

THE NEWS AND FOREIGN POLICY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE NEWS MEDIA ON THE MAKING OF FOREIGN POLICY

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Relations among nations do not necessarily imply conflict. Unless there exists a situation of war between two or more national actors, the very term conflict is avoided as far as possible. With few exceptions, nations today are careful to declare their commitment to the preservice of peace. The containment of conflict and the defusing of dangerous situations where conflicting interests exist among various national actors, are liable to turn a potential conflict into an open conflagration, and are thus among the prime objectives of a nation's foreign policy. However, the formulation of such a policy, the articulation of the diverse and often contrary interests of which such a policy is the end result, is a very complex process, involving a great deal of coordination among numerous factors whose interests eventually combine into such a policy.

The democratic belief system implies, among other things, that a nation's policies be based upon the opinions, desires, and interests of a majority of its

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citizens. It is more or less taken for granted that these elements should be used as actual inputs in the formulation of policy. How this purpose is to be achieved is less clear. The problem is most acute in the area of a nation's foreign policy, for, as James Rosenau stated in 1961, "Few aspects of public opinion lend themselves more readily to impressionistic and faulty analysis than does the relationship between the foreign policies of a nation and the opinions of its citizenry" [1]. Notwithstanding the volume of the literature dealing with this relationship, "the scholarly community involved in this research—Bernard Cohen was writing 12 years later—is inescapably attributing a fundamental role to public opinion in the formulation of foreign policy in the absence of empirical evidence to that effect . . ." [2]. In his critique of the literature on the subject, Cohen points to the shortcomings of what he calls the "osmosis hypothesis," a term he uses to describe statements and models that obscure the mechanisms by which opinion is absorbed and translated into policy [3]. One of the more neglected aspects of the opinion/policy relationship, which has only rarely been addressed in any systematic fashion, is the role of the news media in relation to both. The news media, to use Cohen's metaphor, are taken for the membrana through which the process of osmosis is taking place.

It is a basic assumption of normative democratic theory that the news media perform a crucial role in the process of opinion formation and of policy formulation. It is further assumed that, in performing such a role, the newsmedia function as independent actors. According to democratic theory, "the public rules, or at least participates extensively in policy making" [4]. The same theory also holds that, with the exception of elections, which are held at long intervals, the news media (we shall henceforth use the term press to cover all of the news media, electronic and printed), are the most important single factor for translating this theory into actual practice. What is more, they do so on a continuing, day-by-day basis which further enhances their prominence.

It would be difficult to find a more eloquent statement of this theory than the following one, provided by Mr. Justice Stewart (1971) in his concurring opinion in the Pentagon Papers case:

In the absence of governmental checks and balances present in other areas of national life, the only effective restraint upon executive policy and power in the areas of national defence and international affairs may lie in an enlightened citizenry—in an informed and critical public opinion which alone can here protect the values of democratic government. For this reason it is perhaps here that a press that is alert, aware and free most vitally serves the basic purpose of the First Amendment. For without an informed free press, there cannot be an enlightened people [5].

As regards international conflict, the news media are thus assigned a critical role not only in the coordination and mobilization of domestic groups, but also in the determination of policy toward external actors.

The Democratic Model of Press Performance

The democratic model of press performance is based upon the following assumptions: 1) that the press transmits politically significant information from one part of the system to another; 2) that this information is absorbed by the public and helps its members to form opinions on political issues; 3) that, similarly, information offered by the press is used by policy makers as a significant input into their decision making process. As to the nature of this information, it is assumed: 4) that where the public at large is concerned, such information consists mostly of substantive coverage of events and issues, which may or may not be placed within a wider, politically meaningful context; 5) that in the case of decision makers, the press not only is the source of substantive information on the matters at hand, but is also a reflector of the public's opinion on these matters. The press can thus provide decision makers with feedback to be incorporated into their future decisions. Last, but not least, it is also assumed: 6) that in performing the functions listed above, the press does so as an independent actor. Although this point is usually never elucidated sufficiently, the general idea seems to be that even while interacting with the subjects of their coverage and with their sources of information, reporters, and others involved in the process of presenting the news, are working from some kind of Archimedean vantage point which places them entirely outside the system.

