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## Questions, questions...

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Events leading up to the war in Iraq, and the war itself, bring into focus a series of questions that have a significant information dimension to them and implications for shaping the world in which we live. Some of these questions relate to the credibility, reliability and evidentiary value of the information contained in the reports of the UN weapons inspectors as well as to the timeliness of these reports in the context of the foreign policies and actions of the key players in the war. Another series of questions relates to the reporting of the war as it is unfolding, principally to the veracity of information reported through the media by 'embedded' journalists. We are reminded of the courage and determination of independent reporters and their crews and the personal risks they have undertaken in bringing information to us.

Associated questions concern the impact of the constant reporting of the war in its early phases and point to the dangers of reducing a highly significant event to a television spectacular. There are also questions about the responses of different groups of people to what they have seen and heard in the media, sometimes followed up by calls for limits and controls on what is printed and broadcast.

Yet another series of questions relates to the destruction of Iraq's and the world's cultural heritage through destruction by bombing and looting of the National Museum of Iraq and the national library. The standing of the Hague Convention on the protection of cultural artefacts during time of war has been weakened considerably by the US defence secretary's comment that 'stuff happens'. The director-general of UNESCO has commented on the devastation and particularly on the loss of governmental records which are vital to public administration and Iraqi citizens once the war is over. The British Museum has already pledged assistance in restoration work, as have prominent archaeologists. The Australian government is yet to comment on this tremendous loss of connection to antiquity.

These questions and the ethical issues that underlie many of them are pertinent to ALIA's

first object: to promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interests of all Australians in a thriving culture and democracy. The death of an Australian journalist, reporting the war independently of the military in Iraq, remains a stark reminder of the extreme personal cost of maintaining a professional commitment to providing unrestricted access to information and ideas.

This is my last frontline as president of ALIA. One of the professional concerns that I identified with my nomination for office was bringing the Association's renewal process to fruition. I believe that this is well on the way to realisation through various projects and initiatives that have been canvassed with the National Policy Congress and various groups over the past couple of years. In addition the Board of Directors has engaged in a planning process to guide the Association through to 2010 and this will unfold during the year with consultations taking place through the groups and the National Policy Congress in September. As indicated in the annual report (published in last month's *inCite*) there has been a significant cost to bringing the renewal process to fruition since it began in 2000. The cost has brought the Association into deficit for the second year. With the executive director, the Board of Directors is working toward a reduction in the deficit by the end of 2003 and a balanced budget by the end 2004.

ALIA remains a partner valued by associations in the information industry and in the cultural industries sector. I am confident that the links that have been forged by ALIA's personal and institutional members with their colleagues and partners in the industry and the sector will continue to strengthen and grow. I would like to thank the directors, the executive director and the staff at ALIA National Office for their support throughout my term. It has been an immensely rewarding time and I wish Chris Mackenzie the good fortune and enrichment that I experienced as president. ■