

know is the fundamental right and is strongly defended in Germany. Even though the government dislikes certain issues raised by the press, there is absolutely nothing it can do about it. The press functions independently and would not tolerate any government attempt to regulate it."

GREECE: "Greece has a totally free and independent press. Anyone can become a journalist. . . . The press plays a very important part in Greek life, because the people are very political and use the press to generate political debates and issues of concern to the nation." —(Dimitri Gimelós).

NETHERLANDS: "There is almost no government interference in press matters. The government doesn't like government-state enterprises. The country is so liberal that there is a reporter for a paper called the *Daily Invisible*, a paper which is not really published. This reporter attends all press conferences, etc., and is accepted as a journalist for a paper which does not exist. The reporter is present to constantly test the system, to see that press access and freedom is working properly."

NORWAY: "Journalists have a high degree of freedom in Norway. The government does not interfere with journalists. However, they are supposed to act responsibly and maintain the public trust. Journalists are usually given free access to information and can always see government officials."

SPAIN: "Since 1984 there has been growing freedom of the press in Spain. The press is having no problems with government, and the government is generally satisfied with the press. No government is ever totally satisfied, and this is true in Spain. Journalists are never really satisfied either; they will always desire the most freedom and the least control, and feel they need to always fight for it. But they are not complaining at present."

## Mass Media and Public Opinion About Foreign Affairs: A Typology of News Dynamics

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How do Americans interpret international news stories? Why do some stories seem to influence public opinion in unexpected ways? Why do many stories fail to register on the public consciousness? To help answer such questions, this article examines three key dimensions of international stories: media intensity, thematic affinity, and image continuity. These factors are used to propose a typology of five basic categories of international news stories.

First it is necessary to review each of the three components used to develop the typology. *Media intensity* is the initial critical factor; without some minimum level of sustained media attention a news topic will not penetrate to the level of recognition or recall. *Thematic affinity* is then relevant, because Americans will interpret international news in the framework of several longstanding orientations; issues are not decided on a purely ad hoc basis. A final element is *image continuity*, that is, the degree of consistency with prior images. This is important because international news, like all communication, must contend with preexisting impressions and perceptions. Based on the evidence presented below, intensity, affinity, and continuity can interact to produce five archetypes of international news stories which produce five different sorts of public opinion consequences.

### Media Intensity

Sustained media attention is indispensable in order to reach the mass public. The highly attentive public—well-educated "news junkies"—may carefully monitor a wide array of stories, but the average viewer does not. To remember much about an international topic, most people need that classic device for learning: "repetition with variation."

Considerable evidence confirms that news priorities play a major role in "setting the agenda" of issues the audience accepts as most important. The media agenda is not accepted at all times by all people, but on balance it is a significant factor in ordering public priorities.<sup>1</sup>

Mass media, to quote from the agenda-setting gospel, do not automatically tell people what to think, "but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about."<sup>2</sup> For example, public concern about Vietnam correlated with the volume of media coverage about Vietnam—not with the number of U.S. troops there.<sup>3</sup> Experiments manipulating the TV news agendas to which people were exposed found that people tended to adopt TV's issue priorities as their own.<sup>4</sup> Agenda setting may be especially strong for interna-

tional affairs, where few people have the option of selecting alternatives firsthand. (In contrast, people appear to worry about the economy even when it ranks low in the news.)<sup>5</sup>

For purposes here, a distinction should be made between the usual notion of "agenda setting" and the simpler idea of "media intensity." "Agenda setting" emphasizes the role of the media in ranking the audience's issue priorities among alternative issues. In contrast, "intensity" does not address the question of whether the audience mimics the exact order of issue priorities in the mass media. As used here, "intensity" refers to a less complex matter—providing sufficient visibility to gain public awareness of the story.<sup>6</sup>

High visibility is indispensable to achieve a national opinion impact. Conversely, the bulk of international stories that rarely surface outside of the back columns of the *New York Times* are entirely irrelevant to mass public opinion. Thus, journalists' decisions about which international stories to spotlight are crucial.

Over 40 percent of TV news time goes to international topics. In most years, out of the 23–24 minutes of nightly news time an average of about 9–10 minutes are devoted to international stories (defined as those involving at least one foreign country).<sup>7</sup> Consequently, network news covers international affairs proportionately more than do even large-circulation newspapers. Most newspapers devote less than 25 percent of their general interest news (excluding sports, fashion, comics, ads, etc.) to international news.<sup>8</sup>

Ten minutes per night to cover the news of the world is high proportionately and is more than widely supposed; purely domestic news does not monopolize the news agenda. However, 10 minutes hardly provides an opportunity for broad or detailed coverage of some 200 countries and 4 billion people. International stories have tended to be pegged to the United States but not as much as those who decry "ethnocentric" news claim. About 61% of the international news stories made an explicit U.S. connection, but about 4 out of 10 did not.<sup>9</sup>

The networks especially concentrate on selected "continuing sagas" and on providing relatively sustained treatment of those subjects (e.g., Solidarity in Poland, 1980–84; Israel v. neighbors, 1967–85). Some dramatic episodes are elevated to the status of "big events" and given intensive, saturation coverage (e.g., the Tet Offensive, 1968; Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, 1977; the Iran hostage crisis, 1979–80; the Beirut hostage crisis, 1985).<sup>10</sup>

