by always declaring our honesty and our credentials, nothing seems more likely to convince them that we are not trustworthy."

Furedi responded to the questions about war by pointing out that earlier Western interventions around the world had also been based on "blatant lying" but had not given rise to nearly the same level of hostility as the conflict in Iraq has.

"We need to ask why that is", he said. "I would suggest that it's because the current hostility is not based on a critical understanding of the war and what it is for, and then an opposition to that. It is because the war appears confusing -- we cannot make sense of it and feel separated from it. This leads to a great deal of questioning and cynicism, which is not really useful or positive."

-- CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS - SMALLPOX

The threat of a smallpox attack has gripped the public imagination over the past 18 months. Smallpox has not existed as a naturally occurring virus since 1977, and no known terror group has access to the disease. Yet some warn that smallpox would be an ideal weapon for terrorists who wanted to cause maximum destruction, while the British and American government has spent millions on smallpox vaccines. How real is the threat of smallpox...?

This session, chaired by Fiona Fox, Head of the Science Media Centre based at the Royal Institution, brought together health, science and military experts to debate the prevalence, or otherwise, of a smallpox threat.

Professor John Oxford spoke first. As Professor of Virology at St Bartholomew's and The Royal London School of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of London, Oxford is in a good position to judge the danger posed by smallpox. He is the co-author of two standard texts on Influenza and Virology and has published more than 250 scientific papers. He also took part in the famous expedition to Spitsbergen, on the Norwegian island of

Svalbard, to uncover the bodies of a group of miners who had died in the 1918 to 1920 flu epidemic. One of his main interests is the link between flu and *encephalitis lethargica*, a condition that causes victims to sink into a comatose state.

Oxford discussed smallpox, describing the disease and outlining whether it still poses a threat. He said early on that "this is not just a question of foreigners, this is not just a question of small terror groups -- it is also a question of states." Oxford pointed out that the only known existing stores of smallpox were in the USA and Russia.

Having described the disease, Oxford argued that it was "unlikely" that there would be a smallpox attack by terrorists. He argued that terrorists are "calculating people and tend to use the most effective and easily-obtained weapon", which is "high explosive." By contrast, smallpox needs to be nurtured in a special laboratory, and takes a great deal of expertise and attention to develop.

Oxford also pointed out that this could only be done by terrorists once they had got their hands on smallpox -- which is far from an easy thing to do. "Officially, it is only held in two places, Siberia and Georgia in the USA", he said. "Though there have been unsubstantiated rumours of a theft of smallpox from the Russian Vector Institute 15 or so years ago, on a recent visit I witnessed heavy security provided by the Russian army."

He pointed out that "there is a standing committee of virologists which, on behalf of WHO, oversees every experiment carried out in one of the two registered centres. Though a previous WHO advisory committee had recommended destruction of the final virus stocks, this has not happened as there is still much to be learned from this extremely complex virus."

Ross Pastel followed. Pastel is a Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army Medical Service Corps, and received his commission in the US Army in 1986. He is a graduate of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is currently serving as Chief of the Education and Training Department in the Operational Medicine Division at the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases. He is responsible for the Institute's 'Medical Management of Biological Casualties' course. In 2000, he organised and chaired the International Conference on the Operational Impact of Psychological Casualties from Weapons of Mass Destruction.

According to Pastel: "There are really two aspect to diseases like smallpox, which make it different to agents like anthrax.

"Anthrax is not a contagious disease -- whatever you deliver, that's what you get. With smallpox, you can deliver it as a weapon but then you have the possibility of what we call *secondary transmission* because it is a contagious disease. It can be transmitted from person to person.

"The point here is that if you use smallpox as a weapon, there again you have two choices: with an aerosol dissemination you can have an enormous impact and infect vast numbers of people. But technically it is very difficult -- it is not something that a bioterrorist is likely to be able to do very easily. But if it is state-sponsored? Yes, then it could be done."

For terrorist groups, Pastel argued that it is more likely a smallpox attack would take the form of a small-scale, one-to-one operation -- which could potentially have deadly consequences.

"If smallpox was delivered by a terrorist it would probably be through person-to-person transmission. In other words, you would have 100 or so suicide terrorists and you would infect them with smallpox and then send them out to infect others.

"How well would that work? For smallpox as a disease there are a number of considerations -- and it is very difficult to miss the diagnosis most of the time. Most of the time, when you get smallpox it is very obvious. We also have the ability to prevent further person-to-person transmission through what we know about medicine today."

"So smallpox can be a weapon", said Pastel. "The question is, who has the smallpox virus? Officially there are two nations in the world who have it: the USA and Russia. Unfortunately we do know that the Russians were producing 20 metric tonnes annually as late as 1992 -- they claim it was all destroyed, but we don't know that for sure. According to a *New York Times* article from 2002, there are three other nations that are thought to have it too: Iraq, North Korea, and then most terrifying of all...France!

"We don't know for certain who has it, and if they have it, will they use it? It would certainly provoke worldwide condemnation were it to be used -- as this would involve reintroducing a disease that has successfully been eradicated in the world. And how will they disseminate it? Again, if it's through aerosol, you could infect a great number of people."

Pastel concluded by taking up a recurring theme in the debate about chemical and biological weapons -- whether their impact is in spreading fear rather than actually spreading disease.

"Some people claim smallpox has more bark than bite", he said. "There are definite problems with initial transmission, and once smallpox is released it would rapidly be stopped. Secondary transmission would probably be very minimal, and we could stop it within generations."

Professor William Bicknell concluded the session. Bicknell joined the Health Policy Institute at Boston University in 1978 and is now Chairman Emeritus of the school of public health's department of international health.

He served as the first Medical Director for the Job Corps, a national programme for disadvantaged youth, and also served as Acting Director of

the national Neighbourhood Health Centre programme in the Office of Economic Opportunity. He subsequently served as Commissioner of Public Health in Massachusetts and later as Medical Director of the Health and Retirement Funds of the United Mine Workers.

Bicknell argued that, "From a terrorism point of view, and from a perspective of preventing terrorist use of smallpox, it is really the first case you have got to worry about -- and that is going to be hard to diagnose early because everyone with a remote hint will not think it is smallpox."

"Bioterrorism is a real risk", argued Bicknell. "Smallpox is easy to hide in any freezer and, whether or not WMD are found in Iraq, it is only one of a number of states on the list of suspects. Of all biological weapons, smallpox has the greatest potential for widespread harm. But the risk of death or serious harm to anyone from any form of terrorism is very low.

"Therefore, we should live our daily lives normally, not in fear -- trusting that our governments are taking steps to reduce chances of terrorism and, if and when terrorism does occur, take steps to minimise the consequences. Have we done this with smallpox? Not yet. There is vaccine for everyone, but we are ill-prepared to rapidly contain smallpox after a bioterrorist release. Monkeypox is a timely reminder that the unexpected can happen and take time to recognise."

"Terrorism has many causes and no one small step will prevent all further attacks", concluded Bicknell. "Until people in the third world have more hope, and until US foreign policy is more even-handed, controlling terrorism directed against the United States of America is likely to be an uphill struggle."

-- EMERGENCY PLANNING - WHAT'S THE PLAN?

What precisely is the authorities' plan in the event of a terrorist attack? How would the health authorities coordinate in order to deal with large numbers of casualties? Is there a plan for the running of government in the wake of a deadly assault?

Eve Coles, senior lecturer in risk and emergency management in the Coventry Centre for Disaster Management, put the case for much more closer coordination between various emergency-oriented organisations and groups.

Coles said that researchers in the UK have long recognised that the emergency management system was in need of restructuring. She said that the fuel crisis and the floods of 2001, and then the foot-and-mouth crisis of 2002, had managed to highlight the extent to which the United Kingdom's capability to deal with wide area emergencies was weak and insufficient.

"After these incidents, the Deputy Prime Minister ordered an immediate review of emergency management in the UK. The terrorist attacks of 11 September then enhanced the ad hoc nature of the system and added impetus to the need to restructure", she said.

She claimed that the word "resilience", which we hear so often today in debates about emergency planning and disaster management, was adopted by the government to describe the way in which they would like to reduce the UK's susceptibility to major incidents of all kinds by reducing their probability of occurring. She also said the government had focused its energies on building institutions and structures in such a way as to minimize any possible effects of disruption upon them -- but questioned the extent to which this had been successful.

Coles said: "It has stated that the 'resilience agenda' is seeking to do three things: 1. Build a comprehensive capability for anticipating major incidents, where possible prevent them or take action in advance that will mitigate their effects. 2. Ensure that planning for response and recovery is geared to the risk therefore ensuring preparedness. 3. Promote a 'culture of resilience' including business continuity thus helping to reduce the disruptive effects of disaster.

"The government has also finally recognised that the legislative framework that currently governs emergency management in the UK is both outdated and outmoded and is drawing up a new Civil Contingencies Bill.

However, the window of opportunity that presented itself in the first two years of the Millennium is rapidly closing, as the bureaucracy of Whitehall and the political will of 'Westminster' play their part in slowing the momentum of change."

Tom Picton Phillips, Acting Programme Director at the Emergency Planning College in York, disputed the notion that change was slow. He discussed the extent to which British institutions had managed to offset risks in recent years, pointing out the risk management theories were not a central part of government thinking. "This has come to the surface over the past two years, especially since 11 September", he said, "but it has been going on behind the scenes for a decade."

Jim Stuart-Black, the Emergency Planning and Security Manager for one of London's largest Boroughs, debated the details of how to coordinate and execute an effective response to any form of attack or catastrophe that resulted in large numbers of wounded individuals.

-- CLOSING PLENARY - ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Governments are exploring new ways to engage the public in matters relating to national security. But what are governments trying out, and can

they hope to be successful? How best to engage us -- by revealing all information pertaining to a potential terrorist assault, or by initiating serious political debates about the terror threat and what lies behind it?

This debate was chaired by Chris Dandeker, Professor of Military Sociology in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London, and formerly Head of the Department of War Studies from 1997-2001.

The first speaker was Professor Thomas Glass. Glass took up his appointment at the John Hopkins School of Public Health in 2000, after spending five years at the Harvard School of Public Health. He has conducted research on the role of psychosocial factors in health and functioning in older adults; he is particularly interested in the role of individual psychosocial factors such as social networks. His recent work includes successful completion of a randomised clinical trial to test the efficacy of a family support intervention in stroke. He is the director of intervention for the Experience Corps, a multi-generational health promotion project.

Glass began by saying he had "two themes". The first, he outlined, is that "disasters are different to emergencies. We don't spend enough time thinking about disasters. We especially don't like to think about the Big One, but we ought to." His second theme concerned the public, which he argued ought to be "a critical player in the event of a disaster, and we ought to talk more about the public. We have talked a lot today about the fact that the public doesn't trust us -- and that might have a lot to do with the fact that we don't trust the public."

"I'll start with a thought experiment", said Glass. "Imagine 100 casualties caused by a biological weapons release in the Tube, right now, this moment. Would the emergency services have the capacity to respond to those 100 casualties? The answer is yes. Would we have 100 beds to put them in? Yes. Would those patients get state-of-the-art medical care? Yes. Would the police be able to establish a defined and secure perimeter? The answer is yes. What would be the preventable deaths associated with this attack? Probably minimal."

But he continued: "What about an event involving 10,000 casualties? A biological weapons release where you suddenly had 10,000 critically injured people in Trafalgar Square? What's the difference between 100 and 10,000 - apart from 9,900? I would submit that the difference is more than quantitative.

"It is a qualitative difference of great significance that we tend to ignore. Fifty years of disaster research has produced one cardinal insight: we can differentiate three kinds of crisis events, based on the ratio of the demand characteristics of the event and the response capacity."

Glass outlined these three types of events: "emergencies, where basically the demands are less than response capability; disaster, where the response required is greater than the resources; and catastrophe, where the demands

overwhelm the entire system. These are qualitatively different things -- catastrophe is fundamentally different than just a big emergency.”

Glass ran through examples of emergencies, disasters and catastrophes and assessed in each instance the success or otherwise of the rescue and emergency response. He concluded that public trust in the battle against terrorist attacks and other disasters could not simply be won -- it would have to be actively shaped. “We need to cultivate public trust and understanding”, he said. “We need a *cultivation approach*. You don’t win public trust by trying -- you have to cultivate it, you have to develop the apparatus of trust in advance. We need to think of ways to pre-engineer the Blitz Spirit.”

Susan Scholefield from the Ministry of Defence followed. She joined the Ministry of Defence in 1981. Recent appointments have included Executive Director and Senior Finance Officer at the Defence Procurement Agency and Head of the Balkans Secretariat at the Ministry of Defence. In November 1995 she led the Defence team in the UK Delegation to the proximity talks at Dayton, Ohio. While on secondment to the Northern Ireland Office, she served as Head of Security Policy and Operations Division.