In the following pages, I shall attempt what will be an exploratory study concerning the validity of these assumptions. The critical analysis of these assumptions is a very difficult proposition. For one thing, their examination entails a departure from one of the most central tenets of the democratic belief system. The very legitimacy of the press's freedom from governmental restraints depends on maintaining its claim to fulfill a meaningful role in this context. Another difficulty is the scarcity of credible data. Although in recent years the performance of news organizations and of the information networks which make it possible for reporters to operate have been the subject of rigorously conducted research [6], many of the relevant problems have not been touched upon to date. On the other hand, there exists a wealth of material on the subject in the form of personal recollections written by the actors involved, political figures as well as journalists. However, in many cases, these recollections tend to be biased in favor of the very same assumptions, with the validity of which we are concerned. My own experience as a journalist has afforded me with some insights into the processes involved and has, perhaps, somewhat immunized me against accepting statements about the power and the independence of the press at their face value. However, my own experiences do not, unfortunately, amount to a systematic exercise in participant observation. The following analysis of the assumptions underlying the democratic model of press performance will have to rely on what is basically an historical approach.

ENGAGING PUBLIC OPINION—THE AUTOCRATIC AND THE EMOTION AROUSING METHODS

As was well known to Machiavelli and to Hume, concern for public opinion is not necessarily proof of commitment to a democratic belief system. Nor is a respect for the power of the press on the part of government a guarantee of press freedom. In the area of foreign policy, the manipulative use of the press by a ruler, in order to achieve policy aims, was practiced at least as early as the Napoleonic era. Napoleon, himself an avid reader of newspapers, was a strong believer in the power and influence of the press. "I believe that by means of the newspapers, a single pen can cause the world to rise up, while a sole sword can never achieve a similar result" [7]. Accordingly, he was very thorough in asserting his control over the French press, and used various stratagems to plant news and commentaries which served his political purposes in newspapers which appeared in countries that were beyond his rule [8]. Newspapers were reporting on international relations from the very first days of their existence, but it is with Napoleon that they began to be exploited systematically in order to achieve definite policy aims. The methods used by Napoleon were clearly those of propaganda: dramatization, distortion, and the suppression of any alternative version. His efforts were directed at moving the public, not at informing it. Coming as soon as he did after the French Revolution, it is not surprising that Napoleon was convinced of the power of mobs, and his purpose was to use the press in order to move them. He seems to have believed in what we would today call a simple "Stimulus-Reaction" theory of press influence. Bismarck, no less than Napoleon, was a staunch believer in the power of the press to influence policy. Like Napoleon, he was a frequent contributor of unsigned articles, and had a special official in his employ whose functions consisted of planting news items and articles, including Bismarck's own writings, in various newspapers in Prussia and elsewhere. This official, Moritz Busch, meticulously chronicled Bismarck's efforts at manipulating the European Press and later published them under the title *Bismarck: Some Secret Pages of his History*. Bismarck's grasp of the possibilities inherent for a politician in manipulating the press is made very clear in the following remark of his, quoted by Busch (1898): "One learns more from newspapers than from official dispatches as, of course, governments use the press in order frequently to say more clearly what they really mean. One must, however, know all about the connections of the different papers" [9]. Busch, incidentally, makes it clear that the often-quoted incident of the Ems Telegram was not the direct cause of the French government's declaration of war on Prussia, as Bismarck had apparently intended it to be. However, it does seem that the Chancellor had engineered the publication of a distorted telegram in order to arouse the emotions of the Parisian mobs, inducing them to mount violent demonstrations in support of declaring war on Prussia.

