

**NBC'S WAR  
IN LEBANON:**

**THE  
DISTORTING  
MIRROR**

**by EDWARD ALEXANDER**

*Author of "The War in Lebanon: A History of the Conflict"*

I think the press ought to be arrogant.  
Reuven Frank, President NBC News  
(May 11, 1983)

I never wonder to see men wicked, but  
I often wonder to see them not ashamed.  
Jonathan Swift

#### THE AUTHOR

Edward Alexander is professor of English at University of Washington, Seattle. His books include *Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Hill* (Columbia University Press, 1965); *Arnold, Ruskin, and the Modern Temper* (Ohio State University Press, 1973); *The Resonance of Dust: Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate* (Ohio State University Press, 1979); and *Isaac Bashevis Singer* (G. K. Hall, 1980). His essays have appeared in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, *Modern Language Review*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, *Dickensian*, *American Historical Review*, *Victorian Poetry*, *Midstream*, *American Spectator*, *Commentary*, and *Encounter*.

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## PREFACE

In June, 1983 Americans for a Safe Israel (AFSI) produced a video documentary "NBC in Lebanon: A Study of Media Misrepresentation." The hour long documentary written and directed by Peter E. Goldman, Director of AFSI, shows how NBC Nightly News misrepresented the war in Lebanon and misled and deceived the American public.

We felt, however, that a more detailed study of NBC's coverage of the war was needed and Prof. Edward Alexander's article "NBC's War in Lebanon: The Distorting Mirror" brilliantly analyzes NBC's falsehoods and techniques of distortion.

The problem of media advocacy and media misrepresentation stemming from the war in Lebanon has been covered in many articles including "Lebanese Eyewitness" by Martin Peretz (*The New Republic*, Aug. 2, 1982), "Misreporting Lebanon" by Joshua Muravchik (*Policy Review*, Winter 1983), "The War in Lebanon" by Frank Gervasi (Center for International Security), "Behind the Lies in Lebanon" by Pearl Sheffy Gefen (*Jerusalem Post*, Oct. 29, 1982), "J'Accuse" by Norman Podhoretz (*Commentary*, Sept. 1982), and "Lessons of the Lebanese Campaign" by Prof. Marvin Maurer and Peter E. Goldman (*Midstream*, April, 1983).

We believe that "NBC's War in Lebanon" and AFSI's video documentary, which go into great detail about one network's coverage, add a new and valuable dimension to the examination of the question of media advocacy.

Those readers who would like to receive a copy or a transcript of the video documentary should contact the AFSI office for details.

Herbert Zweibon  
Chairman, Americans for a Safe Israel

## INTRODUCTION

A word fitly spoken is like apples of  
gold in pictures of silver.  
*Proverbs XXII, 11.*

It probably took several centuries from the time printing was invented for the belief to die out that 'whatever is in print must be true.' Now, in the age of television, we face a parallel danger in the widespread belief that "pictures don't lie." In fact, as I shall frequently have occasion to suggest in the following pages, pictures, like words, can and do lie, for pictures, like words, are created and manipulated by men, whose reputation for probity has been open to question since the expulsion from Eden. The injunction to "hold the mirror up to nature" sounds sensible enough until we remember that mirrors may be dirty or clean, concave or convex, cracked or whole; and that everything depends upon which portion of nature you choose to reflect, how often you reflect it, and how much you reveal of the history of the reflected images. Not the least danger of distortion in the use of the mirror is the tendency of the owner to hold it up to himself and make it into the deceiving mirror of self-love, a mirror that reflects not life but the spectator.

If, as James Billington argued in his book *Fire in the Minds of Men* (1980), the press, once known as the Fourth Estate\*, has now "in many ways replaced the First [Estate], the Church," we are under the most compelling obligation to ask whether journalists are using their enormous power for good or for evil, responsibly or recklessly. Americans have long assumed that their press, unlike the British and European, will clearly distinguish between news and editorial opinion. Even in the wake of the war in Lebanon we may still take some comfort from the fact that American journalists generally lagged far behind their European and British colleagues in the art of cloaking naked partisanship in tendentious reporting. But the tendency of our television news media to flout the conventions of balance, fairness, and accuracy in the interests of political ideology is growing, not receding. NBC's disregard for these conventions (and, in the case of fairness, federal regulations) was by no means *sui generis*; but I have chosen to analyze NBC rather than its competitors because the malpractices common to the three major networks were drawn out into extreme or radical form by NBC. Neither of the other networks, for example, allowed so complete a monopoly on the expression of editorial opinion on the war to one set of biases as NBC did in making John Chancellor its sole editorialist. (The closest NBC came to acknowledging that there might be a side to the question other than the anti-Israel one that Chancellor expressed several times a week, was on August 4. In the wake of Chancellor's intemperate outburst against "imperial

\*In constitutional law, an "estate" denotes an organized class of society with a separate voice in government, such as the clergy, nobility, and commons (knights and burgesses) were in Europe starting in the thirteenth century.

Israel" on August 2, Tom Brokaw read from three letters disagreeing with Chancellor's views. But he took care that the three selected were all by people with names readily identifiable as Jewish, and added that in any case reaction to Chancellor was about evenly divided between those who agreed with him and those who did not.) NBC also outdid the other networks in its relentless insistence (e.g., on June 24, 28, and August 2, 4, 12, 13) that American public opinion was turning against Israel. Since NBC is one of the principal shapers of public opinion, this insistence (based on the flimsiest of evidence) could only be construed as a self-serving exercise. NBC was also the only network that consistently refused to acknowledge the existence of PLO censorship.

My discussion of NBC-TV's coverage of the war in Lebanon extends from the period of June 4 through August 31, and is based on videotapes of every night of evening news during that period. My observations touch on six major subjects or problems in NBC's reporting and commentary: 1) The Subject of Censorship; 2) The Question of Civilian Casualties; 3) Deliberate Falsifications; 4) The Terminology of Bias; 5) The Missing Background of the War; and 6) Selective and Tendentious Interviewing.

Finally, a distinction is in order. On this subject as on most others, generalizations about an organization cannot authoritatively render the whole truth about every individual who works for it. Not everybody who reported the Lebanon War for NBC was engaged, as Mudd, Chancellor, Brokaw, Mallory, and Reynolds appeared to be, in a private war against Israel. Whatever objections one may have to particular reports and even the surrender to shared media clichés by Bob Kur, Rick Davis, or Martin Fletcher, it would be unfair to impute to them any such will to deceive as moved many of their colleagues. These men acquitted themselves, under very trying conditions, honorably; but their efforts in the direction of seeing clearly and telling what they saw in a plain way were nearly lost in the plethora of calculated distortions that comprised NBC's overall approach to the war in Lebanon.

## I. THE SUBJECT OF CENSORSHIP

In Lebanon, Palestinian commanders permitted camera crews and correspondents to move freely into areas under attack, but not to photograph military targets hidden among civilian offices and apartments.

John Martin, ABC News.

No theme, not even that of civilian casualties, was more relentlessly pursued by NBC-TV than that of censorship: that is to say, of Israeli censorship, for censorship by Israel's adversaries was blithely accepted by NBC as an aspect of the natural order of things. The opening salvo in NBC's campaign against Israeli military censorship came on June 5 and established the pattern that would be followed throughout the summer. Jessica Savitch, introducing a report by Vic Aicken from northern Israeli "settlements and villages," sternly warns that "It's censored by the Israeli military." Aicken himself stresses at the outset of his report that he can only show pictures "allowed by the Israeli censor," and concludes the report with these words: "Vic Aicken with a censored report from northern Israel." Then Savitch, who believes in nothing so much as incessant repetition, remarks: "His report was heavily censored by the Israelis and half of the pictures he wanted to send out were cut." Then, presumably for the benefit of those viewers who can understand nothing unless it is repeated five times, NBC places next to Savitch a large placard saying "ISRAELI CENSORSHIP," at the same time that she most audibly and visibly inhales her scarcely controllable outrage at this violation of NBC's inalienable rights.\*

In the days and weeks to follow it became clear that NBC was determined to retaliate whenever possible the injury inflicted upon its "right to know" by Israeli censorship. Not only would reports from Israel and from southern Lebanon begin and end with graphic and oral references to Israeli censorship, but reporting of the war would be periodically punctuated with entire program segments devoted to the subject of Israeli censorship. Thus what might have begun as a piece of valuable information about the difficulties of reporting the war soon became a means of editorializing, almost unceasingly, against Israel. The venomous tone and compulsive repetition suggested that people at the upper echelons of NBC News had allowed their sense of outrage to determine editorial policy.

The anger was much in evidence in Roger Mudd's remarks of June 18 about Israel having censored two cassettes of interviews with PLO prisoners, and "refusing" to say why, and in the furious outbursts of June 23 and 24 by Brokaw and Chancellor. Brokaw started the program of June 23 with the ritualized announcement of Israel having broken yet another cease-fire, then switched to

\*Readers interested in Miss Savitch's techniques of demagoguery applied to a wholly different subject should consult Dorothy Rabinowitz, "Lesley and Jessica: TV demagogues," *N.Y. Post*, 27 May 1983.

Steve Mallory, whose voice came out of a blackened screen, against which were boldly superimposed the words: "PICTURES CENSORED." Since NBC had decided (perhaps, even from its own point of view, unwisely) that no amount of repetitious haranguing on this subject can be excessive, Brokaw followed up with a separate story on the Israeli refusal to transmit pictures of injured children, damage and casualties in a Beirut neighborhood. The visual backdrop showed an Israeli flag, cassettes, and "Israeli Censorship." Then, in high dudgeon, Brokaw declared that the story had nothing to do with Israeli national security, and, in a voice dripping with sarcasm, noted that Menachem Begin had complained of "corrupt media."

The fury against Israel over the censorship spilled over on this evening into a particularly egregious distortion of facts by Roger Mudd. Trumpeting what sounds like a spectacular revelation of yet more Machiavellian skullduggery by Israel, he "reports" that this war in Lebanon has been coordinated with a "campaign" against Palestinians in "Jordan's West Bank, which is occupied by Israel." When we switch to Martin Fletcher in said "West Bank" however, we get nothing more than a reasonably sober account of Israeli troops quelling demonstrations by Arab university students in favor of the PLO. Mudd's revelation proves to be mere wind. Mudd tried a similar stunt on the following evening, June 24, in his introduction to Steve Mallory's typically sensational report of blood, chaos, filth, and fire in West Beirut, caused by the explosion of powerful car-bombs of unknown origin. Since not even Mallory was about to assign the blame for these to Israel, Mudd took it upon himself to do so by insidious juxtaposition: "The Reagan White House revealed today that Prime Minister Begin promised President Reagan on Monday that Israel would not try to capture Beirut. By making Israel's pledge public . . . the White House was bringing pressure on him to live up to it. But as we will see in a moment . . . sending in an army is not the only way to destroy a city. It can be shelled to death from without and within." But just in case there are viewers who do not fall into the Mudd trap, Brokaw is ready with yet another blast at Israeli censors for allowing such scenes (which might reflect unfavorably on the PLO) to be transmitted while deleting material that has nothing to do with Israel's national security. Now that its anchorman has on two consecutive nights editorialized against Israeli censorship, one might suppose that the subject has been for the moment exhausted. But no, NBC's resident sage John Chancellor must add a long, sweaty editorial on the matter.