“I want to explain a bit of the framework within which the government in the UK is working to build resilience”, Scholefield started, “and an important strand in that is the warning and informing issue on which this conference is focused. But in terms of the wider resilience, it is one of about a dozen strands we are working on intensely.

“The Civil Contingencies Secretariat was set up in July 2001, not, you will note, in response to 9/11, but to the Fs -- fuel, flooding and foot-and-mouth, where the view was taken that there needed to be better coordination within government nationally and also crucially at the regional level. Our aim is to improve British resilience by working with others on anticipation, preparation, prevention and resolution. We do not solely focus on the Big One, but on the big ones....”

Scholefield ran through some of the jobs that the Secretariat executes in its effort to prepare the population for any potential “big ones”. She pointed out that the Secretariat:

- conducts what is referred to as “horizon-scanning activity” to identify and assess potential and imminent disruptive challenges to Britain, and to assist in the development of an integrated response. She said that a central aim is to build partnerships with other organisations, to develop and share best practice in horizon-scanning and to develop the knowledge of Britain’s critical networks and infrastructure;

- ensures that the government can “continue to function and deliver public services during crises”; this is achieved by working with departments and other Secretariats in the Cabinet Office in order to ensure that plans and systems to cover the full range of potential disruption are in place;

-- leads the delivery of improved resilience "across government and the public sector", including supporting ministers in the development of policy, agreeing priorities and ensuring that core response capabilities are developed accordingly;

-- seeks to improve the capability of all levels of government, the wider public sector and the private and voluntary sectors to "prepare for, respond to and manage potential challenges, through development of key skills and awareness."

Frank Furedi, who earlier spoke in the session on 'Trust, rumours and public perception' concluded this debate on engaging the public. Professor Furedi, a sociologist at the University of Kent, has written extensively on questions relating to fear and mistrust among the public. "Following on from Thomas Glass's comments, I will take it as given that public should be seen as an active element in any kind of response", said Furedi.

[MANY PUBLICS]

"In many ways, the adequacy of the response depends on the extent to which the public is activated -- genuinely activated. I would say, however, that it is important to realise that the meaning of the public that we are engaging is far from self-evident. The public today is far, far different to the public of the Blitz Spirit, to give an example that was mentioned earlier on."

Furedi ran with this theme of 'what is the public?'; he argued that the public and its attitudes to authority and questions of engagement have changed dramatically in recent decades. "To give you an example of how things have changed", said Furedi: "I did a little study, comparing some of the floods that hit England in the early 1950s to the so-called F-words (fuel, flooding and foot-and-mouth) that Susan mentioned earlier.

"Those older floods in the past were genuine emergencies, with hundreds of casualties and great damage caused to homes and property. These events completely disorganised communities -- they were very serious indeed. The floods that we know from recent times are actually small episodes -- in terms of the number of deaths and the amount of destruction that occurred.

"But when you compare public reactions then and now to these very different events, it is like night and day. In the 1950s, you find that the public virtually runs the whole show, where they organise a lot of the emergency work; you find that there is hardly any complaints about anything back then, and there is not a rush to blame anyone. The first time that someone is blamed is not until a year-and-a-half after the floods, when some decide that the government should possibly have tried prevent the floods or reduce the level of destruction."

"In general", said Furedi, "what you find in the 1950s experience are descriptions of the public that are entirely made by government communicators -- so you will have the Home Secretary saying things like, 'This is a sturdy reaction from the local people and they stood shoulder to shoulder', and so on. Of course, behind the scenes there was probably murmuring and not everybody was happy, but by and large that's really what the public was back then.

"But consider the public today -- after floods in which two or three people might have died as a result of subsequent incidents, and when a relatively minor event in the scheme of things is treated as 'Britain in crisis'. It is worth noting that the floods in the 1950s never made big headline news, they never made the front page of *The Times* -- they were always on page two or three, usually. In contrast, today the floods capture the imagination of TV news reporters, the front pages of the papers, and so on."

Furedi pointed to another major difference between the experiences of serious disasters in the 1950s and the experience of less serious disasters today. Whereas in the past there was a tendency for people to put their heads down and get on with rebuilding their lives and their communities, today there is often a swift move to apportion blame for everything that goes wrong, to seek compensation and to make claims of victimhood. Furedi argued that this shift reveals a substantially different public today, to the one that existed 50 or so years ago.

"Almost instantly today people start blaming others -- even before you can say the word 'flood'. What is interesting today is that the number of voices making claims about the floods is phenomenal -- all sorts of interest groups, advocacy groups and so on. In general, this so-called 'voice of the public' is actually filtered through these mediating groups. It creates what I call a 'fear market', where a number of groups and organisations effectively encourage people to make compensation claims and to relive experiences. So I would argue that there is a much weaker sense of 'the public' to engage with today."

Furedi concluded by calling for less intervention into people's lives, and for the public to be allowed to reconstitute itself independently of destructive outside forces: "Ultimately, the ability of the public to respond and play an active role depends on its own understanding of how the fear market operates -- so that the public can make up its own mind insulated from the pressures to feel fear and to accept the agendas that are shoved down its throat. The extent to which the public can make up its own mind is the key variant in deciding whether or not it can play an active role in the kind of 'big ones' that we have been discussing."

-- EVENING EVENT -- ALERT BUT NOT ALARMED

Is it possible to live in a society that has permanent Terrorist Threat Warning Systems, without feeling slightly on edge? Governments claim that they want to warn us without scaring us -- to keep us alert without making us feel alarmed. What balance should be struck between alerting people and alarming them? In this evening event -- intended as a more informal discussion of the ideas that had been raised during the first day of the conference -- three esteemed speakers considered one of the central themes: how to strike a balance.

The evening event was chaired by Simon Wessely, Professor of Epidemiological and Liaison Psychiatry at King's College School of Medicine and the Institute of Psychiatry, and Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist at King's and Maudsley Hospitals.

First to speak was Dr Pat Troop, who has a wealth of experience in both public health medicine and senior management. Before taking up her current appointment as Chief Executive of the Health Protection Agency, Troop was the Deputy Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health, with special responsibility for public health. Her early career was in clinical medicine and she has worked as a public health professional since 1975, both in the north west of England and with Cambridge Health Authority. She was also Regional Director of public health from 1994 to 1999.

Troop started by arguing that it is crucial to take stock of the resources we already have to deal with terrorism and catastrophe, rather than rushing to institute new bodies and organisations. "We don't set up a special system, we build on what we know and what we are familiar with", she said. "So if we were to have a covert attack, unless we have a good system for any type of problem, we won't pick it up."

"This for me is quite important, because when I've been talking to people about emergency planning, they clearly feel very nervous, as if something special has to be done during an attack. In fact, much of what they would have to do, they do already for other problems and crises. If you have a point-source Legionnaire's disease, many of the principles are the same as a point-source anthrax outbreak. So it is important that people recognise that -- that actually they know a lot and they have already got a lot of skills."

Troop went on to argue that what is especially important for remaining alert in the face of terror or biological attacks is the question of how to "keep our networks intact." "These are international issues and we cannot work in isolation", she argued. "So the first thing for me, if we are going to be alert, is to have really good international networks, where we can work with the World Health Organisation, with the intelligence services, and with the European Union -- for example, although it wasn't a deliberate release, after the SARS issue we were all having telephone conferences with people

around the world about how to combat this outbreak, and that is very important.”

“We also need robust surveillance systems”, said Troop. “And to have robust surveillance systems we need multiple methods. It’s not enough to rely on any one system. Following 9/11, we really pushed forward in working on [the telephone system] NHS Direct. We started it for the flu epidemics, so that we could see if there was a flu epidemic starting -- and evaluation has shown that, with NHS Direct, we were able to pick it up even before we were picking it up in primary care, because people were starting to phone in with symptoms.

“So after 9/11, we pushed forward our work on NHS Direct and we now analyse it on a daily basis; we are able to break things down into small areas, and although it doesn’t give us detailed information we have had a number of issues where people have noticed clusters coming up and we have gone to investigate to find out what they are about -- and they have turned out to be something around water or food, and very localised.”

Troop argued that alongside this national system of monitoring, we still needed to ensure that doctors and nurses remain vigilant; it is not enough, she argued, to keep an eye on developments from “a centre”. “Of course, we still need primary care to play a central role”, said Troop. “I don’t think we do enough to use primary care as a surveillance method. We have the traditional notifiable diseases and other kinds of reporting and we have laboratory reports. One of the problems, however, is when you get very *small* numbers of patients complaining of symptoms, which is hard to pick up.

“So to have a system that is real-time but also sophisticated enough to pick up these small changes is our central challenge. In short, picking something up, tapping into even minor changes in illness rates and so on, is one of the most important things in terms of being alert for potential attack or disaster.”

As part of this heightened ability to “pick things up” in time, Troop argued that disseminating information and distributing findings and facts to the primary care sector would be of paramount importance. “We need high clinical awareness. Clinicians need to have clear, authoritative, timely information; it needs to be updated regularly, and they need to have easy access to it. We need training, and a big issue is how do you keep people up to date. One example, again, is SARS -- as it has gone out of the media, despite the fact that we have put out lots of information, it still has shown a lot of decay in people’s understanding and awareness. That is a real challenge -- we are looking at this through our local health protection teams, but nevertheless I think one of our biggest challenges is going to be how we keep people up to date.”

Troop concluded by moving her focus from central systems of surveillance and the primary care sector to the third important part of keeping a nation

alert -- engaging the public. "One of the roles of our organisation is to be the public face of health protection and we have got a major programme to build up a public focus and an authoritative, impartial source of advice.

"In health protection, half the problem for many people is not feeling that they got impartial, authoritative advice. There is this problem of who do people believe, who do they trust -- and one of our responsibilities over the coming months is to build up that trust and turn ourselves outwards to the public. We need a really open approach to how we communicate."

Troop was followed by Dr Michael Fitzpatrick, a practising GP from East London, who opened with an anecdote. "It is a pleasure to follow Dr Troop", said Fitzpatrick. "I have never met Dr Troop before this evening but I have had a lot of letters from her. In fact I brought one of the letters along. Dr Troop, as has been said, was the Deputy Chief Medical Officer until very recently, and as such was the head of the public health alert system called Cascade -- for alerting doctors all over the country about imminent health risks that we should be alert but not alarmed about....

"This is one message that I and other doctors received: 'Please activate the Cascade - suspected case of rabies in Tayside, Scotland.' People might remember this case of an unfortunate man from Dundee who had an enthusiasm for bats, and he acquired rabies after being bitten by a bat. I have to tell you that down in Hackney, this is not a big problem. When I got this letter, I thought 'What is this about?' Like many of these things, it very helpfully includes a helpline number, as GPs often need a bit of counselling about these matters.... So I rang up and asked what it was about, and they said, 'We thought there might be a problem of people coming to see GPs, worried that they had been bitten by bats, and would want to be reassured.' Surely for the number of people at risk for something like this, it would have been cheaper to send Dr Troop around personally to talk to potential victims."

As well as working as a full-time GP, Fitzpatrick is a columnist on the medical journal *The Lancet* and a regular contributor to the online publication *spiked*. He has appeared frequently on radio and television, and is the author of *The Tyranny of Health: Doctors and the Regulation of Lifestyle*. His book on the MMR-autism controversy is due to be published early next year. After opening with his Troop story, Fitzpatrick argued that GPs have been given a hard time since 9/11.

"Since 11 September, we in General Practice have been drowning under the number of Cascade public health alerts", he said. "Sixteen separate guidelines on bioterrorism have been circulated by various agencies. The *Guardian* announced one of these, which was released just a month after 9/11: 'Doctors have been advised to be particularly suspicious of illness in previously healthy people.' That poses a big problem for GPs -- because most of the people who come into our surgeries were in fact previously healthy. Should we now raise the alarm immediately when such people walk through our doors?"

Before moving on to discuss the public/political problems with what he referred to as “scaremongering” over bioterrorism, Fitzpatrick outlined a practical, everyday problem with expecting GPs to be on the lookout for potential anthrax or smallpox outbreaks. “I don’t know if people realise this -- but everything begins as a minor flu-like illness. You may have a runny nose or a cough, and 24 hours later you’re on a ventilator with SARS or you’ve gone into multi-system collapse as a consequence of ricin poison. But just about everything starts off as a minor flu-like illness.

“And if you’re a GP like me, you have a problem. With everyone who walks through the door, are you going to be thinking, ‘Is this one of these incredibly rare remote possibilities, which we need to be alert for?’ -- or do you work on the basis that things that present as minor flu-like illnesses are likely to turn out to be minor flu-like illnesses, as corresponds to general everyday experience?

“The problem with that approach is, of course, that when someone staggers into my surgery with a sore throat and a fever and it turns out to be the very earliest stages of the bubonic plague, I am likely to send him away with paracetamol and advice to rest for a few days. But is that such a bad thing? If it turns out to be the plague, he will find out soon enough! And if in the much more likely scenario it doesn’t turn out to be the bubonic plague, he will be much relieved that I didn’t alert the public health warnings system and visit upon him the full wrath of intensive investigation.”