In the course of the last decades of the 19th century, the mass circulation press

was developing rapidly, which, in turn, increased the potential of using it in order to generate emotional mass appeals, which were then directed at governments. As a general rule, the mass circulation press of the late 19th century and early 20th century, devoted only minimal space and effort to the coverage of foreign affairs. Its readers belonged to social strata which not only lacked the capacity to understand the complexities of international affairs, but were usually committed to the belief that such matters did not concern people of their standing. The mass readerships' lack of interest in international affairs, and the concomitant lack of information on the subject, did not, however, preclude an emotional reaction on its part, in the event that such reactions were provoked. The arousal of mass emotions on foreign policy issues was attempted for both political and commercial reasons. An outstanding example of the latter is the role played by the Hearst papers in connection with the Spanish-American War of 1898. In this case, the political decision of declaring war on Spain was taken after a long and concentrated press campaign. The campaign began with dramatic descriptions of Spanish atrocities, some of which, at least, were apparently apocryphal. Later, the campaign was intensified while public feelings were fanned to a pitch by the repeated use of the slogan "Remember the Maine." The tactic of using descriptions of atrocities perpetuated against civilians in order to arouse public emotions may well have suggested itself to Hearst as the result of what had happened in Britain 20 years earlier. On that occasion, the public's emotions had been raised by a feat of genuine investigative reporting: the descriptions of the atrocities by Turkish forces in southern Bulgaria, written by an American correspondent Januarius Aloysius MacGahan, for the *London Daily News* in the summer of 1876. The British public's outrage against the Turks was so intense that Disraeli was forced to qualify his pro-Turkish policy. This, in turn, made it feasible for Russia to declare war on Turkey. It was this war that led to the independence of Bulgaria [10].

It is hardly surprising that in most cases where journalistic treatment of foreign affairs resulted in emotional reactions on the part of the mass public, the subject treated was war. By the end of the 19th century, war correspondence had become a well-paid, high-status profession, whose members' claim to distinction rested more on their literary talents than on their grasp of strategic or political issues [11]. In the course of World War I, both sides made extensive use of sensationalist dramatic eyewitness reports for propagandistic purposes. Arousing hatred toward a cruel enemy, capable of perpetuating terrible atrocities, was among the most important aims of war propaganda [12].

The Press and International Conflict

While the experiences of World War I clearly demonstrated the power of the press to arouse mass emotions and to reinforce discord and hatred, they also served to confirm the beliefs of those who saw the press as capable of guaranteeing peace on earth.

This belief did not emerge as the result of the war. It had its antecedents in the concept of the free marketplace of ideas, which held that public opinion was formed by rational argumentation. If the newspapers could only be prevailed upon to use their enormous power to further this aim, wars would become virtually impossible. "An agency, a world-wide instrumentality as the press is," the editor of the *Wyoming Tribune* told the American Association for International Conciliation in 1913, "which is able to provoke an unnecessary war, certainly is potent enough to prevent one. Acting in unison, with high and patriotic purpose, the newspapers and magazines . . . can place the United States in the vanguard of nations ready, anxious and willing to discard the barbarism of war" [13]. If told the true facts, the public is bound to be opposed to war. Hence, if public opinion does not condemn war, it is the fault of the newspapers, who failed to provide it with enough information, and excited its passions. "No people on earth desire war, particularly an aggressive war. If the people can exercise their will, they will remain at peace," wrote American Secretary of State Robert Lansing, in April, 1918, while fighting was still going on [14].

The Wilsonian commitment to the open conduct of international relations was predicated on the same belief in the capacity of the public to judge correctly if properly informed. It was this belief, no less than a deep aversion toward the manipulative character of 19th-century European diplomacy, that found expression in the first of President Wilson's Fourteen Points, promising "open covenants of peace, openly arrived at after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind." The second part of this formula was virtually abandoned, even before negotiations at Versailles had properly started [15]. Soon after, the general election which was called in Britain for December, 1918, and the press campaign that preceded it, were to prove that public opinion can be agitated to respond emotionally on issues of peace negotiation as well as on those of war. Throughout the election campaign, Lord Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* inserted the epigraph "The Junkers will cheat you yet" each day at the head of its leading article, and implored its readers not to vote for candidates showing "any tenderness for the Hun" [16]. It was as the result of this campaign, and of the government brought to power by it in England, that the Versailles Treaties became what has been subsequently termed "a vindictive peace."