By focusing heavily on selected sagas and a few big events, TV news makes less of an effort to juggle simultaneously a multitude of "smaller" competing stories.<sup>11</sup> For example, except for the Iran hostage crisis, Middle East news (from 1970 through 1980) was reported largely in terms of Israel's relations with its immediate neighbors. Oil and OPEC represented one other major story line. Relatively little attention went to other topics such as the war between North and South Yemen, Libya's Kaddafi (before the links to Billy Carter), Iran (before the downfall of the Shah), the pro-Soviet putsch in Afghanistan in 1978 (a year before Soviet troops landed), and the assassination of the American ambassador to Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

Outside of a few elite newspapers, international news gets short shrift in most American dailies. As with TV news, relatively few stories are covered in any kind of sustained way. A few front-page stories will copy the agenda of the *New York Times*, but there the similarity ends. The depth and range of *Times* stories cannot be found elsewhere.

If an international news story does attain an adequate magnitude of coverage,<sup>13</sup> it then becomes relevant to consider where it will fit with the public's values and orientation toward foreign affairs, the topic of the next section.

### Thematic Affinity

To understand the reception given to news, one must understand the American public's basic orientations toward foreign affairs. The public's predispositions form the context in which international news is interpreted, and messages contradicting these outlooks will be resisted. How do Americans see the world?

Stereotypes about Americans are plentiful. Depending on who sketches the caricature, Americans are all jingoistic adventurers eager to assert power, or ethnocentric know-nothings incapable of subtle diplomacy, or cowardly isolationists with no will to defend Western interests. In addition, there is the odd impression that the American public treats each foreign policy issue in an ad hoc manner, as if based solely on the information in the last newspaper or newscast.

All of these notions are misleading. U.S. public opinion is neither ad hoc nor does it fit into crude categories such as isolationist, militarist, or internationalist. However, most Americans do interpret international news from a set of common values that have been remarkably consistent across decades of opinion polling.<sup>14</sup> Seven major patterns stand out most strongly:

- Belief in universal human decency.
- Faith in communication and negotiation.
- Sympathy for human rights everywhere.
- Opposition to foreign combat.
- Support for a strong defensive shield.
- Favor U.S. economic self-interest.
- Inclination to favor president's leadership.

Together these points create the interpretive filter for international news. Each one merits elaboration and empirical justification.

*Universal human decency.* Americans believe people are basically good. Yet, Americans are not hesitant to view rulers or governments as bad or even monstrous. This factor proves to be significant, not trivial. It means, for example, that Americans can be sincerely concerned about the fate of the Palestinian people and at the same time hostile toward the PLO.

Even after World War II, Americans approved a benevolent treatment of the citizens of Germany and Japan. With their wartime rulers swept away, they were seen as friends and allies within a very short time. One remarkable survey in 1947, not long after the end of the brutal war, asked Americans: "At the present time, do you feel friendly or unfriendly toward the people of Germany as a whole?" Only 28 percent answered "unfriendly." By 1953, only 15 percent felt so.<sup>15</sup>

While some nations have a history of centuries-old hostility of the Polish-Russian variety, the United States does not. One consequence of this is that Americans are likely to assume that, if it were not for the men in the Kremlin and their government by gulag, there would be friendship, not dispute, with the average Russian.

*Hope in communication.* This comes as an outgrowth of the underlying optimism toward other peoples. Americans invariably favor communication with other countries, adversaries and allies alike. In the belief that people are basically good and communications promote peace, Americans support cultural and diplomatic exchanges—without much regard to the politics of other regimes.<sup>16</sup>

Americans place faith in the power of discussions to resolve strife. When Anwar Sadat went to Jerusalem and joined in direct talks with Menachem Begin, Americans were ecstatic. Sadat received an outpouring of sympathy and support because he showed himself willing to break Arab barriers to talk with Israel.

Americans believe that a willingness to discuss differences is an essential part of civilized behavior. Anyone interested in peace is prepared at least to talk with the other side. Therefore, it should have come as no surprise that two of President Nixon's most popular moves, both with the press and with the people, were his trips to Moscow and to Beijing—the first time a U.S. president had visited either capital. Even Americans who were cynical about the motives of Soviet and Chinese rulers still wanted to see the president make every effort to talk away tensions.

The American eagerness for negotiations is nothing new. In 1937, some 66 percent favored a "world disarmament conference," and 79 percent wanted mutual reductions in "spending for armaments." In 1938, 59 percent favored the Munich agreement and agreed that "England and France did the best thing in giving in to Germany instead of going to war." In 1939, about 69 percent wanted a "conference of leading nations of the world to try to end the present war and settle Europe's problems."

*Human rights.* Empathy for other peoples and a commitment to freedom produces American concern with human rights violations. Images of the good people in other countries suffering at the hands of despots are painful ones. Policymakers in Washington may debate whether Soviet-aligned states or certain "Western" dictatorships ought to be the chief targets of efforts to promote human rights, but Americans will endorse condemnations of any government understood to be abusing its citizens. Rationalizations of abhorrent behavior by allies are doomed to fail, no matter how much worse the potential alternatives might be.