Fitzpatrick argued that these practical problems that GPs face in an age of “over-alertness” pointed to some bigger problems in a society that fears and expects the worst.

“It highlights that the price of permanent vigilance is the price of a permanent disabling anxiety”, he argued. “You have a sense of paralysis effectively, if you have that level of vigilance around medical matters. And if you think about it, this is precisely the effect that is desired by people who perpetrate acts of terror; the whole point of the exercise is to raise those fears and have that paralysing effect on societies that are vulnerable to these sorts of scares. We can see this clearly in the anthrax attacks after 9/11 -- half a dozen people died from anthrax, but a whole society was paralysed by it.

“People may remember back to 20 or 30 years ago, when there were IRA bombs going off in London, and people often said that we mustn’t change our lives too much in relation to that because that would be a concession to terrorism. This was the rallying of the British spirit in response to such attacks. But that, today, would be seen as being *in denial* about a serious threat and would become an argument for sending someone off for counselling.”

According to Fitzpatrick, there is a contradiction in our culture of openness and transparency -- where on the one hand “you’ve got to have contingency

planning, and on the other hand you've got to have public information". But, argued Fitzpatrick, "these two things are actually quite distinct. If you're going to have contingency planning, and every government should have contingency planning, far the best way to carry it out is discreetly, largely in secret. That is a process that needs to go on behind closed doors.

"There is a big problem when that process starts to be thought about in public, when public exercises are organised on the basis of contingency planning. That generates anxiety and public fears out of proportion to any benefit that might accrue from it. Liam Donaldson, the current Chief Medical Officer, made the point after 9/11 that we have got to think the unthinkable, in order to get the best plans in place. But....you can't think the unthinkable, that's the whole point about something being unthinkable!"

Fitzpatrick argued that there is a strong propagandistic element to the government's focus on "keeping safe" and telling the public of every potential terror attack, however unlikely it might be. "It is pysops", he said, "which has always been a big issue for governments in terms of maintaining the morale of the population in response to threats.

"Now those kind of propaganda concerns have taken over -- and in a way we have got the worst of both worlds. We have got the private contingency-planning world of intelligence, which hasn't got a clue about what is going on - it didn't know where the weapons of mass destruction were in Iraq, and it didn't have any sense of what was happening in the USA before 9/11, making it totally useless in terms of protecting the public discreetly against these sort of threats. But on the other hand, we've got this public promotion of fears and scares on a very big scale."

"This has many more aims than what it professes to be about, which is supposedly protecting people from the threat of disease", concluded Fitzpatrick. "There is a concern on the part of government officials and various health institutions to demonstrate concern for the public, to show that they care for the welfare of the public; that is a very important principle. Probably even more important from the standpoint of the government is avoiding blame -- when if anything does go wrong, at least government officials can say, 'Well, we issued these warnings before it happened'. So blame-avoidance has been got in there early. But the price of blame-avoidance is the generation of a continual high level of anxiety -- and that is bad for society.

"The other significant element, of course, and this has always been a feature of psyops, is to cohere domestic support for the foreign policy objectives of the government in any given time. There is a striking relationship between the promotion of these scares and these foreign policy objectives. The ricin was found in Wood Green [in north London] at a very convenient time for the build-up of the war in Iraq. If people can be galvanised against some assumed threat, then it can empower the government's actions in Afghanistan, Iraq or wherever else.

"It seems to me that this is the problem: we have an ineffective contingency-planning intelligence world -- and a public health alert system which has been dominated by propaganda and the promotion of scares and fears, out of proportion to any practical value it has."

Mike Grannat concluded the evening debate. Grannat is Director-General and Head of Profession for the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS). He has been the Head of the GICS -- the most senior Civil Service communications professional -- since February 1997. He has also been the communication director for three departments of state and the UK's largest police force, and press secretary to five Cabinet Ministers and London's Police Commissioner. Grannat was the founding Head of the Cabinet Office Civil Contingencies Secretariat in 2001.

"The government doesn't give out information that it doesn't need to -- because what people think they need and what other people think people need, is often different from what *we think* they need", started Grannat. "We do try to apply risk communication principles, and those are precisely the principles that the Department of Health already applies on public health issues and may apply just as much to this area as any other."

"We try to be active, and when we communicate with people we look to do it proactively. We look to demonstrate as much as possible openness and transparency, though that is sometimes difficult. We need to frame announcements and concepts within a framework that people understand -- and most importantly, there is a need to encourage self-responsibility.

"The dilemma that we face is this one: we may need in some circumstances, to engage very fully and very frankly with a large number of people. We are not marketing washing machines here; we need to reach 100 per cent of the audience in a particular area. That can be very intense, as it was in Manchester in 1996, when the police had to evacuate 75,000 people inside of 90 minutes, to get them out of the way of a very large bomb.

"We need to convey complex and very uncomfortable information during a crisis -- that is not easy and there is an argument which says you should do it before the crisis even happens. I don't buy the argument that you shouldn't tell people certain things; I think you have to.

"There is a need also to keep some information away from the bad guys", concluded Grannat. "We are not in the business of helping terrorists to disrupt the nation. I was director of public affairs for the Metropolitan Police during the height of the IRA's bombing campaign in London -- it was very interesting: people would not come to work if it snowed half an inch, but they would bloody well come to work if there were an IRA bomb. We need to reconstitute that kind of spirit, as best we can."

Grannat continued: "So let me explain the practise of what we do, and some of the mechanisms we have got out there. Firstly, I think this is a

truism but I'll repeat it anyway: public confidence and safety depends on timely, clear and coordinated information.

"That's a very trite thing to say easily, but when you think about the numbers involved in conveying to people the information they need to protect themselves, that is a lot -- it involves the police, the government, the Department of Health, all sorts of people reaching similar audiences with overlapping interests and giving them information that should to say the same thing.

"Practitioners of risk communication will know that one of the easiest ways of becoming incredible is for sources of authority to say different things about the same problem.

"A second point -- the news media deliver essential information for communities during a crisis. They have an absolutely crucial role in warning and informing the public. They reach more people, most of the time, more quickly and with more information -- and they are more believed -- than most of the rest us.

"So we have some mechanisms to try to use, essentially, the media, to try to get people the information they need -- in whatever novel circumstances that may arise, and in this day and age they may be very novel and very sudden.

"We have two such mechanisms: one is that we have a coordination centre for government and other services for when we have a problem of national significance, to ensure that the information that flows out does so in a coherent form and reaches all the people that it needs to. Secondly, we take part in a thing called the Media Emergency Forum, which has been around, looking at best practice in the news handling of disasters, since the mid-1990s.

"On the first, the news coordination centre, this is quite simple. If we have some major emergency the routine in government is to set up very quickly a single centre for coordinating public information and handling inquiries.

"We gather together everyone we need in that centre, including government departments, the police service, private companies, whoever, to make sure that we are all saying the same thing to people. The key is making sure that people are not confused, but that they have information that will help them help themselves.

"A lot of the audience might be people who are not affected -- and if there is a potential terrorist attack, telling 10million people that they are not affected is just as important as telling 10,000 people that they are. If you think about the emotions and anxieties that come to the fore in these kind of situations, making that distinction between those who are affected and those who are not is crucial.

"Who are the key players in all this? Well, obviously one of them is the new media, the broadcast media, whether it is national or local, editors and reporters.

"I think that journalism has been dumbed down in recent years -- not by the talented people still in that profession, but by the lack of specialism.

"We have far fewer specialists who can analyse information for the public than we have ever had before; today it is far more about adversarial behaviour. And I think that the way that one man can take on the Royal Society over genetically modified organisms proves that point entirely. The media is too often in adversary and not analysis.

"The aim of the Media Emergency Forum is that in an emergency the public should receive necessary advice and information completely and quickly, through normal news channels doing their usual job -- through familiar faces, familiar people, familiar pages and familiar pictures.

"So we would be exploiting those channels that people usually believe, because under the circumstances of a potential attack we might be asking people to suspend disbelief."

An audience member asked Grannat: "What effort is being made to convince the public that they are saving going in than staying outside? As far as I can tell, most people think that is just something the government says because it doesn't want everyone outside clogging up the roads.

Grannat responded: "I think we have to do more on that, but actually the evidence we have comes from the National Standing Committee on Informing and Warning the Public, who are emergency planners and broadcasters and others, which shows that we do have to give the public real and useful practical advice.

"There are real difficulties; and the main one is the question of how you convey a threat to people when there is nothing else going on? People are going to say to themselves, 'Why are we being told this?' I do think, however, if we keep pouring information out on people, it will devalue the currency of warning and also the currency of fear.

"There are times when a little bit of fear goes a long way, and it ought to."

Bill Durodié, conference organiser, asked: "Do you think the currency of the word specific has been devalued, considering what happened at Heathrow recently? Initially the warnings were about Heathrow, then about four other airports; first it SAM missiles, then it was chemical and biological weapons, then they found a grenade at Gatwick."

Grannat interjected: "Actually the only military action taken was at Heathrow, and a lot of the other warnings were from people's own suppositions. I'm not going to go into why we did, because I can't tell you.

But I can tell you that what we did was at Heathrow, and the grenade at Gatwick was not related to that.”

Frank Furedi, who spoke at other sessions during the conference, asked from the audience: “Why did the government manage to hold the line on SARS, and not cause fear? I was impressed with the government’s response to SARS because, unlike so many other public health responses, it seems sensible and measured.”

Pat Troop said: “I think it was because the information was accurate and clear. As I said we locked in very quickly on the international situation; we were having daily tele-conferences with all the people involved.

“And we tried to stick to very clear, factual and straightforward information based on what had happened in other countries, and then trying to give very practical advice.

“The problem when we handle these kind of things is the whole issue of how far do you go. When SARS first started we put out lots of press releases explaining what was going on.

“We were worried because the situation in Toronto was all down to one patient arriving with the illness. But because we concentrated on the professional networks and trying to get the information out in a professional way, I think it worked.”

Dr Michael Fitzpatrick said of the SARS issue: “In Hackney we had a few cases of SARS anxiety, quite a few people coming in who thought they might have caught it from a third cousin that they bumped into who came back from India or somewhere.

“I agree that the government handled the SARS thing well, and it ended up in this very peculiar position where the general balance of the media coverage was that the government hadn’t done enough. You had Liam Fox on the back foot, saying that more scare mongering should have been done.

“The context of this is important and it comes back to a point Mike Grannat made, which is that there is, in a way, a devalued currency of fear; as a consequence of the government constantly issuing public health alerts, around all sorts of public health propaganda campaigns, it has helped to generate a free-floating anxiety around issues of health.

“Then something like SARS comes along and people will leap on it, even though the government says this is nothing much and there have only been half a dozen cases. It’s the broad background that causes the problem and not the specifics of the SARS virus.”

-- DAY TWO: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE WAR ON TERROR?

Many argue that the media is more central to everyday life than in any other period. Governments seek to cultivate relationships with the media, as a way of connecting with and communicating to the electorate. In war reporting, too, there have been striking changes: in Iraq, journalists were embedded with fighting forces for the first time ever. In such a media-focused climate, what role should the media play in times of war and terror? What are the media's responsibilities? This day of debate engaged with these and other questions pertaining to the media and war.

-- OPENING PLENARY: MEDIA PERFORMANCE

How has the media performed so far, in relating the war on terror to the public? Have media outlets given a fair, objective view of the war and its consequences -- or have they shirked their responsibilities to communicate information accurately and objectively?

This session was chaired by George Eykyn, a BBC News Correspondent and occasional presenter on *BBC World*. Eykyn spent several years covering the Troubles in Belfast and in the early 1990s he extensively reported on the war in Bosnia. He has been involved in developing the full range of BBC news safety courses, including Hostile Environments and NBC training.

Eykyn opened the sessions with some thoughts on how the media has changed: "Just one observation from me to start us off -- about how everything has changed and how we have all had to alter our way of thinking, in the wake of 9/11 in particular. In 1998, after bin Laden had detonated those two bombs at the US Embassies in East Africa, a colleague and I decided to explore whether or not bin Laden was after chemical and biological weapons and what he might do if he could get his hands on them.

"We started a long research project. It was a very interesting time -- there were all sorts going on that wasn't being reported, including attempts to clamp down on al-Qaeda in Albania and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. We wanted also to explore how ready Britain was for such a horrible event and to contrast it with how ready the Americans were -- who were saying very loudly that they were spending a lot of money on civil defence at that time.

"I went to see a very senior editor at the BBC, to propose a documentary. I wanted the programme to be called 'Look Away Now' - I had the programme mapped out, and my pitch was that this was the kind of thing that kept the US President awake at night. The senior editor I spoke to that day in early 2000 said that this was too scary a subject, and that I hadn't demonstrated that the threat. Now I turn on my radio and I listen to the *Six O'Clock News* and I hear police constables debating whether they are going to shoot people at a bio-cordon in the event of a bioterrorist act. Truly everything has changed and we have adjusted the margins of what we consider normal."