Notwithstanding such setbacks, belief in the power of public opinion to judge issues on their merit, if properly informed, persisted [17]. In the course of the 1920s and 1930s, considerable efforts were devoted to the cause of bettering the performance of the press.¹ Great importance was placed by the League of Nations on its Information Section, which was the most important part of the League's Secretariat [18].

In 1934, the League's International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation arranged a symposium on the "Educational Role of the Press," in which some of the best known journalists and editors of the day took part. With no exceptions, they all confirmed their belief in the power of the press to engage public opinion

in the interest of universal peace. Their rhetoric seems hardly to have been affected by the contemporary triumphs of Fascist and Nazi Propaganda or by the performance of the press under those regimes.

Notwithstanding abundant proof to the contrary, belief in the capacity of the press to exercise a pacifying influence on world politics, persisted even after World War II. In its Report on International Communication, the Commission on the Freedom of the Press stated that "understanding among peoples is one of the four or five primary instruments for promoting world order and peace," a goal which, according to the authors of the report, can be attained by "Taking hold of the improvements that science has affected in all fields of communication" [19].

In 1947, Seymour Berkson, general manager of the *International News Service* wrote as follows: "A peace that is not supported by the free flow of information upon which the peoples of the world can build mutual faith and understanding, is just another armed truce. It makes little difference how cleverly its diplomatic machinery may be designed by governments or statesmen, if this so-called peace can be shattered at will by manipulating the emotions of this or that populace with false information" [20].

PUBLIC OPINION, NATIONAL IMAGES, AND THE NARCISSUS PSYCHOSIS

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by the UN General Assembly, declared that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." However, in the course of consequent attempts to pass a UN Convention on the Free Flow of Information, the concept was carefully qualified so as to accommodate the Soviet Bloc's version of press freedom [21]. Whether or not the concern with a free flow of information across national borders is consistent with the continuous efforts nations make to shape the image which citizens of other countries hold with respect to them, is not made clear. Whatever their purpose, these efforts seem to be based upon the assumption that there exists a causal relationship between image and foreign policy decisions. Kenneth Boulding (1959) defines national images as "images which a nation has of itself and of those other bodies in the system which constitute its international environment," and distinguishes between two representative images—the image of the small group of powerful people who make the actual decisions and the image of the mass of ordinary people. In democratic societies, he says, the aggregate influence of the images of ordinary people is very great, for although the powerful can manipulate to some extent the images which ordinary people hold, they cannot diverge from them too much [22], Louis Kriesberg (1974), in discussing conflict situations between nations uses the terms "feelings of hostility and mistrust between leaders or peoples of a pair of nations"

[23]. The term "image," in this context, should, we believe, be treated with more circumspection than is commonly the case. It should be used differentially in relation to the several audiences concerned. Where the general public, in whatever country, is concerned, images are formed as the result of emotional stimuli as well as, and perhaps more than, on the basis of informational inputs. Both can be used manipulatively. Robert Jervis (1970) [24] uses the term in an entirely different sense, and is concerned mainly with the role of images, as held by or shaped for policy makers themselves. Although in parts of his analysis Jervis does make a distinction between various domestic audiences to whom certain image-oriented efforts are addressed, he is, in general, concerned with images projected from one state to another. The process of making these projections is described in relation to the policy makers actually engaged in it.

It is not unusual for writers on the subject, as well as for practitioners, to use the term "public opinion" on foreign policy issues and images held by the public of foreign states, indiscriminately. As a result, the aim of propagandistic efforts directed by one nation at another, is not always clearly defined.