Concern for human rights abuses makes it difficult to generate much enthusiasm for the defense of illiberal allies. To be sure, some hardliners will contend that if U.S. support is to be confined to the Switzerland of the world—that is, to tranquil islands of democracy and plenty—then most of Asia, Africa, and Latin America will be future Afghanistans, Cambodias, and Nicaraguas. Nevertheless, the American revulsion toward human rights violations destroys sympathy for autocratic allies.

As much as Americans may deplore the trampling of freedom anywhere abroad, their approved approaches for responding to such problems are severely circumscribed. American concern about human rights is held in check by an even more intense American attitude regarding foreign combat.

*Opposition to foreign combat.* Contrary to the cliché, wars are not popular. The most popular politicians have been those who promised to do everything possible to keep "our boys" out of war. For as long as national public opinion polling has been conducted, results have shown widespread opposition to fighting overseas—as long as the United States is not directly attacked.

Americans overwhelmingly wanted to stay out of World War II. Gallup polls in 1939 showed that 96 percent of those surveyed opposed "joining the European war." When asked if they wanted the United States to keep out of the war even if it would mean Germany would conquer England and France, 77 percent still said "stay out." As late as July 1941, an overwhelming 79 percent still opposed American involvement.<sup>17</sup>

As early as December 1950, a plurality said the United States had made a "mistake in going into the war in Korea." The Korean conflict was no more popular than Vietnam.

Presaging Vietnam, in 1954, 72 percent disapproved of U.S. soldiers joining with the French in the Indochina fighting.

Consequences of this antiwar tradition are profound. It means that Americans resist, under almost all circumstances, the need to send soldiers to fight on distant shores. Attitudes toward El Salvador and Lebanon offer recent illustrations. Not surprisingly, most Americans reject sending U.S. soldiers to fight in El Salvador, and Americans never fully endorsed the U.S. military presence in Lebanon in 1983-84.

What is at first glance surprising is that Americans did indeed support, after the fact, the 1983 intervention in Grenada. Grenada and Lebanon, however, offer polar examples of the types of military ventures Americans will approve or reject. Although few would have given a pre-invasion endorsement of the move, Americans did support the *fait accompli* in Grenada because it was successful, quick, rescued Americans, had a limited number of casualties, and had clear and easily understood objectives. Its antithesis was Lebanon, where the involvement was prolonged, casualties were high, and objectives were more complex. In the public's eye, it held few prospects for success as Marines became targets for snipers and terrorists.

One still encounters the view that the Vietnam experience somehow created an antiwar constituency where none had been before. As shown above, the American revulsion to war long predated the Tet Offensive. It is an enduring American attitude and not a wave of post-Vietnam isolationism.

*Unoffensive defense.* Avoidance of combat converges with another belief: Americans want a strong national defense, largely because it is understood to be protection against actual combat. In 1938, despite their strong resistance to participation in the war in Europe, Americans overwhelmingly favored President Roosevelt's strengthening of U.S. military forces. When asked if the proposed larger navy would "more likely get us into war or keep us out of war," 73 percent said such defensive strength would help keep us out.

Americans get upset with leaders who appear either too weak (and invite conflict through cowardice) or too aggressive (and invite conflict through belligerence). Teddy Roosevelt's famous phrase summed it up. Since the day he said it, "speak softly but carry a big stick" has been a popular expression of American instincts: do not be loud and warlike, but be sufficiently armed to discourage attack. In recent years, conservatives have gone for the big stick while neglecting to speak softly. Liberals have mastered whispering but want to whittle down the size of the stick. Invariably, Americans are unhappy with politicians who come to represent either extreme.

This is not to claim that Americans are incapable of shifts toward more hawkish views—Americans do not want to be threatened, intimidated, or pushed around. However, such inclinations are severely restrained by the public's dread of bloody foreign swamps. Outrage over an event like the Soviet attack on the Korean Airlines jet subsides quickly as people revert to their wish to minimize tensions and preserve peace. Such preferences are due neither to the fall of Saigon nor to manipulation by liberal journalists. Cautious orientations have been prevalent throughout this century.

*Economic self-interest.* Election analysts have long noted that Americans vote their pocketbook, and economic conditions are outstanding predictors of whether incumbent presidents will be reelected. A neglected but comparable consideration is that economics forms an important part of the public's view of foreign policy. Americans often regard

the pursuit of national self-interest and its concomitant use of diplomacy in economic terms.

Americans overwhelmingly believe foreign policy has a big effect on the economy. In 1982, 72 percent said U.S. foreign policy has a "major impact" on "our overall economy at home"; 81 percent said it has a "major impact" on gasoline prices; and 66 percent said it has a "major impact" on unemployment. Consequently, the public ranks issues of economic self-interest as goals that ought to be the top priorities of U.S. foreign policy. When presented with a variety of possible goals, the top three were all economic: "protecting jobs of American workers," "keeping up the value of the dollar," and "securing adequate supplies of energy."

*Presidential leadership.* Traditionally, Americans support the president in times of crisis. They are also inclined to support the president even without a crisis. This reaction has not disappeared in recent years, although support is not now, nor has it ever been, carte blanche. But within certain limits—set largely by the preceding six factors—the president can draw on a huge reservoir of public support.