The first speaker was Nik Gowing, who has been a main programme anchor for the BBC's 24-hour international TV news and information channel BBC World, produced by BBC News, since February 1996. Gowing's appointment draws both on his extensive reporting experience over two decades in diplomacy, defence and international security and his presentation/chairing skills. His experience includes: foreign affairs specialist and presenter at ITN; a BAFTA award in 1981 for his exclusive coverage of martial law in Poland; diplomatic editor for Channel 4 News in the 1990s; and a 'Hotbird' award in 2002 for his 9/11 coverage.

"I am speaking in a private capacity", said Gowing; "this is not an official BBC News view, although many of the issues are going to be central to the way we work in newsrooms."

Gowing elucidated: "For the past decade I have taken an interest in real-time information, especially for wars and emergencies. And the question I want to ask in relation to that is: who is commanding the high ground? I think answering that question is central to communicating the war on terror. I want to get over to you some basic principles, which I hope will act as a kind of bedrock for much of what you are going to hear today.

"I want to talk about news -- but I also want to raise the problem of rumours. During the first hour or two hours of a story breaking, there are always masses and masses of rumours. The trouble is that people are queuing up for rumours and hearing rumours, and what we have to do -- all of us -- is *distil*.

"What I'm talking about particularly is tension, extreme tension. The issue of news versus rumours encapsulates the challenge because it highlights what happens at Cobra, it highlights what happens at PGHQ, it highlights what happens in any police control room as well. I have christened the phrase 'the tyranny of real time', because we are in the business of real time, and it is a *tyranny*. Much of this relationship is cruel and arbitrary -- which is, of course, the definition of tyranny. That is the same for us as it is for many of you who are handling real-time information."

Gowing outlined some examples, where the speedy dissemination and release of information can lead to this kind of tyranny: "When you are on air for six hours during the 9/11 attacks or during the death of Princess Diana, then you are dealing with the cruel and arbitrary nature of information. There is a feeling out there that it is the "bloody meejah" that is responsible for much of this tension. In Bosnia, we were even known as reptiles. It has become an instinctive reaction to say that it is the media that is at fault here. I think that mindset has to be reversed -- we are part of a process that uses cheap, lightweight technology that allows us to do our business virtually anywhere.

"A keyword from my perspective is: *transparency*. That transparency is what is creating an instinctive feeling, especially among those of you who are in

government, that we are the damned media who create damned problems for you.

"There are, and there always will be, news-gatherers and information-gatherers, everywhere. This leads me to another point on the issue of transparency: who out there really is the media? I work for one of the largest news media organisations in the world, but there are many others out there who, probably, you have not even begun to think about: members of the media matrix.

"We are now much more than you think. There are people out there who do not have the resources of £3.2 billion of the BBC's budget, but who can become equally powerful now in a moment of crisis. To highlight a few of these organisations: GNN, the Guerrilla News Network; the Drudge Report, which revealed the Lewinsky scandal five years ago -- not *Newsweek*, Drudge.

"What about other sites in a moment of crisis -- something like the *Electronic Intifada*, which is like many other websites out there at the moment, challenging governments and those in crisis. The reason I use the example of the *Electronic Intifada* is because of what it says on its homepage: 'We will equip you to challenge myth, distortion and spin in the media in an informed way.' This sets out to challenge *us* in our business of the media."

"There's another phenomenon", concluded Gowing: "the issue of bloggers. One blogger who came to particular prominence during Iraq was the Baghdad Blogger, which is now published by the *Guardian* newspaper quite widely. This is his transmission capability -- in a room in Baghdad, under Saddam Hussein's autocratic regime. But he is part of the media as well.

"Overall, I think that out there is a whole stream of robo-hacks -- we at the BBC are robo-hacks. They use technology that you can buy for 300 or 400 pounds at a mainstream store to make their broadcasts -- and that too becomes part of the media matrix. Anyone can be out there doing this from virtually anywhere in the world."

Professor Steven Barnett, a writer and broadcaster on media issues, followed. Barnett has directed a number of research projects on broadcasting. His most recent studies include a 25-year analysis of changing trends in TV news, and a study of TV drama and current affairs programmes. He writes a fortnightly column for the *Observer* and is a regular contributor to the broadsheet and specialist press on media issues. He has been researching and writing on the communications industries for 20 years, and is on the Editorial Board of the *British Journalism Review*.

"As I understand, in this session we are making some kind of judgement on how the media have performed in this so-called war on terror", opened Barnett. "I have to say, I have problems with the notion of a war on terror -- I think it raises problems about some kind of identifiable and tangible

enemy, and simplistic notions of Us versus Them. This obviously raises questions about who we are and who they are. I particularly liked Onora O'Neill's point yesterday, where she said this is a phrase borrowed from the advertiser's lexicon, alongside the war on drugs and the war on tooth decay.

"I'm going to start by putting my comments into an academic context, and setting out a criteria for assessing media performance -- partly because in higher education, as we all know, we can't evaluate our performance unless we have defined our performance indicators.

"So what exactly are we assessing in terms of the media's performance? I will give you four roles that the media can and should ideally play in democratic societies: first, it should be a conveyor of relevant, accurate and undistorted information, and easy accessible means of giving the public tools with which to come to an informed view of the world. In an ideal world, citizens can, on the basis of this information, come to rational opinions about the nature of the terror risk, its provenance and seriousness, and what action their government should take in the interests of their safety...and with their money.

"Secondly, the media should provide access to collective, rational debate, where citizens can deliberate and develop their own arguments. This might be letters columns in the press, chatrooms on the internet or participation on a TV chat show, and so on. The media in this case have a potentially ideal role as a neutral public space, that can assist rather than direct rational debate and collective opinion formation.

"Thirdly, there is the media's watchdog role, holding governments and elected representatives to account, investigating allegations of wrongdoing or corruption or lies. This is sometimes known as 'digging up the dirt' -- dirt that powerful interests might be trying to conceal.

"And fourthly, there is the role of the media as tribunes of the people, where newspapers or TV programmes try to synthesise the public's collective view and campaign, as they see it, on the public's behalf.

"Those are the ideal, typical components of a mass media that serves the interests of a healthy democracy. In practice, in virtually every area of reporting -- from foreign reporting to sport to mundane parliamentary reporting -- there are a number of fundamental structural changes in the media that are transforming the nature of journalistic practice. We can see these forces at work in particular around the coverage of the threat of terrorism, and more recently, in relation to the coverage of the war in Iraq.

"I want to talk about three of these forces, and their impact on the communication of information. The first, inevitably, is competition. The scale and size of the media industry today dwarfs anything that we have seen before -- ever. We have an information supply that is unprecedented in the history of communication. The problem is that this supply bears very little relation to demand. Advertising revenue is in decline, commercial

television has faced the biggest recession in its history. The end result is that less money is chasing a vast array of news outlets, and this leads to ferocious competition.

“This is not an environment conducive to a sober and rational explanation of complex events. In particular, in times of war it means that editors and programme-makers want the excitement of arresting pictures, they want immediacy and frenzy, they want to convey the breathless excitement of danger and they want to be first with breaking news. News becomes drama and the facts can sometimes get in the way of a good story. So entertainment values invade our news, making it a less reliable platform for an informed citizenry.

“The second problem is equally damaging, and that is the intrusion of overt editorial and proprietorial agendas. This, for the moment, is a newspaper rather than a broadcasting issue in the UK. In the USA, where the fairness doctrines were abolished some years ago, it intrudes on all media. The British press has always been, to some extent, subject to the whims and views of its owners, but I can’t remember any time in modern media history when almost every newspaper has been attached to some kind of campaigning which almost obliterates the search for truth.

“From Murdoch’s uncompromising pro-war, pro-Blair stance to Rothermere’s pro-war, anti-Blair stance, to the Mirror papers’ anti-Blair, anti-war stance, accurate information takes second place to grandstanding and campaigning. Newspapers purport to speak on behalf of the public -- in fact, as Murdoch and Black have more or less admitted, they are mouthpieces for their owners.

“The third problem is the increasingly sophisticated machinery of government and political parties, which now often manipulate the news agenda. This is nothing new, and the process of monsterring -- exaggerating the evil nature of an enemy -- has been going on for many generations. But resources invested in political PR is greater than ever before.”

Barnett concluded: “The end result is that more information lies with information gatekeepers, and information flow is more likely to express the policy agenda of the government.”

Following Barnett’s introductory comments, the audience were invited to ask questions. Bill Durodié, conference organiser, said: “On one of your performance indicators -- the undistorted element. What we hear nowadays is more and more critics saying there is no such thing as value-free information, and they attempt to introduce what they call alternative, unheard or lay voices into the debate. And the journalism profession has aided that through the ‘journalism of attachment’.

“Surely it is the case that now, more than ever, we should at least hold on to the aspiration for value-free information -- even if it isn’t achievable; surely it is a better principle than the one that says we have to hear lots of

voices and values in every debate? The biggest danger is that we end up with a so-called 'responsible media' where when you say responsible, and unravel it, it means having a social policy agenda."

Barnett responded: "There is a very familiar call for 'let a thousand flowers bloom', which generally means 'let's remove all restrictions and regulations'. It's basically code for de-regulation. What generally happens, and America is a very good example, is that you leave it to the market place and it produces a very homogenous, uniform number of voices.

"But by value-free, I assume you mean rules on impartiality and unbiased reporting. We are increasingly going to be forced to define and to measure impartiality. I have no doubt about that. The whole apparatus of Ofcom and the new office of communications is talking about evidence-led decision-making, and that goes for public service broadcasting, it goes for impartiality, it goes for any kind of rules that we might seek to impose in the public interest. Otherwise we might go down the route of the FCC and we say if you can't justify it, you bin it."

Philip Taylor, Professor of International Communications and Director of the Institute of Communications Studies at the University of Leeds, followed Barnett. Taylor is Chairman of the Inter University History Film Consortium, and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. From 1983 to 1984 he was a Visiting Professor of Political Science and History at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and, on his return, was promoted to Senior Lecturer in International History in 1987. In 1990 he was initially seconded to serve as Deputy Director of the newly created Institute of Communications Studies and became Director of the Institute in 1998.

"One thing that came up several times yesterday was the question of meaning, and how we make sense of what is going on", started Taylor, linking the debate about responding to terror to the media's methods of communicating the war on terror. "I want to talk about what the Americans think is going on -- and thereby try to partially explain why we in Europe just don't get it."

"The news media in any particular country do have strikingly similar agendas that act as a mirror for national concerns, within the parameters of national political configurations", argued Taylor. "In times of crisis especially, headline news is often the same from tabloid to broadsheet; or ITN may lead on a story that the BBC places second, or vice versa. There are very similar concerns across the media."

As an example, Taylor showed that national medias' approach to the Iraq war reflected their national elite's approach to the conflict. "During the recent Iraq war, the American media was largely supportive", he said. "The French, German and Russian media were largely hostile, reflecting of course the positions of their governments. The British were split, particularly in the run-up to the war, before the 'support our boys' factor kicked in -- reflecting divisions within the country as a whole.

“Even then, levels of 56 percent support for the war when it did start were considerably lower than for earlier British interventions -- perhaps since as far back as the Suez crisis.”

“One striking difference between the American and European coverage of the Iraq war was that on this side of the Atlantic it was rarely connected with the war on terrorism”, continued Taylor. “The recent Iraq conflict was framed on this side of the Atlantic in terms of a traditional, small, short war -- with many suggesting that 2003 was merely the Bush family’s unfinished business, to finish off what the original and much larger coalition of the willing ought to have done back in 1991.

“Attempts by various supportive European governments -- Britain and Spain especially -- to link the removal of Saddam Hussein as an essential ingredient of the war on terrorism fell largely on deaf European media ears. Hence the questions about the connections between Saddam and 9/11, the ongoing debate about weapons of mass destruction, and so on. The war is now discussed, after the fact, as having been about liberating the Iraqi people.”

“But for the Americans”, said Taylor, spelling out the differences between American and European media coverage of Iraq, “that was *always* one of the aims -- as revealed, for example, in early January 2003, when President Bush told troops in Texas that they would be fighting, not to conquer anybody, but to liberate people.”

“That kind of comment about liberating people”, said Taylor, “should surprise no student of the Bush doctrine, as articulated in the president’s State of the Union address in January 2002, and in subsequent speeches by senior administration officials. This Bush doctrine has three essential strands. These three strands appear to signal a fundamental break with American foreign policy of the past. This has barely to penetrate European media analysis -- even in the debate about how much the world has changed since 9/11.