Attempts by one nation to influence the public in another nation are, as a rule, based on different conceptions of the characteristics of foreign publics, their capacity to hold independent opinions, and the extent to which they are susceptible to holding and forming stereotypes. According to Communist theory, propaganda is a legitimate tool designed to further ideological aims, and is to be used accordingly to influence both domestic and foreign publics. In the case of the United States, its efforts to influence publics abroad, while often aimed at short-term policy ends, seem, basically, to derive from an intense preoccupation with its own image. Proponents of the theory of "media imperialism" believe that there are ulterior political and economic motives behind America's urge to propagate its own image and impose it upon other societies. However, the concern of most Americans for "world public opinion" does appear to transcend immediate concrete policy aims. Dean Acheson described this concern as a "Narcissus Psychosis" when he wrote "An American is apt to stare like Narcissus at his image in the pool of what he believes to be world opinion" [25]. Yehezkel Dror (1971) lists American attitudes toward "world opinion" as one of the major fallacies afflicting the nation's strategic study and analysis: "In its positive form—that world opinion is real and matters a lot—this fallacy is rooted in a positive view of the world cast largely in the image of oneself, and is based, through the convex mirror theory, on an image and ideology which allocated a lot of weight to public opinion . . . this fallacy relies on world public opinion to have real impact on international relations" [26].

On the level of its declared information policy, the United States does indeed appear to be operating on the basis of a convex mirror theory of the impact of public opinion and its role in the formation of foreign policy in other nations of the world. In 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War, a House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee, headed by Congressman Dante B. Fascell, recommended "a comprehensive redefinition of the USIA's mission, and a thorough overhaul of

its operations" as a means to counteract the erosion of American image abroad. Following the subcommittee's report, an Emergency Committee for the Reappraisal of US Overseas Policies and Programs was established. Its members professed a surprisingly naive view on the subject of world public opinion: "The new force of public opinion plays an increasingly important role in affecting action by governments everywhere. The common man plays a part in determining governmental policy in international affairs, even in dictatorial regimes . . . the communications revolution has made him an important individual in the foreign policy decisions of his government . . . Modern technology in communications has furthered the process (of public diplomacy)" [27]. Following a somewhat bizarre logic, similar assumptions as to the power of public opinion, and the ability of the press to influence policy, in non-democratic regimes, seemed also to have formed the basis of some of the covert attempts at influencing these factors. The extent of the operations undertaken by the CIA which were directed at the mass media in different countries of the world, was only revealed in 1977 [28]. According to Hanna Arendt (1971) American preoccupation with its image abroad, and with the judgment of world opinion, has had far-reaching political consequences. This preoccupation can be so overbearing as to influence the making of policy as such. When this happens, policy makers are no longer concerned only with the manner in which the results of their policies are presented to the world. Psychological considerations, having to do with the images evoked, come to dominate policy making itself. The belief in the importance of images is, according to Arendt, characteristic of "the recent generation of intellectuals, who grew up in the insane atmosphere of rampant advertising and were taught that half of politics is image making and the other half the art of making people believe the imagery" [29]. Using Neel Sheehan's term, "problem solvers," to define the group drawn into government from universities, think-tanks, etc., to "solve" the problems of foreign policy, these people, according to Arendt, lied, "not so much for their country, certainly not for their country's survival which was never at stake, but for its image." The constant shift in the definition of both the strategic aims and the tactical targets involved was the result of the fact that "the ultimate aim was neither power nor profit. Nor was it even influence in the world in order to serve particular tangible interests for the sake of which prestige, an image of the greatest power in the world was needed and purposefully used. The goal was image itself, as manifest in the very language the problem solvers, with their 'scenarios' and their 'audiences' borrowed from the theater [30, 31].²

THE DEMOCRATIC MODEL AND THE FORMULATION OF FOREIGN POLICY

Recent developments in electronics and satellite technology have greatly enhanced the ability of the newsmedia to supply their audiences with extensive, almost immediate coverage of world events. As a result, there is little doubt that

the citizen of the 1970s is in a better position to know what is happening around the world than were any of his predecessors. Whether or not the media's capacity of spanning geographical distance has also enlarged the public's interest span is less clear. Audience research has supplied us with considerable information about the demographic and social indicators of those who pay attention to the international content of the mass media, and we also know something about the manner in which various segments of the population view the various media as trustworthy sources of news. However, little is known, as yet, about whether the broadcasting of foreign news on television, has had any impact on the general public's interest in foreign affairs.