Most Americans do not feel obliged to critique the details and tactics used by the president and foreign policy professionals. Their performance will be judged by the product—by the extent to which they can successfully turn these broad goals into foreign policy achievements.

Implications for policymakers are clear. An administration perceived to violate these tenets regularly will lose public support. However, if the general foreign policy reputation of an administration is solidly in this mainstream, it can get away with an occasional transgression. Most people will at least listen to a president's attempt to justify policies that they might have otherwise disliked. But it is not easy to make a convincing case when it appears to contradict this national ethos.

A 1982 Gallup poll revealed the extent to which Americans share this ethos. At remarkable levels of between 80 and 94 percent, the public agreed that the following were "important" goals of U.S. foreign policy:

- Protecting jobs of American workers (94%).
- Keeping up the value of the dollar (93%).
- Securing adequate supplies of energy (93%).
- Worldwide arms control (89%).
- Containing communism (86%).
- Combating world hunger (91%).
- Defending our allies' security (89%).
- Matching Soviet military power (83%).
- Protecting interests of American business abroad (87%).
- Promoting and defending human rights in other countries (85%).
- Helping to improve the standard of living in less-developed countries (85%).
- Protecting weaker nations against foreign aggression (84%).
- Strengthening the United Nations (80%).

This series of foreign policy goals summarizes the public's desire simultaneously to reduce tensions, maintain a defensive military shield, promote American economic self-interest, and help the hungry and oppressed of the world. This list is not exhaustive, but it captures the major, long-term values in the public's interpretation of international issues.

These themes will be used in evaluating the affinity of Americans for the messages in various foreign news stories.

### Image Continuity

Another central element in the impact of foreign news stories is the extent to which they challenge or reinforce current images. Before integrating this element into the typology, it should be briefly reviewed.

Classic findings are that persuasive mass communication is "more likely to reinforce the existing opinions of its audience than it is to change opinions."<sup>18</sup> And minor change is more likely than outright conversion. Likewise, the more important the issue to the audience, the less influential are persuasive messages. The logic of these principles also applies to changes in images of leaders, groups, and countries.

Image changes are made difficult by a variety of barriers, both sociological and psychological.<sup>19</sup> Sociological barriers include social networks and reference groups sustaining core values and mediating discordant news from elsewhere, along with influential local opinion leaders and interpersonal discussions serving to authenticate or delegitimize tentative views drawn from mass media.<sup>20</sup> Psychological barriers include long-standing attitudes gained from family, church, school, job, peers; selective exposure (avoiding opposing messages); selective perception (screening out discordant messages); selective retention (remembering only reinforcing messages); plus other devices (e.g., schemas; discounting source credibility; denial).

Despite these obstacles, mass communication can be persuasive due to such factors as source credibility; repetition with variation; multimedia dissemination; reinforcement with personal contact; two-sided accounts; new subjects (i.e., no prior views on topic); and consistency with other views and other information. Television and newspapers are generally considered reliable; so "source credibility" is high.<sup>21</sup> Journalists usually employ ostensibly "two-sided accounts," making the presentation more credible. And, "repetition with variation" drums messages in a giant multimedia echo chamber, as major U.S. media ordinarily display similar agendas and similar story plans.

Thus, despite certain barriers, the mass news media are well situated to influence the images of people, places, and things. Although outright changes in images will be difficult, reinforcement of existing images—or the creation of a new image where none existed before—will be easier. Any look at public opinion and international news must keep these basics in mind.

### A Typology of News Dynamics

For an international news story,<sup>22</sup> public opinion dynamics should be heavily dependent on these three potent factors, reviewed above: (1) media intensity, the magnitude of the story's visibility; (2) thematic affinity, the degree of congruence with public values toward international affairs; and (3) image continuity, the extent of consistency with existing information about international actors and activities. Interactions among these three dimensions can help explain differences in public opinion reactions to various stories.

Following the maxim that simple models are best, the approach is plainly reductionist. Each of the three factors is dichotomized to simplify the resulting typology. For example, intensity will be treated as "high" or "low." All three variables are actually ordinal and not true dichotomies, so there are no firm boundaries between resulting cate-



teria for classifying stories into each of the five types, gives examples, and suggests the probable ensuing public opinion outcomes. Each story type is reviewed below.

### Type I

Type I stories are covered in ways that are high on intensity, affinity, and continuity. They result in powerful reinforcement of existing worldviews. Even if the specific event is "new," the public is not really surprised by a Type I story because all of the characters are played true to their previous casting. Viewers and readers do not resist the story; indeed, they are receptive to it, even if it involves "bad news." Type I stories strengthen our established view of the world.

Examples of Type I stories include the 1979-80 coverage given the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; 1980-84 coverage of Solidarity in Poland; 1983 coverage of the attack on the Korean Airlines plane; 1984-85 coverage of the Ethiopian famine; 1979-80 coverage of the Iranian hostage crisis. Americans were not too surprised to hear that the Kremlin was up to no good or that people in their occupied lands were rebelling. Nor was it incongruent with past impressions to learn that Africans were starving or that fanatics were holding Americans hostage.