Chancellor begins with the astounding remark that "Censorship in the Middle East is getting to be a real problem, and it sometimes makes it hard to cover a story." Chancellor did not remind his audience that Israel is the only democratic country in the Middle East, the only one in which there has always been a free press, or that censorship, ranging from authoritarian to totalitarian, and employing methods ranging from persuasion to coercion to murder, has, time out of mind, prevailed in the Middle East. Had he done so, viewers might have wondered why Middle East censorship never became a "problem" for Chancellor and his colleagues until practiced, in the midst of a hard-fought war, by Israel. He does, in the course of this diatribe, mention that although Syria helpfully transmitted

the tape that Israel had intercepted, Syria "enforces a total ban on stories about its own military." Yet Syria's far more stringent censorship is mentioned only casually and "incidentally": it does not, for Chancellor, constitute a "problem." Exactly why this should be so is not clear, especially since Syrian censorship had earlier in 1982 effectively kept television cameras away from the Syrian city of Hama (the fifth largest in the country) while the Syrian army ruthlessly massacred, with tanks and artillery, between 15,000 and 20,000 of its own unarmed citizens, who had been guilty of refractory behavior towards the regime. Where then was Chancellor's concern for the American public's right to know, and for NBC's right to film? Was he not then, as is he not now, troubled by the "problem" that very little, if any, attention is paid by the news media to slaughters that cannot be photographed although they are known to have happened? We know that his employer, Reuven Frank, is not. For when the head of NBC News was taxed with this question, he responded, with his characteristic moral tact: "There isn't interest in the Copts or the Kurds, or the massacre in Burundi . . . so you don't cover them." To talk of what "should" be covered is impermissible because it suggests *moral* criteria, with which his profession is unconcerned. "You cover what you think is interesting for the viewers. I can't imagine anybody getting upset about the Copts." As if it had never occurred to Mr. Frank that the absence of "coverage" explained the absence of "interest."

Although Chancellor acknowledged that Syria's censorship policy left something to be desired, he expressed no misgivings about PLO treatment of journalists and even went out of his way to remark that "There is no censorship in Beirut . . ." This must have come as a stunning revelation to the countless journalists who in recent years have testified to what the *Guardian* of London (one of the most fiercely anti-Israel papers in the world) called the "censorship by terror" that prevailed in Beirut, and the *Economist* named the phenomenon of "publish and perish." On February 22, 1982, John Kifner, *New York Times* correspondent in Beirut, wrote:

To work here as a journalist is to carry fear with you as faithfully as your notebook. It is the constant knowledge that there is nothing you can do to protect yourself and that nothing has ever happened to any assassin. In this atmosphere, a journalist must often weigh when, how, and sometimes even whether, to record a story. . .

There is a pervasive belief among the Beirut press corps that correspondents should be extremely wary of incurring the wrath of the Syrian regime of President Hafez al-Assad.

In February 1982 Zeev Chafetz, then director of Israel's Government Press Office, charged that substantial segments of the western news media follow a double standard in reporting and commentary on the Arab-Israeli conflict because they fear and respect Arab terror, but take for granted and abuse the freedom allowed them in Israel's open society. He explicitly charged that terror prevented critical reporting on the PLO and Syria, and that ABC's wide-ranging attack on Israel (in the program "20/20") had a casual connection with the murder in Beirut



in July 1981 of Sean Toolan, ABC-TV's correspondent there. (Toolan's sin had, apparently, been his contribution to a program by Geraldo Rivera on PLO terrorism.) Chafetz also claimed that five US journalists had in 1981 been held for almost 24 hours by Palestinian Arab terrorists without the incident being reported in their newspapers for over six months. (They had been released after their lives were threatened and their employers promised not to report on the episode.)

Over a period of five years a series of threatening letters, assassination attempts, explosions, and murders by the PLO intimidated the Lebanese press to the point where, according to Edouard George, senior editor of Beirut's French language daily *L'Orion Du Jour*, "not one of them dared to write or broadcast the truth." Peter Meyer-Ranke, Middle East correspondent for Germany's Springer chain of papers, said he had personally observed "self-censorship, self-restriction, and silence" by his colleagues in Beirut. Among those who, because they did not silence themselves, were silenced forever by the PLO are: Salim Lawzi, owner of the weekly *Al-Hawadit*, arrested at a PLO checkpoint in July 1978 and tortured to death in the village of Aramoun, after which photos of his body were distributed among Beirut's journalists as a warning; Edouard Saeb, editor-in-chief of *L'Orion Du Jour* and local correspondent of *Le Monde*, shot to death in September 1976 while crossing Beirut's Green Line; Riadh Taha, president of the Lebanese newspaper publisher's union and part of an effort to form an anti-PLO front with Bashir Jemayel, murdered by the PLO outside the Carlton Hotel in Beirut. George listed seven foreign journalists murdered by the PLO in West Beirut between 1976 and 1981: Larry Buchman, ABC-TV correspondent; Mark Tryon, Free Belgium radio; Robert Pfeffer, correspondent for *Der Spiegel* and *Unita*; Italian journalists Tony Italo and Graciella Difaco; ABC correspondent Sean Toolan.

Where, during the years when these outrages were perpetrated in Beirut by the PLO, was the voice of John Chancellor and NBC to decry censorship? Why is it censorship becomes a Middle Eastern problem only when it is practiced (and hardly in a manner even remotely resembling the instances just cited) by Israel? No one with a passing acquaintance with human nature ought to have been surprised that the intimidation and terror with which the PLO censored journalists before June 1982 continued, a *fortiori*, once it came under direct attack by Israel. Countless witnesses told how PLO commanders—in the words of John Martin of ABC News—"permitted camera crews and correspondents to move freely into areas under attack, but not to photograph military targets hidden among civilian offices and apartments." In other words, the television reports coming from PLO-occupied West Beirut were indeed censored, contrary to what Chancellor alleged, and censored in such a way as to remove from

'NBC has questioned the accuracy of George's list, claiming that not all of these journalists were killed by the PLO or Syrians. George told us in a telephone conversation that his sources were articles in his newspaper *L'Orion du Jour* as well as other journalistic sources in Beirut. The murder of Pfeffer has been generally acknowledged by journalists, but it is impossible for us to independently confirm the cause of the other deaths. It is well known, however, that many foreign journalists were forced to leave Beirut because of threats from the PLO. According to press reports, these included Larry Pintak of CBS, *Le Figaro's* J. Stocklin, BBC's Tim Llewellyn and Jim Muir. Reuters correspondent Bernd Debusman was shot in the back after receiving threats from Syrian officials. *Editors.*

sight precisely the evidence used by Israel to justify its siege. "What's more," observed the *New Republic*, "you weren't even told that you weren't seeing something important. So while television relentlessly repeated that dispatches from the Israeli side were censored by Israeli authorities, it didn't tell you of the PLO's censorship—which of course made the censorship that much more effective." Ann Medina, of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, showed the rare courage to film PLO censorship with a hidden camera. Her film proved, beyond any possibility of contradiction, how a PLO censor accompanied reporters in Lebanon "everywhere we go." This may help to explain the intriguing way in which *Newsweek*, in a rare burst of candor, sought to justify the "anti-Israel tone of many dispatches from the front" by disclosing that "many correspondents based in Beirut developed warm relationships with PLO leaders." Is it conceivable that fledgling reporters are taught in their journalism courses that cozy relationships with terrorist combatants afford indispensable aid in impartial reporting of wars in which those terrorists become involved? If so, perhaps they should be warned that in the business of war reporting, "warm relationships" may be a self-deceptive label for anticipatory compliance with terrorist censorship.

The extent to which television became, in the words of Ted Koppel of ABC, a war-weapon in PLO hands, even forced two of the major networks—CBS on July 9 and 12, and ABC on July 12—to acknowledge the existence of PLO censorship; only Mr. Chancellor and his colleagues at NBC maintained their stony silence on this subject. They maintained it even in the face of what an observant viewer of their own pictures might well have construed as evidence to the contrary. Thus, on June 12, just after Mallory's standard report on bombing in Beirut, we are shown several PLO fighters retreating into central Beirut. One of them points his gun menacingly at Mallory's cameraman, prompting the remark that "they *don't* like to be photographed." Inadvertently, NBC thus reminds us that the PLO is *very* much in the censorship *business*, **but that** its favored instrument for keeping camera crews from photographing military installations is the gun rather than the pen. By a peculiar coincidence, which perhaps only a Viennese doctor could satisfactorily explain, this very same film sequence was again used, with typical unscrupulousness, and without comment (or any explanation of the gross falsification involved) as part of Jack Reynolds' report of events allegedly taking place on June 29, and as a prelude to a Roger Mudd harangue against censorship—Israeli censorship, that is. By some subterranean psychological process, the fact of *PLO* gun censorship insinuated itself into the minds of the NBC news staff but came out to the American public as an attack on Israeli pen censorship. And wherein lay the Israelis' offense against free expression? Jack Reynolds' signoff words—"West Beirut"—were "inexplicably removed by Israeli censors." This, but not the PLO threats against reporters' lives, was yet another "problem" for Chancellor, Mudd, and company.

Following the line taken by Brokaw on June 23, Chancellor in his commentary of the 24th generously allowed that "every journalist can understand when censorship is used by a government to protect the lives of its troops. But increas-

ingly, in the Lebanese story, censorship has been used to protect Israel's image and to serve its political goals." NBC's commentators always know what is or is not relevant to Israeli national security, for which—so it is implied—they have the gravest concern; but no other form of censorship is permissible. At least it is not permissible for Israel, for it is well known that the British blackout of television coverage of the war in the Falklands, a war that, whatever might be said in its justification by the British, could hardly be said to have been fought in the protection of British national security, did not stir Chancellor, Brokaw, and Mudd to the rage they vented whenever Israel refused to transmit film over satellite. Rarely is the arrogance which Reuven Frank recommends as the *sine qua non* for ambitious journalists so much in evidence as in NBC's lectures to Israel on its moral transgression in failing to provide complete information services to its enemies in wartime. First, even the most careless viewer, watching NBC's relentless barrage of anti-Israel stories, must be struck dumb by Chancellor's temerity in saying Israeli censors won't pass stories "that make Israel look bad." Secondly, is Israel any more under a moral obligation to transmit from its Tel Aviv satellite interviews with Yasser Arafat or other PLO spokesmen than the United States in World War II would have been to disseminate interviews with Hitler conducted by foreign journalists sympathetic to his "cause"?

When Reuven Frank, the president of NBC News, was asked about the vendetta his staff had carried on against Israel over the issue of military censorship, he replied that "Basically, the Israelis are treating the foreign press better than most of the other countries. We are picking on them." This is a typical reply from Mr. Frank, who is fond of parading his general cynicism, which diverts attention from his particular responsibility for NBC's misdeeds and from his own entire indifference to self-correction.