Alfred Hero (1977-78), a long-time student of public opinion on foreign affairs in the United States, after examining an extensive body of survey and other systematic social research documents, finds that only a small minority of the adult public is much interested in world affairs beyond broad questions of war and peace. "Depending on the rigour of the criteria for knowledge, interest, and political behaviour applied, the issues in question and other standards, this minority is considered to constitute from roughly 10 per cent to fractions of 1 per cent of the adult population. Only a very small minority—perhaps several hundred thousand—manifest a cause and effect, relatively analytical interest across much of the broad spectrum of international issues of continuing importance to the United States" [32]. Most of this minority is interested primarily in a much narrower range of international phenomena, usually related to their own economic, occupational, ethnic, intellectual, or other particular concerns. The global position of the United States and the impact its policies have upon world affairs seem to have little influence on the interest of its citizens in foreign policy issues. In Europe, even where political parties often make foreign policy issues a matter of partisan orientation, interest in foreign affairs is no more widespread than it is in the United States. A recent observer of the French scene, Marie Claude Smouts (1977), has this to say on the subject: "In France, as in a good many countries, public opinion generally takes little interest in foreign policy, except for a few categories of persons directly concerned. . . . Now that daily life depends more and more on decisions taken at an international level, the complexity of subjects treated at that level . . . deflects the public's interest to more immediate preoccupations. The absence of any burning foreign problem reinforces this indifference. In addition, the idea that foreign policy is no concern of the public is very widespread. In a general way, in France, the feeling that politics is a dubious, rather obscure activity, is accompanied paradoxically enough, by a certain respect for the majesty of power." [33]. The lack of interest on the part of the general public in issues of foreign policy, has not discernably affected the tendency of politicians to refer to the preferences of public opinion in their argumentation. Nor has this tendency diminished as the result of the fact that foreign policy issues figure only very rarely on electoral platforms.

For adherents of democracy, the apparent incompatibility of popular control

and effective foreign policy poses a serious problem. The problem was clearly stated by de Tocqueville (1835), when he wrote: "I have no hesitation in saying that in the control of a society's foreign affairs, democratic governments do appear decidedly inferior to others. . . . Foreign policy does not require the use of any of the good qualities peculiar to democracy but demands the cultivation of almost all those qualities which it lacks . . . a democracy finds it difficult to coordinate details of a great undertaking and to fix on some plan and carry it through with determination . . . it has little capacity for combining measures in secret and waiting patiently for the result" [34]. On the level of daily performance, this has led to the preservation of numerous aristocratic trappings insofar as the exercise of diplomacy is concerned. On the conceptual level, the problem of incompatibility between democratic rule and foreign policy remains a serious one.

INDEPENDENCE OF THE NEWS MEDIA AND THE DEMOCRATIC MODEL

One of the essential components of the democratic model of media performance is the independence of news organizations and of the professionals who work in their employ. In view of the pressures to which news professionals are subjected within their own organizations, it is doubtful whether one can speak in one breath of these two elements—namely, the independence of the organization vis-a-vis the various actors in the political arena and the position of the individual newsman in relation to his sources and subjects of coverage and to the organization for which he works. For the sake of simplicity, however, the distinction between the two kinds of independence shall only be made where it is absolutely necessary to do so.

The tradition of viewing the press as an independent actor in the political arena goes back to the early 19th century, when the phrase "the Fourth Estate"³ was first coined.

More recently, the concept was elaborated upon by Douglass Cater (1959) in his *Fourth Branch of Government* [35]. Other observers of government-media relationships, like Benjamin Cohen, Dan Nimmo, and, writing much later, Leon Sigal, have described these relationships in terms of an elaborate ongoing exchange system.