These stories are portrayed in U.S. media with clear-cut good guys and bad guys. Cues and issues are unambiguous and the results are overwhelming—condemnations of the villain, sympathy for the downtrodden. Public reactions to the major features of a Type I story show strong agreement.

### Type II

Type II stories are given high levels of intensity and affinity, but exhibit an image discontinuity. They can puzzle, surprise, perhaps intrigue. Unlike Type I, Type II news shifts the public's prior conceptions. Type II stories usually force many viewers to revise existing images, both because of the intense volume of coverage and because the U.S. media version aligns the story clearly (pro or con) along the axis of traditional affinities. The resulting audience responses verge on a consensus.

Illustrations of Type II stories include the Tet Offensive in Vietnam (covered in 1968 as a stunning, unexpected reversal of the American war effort); Richard Nixon's opening to China (covered in 1972 as a bold and progressive move); Carter's Camp David Treaty (covered in 1978 as a stunning breakthrough for Mideast peace). Type II stories do produce a jolt, but an effective one. Consider the way Americans were told about Anwar Sadat's journey to Jerusalem in 1977.

Praised as courageous and heroic, Sadat benefited from lavishly favorable coverage.<sup>23</sup> He was given hours of deferential interviews on the medium in which he was very effective—television. Moreover, the trip was given saturation coverage: The week prior to his trip, it garnered over one-third of all newscast time; during the trip, two-thirds of all news time, along with 17 hours of live coverage and two hours of special reports; and for ten days afterwards, nearly one-third of all news time.<sup>24</sup>

The setting combined classic elements for attitudinal impact: intense repetition with variation over a three-week period, multimedia hype, status conferred from Sadat's media prominence, with no need to abandon most other opinions (one could still support Israel). Plus, Sadat appealed to heartland American sentiments for conciliation and communication to help avert conflict.

The image of Egypt and its leader underwent a dramatic transformation.<sup>25</sup> Sadat's personal popularity soared.<sup>26</sup> Sadat broke Arab stereotypes which had been confined to images of alien religious fanatics, terrorists, or oil-rich sheiks.

The impact of Sadat's coverage was staggering. Who could have guessed in 1976 that soon an Egyptian would be more popular with Americans than either the leader of Israel or the president of the United States? Sadat shattered stereotypes and transformed images of the Middle East situation. None of these changes could have occurred had the mass media treated the story as Type IV or Type V. It would be difficult to conceive of these powerful effects had media decision-makers chosen to relegate the story to more modest visibility, given Sadat less TV airtime (he received twice as much as Begin), or treated Sadat's move as debatable and questionable (as did some of the European press).

### Type III

Type III coverage is high on intensity and continuity, but mixed with regard to thematic affinity. In other words, the news depicts key story components in a way that prompts contradictory impulses from Americans. These stories confuse people and produce various mixed emotions; the audience is torn between conflicting values.

The 1983-84 news of U.S. troops in Beirut is a case in point. Americans were pulled between, on the one hand, supporting the Commander-in-Chief and somehow helping the unfortunate people of Lebanon and, on the other hand, following their instinctive opposition to sending American soldiers into dangerous situations in a faraway land. As a result, polls found Americans sharply divided on the subject.

Along with ambivalence and confusion, another response to Type III stories is to recast the media messages into a more palatable form and employ selective exposure, selective perception, and selective retention. People may reinterpret the story in their own terms or may try to ignore it as means of reducing confusion.

Another example of a Type III story was the treatment of Palestinians and the PLO. Content research found that, during the late 1970s, a substantial amount of attention was directed to the problems of the Palestinian people and toward the PLO.<sup>27</sup> Survey research correspondingly found increased public cognizance of the Palestinians.

In a 1975 Yankelovich survey, only half of those surveyed (52 percent) had heard of the PLO. By early 1978, the percentage had increased to 77 percent. What they had heard, they definitely did not like. The PLO was strongly viewed as "undemocratic," "anti-American," "backward," and comprised of "terrorists." All of this was entirely consistent with the prior media characterization of the PLO. At the same time, the "Palestinian people" had begun to receive much better press.<sup>28</sup> From news magazine cover stories to television documentaries, Americans were told about the sad plight of Palestinians. But then there was still the PLO and Yassir Arafat to contend with.

What was the public reaction to this Type III situation, given the confused thematic affinities? As is often the case in Type III situations, Americans simply "remodeled" the story themselves, in order to resolve incongruities. Faced with an inability to reconcile their value preferences and the totality of the news stories, Americans reached a solution: They decided that Arafat could not represent the Palestinians—never mind that repeated surveys showed Palestinians overwhelmingly accepted the PLO as their representative.

In 1978, among those familiar with the PLO, a large majority of 63 percent said the PLO did not "represent the point of view of a majority of Palestinians." (Another 23 percent were not sure.) Again in 1982, most Americans continued to distinguish between Palestinians and the PLO. A 55 percent majority said, in an ABC News/Washington Post

poll, that the PLO "does not represent" Palestinians; only 25 percent believed the PLO was representative.