“My argument today is that US foreign policy most certainly has changed. It has become one gigantic risk-management exercise, in which the threat of further terrorist attacks drives virtually every other aspect of American foreign policy. And this in turn engenders further risks, until the goal is completed. But that is the question -- what is the goal?

“American foreign policy now deals with the world as it might be -- and this very uncertainty not only worries US allies, it also fuels the predisposition of the media to speculate about motives and risks, when it is unable for the most part to report the facts about a war against terrorism that is largely being fought on a variety of secretive fronts, such as intelligence, law enforcement, financial tracking and so on. Except, that is, when the military front explodes on to the front pages, such as in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

Taylor said that in order “to understand the motives”, we first have to understand these “three fundamental strands of the Bush doctrine”. He outlined them as follows: “The first of them is that because they are terrorists, and I am quoting from the State of the Union address here, because they ‘view the entire world as a battlefield, the United States must be proactive in pursuing them wherever they are’.

“Now this exercise of active, American leadership, especially with the threat of impending proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction that might one day be handed over to terrorists by rogue states, could involve the USA acting pre-emptively.

“For all the subsequent diplomatic manoeuvres involving Resolution 1441, and a possible subsequent resolution justifying military action against Iraq, it was this element of pre-emptive war which found its doubters among American allies who appeared concerned that the USA would henceforth act unilaterally -- not so much in the war against terrorism, where international cooperation of the intelligence services of almost 100 countries is marked, but insofar as the second element of the Bush doctrine is concerned: and this second element is, of course, regime change.

“Traditionally and since the creation of the modern state system and the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, it was an unspoken but universally held principle of international affairs that one state did not interfere with the internal affairs of another, short of war.

“Now an interesting twist to the ongoing Iraqi crisis of the 1990s was the puzzlement prior to recently of why the American-led coalition had failed to finish the job in 1991. Yet that previous conflict in 1991 was not about regime change in Baghdad; it was about the liberation of Kuwait.

“So there can be greater indication of how the new world has changed since 9/11, than the overt American shift away from that position of respecting states’ integrity. Regime change against a clearly identified member of the Axis of Evil was a dramatic reversal of centuries of international relations and indeed from the principles enshrined in the American-inspired UN charter, namely in Article 2.7, on not interfering in the internal affairs of other states.

“This shift gave rise to concern on this side of the Atlantic that the era in which Washington would only act multilaterally was over. It certainly stood in stark contrast to the multilateralism of the Clinton administrations.

“Vice President Cheney elaborated on this point in 2002 when he stated the ‘President has made very clear that there is no neutral ground in the war against terror. Those who harbour terrorists share guilt for the acts they commit’. Under the Bush doctrine, he continued: ‘a regime that harbours or supports terrorists will be regarded as hostile to the United States.’ This was the justification for the war in Afghanistan.

"The third and least publicised element of Bush doctrine was the 'non-negotiable' promotion of liberal democratic values, as part of the American global mission. This was essentially an overt expression of what had been implicit in American foreign policy during the Cold War -- namely the selling of democracy, US-style, to areas where it did not exist.

"Cheney again elaborated: 'In the Middle East, where so many have known only poverty and oppression and tyranny, we look to the day when people can live in freedom and dignity, and the young can grow up free of the conditions that breed despair, hatred and violence.'

"Regime change, in other words, is not just a political or rhetorical issue -- it is an economic, political, cultural, philosophical, and psychological aspiration to extend democracy, US-style, to the non-democratic world. So whereas public diplomacy of the past had attempted to sell democratic principles through persuasion, it would now appear that Washington is more interested in coercive public diplomacy as a better option."

In the discussion that followed, John Gallagher from Cardiff started: "I would like to say thank you to the media for their independent reporting, I personally appreciate it. But what disappoints me slightly is an impression I have of institutionalised narcissism -- aren't we wonderful, aren't we doing a good job? The media very rarely admit to being wrong. I would just like to ask you: which Blair do you trust, Tony or Jayson?"

Another audience member inquired: "Hasn't the media lost track of what is in the public interest and that which will interest the public?"

Nik Gowing was the first speaker to respond, telling Gallagher that "I think you're wrong about narcissism and also about admitting when we're wrong. I think because of the pressures of 24-hour news and so on, we are more able to correct ourselves than ever before, because we have rolling deadlines.

"I have done it many times on air -- not by saying 'We were wrong an hour ago', but by taking the viewer through the fact that the reporting of what we've been getting from a big incident has changed. When you have a bulletin at 5pm it can be very different by 6pm.

"So I would reject what you are saying about self-congratulation -- I think we are more self-aware and self-critical than any time in the past."

Barnett interjected: "I think what Nik has said goes very much for broadcast journalism -- but I don't think it applies to print journalism.

"I do think we need to make a distinction. There is an enormous amount of navel-gazing, some people call it self-criticism, which goes on inside the broadcast industry. There are a huge number of conferences and seminars

discussing 'what is the right approach to coverage and avoiding drama and maintaining accuracy and so on?'

"There are not particularly similar events in the print world. There are huge professional, ethical and philosophical differences between those two media, and there are other areas of the media as well where there are big differences."

Bruno Waterfield, a reporter based in Brussels and chair of a later discussion on the media, said: "On the public interest question, it isn't the job of the media to define the public interest. Those of us who work as reporters may have all kinds of varying views as to what may or may not be in the public interest, whether you work for the *Telegraph* or the *Sun* or whatever. I think the public interest arises out of some of the kinds of debates and political processes that occur -- it is not the job of the media to substitute for that democratic process.

"It is a fundamental conceit of many reporters that they attempt to do so. I think the job of reporters and journalists is to tell the truth -- to be objective as far as you can be. I don't have a great deal of sympathy for the print journalists who now have to turn around copy in perhaps the same amount of time as someone working on a wire news service. If you turn a story around in five, 10, 15 minutes, that is simply the first stab at the truth.

"I think the problem is that much of the media, far from being confident, is in fact insecure; if you look at the whole weapons of mass destruction debacle, one of the real problems is that the media there didn't try to be objective, so we are left with a post-festum discussion."

Philip Taylor responded by claiming that the media did, indeed, need to be careful about setting itself up as "the public". "We can contribute to public debate and to public awareness", he said, "but we cannot create or sustain the public in the ways that some journalists seem to believe."

-- MIDMORNING PLENARY: LIVING IN FEAR

Are we a society obsessed with risk and living in fear? Or are we just more sensibly aware of threats than in the past? Have the post-9/11 terror warnings created a fearful moment, where many assume that we live in a dangerous, unknowable world? Or have they reassured us that governments are taking threats to our safety seriously?

Jon Snow chaired this session on 'living in fear'. Snow is the main presenter of Channel 4's flagship news programme, *Channel 4 News*, which ITN has produced since its launch in 1982. He joined the presenting team of this highly acclaimed programme in April 1989. He also presents *First Edition*, the weekly news and current affairs programme aimed at 9 to 13 year olds. In addition to presenting ITN's programmes on Channel 4, Snow is Chairman

of the New Horizon Youth Centre and Deputy Chairman of the Media Trust and Vice Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University.

Snow introduced the first speaker, Professor Avi Bleich, who is Director of Lev-HaSharon Mental Health Centre (including a 300-beds psychiatric hospital, a 100-beds psychogeriatric hostel for Holocaust survivors, and a few communal psychiatric clinics). He serves also as Chairman of Psychiatry at the Tel-Aviv University Medical School. His past military career has included becoming Head (Colonel) of the Mental Health of the Israel Defense Forces. One of his current research interests is the field of traumatic stress and its short and long lasting psychological effects and psychiatric issues.

Bleich set out to describe what "it is like for a society to live in fear -- in this instance, Israel". Bleich has been conducting a study over the past two years, examining the extent to which acts of terror impact on Israelis and cause Israeli society to become "gripped by fear". "From late September 2000 and up to May or April when we gathered the data", said Bleich, "my society has suffered almost 20 months of intensive ongoing terrorism, including suicide bombing. How would you define suicide bombing -- conventional or unconventional weapons? I'll leave that for you to decide....

"During this period, there have been 13,000 terror events. It is now up to nearly 17,000 terror events." Bleich said, "You can see clearly that there is a huge number of dead and wounded -- caused by everything from rock-throwing, to lynching, to being run over, up to suicide bombings."

"The aim of our study was to determine the prevalence of post-traumatic stress symptomology", he said, "the symptoms with which we react to terror events, and post-traumatic stress disorder, the clinically relevant order. We did a telephone survey; we conducted structured questionnaires with the objective of tracking post-traumatic stress symptoms in the wider population, including in the Arab-Israeli population.

"We examined a number of stress-related symptoms -- including orientation towards the future, which is a big problem in our society; sense of safety; help-seeking issues; coping modes; and other demographic issues.

"Looking at the results, you can see that in Israel in May 2000, 16 per cent of our adult citizens were directly exposed to terror attacks. There is also a secondary circle of exposure to terror events, through the experience of family and friends. This means that only slightly more than 50 per cent of the Israel population has not been exposed to terror events -- the rest, over 40 per cent, have been, a huge proportion.

"What are the consequences of this? Various numbers of Israeli adults have post-traumatic stress and associative symptoms -- mainly detachment from reality and from their own identity, like amnesia and so on; others re-experience the sites, memory and imagination of the event that occurred, either when they are asleep or in flashbacks when they are awake; more than 55 per cent try to avoid people, sites, feelings, situations that remind

them of the terrorist attack -- by not getting on a bus again, or by not going to a discotheque, and so on.

"Fifty per cent are increasingly aroused by startle responses, and they have problems in getting to sleep. Additionally, 60 per cent felt that they were sad, depressed, gloomy, etc. When you take all these symptoms, looking for a clinically-defined disorder -- what we call post-traumatic stress disorder -- we were surprised to get the figure of 9.4 per cent. Why were we surprised? After the one event in America, the terrible event of 9/11, researchers recorded a rate of post-traumatic stress at 17.5 per cent. It dropped to six per cent after six months -- but this was after only one event. What we are experiencing in Israel, as you already know, is relentless and continuous attacks -- so for that reason the relatively lower figure of 9.4 per cent suffering from post-traumatic symptoms really, really surprised us."

Bleich continued by turning his attention towards Israelis' broader sense of safety and wellbeing, how they themselves feel about their society and the threat it faces from terrorism.

"What about sense of safety?", he asked. "Well, nearly 60 to 70 per cent felt that they are not safe, that their life is in danger. But at the same time, 82 per cent felt optimistic about the future. You may think this is an expression of cognitive dissonance, namely that you don't allow the facts to change your attitudes. But this finding was replicated in another study of Israeli society, probably reflecting some survival coping modes. Nevertheless, many keep on going, feeling optimistic.

"What about help-seeking issues? The majority of the population don't feel that they need professional help. Only slightly more than 10 per cent use help hotlines, and few use tranquillisers.

"This might be interesting to you, how we seem to be coping with such a terrible situation. But there are many tried and tested coping mechanisms, and the most commonly used one is to check again and again on our nearest and dearest ones. This is something we do every day, whenever something happens.

"Social support is critical for many reasons -- it can make you vulnerable to post-traumatic symptoms if you don't have social support or it can help you to recover from such symptoms if you do have it.

"Around 30 per cent of Israelis said that they don't want to watch media, electronic media mainly. But if you go up the list you will find that double this figure *want* to see the coverage, again and again, and that it somehow helps them with their coping.

"Nearly 60 per cent of Israelis felt that faith in God is helping them, which is much above the religious rate of Israelis in Israeli society, at least as it is expressed through the religious parties.

"In Israel, in May 2000, you don't have to be directly exposed to a terror attack in order to be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. In every study we know that the level of exposure is positively correlated with your vulnerability or your chance to have PTSD -- not in Israel. So you can only assume that the huge nature of the events, together with the media coverage, made the impact.

"This traumatic reality is specifically malignant for women. Women are much more vulnerable to PTSD as large, as we know, and specifically in Israel. I can only assume that the specific nature of reality in Israel, which involves worrying for your loved ones, may have a big impact on women.

"As you can see, taken together the findings point to simultaneous responses. On the one hand, nervousness, stress, a feel of unsafety; on the other hand, signs of adaptation and coping; on the one hand traumatic-related symptoms, with a relatively low number of PTSD cases; little demand for professional help, and at the same time expressed optimism about the future.

"A possible frame of reference for this kind of response would be the British under the German Blitz. There are no registered empirical data, the like of which we can collect today, but generally speaking, there is a resemblance. I am not aware of another society that can provide a frame of reference for such an ongoing, continuous threat as modern-day Israel.

"So the conclusion, from a mental health professional, would be in a way optimistic -- though as you might guess, our ultimate goal is a peace treaty, not efficient coping."

Jon Snow allowed initial questions to Bleich from the audience. One audience member asked: "What do you think, on the basis of this study, might be the implications for the peace process -- bearing in mind that Israel society will at some stage, we hope, be asked to or required to live in peace with its Palestinian neighbours, given the traumatic impact of at least 18 months of terror and fear? Is that something you covered, and is it something on which you have views outside of your medical views?"