Throughout the summer, NBC continued to hammer away at Israel over the issue of censorship. Always the stress was on the political nature of Israeli censorship, sometimes qualified by a fleeting reference to Syrian censorship, but never any at all to PLO censorship by terror. The program of August 1 appeared at first to give some semblance of balance by using background graphics referring to Syrian censorship in Rick Davis' report from East Beirut, and background graphics referring to Israeli censorship when John Hart appeared before a map of Lebanon, and informed his viewers that during the preceding eight weeks many scenes had been "missing in the war reports from Lebanon . . . Reports from West Beirut sent from Syria, subject to Syrian censorship; reports from East Beirut sent from Israel are restricted by Israeli censors." But all this was merely prelude to yet another report, very detailed, on Israeli censorship, with the Syrians forgotten altogether. Bob Kur, a far more scrupulous journalist than Chancellor, made some attempt to explain Israel's rationale for what Kur condemned as "purely political" censorship: "Israel does not want to generate sympathy for the PLO or, some say, with good reason, provide a stage for its spokesmen." Kur also admitted that "Israeli censors never tried to hide the damage in southern Lebanon, nor did Israel try to hide its unprecedented antiwar demonstrations," and that "a degree of censorship during wartime is not

unusual for any country, and some have been more restrictive than Israel." But any credit that might rebound to Israel from these acknowledgements was quickly erased by Kur's conclusion that there was so much criticism from abroad of Israeli censorship that "Israel could not easily have increased censorship." In other words, here as in all other respects, Israel was just as mischievous as the world allowed it to be. Why "the world" allows Israel's adversaries to be so much more mischievous, with impunity, Kur did not bother to explain. Perhaps the answer is, as R. Emmett Tyrrell, editor of *The American Spectator*, alleged: "Not all our allies are . . . diabolized. The diabolizing comes down only on those who actually oppose America's enemies."

## II: THE QUESTION OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES: "NO MILITARY TARGETS HERE"

Israel, by aiding Lebanese Christians since 1975, has saved more civilian lives than have been lost in this war. But a television screen is easy to fill . . . Television in war is bound to suggest more generalized destruction than has occurred. Furthermore, had there been television at Antietam on America's bloodiest day (Sept. 17, 1862), this would be two nations. Americans then lived closer to the jagged edges of life, but even they might have preferred disunion to the price of union, had they seen the price, in color in their homes in the evening.

George Will, *Newsweek*, August 2, 1982

On August 2, a photograph, published throughout the world, showed what was described as a severely burned baby girl, with her arms amputated, who had been wounded during an Israeli bombardment of West Beirut. The photograph came to symbolize Israel's allegedly indiscriminate bombing of civilians. On August 14, NBC's Fred Francis reported Secretary of State George Shultz's endorsement of Ronald Reagan's view that the "symbol of this war" was this same "picture of a baby with its arms shot off." It was a symbol in more ways than Reagan and Shultz understood, for by August 20 it had been conclusively proved that the photograph had been deliberately misrepresented in the news media in order to smear Israel. Doctors who suspected the veracity of the photograph sent a special team to find the baby, and discovered it to be a healthy boy (Reagan, Shultz, and NBC even had the sex wrong) with a broken left arm still in a cast, but otherwise healthy and intact. He was released from the Beirut hospital five days after his picture as a moribund girl made front pages around the world. NBC did not think it worthwhile, after Francis had reported the "story," to correct the misrepresentation, or, for that matter, to correct the impression given by the complementary supporting story of the August 14 news, by Steve Delaney in Beirut. This told of a West Beirut home for retarded children in which—allegedly as a result of frequent Israeli shelling—the children were found starving, and lying in their own excrement. Mother Teresa was photographed carrying one of the skeletal children from the home. But Mother Teresa, unbeknownst to NBC viewers, said in a later television broadcast that the children had been kept in these wretched conditions for a very long time, and that those responsible for the conditions, since long before the Israelis came, not only got off scot-free, but had the additional satisfaction of seeing their hapless victims used for their own propaganda purposes.

The doctored photograph and the stage-managed hospital visit of Mother Teresa were thus "symbolic" of the uncontrollable desire of many in the news media to depict Israel as a brutal power intent mainly on the destruction of Palestinian Arab civilians. That civilians were uprooted, injured, and killed in this war, as in all wars, no one can doubt; but they were not uprooted, injured, and killed

to anything like the extent or with anything like the callous indifference or evil intent alleged by the journalists, NBC's reporters foremost among them.

Almost from the outset of the war, NBC's field reporter in Beirut, Steve Mallory, made it his special duty to insist, day in and day out, that Israeli bombing raids did not merely cause civilian casualties as a by-product of military missions, but were directed at civilian targets and areas. On June 4 Mallory reported the Israeli attack on a sports stadium in southern Beirut used by the PLO as an arms depot; the attack, said Mallory, was "deadly accurate" and "officials said most of the casualties were civilians." Who these helpful "officials" were Mallory did not say. On June 5 he reported the Israeli bombing of "a school bus: 15 died in the bus." He thus conveyed the impression to his innocent audience that those inside the bus were school children. In fact, nearly every other report on the incident said that the bus was not a school bus, and that its occupants were adults, not children. Some reports, crediting PLO claims, identified the men as construction workers, but Mallory suppressed even this half-truth lest it dilute the image of an Israeli massacre of young innocents. As for the larger attack on the "major coastal highway" linking Beirut to Southern Lebanon, Mallory claimed that "Bystanders asked, 'Why? No military positions here.'" On June 11, Mallory reported that "As the cease-fire was taking effect, Israeli warplanes streaked over Beirut. One dropped a bomb on a predominantly Moslem side of the city, hitting a civilian area. There are no military targets here." On June 12, Mallory reported crews "looking for casualties or survivors of yesterday's Israeli bombing of civilian areas of central Beirut." On June 17, Mallory described Israel's attack on Beirut International Airport and then sounded his standard refrain: "no military positions here." It was perhaps at this point that those viewers of NBC who had ever been in a war, or read about one, or been endowed with even the most modest portion of common sense, must have wondered whether there was anything that Steve Mallory did consider a military target, since he had already ruled out major airports and highways (so long as they were under Arab control). No matter how often he reported on Israeli attacks, it was the identical story. June 21: "An Israeli round hit . . . in Central Beirut—primarily a civilian area" (and to show just how "civilian" it is, NBC follows the pictures of Israeli shelling with one of Arafat dandling a baby) June 25: "no military positions here" (residential area of West Beirut); June 26: "Most casualties were civilians"; June 28: "It's been . . . *civilians* who've lost the most."

The pattern of reporting the war from West Beirut established by Mallory was continued by Jack Reynolds, with the addition of strongly tainted political rhetoric and lurid emotionalism. On July 9, one of the rare occasions when NBC allowed that somebody else besides the Israelis was firing, Reynolds noted that when "the Israelis responded—people were hit." On July 10 he gave his typically florid account of the day's shelling, followed by invocation of the Mallory refrain: "There are no Palestinian fighters here, they said." In this instance, "here" was the area of the foreign embassies, an area which published reconnaissance photos showed to be replete with tanks, mortars, heavy machine guns, and anti-aircraft positions; yet NBC saw no need for correction, retraction, or apology.

James Compton, who replaced Mallory in West Beirut in mid-summer, seemed torn between repetition of the Mallory-Reynolds formula and glimmerings of awareness of what virtually every disinterested observer of the PLO "defense" strategy had known for years: namely, that the PLO always places its troops and its weapons in and around schools, hospitals, and apartment houses, deliberately seeking to maximize civilian casualties in the event of an Israeli attack. (In many cases, PLO fighters hid behind rows of women and children when firing on Israeli forces.) As David Shipler wrote in *The New York Times* of July 25:

The P.L.O. was not on a campaign to win friends among the Lebanese. Its thrust was military. The huge sums of money the P.L.O. received from Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries seems to have been spent primarily on weapons and ammunition, which were placed strategically in densely populated civilian areas in the hope that this would either deter Israeli attacks or exact a price from Israel in world opinion for killing civilians. Towns and camps were turned into vast armories as crates of ammunition were stacked in underground shelters and anti-aircraft guns were emplaced in schoolyards, among apartment houses, next to churches and hospitals. The remains could be seen after the fighting, and Palestinians and Lebanese can still point out the sites.

Whether from ignorance, obtuseness, or cravenness, Mallory and Reynolds failed to mention any of this while expressing continuing wonderment and outrage at Israel's bombing of what they confidently declared to be "civilian" targets.

Compton began in the established NBC style. On July 27 he reported a hit on an apartment house "at least a mile from any Palestinian military concentration." On July 29 he reported on a hospital hit by six artillery shells because Israel was "trying to get at an already-destroyed tank that sits nearby." On August 1, however, complications arose. As usual, it is alleged that Israeli "artillery (shells) fell in a seemingly random way in congested central neighborhoods," yet we are also told that "whole neighborhoods that held concentrations of Palestinian forces have now been reduced to rubble by the Israeli bombing." This must have come as something of a shock to viewers who had been assured, by Mallory and Reynolds, for week after week, in the wake of Israeli shelling of these very neighborhoods, that "there are no military targets here." Then, in yet another paradoxical turn, Compton remarks on "the assumption here ... that the PLO forces will now pull back into neighborhoods that hold concentrations of Lebanese civilians, forcing the Israelis to come after them in door-to-door fighting. . . ." On August 5 he was back to the formulaic post-bombing refrain—"We could not find any Palestinian military targets"—but followed it with an apparently contradictory reference to the "tragic" situation in which PLO fighters have moved out of "camps" and into "civilian" neighborhoods, inviting Israelis "to come and get them."

Not all of the confusion here is innocent. At no point did NBC ever bother to inform its viewers of what this little word "camp" may mean in the Lebanese context. In the context of the phrase "refugee camp" it evokes the image of post-war DP camps and the miserable hovels in which the first wave of "displaced persons" the world over takes refuge. But very few PLO camps fit into that description. What NBC referred to as "PLO camps" should have been called "armed bases," which were additionally "protected" by maintaining the close presence of Palestinian Arab civilians and their families. They were also, as *The Times* of London reported on August 21, "military training camps": "members of the Italian Red Brigades and the West German Baader-Meinhof gang were trained at the so-called 'European base' at the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut. The camp is one of those subject to recent heavy Israeli bombardment." Many of the "refugee camps" were in reality whole urban neighborhoods, with high-rise apartment buildings, and not a tent or mud-hut in sight. It was as if Mallory, Reynolds, and Compton were to have called General Custer's Indian-fighting camps, or the Wild West's Fort Bravo, "trading posts." This became abundantly clear, even despite what might be called NBC's own censorship system, on August 11, when Compton reported Israeli raids on the refugee camps. A woman resident, sounding very much as if she'd been coached by Steve Mallory, steps forward to express the predictable denial: "there are no fighters here." But James Compton, to his credit, declares that this isn't the whole truth, for no sooner had she spoken than three PLO fighters emerged from hiding: "the truth is the Palestinian forces are mingled with civilians everywhere in this refugee camp," a truth it took NBC ten weeks to divulge.

The false testimony of this Palestinian Arab woman, testimony of precisely the kind so eagerly sought after, and so uncritically regurgitated by Mallory and Reynolds week after week, should make us pause to reflect on just how innocent are the "innocent" adult civilians injured in bombing raids on PLO concentrations. The PLO constitution, or "National Covenant," spells out, in 33 variations on a single theme, its members' commitment to the destruction of the state of Israel. No matter how diligently certain journalists seek to deceive themselves and others on this fundamental point, every Palestinian Arab is aware of it and no Palestinian Arab bothers to deny it except when whispering into the ears of journalists in cafes. Palestinian Arabs in Lebanon are not innocent of the PLO's merciless plans and procedures for the erasure of Israel from the map. How could they be, when they saw the wholesale deployment of PLO armaments in houses, and hospital grounds? The degree of culpability of a person who harbors a killer is not the same as that of the killer; but it is not the same as innocence either. Even in the "normal" circumstances of war, it has traditionally been assumed that the immunity of noncombatants must be qualified if military operations are to be made possible at all. Should the fact that the PLO went to such lengths to mingle itself with the civilian population have made it as immune to attack by Israel as it made it immune to attack by the reporters at NBC?