The public's insistence on distinguishing between the Palestinians and the PLO helps explain the positive reaction to Palestinian calls for a homeland. In a 1980 Harris poll, 71 percent agreed that Palestinians deserved "their own independent state, just as much as the Jews deserved a homeland after World War II." But when respondents were reminded of the PLO, they instantly reversed themselves: Only 15 percent told Harris that "Arafat and the PLO should be given the West Bank and allowed to form an independent state."<sup>29</sup> Some tentative American recognition and sympathy has evolved for the Palestinian people, but such sympathy is inhibited by cross-pressured thematic affinities and the specter of the PLO. Presented with this Type III story, Americans recast their interpretations as necessary to keep the distinctions straight.

#### Type IV

Type IV stories are high on intensity, but are depicted in ways that mix thematic affinities and lack image continuity. Such stories produce discomfort and denial. Many people find them to be unpleasant and annoying. "Cognitive dissonance" is a particularly appropriate term for reactions to Type IV stories.

Consequently, many viewers dismiss or reject these media messages. Ronald Reagan's visit to the Bitburg cemetery serves as one case study. Its media themes confused people who long ago made peace with the German people, but certainly abhorred Nazis; most people want to support the president, but are not insensitive to human rights. Reagan's image as a genial fellow further diffused the issue. White Americans were divided toward the visit, pundits were surprised that it did not do more damage to the president. But it was an ideal Type IV story and destined more to be denied or dismissed.

Another series of stories that fit the Type IV pattern was the negative news about Israeli policies from 1977 through 1982. The stories (unfavorable accounts of the West Bank occupation, of Begin vis-a-vis the Camp David Treaty, of Begin "intransigence," the shelling of Beirut, and so forth) did not do widespread damage to Israel's basic reputation.<sup>30</sup> If the prior image is strong enough and the thematic affinities are complex enough, the story is Type IV and its impact is minimal.

#### Type V

Type V stories are low in media intensity. Without a minimum level of coverage, the factors of affinity and continuity are irrelevant. To penetrate the political awareness of the mass public, topics need sustained prominence. Examples of Type V stories include the trivial amount of coverage given the death of 2-3 million Cambodians under Pol Pot during 1975-78,<sup>31</sup> the Shah's Iran during 1972-79, or the Ethiopian famine prior to extensive TV coverage in 1984.

Afghanistan offers another illustration. Until the end of 1979, it was a special symbol for journalists. As a remote, backward country, it epitomized the sort of topic that most mass-market news outlets could not afford to cover. Only the *New York Times* was believed capable of periodically updating Americans on something so esoteric. Perhaps if the Kabul government presided over oil or if the United States had a few million Afghan-Americans, its news value would have been greater; instead, Afghanistan was a well-chosen symbol for nations only the *Times* could care about.

During most years in the 1970s, not a single story mentioning Afghanistan appeared on the weeknight newscasts of ABC, CBS, and NBC. Then the initial pro-Soviet coup in 1978 was given less than three minutes on the nightly news. Notwithstanding upheaval, purges, and Soviet activity, the new Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was deemed no more newsworthy than the old obscure neutralist Afghanistan. More unexpected was the perfunctory coverage that was given the subsequent February 1979 kidnapping and assassination of U.S. Ambassador Dubs (e.g., five minutes on ABC and no follow-up). It was not until Soviet troops physically landed in Kabul in late December 1979 that what had been an unknown Type V story soared to Type I, at least through 1980.

#### Coda

These illustrations suggest that the typology does "work." It differentiates various public opinion impacts of assorted international news stories according to their portrayal in the media on three dimensions: media intensity, thematic affinity, and image continuity. The typology of five story archetypes points research on media effects away from an exclusive reliance on content analysis, away from the mistaken assumption that Americans will necessarily interpret a foreign story with the same categories of meaning as coded by a content analyst.

Analyses of media messages need to be integrated into research that anticipates factors relevant to the audience's decoding of those messages. For example, a content analysis that ignores the critical element of media intensity thus omits an indispensable key to exploring the implications of that content. Enough is now known about the dynamics of information transmission to create content studies that are targeted to tap the pivotal parts of foreign coverage. This typology indicates that media intensity, thematic affinity, and image continuity are pivotal.

The proposed typology does not exhaust the factors which may contribute to the public's reaction to various foreign stories. (Story complexity, for example, appears to be another constraint on the public's comprehension and processing of foreign news.) Nor does the typology attempt to encompass explanations of the choices of media decision-makers to portray certain stories in a particular fashion. The typology does, however, provide a heuristic tool for analyzing the wide variation in international news stories and the wide variation in their public opinion consequences. Given their prior values and impressions, Americans know more about the world than "just what they read in the papers" or see on TV. But how that media rendition interacts with the world in the heads of the audience becomes the ultimate story.

#### Notes

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2. Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1963), p. 16.
3. Ray Funkhouser, "The Issues of the Sixties," *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring 1973) 37:62-75.
4. Shanto Iyengar, Mark Peters, and Donald Kinder, "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-so-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Program," *American Political Science Review* (December 1982) 76:848-58.
5. Researchers have had trouble disentangling the independent effects of TV v. newspapers—especially because their agendas are often so similar and because so many respondents are exposed to at least a little of both. In calculating the individual agenda power of each medium, results are

mixed. See, e.g., Philip Palmgreen and Peter Clarke, "Agenda-setting with Local and National Issues," *Communication Research* (October 1977) 4:435-52. Their cumulative effects are usually found to be quite powerful.