Bleich responded: "My idea is that a possible tool to work with our Palestinian neighbours would be our mutual traumatic experience."

"This could be a bridge between us", he said. "And we are going to implement this in the near future, together with Palestinian psychologists and psychiatrists." Bleich said that he and his colleagues were in the process of making links with trauma centres in Palestinian territories, as a means of reaching out to the other community.

Simon Chinn spoke after Bleich. Chinn was producer and co-writer of BBC2's dramatised documentary, *Smallpox 2002: Silent Weapon*, which depicted a major bioterrorist attack and was nominated for a Royal Television Society award. Chinn's other documentary credits include: *America Beyond the*

Colour Line (BBC2/PBS), *Correspondent: The Promised Land* (BBC2), *The Real Alan Clark* (Channel 4), *Smith, Mugabe and the Union Jack* (BBC2) and *War in Europe* (Channel 4). He was also a producer on Channel 4's BAFTA-nominated international affairs series, *Weekly Planet*. He is a producer at Mentorn, one of the UK's leading independent TV production companies.

"We attempted for the first time on TV to depict the devastating consequences of something that thankfully hasn't happened yet -- namely a large-scale bioterrorist attack", said Chinn, introducing a clip from his film. "I'd like to concentrate on the experience of making that film and its impact when it was broadcast. There are real lessons to be drawn from it in terms of the media often playing a role in increasing alarm over terrorism-related events."

Chinn said he and his production team took very seriously their role and responsibilities. "We always were aware of the tension between instilling fear into those who watched it and our responsibility, which we actually took very seriously, to raise awareness and initiate a well-informed public discussion about how to protect against these kind of attacks. And with 9/11, that sense of responsibility increased", he said, describing how the film had been conceived and made in the months before 9/11, but then broadcast two months after the attacks on New York and Washington.

"We knew there would be people who would accuse us of scaremongering. AA Gill was one.... He wrote, 'What's the point of this programme? It doesn't provoke a debate or elucidate a truth. It's just scaremongering.'

"But I think Gill and other critics missed the point. During researching the film we became aware of how woefully inadequate our defences in the UK are for a bioterrorist attack, particularly one involving smallpox. Our public health system would quickly be overwhelmed, few British hospitals have made preparation for an attack, and there are very few global stocks of smallpox vaccine -- something which is now being addressed, fortunately."

"But most alarming of all", concluded Chinn, arguing that his film helped to "jolt viewers and officials", was the fact that "the UK government was entirely unwilling to discuss the possibility of a bioterror attack and how we might respond. Thankfully, that is now changing."

Simon Wessely, professor of psychological medicine at the Institute of Psychiatry and King's College, London, concluded the session. Wessely directs the Gulf War Illness Research Unit, and is author of over 300 scientific publications, many dealing with various aspects of military health. He has a particular interest in unexplained syndromes and post-conflict health.

Wessely talked about "cultural scripts" -- he argued that one reason why we seemed to be 'living in fear' today is because we lack a cultural script through which to make sense of events. "We do not have 'familiarity' or 'habituation'", he said, in terms of "what is happening to us and why."

Revisiting some of the points made by Patrick Mercer in Day One, Wessely contrasted our earlier dealings with the IRA's violent campaign and our current approach to the war on terror. He argued that there was "an element of predictability" to what the IRA did, allowing us to cope with it much more effectively.

He also contrasted the fearful response to the Washington sniper attacks of late 2002 to people's general response during times of war. "When we understand what is happening, when there is a certain habituation to events, then they generally have a less frightening impact on us."

Referring to Chinn's smallpox film, Wessely said: "One reason why Simon's film would go down well with audiences of epidemiologists, and I am also an epidemiologist, is because we actually have very boring lives. And many of us hanker after the romance and excitement of the great days when epidemiologists actually did things and fought diseases."

He outlined the remit of his speech: "I am going to talk about three things: the historical work that we have done on fear and panic; our work on Gulf War Syndrome; and today's, what I would refer to as, psychology and reassurance. So from the past, right through to the future.

"We've actually touched on the issue of psychological responses in history and the problem, or lack of problem, of British morale and psychological resistance during the Blitz.

"I won't go over old ground, except to once again say that there seems to be a consensus, which is informed by historical research, that populations facing adversity have a default position of showing resilience, and many historical examples show that that is the case.

"There are of course exceptions, but it is those exceptions which illuminate the rule -- which is that on the whole communities during the Second World War did show remarkable psychological resistance to the threat of mass bombing.

"The question is: why? Patrick Mercer, yesterday, said that the reason London had coped with similar adversity, the Provisional IRA's bombing campaign, is that the IRA had obligingly let off rather a lot of bombs, and this was a good thing because the security services knew how to deal with the attacks and got to know the enemy, while the population habituated to the new reality. He might have said it in a somewhat trite fashion...but actually he's absolutely right.

"Just as in the Blitz, it was the very familiarity of what was happening that allowed people to habituate and reduce their fear reactions. It also, of course, provided a cultural script for the British, beginning with the Blitz and then again with the PIRA and again now, of examples of resilience. And we haven't really mentioned that at all -- the role of cultural scripts, of shame as well, when these scripts are violated, is extremely important.

"We can see other cultural scripts across the world. I was in Washington during the sniper attacks, and I remember watching people doing their grocery shopping as if they were in the first scene of *Saving Private Ryan*. One had the instinct to want to say to these people, For God's sake, pull yourself together, and stop this! I felt that this, in Washington, was a cultural script that had gone wrong.

"Going back to the Second World War -- there were episodes of fear, which returned briefly when new threats arrived, when there were new weapons, but these again rapidly habituated. It was not helped by government pronouncements deliberately provoking rumours, which is what they did. Overall, habituation didn't take long; panic did occur, but it was local and isolated.

"Underlying it was also the overwhelming support of civil society -- by the end of 1944 up to 85 per cent of the British population were involved in the war effort in one shape or form, many of them in volunteer ways. So there was an enormous wave of volunteerism in society during the war years, and very few people could not feel that they were not contributing directly to the war. Of course, this is a very difficult thing to reproduce in the war against terror, as opposed to the war against Germany."

What were the conclusions of this historical evidence that people cope very well under adverse and threatening conditions? "It means", said Wessely, "that people, even in our angst-ridden era, can be expected to cope with adversity, unless of course we do our best to impede those natural resilience reactions with some of the ways that we deal with people.

"So although people can cope in the short term, we often have concerns about how they will cope in the long term. We also have tremendous concerns about the way our own therapeutic reactions, and the way in which we now use armies of trained counsellors, as a way of helping people over these adverse events, might impact on people -- the modern research we have done on this shows very clearly that such interventions do more harm than good. So we can expect people to do well unless we get in the way.

"But what about when the threat is unseen, unclear and unspecified -- not as what happened in the Second World War, not as what happens in Israel, and not as what happened against the PIRA, but when the threat is invisible and unclear but still potentially fatal? Now of course we are into the concerns around chemical weapons, biological weapons and the story of the Gulf War.

"We have been running a cohort of over 12,000 British armed forces who fought in the 1991 British Gulf War. What have we found? We know that those who went and fought in the Gulf War from the coalition countries of Britain, Australia and the USA have worse health.

"They have more symptoms, they feel worse, and their health has been effected. Their perception of themselves has been affected, and indeed up to 20 per cent of them believe that they have Gulf War Syndrome, whatever that might be.

"They are not dying any quicker, their mortality is normal, there is no evidence whatsoever of disease -- this is a feeling state; it's not cancer or heart disease, but people feel worse and they feel it is some consequence of going to the Gulf as this has not happened in other British military interventions abroad.

"The kinds of conditions that people from the Gulf report are actually familiar to us from other contexts. They look like, in the civilian context, patients who have chronic fatigue syndrome or those who have multiple chemical sensitivity, or they look like people who developed symptoms after so-called Agent Orange. Such syndromes have all been seen before, they are not new -- but they can still be very debilitating. Why should this 'Gulf War Syndrome' have happened?

"There isn't any instant explanation, but there are a couple of insights that are very relevant to today's discussions -- first of all is the side effects of the medical countermeasures, and there is no doubt in my mind, and our research has confirmed this, that there were side effects from the particular vaccines used to protect people against biological weapons.

"It is worth remembering that there is no such thing as a free lunch and there are such things as side effects from vaccines -- and it is certainly the case that the medical regime we used in 1991 did cause some side effects to soldiers and that has contributed to ill health.

But it isn't the only explanation at all -- and one we think is a stronger explanation is the fear of chemical and biological weapons themselves. This fear had extremely malign influences that have lasted a very long time.

"The strongest risk factor for developing symptoms after the Gulf War was *believing* that you were exposed to chemical weapons. If you believed you were exposed to chemical weapons, then you were eight or nine times more likely to get ill.

"Now we don't believe there was any use of chemical weapons -- there are one or two people who would argue with that, but there is a general conclusion that they were not used. But if you thought they were, and you thought you were exposed, then you were much more likely to get ill. So the fear of these weapons is directly causing illness, even in the absence of those weapons being used."

"Why should that be?", Wessely continued. He went on to outline how fear of our environment, a broader anxiety about the world around us, could have contributed to the sense among Gulf War veterans that they had been made ill in 1991.

"I think it is pretty straightforward - this is almost psychology for beginners. If you look at the standard literature on risk perception, what do we know? We know that the things that make people scared are the terrifying things; that man-made things are much more scary than natural hazards, even if natural hazards are more dangerous.

"We know that involuntary risks make people scared, where it wasn't their choice to expose themselves to the risk. Invisible threats are much worse; threats that seem to involve the next generation are extremely scary; and risks for which there seem to be no benefit are also a cause of great concern.

"We can see then why this Gulf War Syndrome links to similar syndromes -- these are not about the military at all, but are linked to our fears of our environment. We can see how our current fears over depleted uranium link to our fears of radiation; the anthrax scare cannot possibly be understood without some thinking about MMR and other vaccination scares; the fear about the smoke from oil fires make sense after years and years of concern about pollution, and so on.

"So underlying these conditions, then, are our own anxieties, our fear of dread weapons -- but underlying that are our anxieties about modernity and environmental health, and the belief that the environment is poisoning us despite all the evidence to the contrary.

"We conclude then that our reactions to chemical and biological warfare are mediated by anxiety. How should we deal with this? How can we reduce this state of living in fear? The answer is obviously to reduce the fear -- but how?

"The problem is that there isn't an easy answer. Some people say that we need more information. Many argue that if there is more information, people will finally understand these fears and not respond so irrationally. The other answer, apparently, is to take more precautions and to enforce more security measures, because the people will then feel protected.

"Is this right? History suggests not. The MMR story has not gone away, despite all the information given out; vaccination rates are still dropping. The Agent Orange story still rumbles on 30 years later. In fact, the more we regulate the more anxious we seem to become.

"It is one of the curious paradoxes of chemical regulation that the country that has the best chemical regulation in Europe is Sweden -- which also has the highest rate of chemical sensitivity." Wessely concluded by arguing that perhaps if we stopped stoking fear and concern over our environment and its potential impact on human health, then perhaps we would see people anxieties, which now can make people feel ill, start to fall away.

In the audience discussion, a student from Goldsmith's College in London asked about anxiety levels. "Why are they so high in Western countries,

where we don't have bombings and all the kind of things Iraq currently has to live with?

"Maybe people should have a trip to Afghanistan and Sudan and see how other people live, where they have to take risks every day. I also want to ask: where is the current threat coming from? Speakers have said that it isn't directly related to the Israel/Palestine issue but is much more complex than that. Who is after us? And perhaps more crucially, why?"

Wessely responded: "Well, if my analysis is correct, I think we are after ourselves. In much of the way that we think about the risks of biological and chemical weapons, what we are actually thinking about are the risks of environmental issues much closer to home.

"We're worried about vaccines, we're worried about pollution, we're worried about additives, we're worried about all these things, which often don't cause any genuine health problems whatsoever. So we've created this environmental fear among ourselves; we are creating problem for ourselves."

Simon Chinn took up this view, arguing that, "people are not walking around terrorised today, as far as I can tell. Yes, people have lots of anxiety -- maybe this is a sensible level of anxiety though. I think we should have more faith in people's ability to be rational about threats."

Journalist Jake Lynch of "Reporting The World", who spoke in a later session, spoke from the audience: "It's often suggested in peace research that conflicts can be made worse and more intractable through a gradually escalating level of fear of 'the other'.

"One form of treatment for that which is often proposed is exposure to 'the other' in the form of bridge-building. It seems to me that the extent to which we can do that is limited, by geography for example.

"But in the context of global terrorism, is there some useful function to be performed by a programme like Simon Chinn's, only looking at the other side of the story, the side that is missed out in the programme -- which is what happens in the lives of the would-be suicide attacker and the would-be smallpox carrier which brings them to the point of doing things?"