Chancellor, reflecting and then magnifying the reactions of NBC's Beirut reporters, consistently damned Israel's siege of Beirut as exacting "a terrible



human ... cost" (June 7), "savage" (August 2), "horrifying" and "brutal" (August 5), and "inhuman" (August 6). Yet there is abundant evidence that Israel made greater, not lesser, efforts than most attacking armies to avoid injuring civilians, and increased its own casualties by doing so. Robert Tucker, professor of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University and a careful observer of modern warfare, has stated that "The places attacked were almost invariably known or long-suspected PLO military positions. Civilian casualties were incurred in the immediate vicinity of such objectives. Moreover, from all that is known, these casualties were of an incidence to be expected when an attacking force is taking even more than reasonable precautions to spare the civilian population from injury." He also noted that even the severest bombardments of the war, those of August 4 and 12, resulted in civilian casualties which, even if we accept the figures given out by PLO officials—not famous for their probity in such matters—"bear no real comparison in their magnitude with the indiscriminate bombings of cities in World War II" and "compare quite favorably with measures taken by American forces against civilian centers in the Korean and Vietnam wars." On August 12, NBC reported thousands of tons of bombs dropped on West Beirut. But the military historian U.S. Colonel Trevor N. Dupuy, Retired, stated that "on that day I spent about five hours observing this bombardment. During that time, it was apparent from my observation that no more than 150 bombs, probably 200 to 500 kilograms each, were dropped on Beirut... To any veteran who has been under air or artillery attack in 'normal' combat situations, this was relatively modest harassment."

The truth of the matter, of course, is that for those who articulate NBC's foreign policy *any* damage wrought by Israeli air attack in Lebanon would have been deemed disproportionate in relation to the value of Israel's enterprise, for it is NBC doctrine that Israel (unlike Britain, for example) may not go to war unless its very existence is at stake. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote on June 22 about the war that "No sovereign state can tolerate indefinitely the buildup along its borders of a military force dedicated to its destruction, and proceeding by periodical shellings and raids." But on August 6 Chancellor said that although Israel might have had a "genuine" concern about PLO actions from Lebanon, it was in "no mortal danger" and therefore had no right to go to war. NBC also laid it down from the outset that, whatever Israel or the Lebanese people might claim to the contrary, the sending of Israeli military forces across the Lebanese border was an invasion by what Chancellor on August 2 called "an imperial Israel which is solving its problems in someone else's country." The notion that Israel entered Lebanon, as the allies entered France in World War II, to liberate the country from a brutal conquering regime received no countenance from NBC's policy-makers. When people in Christian neighborhoods of Beirut had the temerity to inform Steve Mallory (June 15 broadcast) that they were happy to see the Israelis arrive, he heaped scorn on those who "welcome the invaders as liberators." Clearly, it is the reporters and not the inhabitants of Lebanon—after all, they just happen to live there, and are not "Palestinians"—who are entrusted with the task of deciding whether the Israelis are invaders or liberators. No wonder that one journalist, shocked by the behavior of many of his colleagues in Lebanon, expressed the view that not the Jews but the journalists consider themselves the chosen people.

### III: DELIBERATE FALSIFICATIONS

If the reporter has poisoned our imagination by his version of the truth,  
he brings us back to reality by his lies.

Karl Kraus

The propaganda battle against Israel during the Lebanon war began with the invention by the PLO of the figures of "600,000 homeless civilians" and 10,000 civilians killed in the portion of southern Lebanon taken by Israel. On June 10, Roger Mudd reported that "the Red Crescent, which is Lebanon's Red Cross, is quoted as estimating that more than 10,000 civilians have been killed or wounded since Friday." This statement did not merely transmit a wildly exaggerated figure, it contained a double falsification. The Red Crescent is *not* Lebanon's Red Cross but a branch of the PLO, something any conscientious reporter would have known and said; and—a fact that Roger Mudd chose not to share with his audience—the Palestinian Red Crescent organization is headed by Yasser Arafat's brother, Fathi Arafat. Although on June 16 John Chancellor announced that "The Red Cross said today that approximately 300,000 may have been made homeless," Jessica Savitch on June 19 proclaimed the favored PLO figure of 600,000 without going to the trouble of inventing a "source" for the figure: "It is now estimated that 600,000 refugees in south Lebanon are without sufficient food and medical supplies." The real Red Cross had on June 18 already refused to endorse the 600,000 figure, but this did not trouble the intrepid Jessica Savitch, any more than she was troubled by the fact that her colleague Bob Kur had on June 17 said that 70,000 had been left homeless by the war.

The figures that NBC disseminated so eagerly were of course ludicrous. 600,000 refugees amounted to more than the total population of southern Lebanon under Israeli control. If, as was alleged by the PLO and its publicity agents in the news media, 10,000 had been killed, primarily in Tyre and Sidon, it seemed odd that the Mayor of Tyre reported to *The New York Times* that only 62 persons had died there, while the Bishop of Tyre said only 50 civilians had been buried as a result of the war operations. The official figures released by the local authorities in Sidon indicate that about 100 were killed. In his story of July 15 in *The New York Times*, David Shipler (certainly no great friend of Israel) said that "it is clear to anyone who has traveled in southern Lebanon, as many journalists and relief workers now have, that the original figures of 10,000 dead and 600,000 homeless, reported by correspondents . . . during the first week of the war, were extreme exaggerations." When he was asked why NBC had knowingly disseminated these PLO-invented fabrications, Israel Bureau Chief Paul Miller replied petulantly that it is "not the job of the media not to report the figures" bandied about by various parties, so long as the sources of the figures are also given. We have already seen how scrupulous Roger Mudd and Jessica Savitch were in identifying their "sources." What Paul Miller did not even attempt to explain was how his reporters could have been so ignorant of the country they were covering as to blithely pass on a figure of 600,000 refugees for an

area whose total population, the vast majority of whom never left their homes, was less than 500,000; or so contemptuous of their audience that even after it became, as Shipler wrote, "clear to anyone who has traveled in southern Lebanon" that the original figures were lies, they never retracted the figures or corrected them. In fact, they gave PLO supporters every opportunity to recite these bogus figures (see, e.g., Steve Delaney's report of June 28 and Jack Reynolds' of July 2) without their accuracy being challenged.

The figure of 600,000, a patent absurdity on the face of it, was irresistibly attractive to journalists hostile to Israel for the same reason that it was invented by the Arabs in the first place: it began with a 6 and facilitated the licentious equation of 600,000 Palestinian Arabs with the 6 million Jews who had been murdered by Hitler. At least since 1967 the PLO has made it a consistent practice to ride on the coattails of the Jewish experience of discrimination, exile, oppression, and murder by stealing the Holocaust from the Jews, presenting themselves as the "Jews" of the Middle East and the Israelis as their Nazi oppressors. Although NBC went to nothing like the lengths of von Hoffman, Cockburn, Oliphant, and other inhabitants of the dirtier sections of Grub Street in alleging that Israelis were doing to Palestinian Arabs what Nazis had done to Jews and others, their reports and commentaries were certainly tainted by this practice. John Chancellor, musing autobiographically on the bombing of August 2, confessed that he "kept thinking yesterday of the bombing of Madrid during the Spanish Civil War." ("Was he there at the time?" asked Frank Gervasi. "The year of the bombing of Madrid by the Junkers 52s of Hitler's burgeoning *Luftwaffe* was 1936, when John was 12 or 13 years old.") James Compton artfully described the Israelis (July 30) as "prepared to force a final military solution." Steve Mallory was always ready at hand when Yasser Arafat had something to say about Beirut's being the Arabs' "Stalingrad", and Jack Reynolds—true to form—went a step further by endorsing the equation (June 29).

Reynolds had already demonstrated his high respect for historical accuracy on June 13 in a report on the rush to volunteer for action among Palestinian Arabs in Jordan, where they have, according to Reynolds, been living in camps "since Israel took over Palestine in 1948." What inflames these would-be fighters "is inevitable ... anger at the Israelis who pushed them out of Palestine." Not even Reynolds' most tendentious colleagues, during three months of broadcasting the war, had the temerity to go quite this far; but Reynolds is NBC's most devout believer in Oscar Wilde's dictum that "the one duty we owe to history is to re-write it."

By 1948 four-fifths of the territory known as Palestine under the British Mandate was already under Arab control, in the country known as Jordan. The United Nations had voted to partition the remaining section—western Palestine—into two countries, one Jewish, one Arab. Israel recognized the Arab part as the Palestinian Arab state, but no Arab country did or ever has done so. Instead, the Arab countries declared war on the Jewish state and attempted to destroy it. The attempt was unsuccessful, but Jordan did succeed in occupying

eastern Jerusalem, which the United Nations had intended to be an "internationalized" city. And this was how Israel "took over Palestine in 1948." Reynolds' version of why many Arabs left Palestine in 1948 is exactly the PLO version, but no reputable historian would endorse it. Even the anti-Zionist historian Christopher Sykes wrote that "there is no evidence of a long-standing and agreed Jewish policy to evict the settled population; on the contrary in the first half of 1948 there is considerable evidence that the Jews tried to prevent the flight. . . . When the war was over, Arab journalists and broadcasters asserted on several occasions that the exodus was a planned Arab maneuver, the main object being to clear the land and thus give freedom of action to the invading armies." (*Cross Roads to Israel*) It is anticlimactic to note that, having uttered these boldfaced lies, Reynolds also failed to ask, as any normally curious reporter would have done, why these refugees of 1948 have for 35 years been kept in such wretched conditions by their brother Arabs. Even John Chancellor was willing to admit (August 9) that "when Arabs attacked Israelis they [refugees] ran away" and that their present plight was more the fault of the Arab countries than of Israel. To anyone who wonders why Jack Reynolds' every broadcast from Lebanon was a condemnation of Israel and an exoneration of the PLO, the broadcast of June 13 is a revelation, the key to an enigma: PLO "anger" at Israel is, according to Reynoldsian psychology, "inevitable"; if it is inevitable, then no moral blame can possibly be attached to the actions that it brings in its wake, however merciless and bloody they may be.

As this discrepancy between Chancellor and Reynolds suggests, the re-writing of history appears to be a free-lance affair at NBC; reporters are free to distort as they like, so long as what they like is not what Israel likes. Roger Mudd, for example, has taken it upon himself to refuse recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital city. NBC's staff is in general chary of locating events in Jerusalem which happen merely to have taken place there. Paul Miller and Martin Fletcher are usually "in Tel Aviv" even when the scenes they describe and the stories they narrate are recognized to be in Jerusalem by anyone who has ever been there (June 6, 7, July 25, 30, etc.). But at least they can justify this practice by claiming that they are transmitting their reports from a Tel Aviv office. With Roger Mudd, however, we are dealing either with spectacular ignorance or the attempt to distort facts to fit policy. On June 29, Bob Kur reported on a debate in Israel's Knesset, which meets in Jerusalem, and concluded with "Bob Kur, from the Israeli Knesset," specifying no location. Roger Mudd promptly helped out by locating it in Tel Aviv, saying "While Tel Aviv Debates, Beirut Waits." On July 19 he announced that the "focus of the Middle Eastern crisis shifted from Tel Aviv and Beirut to Washington today." The Lebanese seat of government is Beirut, the American seat of government is Washington, and the Israel seat of government is Jerusalem. Why then Tel Aviv? On August 5 Mudd introduced Jim Bittermann, reporting "from Israel's capital"; perhaps by this time somebody at NBC had told Mudd that it was unseemly to adjust geography so blatantly to fit bias, but that if he felt so strongly about the matter, he should rest content with blank ambiguity. (When Shakespeare's Macduff asked his countryman Ross, upon the latter's return to England, "Stands Scotland where it did") was

he really worrying about his country's suffering or fearful that some eleventh century Roger Mudd had relocated Caledonia in Wales?) Although NBC did not go so far as explicitly to consign Jerusalem to the rule of those who are daily proclaiming their resolve to "liberate" the city, it did refer over and over again (see Savitch, 31 July, or Mudd, 23 June) to "Jordan's West Bank" and it is hardly a secret that the city of Jerusalem is included in the Arab definition of "West Bank." It was as if NBC had decided, on its own, to assign sovereignty over this disputed area to the country that invaded it in 1948, a sovereignty not even Arab nations have ever granted to Jordan.