6. Hahuk Sahin, Dennis Davis, and John P. Robinson, "Television as a Source of International News: What Gets Across and What Doesn't," in *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, William C. Adams, ed. (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1982), pp. 229-44; Russell Neuman, "Patterns of Recall Among Television News Viewers," *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring 1976) 40:115-23.

7. James F. Larson, "Conceptual Approaches to the Study of Television News," *Television's Window on the World* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1985), pp. 20-33; and William C. Adams, "Covering the World in Ten Minutes," in Adams, *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, pp. 3-14.

8. William C. Adams, "Covering the World in Ten Minutes," in Adams, *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, pp. 3-14; American Newspaper Publishers Association data cited in *The Mass Media*, Christopher Sterling and Timothy Haight, eds. (Praeger, 1978). The proportion of international news on TV even surpasses that printed in the *New York Times*. George Gerbner and George Marvany, "The Many Worlds of the World's Press," *Journal of Communication* (Winter 1977) 27:55-60.

9. During the late 1970s, the average nightly newscast had about two foreign video reports (each usually over two minutes long), along with two domestic (e.g., State Dept.) video stories about international affairs (each usually over two minutes long). Later in the newscast, the anchor was likely to read about three studio reports of international news (averaging about half a minute each). This composite (late 1970s) newscast would have included at least one story involving the Soviet Union, two stories about the Middle East (in reference to Israel and probably Egypt, Lebanon, and/or Iran), two stories concerning Western Europe (most likely Great Britain, France, or Germany), a brief story mentioning Latin America, and a briefer story related to sub-Saharan Africa, or as an alternative, a Japan or China story. See James F. Larson, "International Affairs Coverage on U.S. Evening Network News," in Adams, *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, pp. 15-41; James F. Larson, *Television's Window on the World* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1985).

10. Don Oberdorfer, *Tet* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984); also see Don Oberdorfer, "Tet: How a 'Big Event' on Television Can Change Our Minds," *Washington Post Magazine*, January 29, 1978; "Iran: Rare 'Hinge Event,'" *Washington Post*, Nov. 25, 1979; "Hostage Seizure," *Washington Post*, Jan. 23, 1981; "Why the Hostage Crisis Held Us All Hostage," *Washington Post*, Feb. 1, 1981. William C. Adams and Phillip Heyl, "From Cairo to Kabul with the Networks, 1972-1980," in William C. Adams, ed., *Television Coverage of the Middle East* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981), pp. 1-37; Waltraud Queiser Morales, "Revolutions, Earthquakes, and Latin America," in Adams, *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, pp. 79-113; William C. Adams, "The Beirut Hostages," *Public Opinion* (August/September 1985) 8:45-48.

11. The news agendas of the three major networks are very similar. This phenomenon is variously attributed to (1) a uniformly high caliber of independent news judgment at all three organizations; (2) professionals responding to comparable constraints within similar institutions; (3) homogeneous values and worldviews of key news personnel; or (4) "pack journalism." These explanations are suggested by observers such as Edward J. Epstein, *News From Nowhere* (New York: Vintage, 1973); Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman, "The Media Elite," *Public Opinion* (October/November 1981) 4:42-46ff; Timothy Crouse, *The Boys on the Bus* (New York: Ballantine, 1972).

12. William C. Adams and Phillip Heyl, "From Cairo to Kabul with the Networks, 1972-1980," in Adams, *Television Coverage of the Middle East*, pp. 1-39.

13. For an approach to identifying exactly how much media attention is necessary to create audience concern see W. Russell Neuman, "The Threshold of Public Attention," paper presented to the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, September 1, 1985.

14. The extent to which values may be widespread in many other countries of the world is difficult to say due to a paucity of good comparative historical survey data and is beyond the scope of this article.

15. Unless otherwise noted, polls by the Gallup organization are cited below.

16. These attitudes did not result from a recent shift. In 1938, for example, when asked if the United States should "refuse to take part in the 1940 Olympic games if they were held in Japan," 61 percent told Gallup that the U.S. ought to participate. Likewise, the initial reaction (prior to President Carter's policy) of two-thirds of the public in 1980 was that, despite Afghanistan, the United States should still participate in the Moscow Olympics.

17. This antiwar orientation is so strong that even after U.S. victories there remained a sizable contingent of Americans who were unconvinced of the necessity of involvement. In 1939, two-thirds of those polled said U.S. participation in World War I had been a mistake. Even immediately after the victory in World War II—often called the most unified war experience in American history—one-quarter of those surveyed said that the United States should have stayed out.

18. Joseph Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (The Free Press, New York, NY, 1960).

19. George Comstock, Steven Chaffee, Natan Katzman, Maxwell McCombs, and Donald Roberts, *Television and Human Behavior* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY, 1978); Philip Zimbardo, Ebbe Ebbesen, and Christina Maslach, *Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior* (Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1977); see also, Sidney Kraus and Dennis Davis, *The Effects of Mass Communication on Political Behavior* (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1976).