While political scientists like Cohen (1963, 1973), Nimmo (1964), and Sigal (1973), are careful to point out that, notwithstanding their dependence on officials as sources of news, journalists are well aware of their constitutionally protected adversary role, other writers, describing the performance of the press from the perspective of the official, take a more cynical view. James C. Thomson, Jr. (1973)—who, as Curator of Nieman Fellowships for Journalists and former Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, is in a position to appreciate the attitude of both reporters and officials—has this to say on their working relationship: "To each, the other is a convenient means, but their ends are usually quite

different. The official wants at best to sell an important administration policy, more often to push the case of his faction within the bureaucratic arena, at worst simply to sell himself. . . . The reporter wants at best to ferret out 'the truth', more often to get a few more clues on which to hang a somewhat half-baked story under the gun of a deadline, at worst to feel the warm glow of proximity to power. . . . The crucial social cement is mutual use; also, depending on the nature of the relationship, mutual flattery. Officials use reporters to pass or plant certain messages and thereby win battles. Reporters use officials and thereby get ahead" [36]. Another former insider, Morton Halperin (1974), views the media as important tools in shaping presidential decisions, which are used accordingly by participants in the policy-making process, to carry to the President such information as will best serve their various objectives [37].

However, there is also an institutional dimension to the problem of government press relationships. Overall editorial policy is not shaped as a rule on the basis of working relationships between officials and reporters. In its broadest sense, the term "editorial policy" means much more than taking positions on concrete policy issues. So-called prestige, or elite newspapers do not periodically redefine their audiences or their thematic preferences, and are what they are more by tradition than as a result of conscious choice. This, too, is ultimately a matter of editorial policy. Developments in recent years, where, in the case of the United States, prestige papers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have tended to assume strikingly adversary positions vis-a-vis the administration on foreign policy matters, have obscured the fact that such positions are an exception, rather than the rule.

This fact is further obscured by ideological and constitutional commitments to the concept of an adversary press already mentioned at the beginning of this paper. However, a careful analysis of the positions taken throughout the years by prestige papers on foreign policy issues would reveal a different picture. Prestige papers, in the United States and elsewhere, tended to refrain from "rocking the boat" on foreign policy issues and avoided diverging significantly from the accepted line of policy. Further research is needed in order to identify the roots of this phenomenon.

We were unable to attempt a systematic examination of the output of prestige papers within the present framework, and therefore cannot measure the extent to which they conform to the broader outlines of official foreign policy or accept the basic tenets on which such policy is predicated. The problem is hardly a new one. In what is perhaps the earliest example of applying the method of content analysis to an investigation of press performance, Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz (1920) have come up with strikingly convincing proof of how the *New York Times* consistently and systematically distorted the news from Russia to suit currently accepted interpretations of events [38].

In their analysis, Lippmann and Merz point to what is, perhaps, the classic failing of prestige papers: "Reliance upon official purveyors of information."

They stress that "statements of fact emanating from governments and the circles around governments as well as from the leaders of political movements cannot be taken as judgments of fact by an independent press. They indicate opinion, they are controlled by special purpose and they are not trustworthy news." The far-reaching political significance of such a distortion of the news only becomes evident in retrospect. Lippmann and Merz write from the perspective of 1920, when they say that the *New York Times* "seriously overestimated the willingness of Russia in 1917 to carry on the war. It seriously underestimated the growth of Bolshevik power in the months that followed. It pictured the people of Russia eager for Allied intervention. It developed suddenly the motive of a Red Peril when the end of the war with Germany had banished the need for 'an Eastern front.' It characterized the regimes of Kolchak and Denikin as essentially democratic. It featured the campaigns of these generals when they were progressing, almost ignored them in defeat. . . ." [39].

Reading these lines in the 1970s one can think of other situations to which, but with a few substitutions, they might have been applicable.

In 1946, Martin Kriesberg, repeated the study of Lippmann and Merz and brought it up to date. Covering the period from 1918 to 1946, and using a more sophisticated method of content analysis, Kriesberg concludes that "News about Soviet Russia as reported in the *New York Times* is keyed to a concept of American interests. The nature of the themes developed, the amount of attention, and the manner of reporting news of Soviet Russia, are determined by the relationship between American and Soviet interests. . . . News placing the Soviet Union in an unfavorable light receives more attention than news that is sympathetic. . . . There is a tendency for unwarranted headlines, loaded words and questionable sources of information when occurring in the *Times* reports, to be consistently unfavorable to the Soviets" [40].