Some observers believe that such falsifications result from ignorance. Thus Martin Peretz of *The New Republic* wrote in October 1981 that "NBC can't persuade its 250 affiliates to air one hour of network news instead of the present half-hour. Thirty minutes is preferable to sixty, since TV news comes to us from men and women who know little and understand even less. But if you haven't seen them improvise, you have not really seen ignorance in full flower." This seems to me an overly charitable interpretation. Those who believe that Roger Mudd, for example, blundered innocently into his falsifications and misrepresentations should pay particular attention to the broadcast of July 2, a typical example of NBC's double standard in conveying statistics to the unwary viewer. A Lebanese American doctor who gained international fame for her fiery flow of anti-Israel rhetoric in interviews by most television reporters in Beirut recites to Jack Reynolds the by now standardized PLO estimates of civilian deaths (those "extreme exaggerations" referred to in *The New York Times*) while the respectful reporter obediently nods his head in agreement. Mudd, entering the ring to deliver the second part of the regular NBC one-two punch against Israel, then announces:

Prime Minister Begin claims the Israeli army has picked up 66 children aged 12 to 13 and armed with submachine guns who were recruited into the PLO. . . . Later, however, a spokesman for Begin said that he had made a mistake and read from the wrong paper, and that the correct number was either two or twenty-two child soldiers.

NBC, suddenly very conscientious in sifting the evidence for statistical claims, was doing its best to suggest that Begin was a liar or a fool. Nevertheless, in subsequent days it became irresistibly clear that, as *The New York Times* reported on July 25: "An extensive P.L.O. conscription program drafted Palestinian boys as young as 12 and mobilized all male students for one to three months of duty a year, according to some Palestinians. During the invasion, Israeli soldiers said they found themselves in combat with 12-year and 13-year-olds shooting rocket-propelled grenades. More than 200 youngsters from 12 to 15 were captured and have *been* released. The P.L.O.'s draft apparently stirred resentment, for Rima Shabb told of checkpoints being set up to catch young Palestinians who were trying to run away. . . . Sister Alisse Araigi, headmistress of a Maronite school in Nabatiye, said, "Families came to us and asked for certificates that children were sick and couldn't be drafted." That Begin's state-

ment of July 2 was essentially true, and that he had erred on the side of caution rather than exaggeration was a fact rigorously concealed from NBC viewers. Showing up Menachem Begin clearly had a higher priority for NBC News than telling the truth about the PLO's short and ready way of exploiting Arab children.

As if this were not enough skulduggery for one evening, NBC also gave an account of "a growing feeling of anti-Americanism" in West Beirut because of injury caused by U.S.-made cluster bombs and shells, dutifully displayed for the cameras. But, as Joshua Muravchik pointed out in *Policy Review* (Winter 1983), NBC neglected to point out that the "story" was written from a PLO press conference at which the shells were displayed. "In contrast, one of the other networks ran the same footage with the simple announcement that it was a PLO press conference. There was a remarkable contrast between the abundant cooperation that NBC gave to this PLO public relations effort and the deep skepticism that it showed to Israel's slightly bungled public relations effort the same night." (Another aspect of the cluster bomb "story" not made public by NBC is that its chief non-Arab disseminator was Franklin Lamb, a certified fraud with a criminal record who had earlier invented out of whole cloth the horror story about the Israeli "vacuum bomb," a type of bomb that does not exist.)

NBC was often so eager to impute monstrous, destructive evil to Israel that it disregarded even the visual evidence it placed on the screen and so fell into ludicrous self-contradiction. On July 5 Reynolds reported Beirut "slowly reduced to rubble" and said that "almost all the civilians here have fled" except the few who had no place else to go. Yet on July 6, one day later, because he is eager to unify his report under the heading "amazing resiliency" of the people in West Beirut, Jack Reynolds shows Beirut returning "to its own sense of normalcy [sic]." By July 8 Reynolds had effected a miraculous transformation and resurrection of a city that three days earlier was little but "rubble". "Almost overnight," he exclaims, West Beirut has begun to change for the better and things look fine now. People are crowding into supermarkets. On July 9 Reynolds continued his rapid repopulation and rebuilding, but not without some uneasy suspicion that some viewers might wonder whether total evacuation and nearly total destruction can be fleeting temporary phenomena. He therefore hastens to explain that "parts of West Beirut are still deserted and destroyed." (!) Reynolds' antics provide a shocking example not merely of how selective camerawork can be used to support virtually any assertion, but of how journalists can persuade themselves that destruction is an arbitrary invention of the camera, and that cities can be emptied and filled, destroyed and resurrected, by tendentious reporters more readily than by the mightiest historical forces or the most powerful machines.

NBC repeated the same cycle at the end of the month. On July 31 Jessica Savitch, with characteristic hyperbole, says "You've got to wonder what is left in West Beirut to be destroyed." If the photographs of Beirut that flashed across the screen two minutes later, showing a city essentially intact, did not raise several million eyebrows, then surely John Chancellor's commentary of August 2 must

have done so. For Chancellor speaks against a background showing a majestic city of brightly shining high-rise buildings stretching as far as the eye can see. Apparently, NBC's reporters, by a judicious turn of phrase and an opportunistic direction of the camera, can destroy and restore cities as will. Whether they can also restore our confidence in their honesty, having first destroyed it by such unscrupulousness of statement and sleight of hand methods, remains to be seen.

## IV: THE TERMINOLOGY OF BIAS

And let us bathe our hands in . . . blood  
Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords.  
Then walk we forth, even to the market place,  
And waving our red weapons o'er our heads,  
Let's all cry "Peace, freedom, and liberty!"

*Julius Caesar*, III, i, 106-110.

More pervasive, more effective, and more insidious as an instrument of persuasion than outright attack upon an object of the journalist's dislike is the repeated use of biased and highly charged language. As the English novelist Arnold Bennett once wrote: "Journalists say a thing that they know isn't true, in the hope that if they keep on saying it long enough it *will* be true."

A listener attuned to the subtleties of language could recognize in the early days of June the tendentious drift of NBC reporting. Mudd began by referring (on June 4 and again on June 7) to Israeli action taken after the shooting of Ambassador Argov in London as "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," thereby implying not merely that Israeli action against terrorist bases was taken solely in response to the shooting, but that it was morally equivalent to it, and that the whole nasty business was an atavistic irruption into the modern, civilized world of unredeemed, "Old Testament" Jewish ferocity. References to PLO shelling of Nahariya on June 4 and 7 depicted it as a "settlement south of the Lebanese border." Nahariya is a town 50 years old; one might as well refer to Bellingham, Washington as a "settlement" because it is south of the Canadian border. The choice of this ludicrous label is not innocent error, for it has the effect of suggesting that Nahariya and other northern Israel towns that come under PLO fire share the questionable and disputed status of the "settlements" in Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") of which Americans have heard so much (and none of it good) in recent years.

On June 6 Paul Miller referred to the approximately 40,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon as the "Syrian peacekeeping army in Lebanon," an expression Senator Daniel Moynihan called "an Orwellian triumph." On June 7 NBC referred to the "PLO coastal town of Sidon," but by June 26 it had become "Israeli-occupied Sidon." In fact, no sooner did Israeli troops take over an area than it was referred to as "Israeli occupied Lebanon" (thus Martin Fletcher in Tyre on June 19). At no point in its three months of covering the war did NBC find it necessary to inform its viewers that Syria, in addition to having had those 40,000 troops occupying half of Lebanon, including half of Beirut, for seven years, has never in its history had an ambassador in Beirut because it does not recognize Lebanon as a sovereign country but considers it part of Syria. Whereas Syria's troops, which had made very



substantial contributions, through savage shelling of Christian population centers, to the figure of 100,000 people killed in Lebanon between 1975 and 1982, are for NBC a "peacekeeping army," Israel's soldiers are part of a "war machine" (Mallory, June 15, Brokaw, June 16) representing "a warrior state" (Chancellor, June 16).

NBC developed certain fixed epithets which it applied throughout the war with a mechanical illogic and unsuitableness far exceeding anything that we find in Homer. Its reporters attached the label "moderate" to Saudi Arabia, for example, so regularly that many Americans watching NBC must have come to think it a geographical term. On June 13 John Hart said that despite King Khaled's death no change was to be expected in Saudi Arabia's "reliable" supply of oil and "stable" prices, and Marvin Kalb prognosticated that the "Saudis may now encourage moderation in Lebanon." On June 14 Paul Miller reported the Mubarak-Fahd meeting as one of "moderate Arab states", adding that Fahd is "known for his peace proposal to recognize Israel" (a disingenuous piece of puffery which disguises the fact that Fahd's proposal did not mention recognition of Israel at all). On June 27 Miller was finding more evidence in London of Saudi moderation and desire for "diplomatic solution" in Lebanon. On July 16 Chancellor expressed fear that Iran might turn its guns "on its moderate Arab neighbors." These endless hymns of praise sung by NBC to Saudi moderation may have gone far to make NBC's viewers forget that this is the same Saudi Arabia that consistently advocates "*jihad*" (holy war) against Israel; that massively supports the PLO; that holds the oil cartel together; that practices public beheadings; that rejected the Camp David accords, the Reagan peace plan, and the Lebanese-Israeli accord worked out by the United States in 1983. Nevertheless, it is an article of faith at NBC that King Fahd is always busily working behind the scenes for "moderation" and peace.

Jordan's King Hussein had his "moderation" credentials and label conferred upon him by NBC and most of the news media long ago, but it seems to have taken the Lebanese war for NBC to transform Yasser Arafat himself into a moderate. Although Jillian Becker, the English writer on terrorism whose study of the Baader-Meinhof gang (*Hitler's Children*) gained world renown, has said that "to speak of international terrorism without mentioning the PLO would be like describing the circulation of the blood without mentioning the heart," nobody at NBC dared to use the word "terrorist" in connection with Arafat and the PLO. It was as if nobody at NBC had been looking when the PLO murdered Israel's Olympic athletes (1972) or invented the fine art of hijacking by blowing up all 47 passengers in a Swissair plane (1970), or slaughtered Christian pilgrims arriving at Tel Aviv airport from Puerto Rico (1972), or murdered the U.S. ambassador in Khartoum (1973), and the Egyptian diplomat in Ankara (1979), or attacked the kibbutz nursery of Misgav Am (1980). An organized ignorance or else a collective amnesia seemed to have taken hold of Reuven Frank's staff, so that none of the hundreds of outrages committed by Yasser Arafat's organization against innocent human beings of every nationality (including the Arab nationality) could be allowed to cast the slightest shadow over NBC's idyllic

picture of "guerrillas" fighting for their homeland and freedom and (this above all) "honor" in Lebanon.