Chinn said that he was interested in this side of the story. But he, and the other speakers, pointed out that there was a problem of "saleability" with such issues. "The fact is that TV executives are interested in what might happen over here", he said, "and not always so interested in how it has happened or the factors that contributed to it."

-- STRAND DISCUSSION: HOW THE MEDIA WORKS

During the Iraq war, many opted to get their news from weblogs and individual websites, which offered a different perspective on events. The internet also allowed many to watch Arab TV channel Al-Jazeera. We now have real-time TV, rolling news channels, and journalists who travel with armies. What impact do these new technologies have on our understanding of war and terror?

Kim Sengupta, a journalist with *The Independent* who specialises in defence, chaired this session. The speakers included: Yosri Fouda, Western Europe Correspondent for the Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel, Dr Philip Hammond, a senior lecturer in the Arts and Media Department at South Bank University and co-editor of *Degraded Capability: The Media and the Kosovo Crisis* (2000) and Nick Robinson, Political Editor for ITV News.

-- CLOSING PLENARY: A RESPONSIBLE MEDIA?

Many politicians and commentators talk about the need for a 'responsible media'. How should we define the media's responsibilities? Should the media be strictly independent - or should it work with government bodies in communicating important information? Has the media been irresponsible in the post-9/11 world?

Bruno Waterfield chaired this closing plenary. As deputy editor for the Brussels online news service *EUpolitix.com*, Waterfield has broad experience in covering political issues. He previously worked as senior reporter on the Westminster staff of ePolitix covering political stories since May 2000.

Jake Lynch spoke first. Lynch is an experienced international reporter in television and radio news. He was Sydney correspondent for *The Independent* in 1998 to 1999 and now works for the BBC in London. He is also author of *Reporting the World*, an ethical checklist for the reporting of conflicts. He teaches MA courses in media and conflict analysis at the universities of Sydney, Australia, and Cardiff, Wales.

Lynch started: "There are a great number of journalists who are prepared to keep thinking creatively and honestly about what constitutes a responsible media, and that is an asset -- not only for the media, but even, I would argue, for democracy."

Lynch outlined some of the ways in which journalists could play a more responsible role in modern societies. He touched upon an issue that he has made his own in recent years -- the question of 'peace journalism', and the attitudes with which journalists should approach sensitive issues. Lynch argued that there were a number of ways in which journalists could seek to avoid misinforming the public or even inflaming conflicts.

In relation to the war on terror, and other warzones, Lynch called on media outlets to "avoid treating conflicts as always being about two groups seeking *one goal*. Rather, journalists ought to "disaggregate" the parties into smaller groups, seeking to outline and explain a number of potential outcomes. He also said the media should avoid always focusing on the "merits of a violent action in terms of its visible effects only", and seek to understand and communicate the effects of violence in terms of the "long-term consequences of psychological damage and trauma".

Lynch spoke of the "Reporting The World" book that he and other "peace correspondents" have been working on: "It arose out of a series of discussions among journalists about issues to do with representation and responsibility in covering conflicts; and it must be said in the context of this particular discussion that there are a great number of journalists in my experience who are prepared to keep thinking creatively and honestly about what constitutes a responsible media. I would go so far as to say that such a responsible media can be an asset for democracy.

"So what is a responsible media? I could commend to you some of the extracts from one of my favourite documents, under which we labour -- the BBC's producer guidelines, which is sort of an updated version of the liberal case for press freedom.

"They say that audiences should receive 'an intelligent account of issues which enables them to form their own views'. What does that entail? One of the things it says is that no significant perspective should go unreflected or underrepresented on the BBC.

"It says that all views should be reflected in proportion to the depth and spread of opinion in British society. And this other stipulation is a particular favourite of mine: there are usually more than two sides to every issue.

"So far so good, I would suggest. The problem we have is implementation, and it is there that I suggest that some of the things outlined in the BBC document run into journalistic conventions that have now outlived their usefulness.

"One of those conventions, for example, is a bias in favour of events over process. This makes itself felt in the findings of Greg Filo, originally published in *Developments In Sociology* last year. Filo and his researchers asked a focus group of viewers what they had gleaned from the almost nightly coverage of events in the Middle East.

"They found that the proportion of the sample who were correctly able to identify the territories as Palestinian as occupation as Israeli was nine per cent -- whereas those who believed wrongly that the territories were Israeli and the occupation Palestinian was 11 per cent.

"Now he suggests, and I have some sympathy with this, that that may arise from the way in which this story is presented as a narrative or a chain of

unconnected events; that if you concentrate, for example, on pictures of the aftermath of a suicide bombing or a military incursion you are on safe ground -- if you start to use the word 'occupation', then you are on less safe ground.

"So Filo suggested that the narrative which takes shape is of this conflict as a series of disconnected events, and what it leaves out is the process -- the process which puts the Israeli forces, in the first place, in a position to carry out military incursions; in other words, the ongoing, 35-year occupation of Palestinian territory.

"This bears upon key issues in reporting the war on terrorism. I was in New York in October 2001, when arguably the initial sting of the attacks on the World Trade Center had begun to ease slightly, giving way to some very good coverage from some questioning quarters.

"Many of you will have seen the now classic editions of *Time* and *Newsweek*, which had as their front page headlines, "The Roots of Rage" and "Why Do They Hate Us?"

"The next day, the *New York Post* had an editorial titled "Dubiously Deep Thoughts", which argued that there was no point examining why they hate us, suffice to say that they do hate us and they must be punished for it. It was a little bit like the John Major comment in relation to the James Bulger killers -- we must understand a little bit less, and condemn a little bit more.

"A responsible media contains within it a question perhaps of what the media is responsible for. I'm going to suggest very briefly that the media does have some responsibility for what happens next in these stories.

"The media does have some responsibility for policy -- not in a linear way, as in the CNN effect, where a situation report on a new channel can lead to under-secretaries of state scurrying across Washington to respond, but in a non-linear way, something I would call a feedback loop of cause and effect.

"Think of it like this: any responsible government, when forging policy, must consider how that policy is going to be sold to the electorate. Politicians are people we look to to devise solutions to problems.

"Inevitably, therefore, there is some premium on how those problems are diagnosed in the media. If we diagnose the problem as consisting of, what one writer in New York said of the incidents of 9/11, a spasm of irrationality, then we form an incentive to offer as a remedy a policy designed to squish that irrationality.

"If, on the other hand, we are prepared to look in to the roots of rage and why they hate us, we may contribute to incentives to devise policy solution based less on targeted weapons and more on targeted development assistance.

"Another pervasive convention in journalism, I would suggest, is a dependence of the news agenda on the words and deeds of official sources.

"Earlier speakers have already alluded to problems with that, when the only difference between the government and the main opposition party is that one is even keener on war than the other, but I do think we need to find a way around this convention. And it goes to the heart of what Phil Hammond was saying earlier, which is that there has been dissension and scepticism in the coverage of the war over the past few month, but only up to certain red lines.

"For example, one of the key propositions Tony Blair made right from the start was that this crisis or this war was really about the threat from weapons of mass destruction; that is one of the propositions that we should have put to greater test than we did.

"What we should have done, as journalists, is to hear from people who could put forward other explanations as to what it was really all about. In that sense, there is a dividing line between newspapers that were prepared to commission op-ed pieces about the Project for a New American Century and those who were not. And every news organisation needs its equivalent of that, in order to put those assertions to the test, and fulfil the aspirations embodied in a document like the BBC's producer guidelines."

Mick Hume, editor of the online publication *spiked* and a columnist for *The Times* (London), followed Lynch. Hume was the editor of *LM* magazine (which he launched, originally as *Living Marxism*, in 1988) until it was forced to close in 2000 following a libel suit brought by ITN. Hume said that while you might expect someone who used to edit a magazine with Marxism in the title to be instantly critical of the authorities, he often finds himself feeling uncomfortable with the contemporary media's penchant for kneejerk attacks.

"This is often more like lazy cynicism, than informed criticism", he argued. Hume said that the only responsibility he felt, as a journalist who runs an independent publication, is "to tell the truth as I see it". Beyond that, journalists should seek to criticise and enlighten.

But Hume claimed that today, at a time when there are few means through which to make sense of what is happening around us, there is a tendency to "blame everything on the authorities". While he maintained that he has taken a "consistently critical" approach to New Labour, he criticised the "cynical culture" where attacking everything is less radical than many imagine. "It can contribute to an unquestioning and blinkered climate," he argued, "rather than informing readers or properly holding governments and officials to account."

He said: "Unlike my prestigious colleagues here today, I don't want to talk about the responsibilities of a media institution, because I don't speak on

behalf of one; and I don't work in an area of journalism where I have to worry about the dread word balance.

"So I just want to talk about what I think the responsibilities are for someone like me, as an independent, opinionated journalist who believes in freedom and who believes that freedom of speech is the most important of all freedoms; about what I think my responsibilities are in relation to the war on terror.

"I think that my responsibility, our responsibility, is the same as it is in every other area, which is to tell the truth as we understand it, and not to be swayed by that from any outside influences.

"The fact that someone has seen fit to declare a war on terrorism should not alter that responsibility on my part to tell the truth as I understand it.

"In fact, in such times of crisis, I would argue that there is all the more responsibility on independent journalists to delve underneath the surface and dig up what's going on, particularly when you've got a largely self-generated crisis, like the one we're in now, where there is so much that is smoke and mirrors.

"The first principle of journalism that I have always operated under is 'question everything'. Accept nothing as it seems and question everything -- I think that is something that all critically minded journalists ought to subscribe to.

"Today that presents a problem that has got both new and old aspects. The old aspect is that we have to question everything that we are told by those in authority; the new aspect is that we also have to question everything we are told by the critics of those in authority, especially today when criticism often moves over the line into cynicism.

"In a former life I edited a magazine called *Living Marxism*, from which you might surmise that I have never been particularly interested in believing what I'm told by the government or the state or those in authority, and questioning them has always been a very important part of my job.

"I feel that the job of journalists is to hold those in power to account. And I think that is even more the case when war is talked about, because there is always more going on in the preparation for and execution of a war than we would be told by those in authority.

"One of the things I find very striking about today's discussion of the weapons of mass destruction is the naivety of those who say, 'Oh, it appears the government has been exaggerating and not telling us the entire truth about this war'.

"You often wonder if such people know nothing of history; do they really think that governments ever came forward and told us the absolute truth in

support of wars? Have we forgotten everything from the Tonkin incident in Vietnam, going right back to the stories about the Germans and the Belgian nuns in the First World War?

"So there is always a necessity what we are told by those in authority as a justification for war. And I think that we still need to do that now -- the weapons of mass destruction is a very good example, as Jake talked about. And there are many other issues in the propaganda war over Iraq which I think deserved far more interrogation from the media than they got.

"Because there are many aspects of that war, things like the rescue of Jessica Lynch for example, really indicated the extent to which the politics of spin drove much of the war. We were told that we've got these terrible politics of spin at home but this war of substance and principle in Iraq, and actually I think the dividing line was not as clear as that.

"There was an awful lot of spin and propaganda in that war that could have been put to a more thorough investigation. That is still a primary responsibility of journalists.

"I want to highlight what I think is the new problem, which is that, today, the idea of questioning everything seems to mean to many, not critical questioning, but just cynicism. It means we have reached the point where the assumption that whatever the government says is a lie has become an automatic, unthinking response -- to the point where I rather suspect that if Blair and Bush provided satellite photographs showing the Nazis marching into Poland, a lot of people wouldn't believe them. And probably a significant number of them would say that it was just a conspiracy to pinch Poland's coal resources.

"This kind of cynical, 'the government always lies' response is not built on any kind of critical investigation of the facts around specific issues, but is based on something that I know you have touched upon over the past couple of days -- the culture of fear, the institutionalisation of mistrust and conspiracy-mongering that really passes for public debate today.

"And the trouble with that conspiracy-mongering, culture of fear and mistrust is that it doesn't distinguish between good and bad government statements.

"So the fact that the polls show that nobody is prepared to believe Tony Blair about weapons of mass destruction might seem fair enough -- and it is fair enough, as clearly a lot of dubious things were going on with the intelligence on that subject.

"But by the same token, when a week or two ago a very lengthy scientific research project published results showing that there was no such thing as Gulf War Syndrome, far from resolving the issue for the public, most people agreed, and many in the media agreed, with the leader of the ex-servicemen pursuing claims who said, Well that's bound to be a lie because

the government funded the research. And as he put it, he who pays the piper calls the tune.

“So fair enough, we don’t believe you about weapons of mass destruction; but we’re not going to believe you about Gulf War Syndrome either. We’re not going to believe you about anything. And this is not a serious questioning of those in authority; it is cynicism and institutionalised mistrust.