20. See, e.g., William A. Lucas and William C. Adams, "Talking, Television, and Voter Indecision," *Journal of Communication* (Autumn 1978) 28:120-31.

21. Roper Organization, "Trends in Attitudes Toward Television and Other Media," (Television Information Office, New York, NY, 1983); William Schneider and I.A. Lewis, "Views on the News," *Public Opinion* (August/September 1985) 8:6-11ff.

22. "Story" is not confined to a single newspaper article or a single TV segment. "Story" is used in this chapter to refer to the entire corpus of news about a relatively coherent topic (e.g., the story of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan).

23. For documentation of the great degree to which Sadat was given extremely favorable treatment during his trip to Jerusalem, see Magda Bagnied and Steven Schneider, "Sadat Goes to Jerusalem: Televised Images, Themes, and Agenda," in Adams, *Television Coverage of the Middle East*, pp. 53-66.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Asi found that, prior to Sadat's trip, Egypt and its leader were given relatively negative coverage. Afterwards, coverage was overwhelmingly favorable or at least neutral coverage. See Morad Asi, "Arabs, Israelis, and TV News: A Time-Series Content Analysis," in Adams, *Television Coverage of the Middle East*, pp. 67-75. In 1976, opinion about Egypt was divided: 46 percent were favorable and 39 percent were unfavorable (12 percent had no opinion). After the 1977 TV spectacular, admiration for Egypt grew steadily. By 1980, 71 percent viewed Egypt favorably; only 23 percent held an unfavorable image. Egypt's favorable rating advanced from a bare plurality to a ratio of three-to-one.

26. By 1980, a Harris study concluded that Americans viewed Sadat as the most respected and most trusted leader in the Middle East, and that he was "more respected than most public figures in the United States."

27. William C. Adams and Phillip Heyl, "From Cairo to Kabul with the Networks," in Adams, *Television Coverage of the Middle East*.

28. More sympathetic media coverage began about 1977, when Sadat helped legitimize the subject by talking calmly but constantly about the Palestinian problem. Ironically, despite attacks for "selling out," Sadat became the first spokesman to articulate for Americans the major Arab complaints against Israel. Sadat frequently raised, and probably helped to legitimize, concerns about the fate of the Palestinian people. *Ibid.*, and see also, William C. Spragens, "Camp David and the Networks," in Adams, *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, pp. 117-127.

29. An NBC News/AP poll in October 1981 included a question on this subject but made it convenient for respondents not to answer: "Do you favor or oppose the creation of a separate Palestinian Arab state on Israel's West Bank, or don't you know enough about the issue to have an

opinion?" Two-thirds (68 percent) took advantage of the escape hatch (which implied that some amount of in-depth knowledge was necessary to answer the question). The third that did express an opinion was about evenly divided—15 percent favored a separate state and 18 percent opposed it. This response suggests there was little intensity for the "separate state" position, and confirmed the public's confusion on the subject.

30. William C. Adams, "Blaming Israel for Begin," *Public Opinion* (October/November 1982) 5:51–55; "Middle East Meets West: Surveying American Attitudes," *Public Opinion* (April/May 1982) 5:51–55.

31. William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984); William C. Adams and Michael Joblove, "Unnewsworthy Holocaust," in Adams, *Television Coverage of International Affairs*.

## The Role of Journalists' Questions in Campaign Forums

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**Abstract** *This article examines the role of journalists' questions in campaign agenda-setting, through an analysis of questions and answers from the 1984 campaign forums. The intention is to identify more fully the conditions and techniques in operation as the agenda is being composed and to illuminate ways in which questioners and candidates vie for dominance.*

*While the audience may see panel members as uninhibited inquirers, the setting and context of forums circumscribe panelists' actions and exert a moderating effect. Panel members are screened and can be vetoed by candidates, and they are bound by demands of television, concerned about embarrassment, reluctant to antagonize candidates, and influenced by the existing campaign agenda. They have influence in introducing topics and guiding discussion, but their questions can be disarmed or neutralized by an array of devices. To the extent that the forums contribute to the public agenda, the power to shape the contribution rests primarily with candidates and secondarily with questioners.*

### Questions

In their pioneering work on agenda-setting, McCombs and Shaw hypothesized that "the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues." They concluded that "the data suggest a very strong relationship between the emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media (reflecting to a considerable degree the emphasis by candidates) and the judgments of voters as to the salience and importance of various campaign topics."<sup>1</sup>

But how do the media elicit the content that they report and therefore make influential in agenda-setting? A principal technique is by asking questions of candidates, particularly at the campaign forums which have evolved in modern presidential politics. While considerable research exists on posing questions in a conventional interview setting, less work has been done on the role that questions play in developing the content of these campaign forums.

It might seem that the questioning is a free, unfettered process engaged in by independent, tough-minded journalists at liberty to press candidates on issues whether or not the candidates welcome the pressure. Yet, do questions posed by journalists in campaign forums really spring from the unrestrained working of open inquiry, or from the context of a political communication system subject to immense pressures and circumscriptions?

The purpose of this study is to examine the function of journalists' questions in campaign agenda-setting, specifically in the campaign-forum format, through an analysis and