On June 20 Steve Mallory reported that Arafat was "trying to work out a compromise peace settlement." On June 22 Chancellor worries solemnly over the danger that as a result of Begin's "success" in Washington Arafat "will lose out to the extremists." (This is said by Chancellor against the background of NBC's picture, already used on the previous day, of Arafat kissing a baby.) NBC's reporters not only insisted on the term "guerrilla" and refrained from using the term "terrorist" for Arafat and the PLO; they were forever suggesting the bias, if not downright bigotry, of those who did call them terrorists. Judy Woodruff reported from Washington on July 12 (on the basis of evidence yet to be uncovered) that the administration was threatening to deal directly with the PLO, "which *Israel* considers a terrorist organization." Tom Brokaw, interviewing Israeli Foreign Minister Shamir on August 6, refers to "the PLO, or the terrorists as *you* call them." In a later report, August 16, Brokaw allowed by implication that some members of the PLO might be less devoted to moderation than Arafat when he said that "even hard-line factions of the PLO are willing to leave."

Whereas NBC classified Arab nations and the various factions of the PLO according to their greater or lesser moderation, Israelis were classified ornithologically, as hawks or (less frequently) doves. Typical was James Compton's (July 17) reference to Ariel Sharon as popular with the "hawky sector of Israeli society." For Roger Mudd even this epithet was not strong enough: on June 9 he averred that "Israel's decision to go after the Syrian missiles undoubtedly means that superhawks are now in the ascendancy in Tel Aviv" (to which city, we recall, Mudd had moved Israel's seat of government). Since nearly all Israeli factions in and out of government were in agreement on the necessity to destroy these missiles, we must conclude that Israel is a society made up of these predatory aggressors, an impression frequently reinforced by NBC's automatic references to "Israel's aggressiveness" (Brokaw, August 12).

The gentlemanly reticence about using the term "terrorist" when Yasser Arafat and the PLO came into view naturally disappeared altogether when NBC went after Israeli leaders. On July 19 Martin Fletcher reported on documents Israelis captured in Lebanese camps, several of which "Israel hopes" will show that the PLO was the center of internationally supported terrorism. But John Chancellor, determined that NBC's viewers will remember who is the *real* terrorist in the Middle East, introduces, in the midst of a commentary having nothing to do with the war at all, the following: "Menachem Begin, a terrorist in Palestine, went on to become Prime Minister of Israel." NBC's Israeli reporters showed remarkable diligence in transmitting those speeches by Communist members of the Israeli Knesset which referred to Begin and Sharon as "terrorists." This was no doubt one reason why Chancellor on August 13 recommended to the U.S. Congress that it emulate the forthrightness of the Knesset in speaking out against Israel's role in the war. (Christian leaders opposed to the PLO fared little better than Israel with Chancellor: Bashir Gemayel was identified in Chancellor's August 24 commentary as "this bloodthirsty young Christian.")

The connotative epithet most frequently applied to the PLO in the course of NBC's reporting of the war in Lebanon was "honorable." On June 25, Kemal Jumblatt, the leftist Druze leader who became one of NBC's favorite interviewees, claimed that Israeli bombing didn't allow time to talk or the chance for an honorable solution. Steve Mallory, acting as the dutiful puppet of Jumblatt's intention, then asserted that "without some honorable solution" the "Palestinians" would continue to fight. Two days later, June 27, Mallory bridled at the notion the PLO should leave Beirut without some quid pro quo, because "the Palestinians want to leave with some honor." (He claimed that "Israelis have rejected the compromise" agreed to by the PLO and the United States, an agreement that seems to have existed exclusively in Mallory's head, for no evidence of it could ever be discovered.) On July 11 Jack Reynolds (sounding very like a PLO spokesman) declared that "the PLO will resist unless an honorable withdrawal can be arranged." On July 13 Reynolds again pleaded that "what he [Arafat] wants most is an honorable withdrawal and a continuation of the struggle for a Palestinian homeland." In June and July, PLO "honor" was constantly invoked by NBC as an argument against the continuance of Israel's siege of Beirut. Such "honorable" men could hardly be expected to agree to negotiations for their withdrawal so long on the siege continued. (No attempt was made to explain why Israel should continue the siege if the PLO was ready to leave, or why, if the PLO had showed not the slightest sign of willingness to leave until the siege had commenced, it should be more willing to leave once the siege had been lifted.) In August, PLO "honor" was as sacred as ever; only now it was the bombing that prevented these honorable men from negotiating their withdrawal. It seems never to have occurred to anybody at NBC that a main reason why the quickly defeated PLO forces stayed in Beirut during the many weeks of Philip Habib's patient efforts was not their "honor" but the fact that the Arab states refused to take them in, and therefore they had nowhere to go. Both Lebanese and PLO officials have stated that the bombardments of August 4 and 12 had the effect of persuading the Arab states to change their mind and of dissuading Arafat and his followers from holding out for political victory in despite of military defeat. Nevertheless, on August 16, Brokaw asserted that now, having fought the Israelis for two months, "they can leave with honor: they believe the world is more sympathetic to their cause (as well they might, given the efforts made on their behalf by NBC and like-minded journalists).

## V: THE MISSING BACKGROUND OF THE WAR: THE PLO IN LEBANON

I rather choose  
To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,  
Than I will wrong such honourable men.

Mark Antony (on the assassins of  
Julius Caesar)  
Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, III,ii,127-29

Who, then, were these honorable men and why was Israel going to such lengths to expel them from Lebanon? NBC had short and ready answers to these questions. Homeless "Palestinians" (in NBC lexicon, only Arabs, not Jews, can be Palestinian, an excellent linguistic means of implying that Palestine belongs exclusively to the Arabs), out of desperation, had organized themselves in Lebanon into fighting units that sought to regain a usurped "homeland." Their "chairman" Yasser Arafat is a beloved leader (see, e.g., Reynolds, July 16) who spends much of his time kissing children, and proclaiming that "We resist to protect the children, the next generation." NBC followed this vignette on its July 12 broadcast by freezing the picture of Arafat kissing a little boy, as if this were the image of him that it wished forever to keep before our mind's eye, although on July 12 he was kissing adults for NBC cameras.

NBC's frequent glimpses of PLO members showed them as devoted to their families, eager to avoid destruction, given to volunteering to clean up neighborhoods in their spare time, and having no desire to kill Jews. The weakness and essential "powerlessness" of Arafat's forces were constantly stressed in NBC battle reports. "Sophisticated Israeli warplanes" are always going "too high, too fast" (June 23, July 22, 23). One could never have guessed from this relentless stress on PLO powerlessness that its forces had in fact amassed gigantic quantities of weapons: rocket-launchers, anti-aircraft guns, tanks, thousands upon thousands of light arms plus ammunition supplied from nearly every arms merchant in the world, and enough from the Russians to equip an army of three to five divisions. NBC viewers rarely saw pictures of PLO weapons being fired from the midst of civilian life because pictures of anti-aircraft batteries and tanks within apartment houses or hospitals would have seriously damaged NBC's portrait of the Israeli attack as an onslaught against civilians.

Ironically, the only time in NBC's version of the Lebanon war that we saw an impressive display of fire-power by the PLO was during the last week of August, when they daily "celebrated" their withdrawal from Beirut. Even these fiery occasions, so lavishly covered by NBC, were deceptively presented. When "salutes" are given "with everything from small arms to tank fire" (Vic Aicken, August 22) one is curious about where the bullets

and shells land. NBC yielded to its curiosity so far as to note (August 23) that two people were killed by these salutes. NBC's stress had to be, however, on PLO "rejoicing" and on the universal devotion of Arafat's men to their leader, a stress that must have left many viewers puzzled when in 1983 violent mutiny against Arafat's leadership broke out.

Israel, on the other hand, was presented as an imperialist power "solving its problems in someone else's country." (Chancellor, August 2) Its prime minister Menachem Begin was usually pictured with a scowl on his face and a *Never* under his chin in a photograph placed alongside a smiling Arafat (see, e.g., July 27) forever searching for "peaceful settlement" (July 3) and tirelessly "signaling . . . willingness to leave Beirut" (July 30). Israel's leaders were nearly always "hardened," "defensive," and "militant" (Brokaw, August 11), its Minister of Defense "boisterous," "uncooperative," "intransigent," and also appearing with a *Never* under his photograph (Fred Francis, August 27). Israel's stony intransigence and unwillingness to compromise found expression in its reliance only on force. Rick Davis, to the sound of blasting guns, declared on July 31: "This is the tactic of persuasion—Israeli style." this already powerful imperial "war machine" was, moreover, supported by the mysteriously "powerful Israeli lobby" (Mudd, June 28) in the United States, where the Congress' reluctance to take a bold stand against Israel may well be due to "the influence of Jewish voters" (Chancellor, August 13). It is even possible, according to NBC, that "the power of the American Jewish community" has been responsible for a long-standing "pro-Israel bias" in news coverage. Since this particular sentiment has been expressed by none other than NBC News' own president Reuven Frank (interviewed August 8, 1982), it comes as no surprise that Roger Mudd should imply sympathy with those Arab-Americans who hope to persuade the news media to be more "fair" to them (June 28).

NBC's reporters often sounded as though they were under instructions to assume that Israel was guilty until proven innocent, and that all utterances by Israeli officials were to be treated with a caution and circumspection nowhere in evidence when Arabs were quoted. Brokaw (June 30) warns that Rick Davis will report from Sidon on how Israelis presented "what *they* called evidence" of an international terrorist ring" that the PLO operated. Judy Woodruff (July 12) has the U.S. administration threatening to deal directly with the PLO, "Which *Israel* considers a terrorist organization." Martin Fletcher (July 19) reports on "documents Israelis *say* they captured" in Lebanese camps. On August 1 the cautious Fletcher says that "Sharon produced aerial reconnaissance photos he *said* showed PLO tanks and heavy machine guns near Western embassies." In itself, such caution about accepting official pronouncements is admirable, but NBC's caution, like its morality, was very selective. NBC invariably took at face value condemnations of Israel by unnamed U.S. government "sources," that convenient formulation that provides license for every tendentious speculation of the journalist. More to the point, it invariably assumed the PLO to be

innocent until proven guilty—or rather, even after proven guilty, for when PLO casualty statistics, for example, were shown to be utter fabrications, NBC continued to allow pro-PLO Arabs to repeat them without challenge or correction. NBC invariably accepted PLO claims that Israel had broken the cease-fires, though even President Reagan blamed the PLO for this. On August 1, one of the extremely rare occasions during the entire war that NBC showed civilian casualties in *East* Beirut, Rich Davis said: "One report said Palestinian mortar hit two apartment buildings. . . . But some of the people here say it was a misplaced Israeli bomb."

In order to arrive at this conception of the adversaries in this war, still more to persuade their viewers to share the conception with them, NBC's news staff had to conceal from view both the immediate background of the war and much of the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. An American citizen who had been so unfortunate as to rely on NBC News for his information about Lebanon between 1975 and 1982 would have known little, if anything, of the PLO occupation of southern Lebanon, of the Syrian occupation of half of the country, and of the bloody civil war that had raged there for seven years. In June of 1982 NBC exposed this viewer to pictures of spectacular devastation and damage in Tyre, Sidon, Damur, and southern Beirut, but rarely bothered to tell him that a war had been going on in these places for seven years. Television cameras zoomed in on damage, but television reporters were not overly scrupulous about specifying when the damage had occurred. John Chancellor's first "history" of the conflict leading to the 1982 war (June 7) included not a single word on the seven years of PLO-Syrian occupation and civil war; viewers were simply told that "Israel is trying to buy a few years of peace at a *terrible* human and political cost." If you had just been watching pictures of devastation in Damur, filmed as Israeli tanks passed through, Chancellor's anger might seem justified. Similarly, if the news media had begun their coverage of World War II on the day of the allied invasion in June 1944, and not taken the trouble to recount what the Germans and the other axis powers had been up to since 1939, the landing in France and the ensuing carnage would have seemed monstrous acts. The truth of the matter was that Damur had been a Christian township whose population had been massacred and its survivors exiled by the PLO in the fighting of 1976-77.

