

media in covering the 1990 summer crisis, the autumn-winter stand-off in the desert, and the one-month war of January-February 1991, was both inadequate and inglorious.

The Ottawa seminar discussed why this was so more than whether it was so. But while speakers from the media might generally agree it was so, they differed on why, and on whether it was inevitable. There was some in-built confusion arising from the very different experience of Americans and Canadians in this war, and it was not always clear whether the pronoun "we," as used by various speakers, meant "we Canadians," "we Americans," "we Americans and Canadians," "we of the international press corps," or one of several other identifications that might have been intended. In some contexts, this blurriness mattered, because the American military, after all, ran the war and won it, allowing only tightly controlled access for reporters and cameras to the scenes of action. Although important politically, the Canadian military role was marginal almost to the point of irrelevance. Therefore the access of Canadian journalists to war zones was virtually zero, except where some enterprising individual might find it for him or herself.

Both Canadian and American speakers engaged in self-criticism with respect to the performance of reporters in the Gulf. Many blamed the admitted failures on the restrictions imposed by the military, implicitly with the connivance of the civilian political leadership. There was not much difference between Americans and Canadians on this score, since the Pentagon, with White House support or on White House orders, set the boundaries of permissible reportage. There was this major difference where pool coverage was concerned: the pool reporters were chosen from American and British applicants; Canadians (and others) were excluded no matter how long they waited or how much they complained. In providing news briefings, Canadian political and military leaders did not go beyond the American guidelines, and perhaps could not have done so given their restricted military role and their absence of direct knowledge. Prime Minister Mulroney's official statements on matters to do with the Gulf crisis came to be known in one Ottawa news bureau as "George Bush plus one hour." This was closer to truth than satire. Reporters telephoning the Prime Minister's Office for comment on a new White House statement, would often be told that there would be a statement in about an hour. This statement, when it came, would say the same thing, sometimes even using the same phrases.