

Iraq 5 years on: media myths and mundanity

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There has been a surge of [media coverage](#) (to coin a phrase) about the Iraq War on its anniversary and it has been generally a bit dull and un insightful. The media has pulled out the stops, partly I suspect because many journalists feel guilty about their role in the lead-up to the invasion. But little of the coverage has been surprising. The ten minute drama-doc films on the [BBC](#) every night have been very well-done, I particularly enjoyed Kenneth 'Henry V' Branagh as Colonel Tim Collins. The best bit of reporting I have seen was by The Guardian's [Ghaith Abdul-Ahad](#) whose very personal five minute films for ITV News at Ten combined poignant interviews, insightful observation, stunning still photography and great filming. You can see them online [here](#). But, in general, what can the news programmes say apart from 'this is what we did then' and 'this is how it is now'?

Anniversaries are dreadful pegs for news programmes. And this one comes at an odd moment. Violence is decreasing (it could hardly get more intense) and a sort of settlement is emerging. That doesn't mean we should not have a full debate about the dreadful cost and consequences but it doesn't seem to fit very well within news programmes. Much of the looking back has felt routine and narrative driven without the insight and political vision of the work of, say, [Patrick Cockburn](#) or [Adam Curtis](#).

One of the myths about the Iraq war is that the media did not oppose it and cheered the troops to the rafters. I remember it differently but then I worked for those pacifist lefties at [Channel 4 News](#) at the time. But hang on a minute, The Guardian, Independent and The Mirror also fought tooth and nail against Blair's policy didn't they? And even in America one in three major newspapers opposed Bush on this issue as [George Mitchell](#) writes:

You may be surprised to learn that, precisely five years ago, at least one-third of the top newspapers in this country came out against President Bush taking us to war at that time. Many of the papers may have fumbled the WMD coverage, and only timidly raised questions about the need for war, but when push came to shove five years ago they wanted to wait longer to move against Saddam, or not move at all.

This blog is not the place for a full appraisal of the media's role in the build-up to the Iraq War (although anybody out there who wants to fund a full research study should contact us via the Polis email) but we should at least recognise that a) it was not the media that took us to war and b) the media did conduct itself with some diversity if not total honour.

Have a look at [this](#) brilliant multi-media presentation by [Reuters](#) of their coverage: it is a fantastic set of images and interviews alongside a whole range of links and maps that are invaluable to anyone trying to piece together the media role and lessons from Iraq.

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