The PLO, generally pictured by NBC as powerless, besieged, idealistic freedom fighters longing for a land and state of their own, had in actuality for six years "had something closely approaching an independent state" in southern Lebanon. These were the words of *New York Times* reporter David Shipler in a lengthy dispatch from Sidon on July 25. The PLO "had an army, a police force, a crude judicial system, . . . a civil service and a foreign policy. Those who lived within its rough boundaries said they were too terrified then to describe it to outsiders. Now, for the first time, they are describing what it was like, telling of theft, intimidation and violence." NBC viewers who took time away from their screens to read Shipler's report must have been stunned to discover that "the major tool of persuasion" of this organization whose yearning for peace NBC

regularly contrasted with Israel's aggressiveness "was the gun." NBC's idealistic "guerrilla" fighters looked very different to those who lived under their reign of terror. "Both Lebanese and Palestinians describe . . . outright theft as a common practice of the P.L.O. . . . They often took things from shops without paying, Miss Raad and others complained. Youssef Alifreh, a young Palestinian resident of the Burj al Shemali camp, near Tyre, confirmed it. 'Now we are happy because the armed P.L.O. left,' he declared. 'When somebody wanted to buy something, he would take it and not pay, and if someone would complain, he would shoot him.' Although NBC's reporters were mightily impressed by Arafat's devotion to children, many Palestinian Arab refugees in camps took a dimmer view, and told Shipler: "Our children were working in the lemon groves, and then the P.L.O. forced them into service!" For the majority of Lebanese under the PLO rule, NBC's honorable men were, precisely, terrorists and thugs: " 'Life was terrible,; said Khalil Hamdan, who owns a gas station in Harouf, a Shiite village near Nabatiye. 'They never used their brain. . . . They used their Kalashnikov. Even in the car, they used a machine gun to open the road for them.'"

This aspect of the Lebanese picture was not confined to *The New York Times*. David Ignatius, reporting from Damur for *The Wall Street Journal*, described how, on the night of January 17, 1976, "Palestinian guerrillas and their Lebanese Moslem allies attacked the northern part of the town . . . crying "Allah-u-akh-bar"—God is great—as they stormed into the houses of Christian civilians. The screams of the attackers and the victims could be heard a half-mile away. . . . About 300 of the people of Damur were killed." Martin Peretz, writing in *The New Republic* (August 2) related that "Lebanese of all persuasions and origins have expressed—I heard it myself dozens of times—gratification at their liberation from the PLO." John Laffin, writing for the *Catholic Herald*, described (September 10, 1982) how "White flags are beginning to show on many a house in southern Lebanon—but not the white flags of surrender. In this region the flags indicate that the family has an unmarried daughter—and naturally a virgin. The Lebanese found that the traditional signal was merely an invitation to rape by the PLO and the custom went into abeyance. Whatever the PLO were defending it was not the sanctity of the Lebanese home." Nevertheless, Roger Mudd on July 28 lamented that the "war has rekindled old hatreds" between Christians and Moslems. (If so, this was a classic case of carrying coals to Newcastle.)

It is scarcely necessary to remark that some awareness of the fact that, in the words of *The New York Times*, The P.L.O. established a de facto capital in west Beirut" or that "the camps became the P.L.O.'s political and military centers, where they shared control with the Syrian Army," would have given NBC's innocent viewers a very different impression of Israel's bombing of west Beirut and of the "camps" than the impression they very likely received from NBC's presentation. There were exceptions to the rule among NBC reporters. On June 13, June 17, and June 21 Bob Kur transmitted reports from southern Lebanon that included interviews with Arabs thankful to Israel for liberating them from the PLO's reign of terror, and he also once mentioned (June 21) that the

PLO habitually positioned their guns near schools and hospitals. But for every such report by Kur there were two dozen by Mallory, Reynolds, and Compton that reiterated the PLO version of past history and present events, which also was the version accepted and propagated by Chancellor, Mudd, and Brokaw on the home front. (On occasion one could sense the conflict between sense impressions—the witness of one's eyes and ears—and ideology, as when Martin Fletcher, on July 28, reported from Damur how returning Christians were trying to restore homes and lives ravaged by the PLO and then—in a jarring *non-sequitur*—asked "How hard will it be for Christians to shake off Israeli patronage, and for Christians and Moslems to learn to live in peace again?")

If NBC viewers got little of the immediate Lebanese background of the war, they got nothing at all (apart from Jack Reynolds' grotesque travesties) of the larger background of the Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948. They were never told that the neighboring Arab states, with the exception of Egypt since it signed the peace treaty in 1979, have been formally at war with Israel since 1948. In that year the state of Israel was established, the Arab states declared war against it, and sent five armies across its borders. This act of aggression, recognized as such by many Security Council resolutions adopted between 1948 and 1951, continues down to the present day, so that the Lebanon War is but the latest in a series of six major battles (1948, 1956, 1967, 1969-70, 1973, 1982) of a prolonged war. Israel, confronted with a permanent state of war for 35 years, in 1982 decided that if the Arabs wanted a state of perpetual war, they could no longer expect Israel to wait for a time of attack convenient to the Arab rulers and commanders.

The PLO too has a history. In 1964 the Arab League created it in order to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel (Israel, of course, in its pre-1967 borders). Although rent by factionalism—Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Libya financed their own factions within the PLO—and at the service of Saudi, Soviet, and Syrian foreign policies, it was united by a "covenant." The PLO National Covenant stipulates in article 6 that no Jew who arrived in Palestine after the "Zionist invasion" (dated by Arafat from 1882) has the right to live there. Article 19 declares that "the partitioning of Palestine and the establishment of Israel are entirely illegal." Article 20 denies any "historical or religious ties of Jews with Palestine" as "incompatible with the facts of history." Arafat declared in January 1980 that "Peace for us means the destruction of Israel." In May of the same year his Al-fatah organization announced, in Damascus, that its purpose remained "the complete liberation of Palestine, the liquidation of the Zionist entity, politically, militarily, culturally, and ideologically." Although the cold-blooded murder of infants and children figured very prominently in the record of PLO exploits—the Avivim school-bus ambush in 1970, the abbatoir at the Maalot school in 1974, the machine-gunning of the babies at Kiryat Shemona in the same year, the smashing of the head of 3-year old Galit Haran of Nahariya against a rock in 1979—NBC did not shrink from presenting Arafat as specially attached to children.

NBC's presentation of the PLO as a valiant band of "guerrillas" seeking to regain their "homeland" resulted either from organized ignorance or the will to deceive. Is it conceivable that nobody at NBC recognizes the distinction



between "guerrilla" actions, which inflict injury upon an enemy by whatever means possible and result in innocent casualties, and PLO terrorist actions, which do not even recognize the concept of innocence among the Israeli population but assume that every man, woman, child, or infant, regardless of occupation, place of residence, or personal history, who happens to be in any street, bus, marketplace, or building where a PLO bomb goes off or PLO members attack, is deserving of death? Is it conceivable that nobody at NBC wondered why, during the nineteen years when Jordan controlled what Jessica Savitch and Roger Mudd call "Jordan's West Bank," there was not only no call for an independent "Palestinian" state in that area but no peace in the Middle East? Is it conceivable that nobody at NBC wondered how an apparently rational man like John Chancellor could present the Lilliputian state of Israel as a predatory Brobdingnagian warrior extending its imperial reach over an Arab world composed of twenty states sprawled over 14 million square kilometers and controlling resources beyond the dreams of Croesus?

During its three months of broadcasting the war in Lebanon, the closest NBC came to an acknowledgement that it might have blotted out the background essential to an understanding of the conflict came on August 6. Tom Brokaw, now in Israel, mentioned, in a bemused fashion, that some Israelis had asked him, "Where were you when the PLO was killing thousands of Lebanese over the past seven years?" But since NBC's willingness to admit error is non-existent and its belief in its infallibility unshakeable—"the press" says Reuven Frank, "ought to be arrogant"—no program of self-correction was ever undertaken.

Predictably, NBC lingered uncritically, admiringly, even affectionately over the PLO's riotous departure from Beirut and the arrival of its various factions at their several destinations. The evacuation was the ultimate "media event" of the war, for it is not difficult to imagine how different it would have looked if the cameras had not been there. Vic Aicken was specially touched by the "pride as well as sorrow" of George Habash's men, and offered mournful threnodies over the wounded, and rhapsodic accounts of tearful farewells, and of Arafat on yet more kissing sprees. (His tone turned acerbic, however, when he noted that U.S. Marines "got lost" because their maps included places that had been wiped out by Israeli aerial bombardment.) Tom Brokaw did say that although "Arafat left Beirut today like an Arab head of state at the height of his glory," "in fact he was being driven out of Beirut by a massive defeat." Yet none of NBC's resident sages could bring himself to name the real truth that was concealed by this masquerade, as Bill Moyers did on CBS (August 23):

Watching scenes of the Beirut evacuation this weekend, I was struck by how it is possible for the cameras to magnify a lie. The Palestinian troops left town as if they'd just won a great victory. Arafat, they praised as a conquering hero. In fact, they are leaving town in defeat. And in fact, Arafat led them to this cul-de-sac where they made their last stand behind the skirts of women and among the playgrounds of children. . . . It could have been otherwise if Arafat

and his allies accepted the reality of Israel, if they had not established with Lebanon a terrorist state sworn to Israel's destruction, and if Arab governments had not found it useful to nurture the PLO in the bloody illusion that Israel can one day be pushed into the sea.

## VI: SELECTIVE AND TENDENTIOUS INTERVIEWING

Jack Reynolds, NBC: "Is the American attitude toward the PLO changing?" Yasser Arafat: "We hope so. I began to touch it through the mass media . . . I began to touch it." (July 16, 1982)

On July 30 NBC's Roger O'Neill offered a special report on what was alleged to be a "spirited and bitter debate" within the American Jewish community over the war in Lebanon. Yet it soon became apparent that this was a debate in which, so far as NBC was concerned, only one side was permitted to speak. By way of showing its readers the substance of this debate, NBC offered its viewers two people at a synagogue commenting, from identical positions, on "Israel's wrong path to peace"; this was followed by glimpses of the anti-Israel protests of "New Jewish Agenda," an extreme left, pro-PLO fringe group; after which O'Neill commented that "to make sure voices of dissent don't get too loud Israeli military commanders are now speaking to American Jews about the war." Apparently these military commanders dispatched to stifle dissent have not done a very good job, since Roger O'Neill *appears* to have been unable to locate a single Jewish voice to speak *for* Israel. He concluded this survey of the "bitter debate" with the observation that the "war has split the American Jewish community like no issue before" and quoted an unidentified rabbi who (bravely defying those Israeli military commanders sent to silence him) told the interviewer that "If we forget about Palestinian humanity, we may soon lose our own." If there exists anywhere in America an articulate Jewish voice that supports Israel's action in Lebanon, NBC has taken special care that nobody shall hear it.