“It means that, for example, no matter how far-fetched the government’s anti-terrorism measures become, there will always be a cacophony calling out for more, accusing the government of being complacent and so on.

“And it also means, away from the war on terrorism, that when the government supports completely sound scientific statements on the efficacy of the MMR vaccine or GM foods, they will also be rubbished because if the government says it, it can’t possibly be true.

“This raises new problems for us, for someone like me as a critical journalist. It means that the responsibility to question everything doesn’t just mean questioning those who have power and influence today; it also means questioning everything we’re being told by the critics. It means questioning their claims with just as much rigour, and holding them to account.

“I think there has been a problem of too many in the media being too ready to go along with this institutionalised cynicism and mistrust, and to really indulge in scare mongering rather than proper debate about the issues.

“So we’re left with this terrible conquest to see who can terrify the public the most -- whether it’s the government going on about Saddam and his weapons of mass destruction, or whether it’s the critics going on about how we’re not doing enough about the threat of SARS in this country, that we’re not doing enough about the threat of sarin in this country, or anything else beginning with S that we’re supposed to be frightened of.

“It’s an awful kind of auction of who can terrify the public the most, and I think that the responsibility of journalists today has got to be to interrogate both sides of that debate and question everything. Because for me, I think when we talk about weapons of mass destruction that threaten civilisation and society, fear is the weapon of mass destruction that threatens us most.

“And I don’t think we need Hans Blix or Mr Blair’s dossier to tell us where to find it.”

Richard Sambrook, Director of BBC News since 2001, concluded the session. As someone who is responsible for all news and current affairs programmes and services across BBC radio, TV and the worldwide web, Sambrook flagged up his “allegiance to the BBC’s code of conduct for journalists”.

Sambrook joined the BBC in 1980 as a radio news sub-editor. Since then he has worked across a wide range of radio and TV programmes and on location for many major news events. He has been Deputy Editor of the *Nine O'Clock News*, News Editor, Head of Newsgathering and Acting Director of Sport. Sambrook agreed with Hume that "lazy criticism" often masquerades as critical journalism today, and questioned the extent to which the availability of easily accessible, 24-hour, real-time news had impacted on "the traditional journalistic culture of criticism and insight". Sambrook argued that, in terms of responsibility, the media should strive to be "clear, accurate, truthful and ethical."

Sambrook said: "I should start off by saying that I agree with a lot of what Mick has just said, and indeed a lot of what Jake said. I want to sketch out what I think are some of the realities that we ought to be aware of, and what journalists' responsibilities should be in this context.

"Firstly, on what is the war on terror and how do we define the media's responsibilities in relation to it. Well, the media is not singular, as that question seems to imply.

"As we have already discussed earlier today, it is plural in the extreme -- and getting more so. There is a huge diversity of sources of information and there is huge and growing competition, and we shouldn't think that the media is one lump behaving with a herd instinct.

"To take an obvious example -- a tabloid report will be very different from a one-hour Radio 4 documentary looking at the same thing. Both are entirely legitimate, and it isn't a question of one being right and one being wrong -- but they are both very different.

"The other thing I wanted to say is that the media is increasingly, and this applies to a public service broadcaster like the BBC as much as it does to a newspaper or the commercial competition, is very much focused on the reader and the audience. If we're not, what are we there for?

"The motivation for doing that from a public service point of view is different from a commercial one, obviously, but nonetheless we have to be rooted in the audience. They pay for us, and we are there to provide them with information.

"Finally on that front, it's important to remember that the media exists in a dynamic environment. It depends on what happened yesterday what we think might happen today or tomorrow; it absolutely depends on what other media have or haven't reported; it depends on the current state of public opinion; and it depends on the current state of political decisions as well.

"This is a dynamic and changing environment, to which different sections of the media have to adapt all the time. So it isn't a very simple command and control structure where we says this is what we have to do, so let's do it; it's about responding to all sorts of different influences, hour by hour.

"So how does this apply to the war on terror? There are a number of categories; the first, in terms of the war on terror, might be the military war.

"Obviously we have seen Afghanistan and now we've seen Iraq, and I would also include under the military tag issues of homeland security. We've talked today a little about the Iraq war, and doubtless there will be questions later about the rights and wrongs of embedded reporters and so on.

"But I would say, as Mick has just been saying, that the role of the media in times of war is to try to give the best and most complete picture of what has happened. It is fantastically difficult during a war to do that; it was fantastically difficult during Iraq and I'm sure that we still don't know exactly what happened there and why.

"I am sure that a lot of the current discussions about Jessica Lynch and the dossiers and so on is an attempt to go back and think about what we weren't able to work out at the time.

"In terms of homeland security, I suppose it's about an evaluation of the level of threat, and we know all the issues around risk reporting. Clearly this isn't just about risks to life; otherwise we would do a lot more pieces on the dangers of smoking than we do on the dangers of terrorism. It is not the media's role to scare people and it is not our role to overblow or underplay a threat. We must try to give people what the scale of threat is and how it might materialise.

"One example of the dilemmas we face was during the anthrax scares after 9/11, when there were an awful lot of hoaxes in this country -- and actually we didn't report them.

"That wasn't because we wanted to suppress them, but because we took a judgement that that would have probably scared people, unnecessarily and unreasonably, when actually there wasn't much of a threat.

"If there had been a real case of anthrax in this country, then obviously our position would have changed dramatically. In this country, I think we're actually quite good at making that kind of trade-off -- what should we report, what shouldn't we report, and so on.

"Another category in the war against terror is the financial war, which is the one that we know least about. A lot of it is secret and hidden; we don't what the terrorists' roots of financial support are, we don't know how it's being tackled, and frankly if we did know these things I don't think it would make a lot of difference, because there seems to be ample financial sources for terrorism and cutting off this or that root doesn't seem to make a tangible difference.

"Then there is the intelligence war, which is particularly pertinent for this discussion. Reporting the intelligence war is not something that the media has traditionally been very good at; intelligence is all about shades of grey and the media, as with all means of mass communication, much prefers issues that are black and white and right and wrong. Shades of grey and process are very difficult to report and calibrate properly.

"And the truth about the intelligence war is that it's not a hard science; it's all about nuance and interpretation, where information is often conflicting or contradictory, so that context plays an important role. Historically, the accuracy of intelligence has been uneven, and of course, as we have seen, intelligence is open to political manipulation and political pressure.

"Moving on to the final area, the biggest and most important part of the war on terror -- and that is the war for hearts and minds. In the UK, that is about trying to win trust; Mick has already pointed out that there has been a decline in public trust, we know there has been a generational change, and so on. It's not the media's role to shore up trust in public institutions, but it is our role to hold people to account and to test integrity on the public's behalf.

"I have above my desk a cutting from a newspaper during the BSE crisis, which is pertinent. It says: 'Politicians say they are not in charge, they at most regulate developments. Scientific experts say they are merely creating technological opportunities. Businesses say they are just responding to consumer demand. Our society has become a laboratory with nobody responsible for the outcome of the experiment.'"

"I think", concluded Sambrook, "that that quote captures a state of mind that is prevalent at the moment, and I think part of our job is to clarify lines of responsibility and accountability to a certain extent."

In the discussion that followed, chair Bruno Waterfield picked up on Sambrook's story about suppressing anthrax hoaxes for the benefit of the public. Was this the job of journalists, he asked. "Is it right not to broadcast things that might cause panic?"

Jake Lynch responded: "I think that is an example of the feedback loop that I talked about in action. If we broadcast hoaxes then we create an incentive to people to create further hoaxes in order to get broadcast again.

"There is no shortage of people who want to be on television for whatever reasons, nefarious or otherwise. There does need to a certain kind of...carefulness, when it comes to things that are quite obviously unreal and non-threatening."

Mick Hume said: "I'm very glad that I don't have institutional responsibility for those kind of decisions. My attitude to censorship is that I will write

what I like and if you want to censor it then you do it; don't expect me to censor myself.

"I do think that an interesting thing about something like this is that it is classic case of shooting the messenger. The media is not the problem with something like the anthrax scares. The real question is: why are people predisposed to be terrified by some washing powder in a supermarket or some sand being spilt in a Liverpool sorting office?

"It wasn't the media that made people scared of those things; there is something else, the culture of fear that I talked about earlier which needs a more thorough investigation.

"When the entire US government closes itself down for three months because there were three or four envelopes of anthrax and a couple of deaths, when the capital of America ceases to function because of the anthrax scare, then I think it's a bit rich of those in power to day that it's the media's fault for putting these stories out."

In the discussion, audience members picked up on the speakers comments about self-censorship and distrust of public bodies in particular. One audience member asked about the showing of dead bodies in war coverage - was it acceptable or not?

Lynch said: "It's often said that if you show dead bodies you will deaden the sensibilities of the audience. I have always thought that in that, implicit in that, is some thought that you are preserving for the ultimate situation the right to show those images when it is in extremis. Well if a war is not that situation, then what is?

"These are restrictions that resulted, not from journalistic questions, but from issues of taste and decency. These images certainly *do* affect the sustainability of the policy.

"If these images are stacking up in American living rooms every night, then the policy is judged to be less sustainable, less doable. That appears to be what frightens some in authority about gruesome images."

Hume responded: "I do think that war is a nasty business and people should be shown war as it is rather than talking about collateral damage and all that kind of nonsense.

"At the same time, it is very striking that before the Gulf War this time we were suddenly shown all these images of the Basra road massacre from the last Gulf War, but no one showed those images at the time when so many Iraqis were massacred by the US airforce there."

"At the same time, however", said Hume, "I think there is something ghoulish and morbid about the fascination with dead bodies at the moment.

There is another example of the propaganda war during the war that could have been questioned more thoroughly, which also relates to dead bodies.

"For the first time ever in this war, the British government chose to fly back the bodies of dead British servicemen; that never happened before ever.

"Until the Falklands War they never flew bodies back; there was always a corner of a far-flung foreign field and all of that. In the Falklands they flew them back long after the war was over. Iraq was the first time they ever had those funerals in the middle of a war, as a televised event.

"That is a stunt, and a particularly grisly and sickly one, and I don't think anybody seriously questioned that. It was a use of dead bodies that I would like to have seen put to question a bit more."

CLOSING REMARKS - BILL DURODIÉ:

I want to sum up a few of the themes that arose over the past two days.

A lot of people have come up to me and said it's great that there was such a varied audience, from scientists, psychiatrists, social scientists, people in the media, and civil servants. I think that bringing all those people together, to see what would happen if we cross-fertilised such constituencies, has been a very productive exercise -- one that I would like to repeat again at some point in the future.

The conference opened yesterday with Nick Raynsford pointing out the famous medical dictum, "First do no harm". But it has become clear through the course of our discussions that the pressure on politicians and officials to be seen to be acting can very often lead them in an opposite direction -- whether the actions they have taken turn out to be measured and appropriate remains to be determined.

We have also debated worst-case scenarios here, in sessions with a "What if?" emphasis. We are continually told to "think the unthinkable", but I actually think that acting as if the unthinkable were already true is actually part of the problem.

Lawrence Freedman indicated that warnings have competing aims. It strikes me that many warnings today go completely ignored -- like the warning on your cigarette packet, which gets larger and larger and larger, but we still ignore it. In many ways, warnings that are actually social policy in disguise tend to be seen as such by the public.

We have discussed the sheer volume of information, which has created big problems in dealing with the war on terror. In fact, I suspect that we now suffer from information overload -- that includes the security services, but also the banking world, who are now charged with monitoring every transaction they deal with, in case of anything suspicious.

We looked at the distinction between information and explanation, and the search for meaning. We talked about the Blitz Spirit--- but during the Blitz, society was more engaged in that battle than we are in the war on terror. It was a more coherent society that stood up to the Blitz.

I followed the chemical and biological weapons strand at this conference -- and the clear message I got was that, at least in scientists' minds, terrorists are not yet capable of using such weapons. I would argue then that the reason such weapons feature highly in people's minds is because they are a powerful metaphor for a sense of corrosion. It points to the disintegration of society from within, which I have spoken about.

I know a lot of people think that Westerners create a lot of new fears for themselves -- perhaps that we seek to fill the vacuum of risks that we have done away with through medical and scientific progress. I think that argument misses what is new today. In my mind, the problem is that we are a less networked society. That might strike you as an odd thing to say in a time when we have real-time TV, mobile phones, net access, and so on.

But the majority of people are not members of political parties, or trade unions, or churches; family networks are declining, as are other community and informal networks. In my mind, less connection means less correction. It often means that individuals' subjective fears and interpretation of events can go unchallenged, by absent networked groups who might traditionally have said: "Well, have you tried thinking about it this way...?"

This is the thought I would like people to leave here with: shouldn't we concentrate more on these issues at home, before rushing off to fight terrorism over there? It is surely the reconstitution of a public and public life in the domestic sphere that should be our main concern if are we to win the wars we need to win.

Bill Durodié and Brendan O'Neill, 2003