On the next evening, Rick Davis interviewed three officers of a relief organization called World Relief about the Israeli blockade against supplies going into West Beirut. They expressed anger against Israel because, they insisted, their food went only to civilians. Also, by happy coincidence, these dispensers of charity (and strong opinion) had met with an Israeli officer who, just like the American rabbi interviewed by Roger O'Neill the night before, alleged that Israelis were losing their own humanity because of their inhuman treatment of the Palestinian Arabs. "The three men said they asked an Israeli officer where his humanity was, and he said 'I left it behind when I came to Lebanon.' . . ."

Two nights later, Roger Mudd interviewed Israeli Foreign Minister Shamir in Washington. He asked Shamir whether President Reagan would pull Habib out of his negotiating role "if you don't lower the level of violence," an expression Mudd was so taken with that he repeated it a few seconds later: "also, if you don't lower the level of violence, won't President Reagan force you to negotiate with the PLO?" Mudd also took it upon himself to suggest—as if he himself had already replaced Habib as the chief negotiator—that Israel pull back five or ten miles as a "sign of good faith." As if this were not enough to indicate NBC's powerful disapproval of Israeli policies, Mudd followed the interview by saying

"Shamir would not acknowledge that Israel is having a credibility problem in the United States, but he also said that if there was one, it was not justified, because, he said, Israel tells only the truth." Mudd's arrogance, hostility, and rudeness towards Shamir must have come as a surprise to viewers who remembered his manner in the previous interview he had done (July 20), with the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, a manner that can most charitably be described as one of oily sycophancy. On that occasion Mudd not only kept putting into the prince's mouth the idea that "the Middle East crisis can't be solved unless Palestine is recognized" (whatever this means) and that Syria dare not take in the PLO for fear this will give Israel an "excuse" to attack Syria; he also interjected engaging laughter by way of tacit approval whenever the prince referred to Israel's malignant designs upon the region.

These three interviews, coming within a period of four days, were only too representative of the way in which NBC sought to buttress its hostile view of Israel's actions in Lebanon by an artful selection of hostile witnesses and a double standard of behavior in cross-examining them. One could watch NBC for weeks on end without hearing a single pro-Israel voice, while Arafat and such fervid supporters of Arafat as Saeb Salam and perfervid Israel-haters as Walid Jumblatt performed day after day. It was not merely that they were interviewed and interviewed frequently (more than seven times as often as anti-PLO Lebanese) but always in a manner respectful, admiring, even affectionate: no hard questions, no abrasive challenges, no snide remarks, all of which were standard in interviews with Israeli officials. To watch an NBC reporter interviewing an Arab official was to be reminded of Swift's adage that crawling and climbing are done from the same posture. A particular egregious example of oleaginous fawning on PLO spokesmen was James Compton's interview with Arafat on July 21. In response to Arafat's indicating that in addition to already-existing UN resolutions on Palestine he would like "a new one," Compton helpfully proposes a Madison Avenue formulation: "If America will say yes, Palestinians have legitimate rights, is that everything you need?" and is mightily pleased by Arafat's sweet reasonableness in replying, "Oh, yes." On none of the many occasions when Arafat was interviewed by NBC did any of the network's reporters dare to ask him what his own responsibility might be for the civilian dead of Beirut and other places. As a *Wall Street Journal* writer remarked on the very next day, July 22: "The American media still has the sense not to glorify a gunman who uses hostages to shield himself from the police, but everyday they are making Yasser Arafat out to be a plucky little hero, even as he hides behind the innocent civilians of West Beirut." And who can know by how much Arafat prolonged this hiding (and multiplied the attendant casualties) because of the favorable publicity NBC's reporters and their colleagues were giving him? If by July 16, as he told Jack Reynolds, he had begun "to touch" American hearts "through the media", was it not plausible for him to believe that he might eventually capture those hearts entirely?

Everywhere a double standard was in evidence in the selection and treatment of interviews. On July 14 Bob Kur reported on Israeli soldiers refusing to

serve again in Lebanon, and interviewed an Israeli soldier who urged his countrymen to "talk" with Palestinian Arabs instead of fighting them, after which Yitshak Rabin, also interviewed, criticized Israel's "political" goals in Lebanon as illegitimate. On July 17 James Compton mentioned that a rally reported to be twice the size of the anti-war rally so lavishly covered by NBC on July 3 had taken place in Tel Aviv, but in this case none of the people involved was interviewed. While Jumblatt and Salam appeared so regularly to castigate Israel that it was easy to believe they had been salaried as NBC field reporters, Bashir Jemayel, the Lebanese Christian leader soon to be elected president of the country, was interviewed only twice, and since, as noted above, John Chancellor had tagged him with the label of "bloodthirsty young Christian" it didn't much matter what he said. PLO representatives were interviewed fourteen times in July and August, but Major Sa'ad Haddad, whose forces now controlled southern Lebanon, was not considered worthy of NBC microphones and cameras. When he was referred to, it was invariably as leader of a right-wing "Christian army" (Fletcher, July 28), although 60% of his militia is Shia Muslim.

In July several U.S., congressmen visited Lebanon. One was Representative Charles Wilson, a Texas Democrat who had voted for the AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia and intended to vote for the Jordanian arms sale, and nevertheless brought back from Lebanon impressions of "the universal enthusiasm with which the Lebanese welcomed the Israeli army.... I mean it's almost like a liberating army ... It was astonishing. I expected this, somewhat, from the Christian population. But I didn't expect it from the Muslim population. . . . And in talking to a group of people, some of whom had lost their homes, some of whom had lost relatives, they said it was awful. But they said that all in all, to "be free of the PLO was worth it." This was a remarkable and newsworthy eyewitness American reaction to the Lebanese war, but it did not appear so to NBC, which never reported it to its viewers. But when five U.S. congressmen, led by the anti-Israel crusader "Pete" McCloskey, called a press conference to announce (falsely, as it turned out) that Arafat was ready to accept Israel's right to exist, the story (or non-story) dominated NBC's Middle East news for three consecutive nights and brought a Tom Brokaw interview of McCloskey on July 26. Congressman McCloskey's announcement that "Arafat accepts all UN resolutions relevant to the Palestinian question" was a transparent farce that has been performed a hundred times in the past decade. Arafat did not, of course specifically recognize UN resolutions 242 and 338, which do not refer to the Palestinians or the Palestinian question at all; he said nothing about Israel's right to exist; he spoke in full awareness that the totality of UN resolutions dealing with "Palestine" is a contradictory hodgepodge that includes condemnations of Zionism as the greatest evil ever visited upon this planet. Nevertheless, Tom Brokaw, exhibiting NBC's characteristic amenability to PLO balderdash, not only failed to ask McCloskey any hard, skeptical questions, but noted irritably that "debate" over the meaning of Arafat's statement "didn't keep Israel from pounding West Beirut for the fifth straight day." How unreasonable of the Israeli air force not to be as impressed as, say, Roger Mudd by the familiar PLO masquerade! At no point did NBC provide identification of McCloskey as an anti-

Israel activist who has long worked to cut off U.S. aid to Israel and been a regular performer on the PLO lecture circuit.

During its three months of reporting the war, NBC never succeeded in discovering a single interviewable American who supported Israel or opposed the PLO. It never interviewed any Lebanese Americans who opposed the PLO, and indeed went out of its way to give the demonstrably false impression that Lebanese Americans supported the PLO against Israel. (The most casual reader of American newspapers would likely have known that the American Lebanese League publicly castigated the PLO for holding much of Lebanon and West Beirut hostage and asked them who gave "the PLO authority to insist that Lebanese civilians die with them?") Also, by a remarkable coincidence, every one of the ten Americans (not counting government officials) NBC interviewed condemned Israel and supported the PLO. Although over 200 U.S. generals and admirals signed their names to newspaper advertisements stressing the "extraordinary significance" of the defeat of the most advanced Soviet arms by "Israel-modified American weapons and tactics," NBC, despite the fact that it consistently took the view that Israeli action had damaged U.S. policy and interests in the Middle East, felt no obligation to interview a single one of them. Had it done so, of course, its constant reiteration that Israel had destroyed U.S. policy and weakened U.S. influence in the Middle East (thus Chancellor starting on June 7, 1982 and continuing without let up through July 14, 1983, when he still insisted that in Lebanon the "only winners are the Soviets") would have had a hollow ring. For the truth of the matter, as the generals and others pointed out, was that Israel's action had given the U.S. the foothold it had sought in Lebanon for a decade, shattered the Soviet reputation as the world's leading arms supplier, and demonstrated that Soviet clients (Syria and the PLO) can be defeated by an American ally. For the first time since 1975 the opportunity existed as a result of Israeli action, for Lebanon to be reconstituted as a quasi democratic nation allied to the West. Are we nevertheless to assume, along with John Chancellor, that this was an occasion for rejoicing in Moscow? Apparently the American government and American people do not think so. Throughout the war, NBC's Chancellor, Mudd, Brokaw, and Francis relentlessly insisted that Israel's action had permanently alienated the American government and the American people. Yet public opinion polls taken during the war showed substantial numbers of Americans supporting Israel and condoning Israel's actions in Lebanon. Moreover, in the late summer of 1983, as I write, public opinion polls show a higher rate of approval of Israel than existed before June 1982. Was NBC's failure to find and interview *any* of the people who make up this "public opinion" perhaps a result of wishful thinking about the possibility of driving a wedge between Israel and America?

## CONCLUSION

It is not easy, nor is it the aim of this pamphlet, to say what is the underlying cause of the deplorable lack of self-critical professionalism in NBC's reporting of the war in Lebanon. We know that just before the Six-Day War of 1967,

when the Straits of Tiran were closed and Arab armies were advancing toward her borders and Nasser and Shukairy were promising to turn the Mediterranean red with Jewish blood, Israel was the recipient of a good deal of sympathy, including journalistic sympathy. But after the war, Israel discovered that the price she would have to pay for winning a war that, if lost, would have meant her destruction, was the universal loss of the sympathy Jews had been collecting since 1945, when discovery of the Holocaust became general. All those statesmen and journalists whose eloquence had for twenty-two years gushed forth on the subject of the dead Jews and of their vanished civilization now fulminated with rage and resentment against a people and a state that preferred life to death and even to the rhapsodic eulogies that might be bestowed on dead Jewish martyrs and the glory that was Israel. Since 1967 this rage and resentment have taken a variety of forms, some of which may have found expression in the reporting of the war in Lebanon. Jay Bushinsky, Cable News Network's man in Jerusalem, described the foreign press as "enraged", bitter and resentful" towards Israel; and David Bazay (CBC) referred to a "get Israel" attitude among his colleagues. Another possible explanation, one of more immediate relevance to citizens of a democracy like America, is that precisely because Israel, unlike any of its neighbors, is an open, democratic society with a free press, it is peculiarly vulnerable to the depredations of a press which has perverted liberty into license. With 1984 only a few months away, it is pertinent to recall that the totalitarian Oceania depicted in Orwell's *1984* rests mainly on the assumption that, given modern technology and a contempt for moral tradition, anything is possible, anything can be done with the human mind, with history, above all with language. Orwell understood that a free press is indeed a guarantor of democratic freedoms, but that a press which plays fast and loose with facts, which attempts to destroy memory, which uses language to render spite and incite hatred, which sacrifices traditional standards of fairness and objectivity to sectarian passion, may well be undermining precisely those principles of freedom, democracy, and tolerance which justify its existence.