An investigation by Susan Welch (1972) of how four American newspapers had covered the Indochina war in the early fifties has resulted in similar findings. Although, at the time, the Indochina issue was not given much attention by the press ". . . by relying almost solely on administration sources, reporters and editorialists laid the foundation for the way the issue was understood. . . support for the administration was forthcoming not only in editorials, but also, and more importantly, in the phraseology of presumed factual reports" [41]. Three among the four papers examined by Welch - *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, are papers commonly recognized as prestige papers and it is these three which were found to echo the administration's positions consistently. The fourth newspaper examined, *The Chicago Tribune*, was found to have challenged these positions persistently. However, this was not the result of the paper's having had superior reporting from the scene but because of its editorial traditions [42].

In his case study of the editorial performance of the *London Times* in the 1930s, Colin Seymour-Ure (1974) shows how the *Times* lent its support to the

government's policy of appeasing Nazi Germany and thus smoothed the government's way in implementing this policy [43].

Although conditions in the United States and in Britain differ greatly with regard to the structure of the press and its political role, it is worthwhile to mention the elements of press influence on foreign policy as identified by Seymour-Ure. He analyses four kinds of influence: First, the negative influence arising from the very fact that the paper did not criticize the government's policy. Second, since the *Times* was (at the time) viewed outside Britain as the official mouthpiece of the British Government, the positions it advocated did have direct influence on opinion and action in other countries. The third element identified by Seymour-Ure is termed by him "influence through access." Both Dawson, the editor of the *Times*, and Barrington Ward, his assistant editor and eventual successor, constantly met with and were influenced by the leading politicians of the day. Lastly, Seymour-Ure refers to the influence of the *Times* as a pressure group in its own right. This function, however, was not necessarily exercised through the medium of print. "Dawson's connections imply . . . that . . . for purposes of defining 'influence' over a government, the boundary between what is published and what is left out is more or less arbitrary. Permeating the political atmosphere as he did, Dawson gathered and 'published' news by letter, telephone and word of mouth as much as in his columns" [44].

Several American writers, proceeding on a much less systematic level, have come up with similar findings about the role played by journalists. It is, in fact, far from easy to define the exact position of journalists in the locus of foreign policy making, and to estimate whether their share in the process is the result of their personal status and connections or the result of their having guaranteed access to the media. Thomson (1973) views their role as follows: "The executive branch, in both its domestic and foreign realms, is a congeries of individuals, groupings and agencies. So-called 'policy making' is an ongoing process of argument, negotiation and even guerilla warfare within, and among competing and changing components of the process of 'bureaucratic politics'. Within this process, the press performs an invaluable and probably irreplaceable function: the sending of messages back and forth among individuals, factions and agencies, and the alerting of the public to important battles, unresolved issues, not to mention downright skullduggery" [45]. Another "insider", Leslie Gelb (1973) describes what he calls the "foreign policy community" in Washington in the following terms: "That group of officials, journalists, exiles from power and congressional aides which congregates at conferences and communicates through an intricate ritual that includes telephone calls, lunches, cocktail parties and the columns of purveyors of high-level political gossip like Evans and Novak" [46].

Washington correspondents of prominent newspapers belong, by the very virtue of their appointments, to an elite group with close connections to other elite groups in the capital. Personality, experience, and the nature of the medium they represent may have their bearing on the particular position each of these

correspondents occupies within this network of influentials. Several of them have described their experiences in detail, and have analyzed their political significance, others have contended themselves with episodic references [47]. What all these first hand testimonials amount to is a clear picture of Washington correspondents as an elite closely interacting with policy makers. Whether or not they also contribute a significant input of their own into the policy making process is much less clear. Arthur Krock (1968), in his *Memoirs* mentions several occasions on which President Kennedy asked his advice on concrete issues. These, however, had to do in the main with the President's problems in dealing with the press. As has been mentioned, journalists may have a catalytic effect on some policy making processes as a result of their role in making information circulate. This, however, does not mean that they fulfil an independent role in the process. The furthest they can go is to publicize alternative policy options, which, as a rule, are rarely their own contributions, but represent divergent views from within the system.

*The Mutual Re-Inforcement or the Adversary Press Model,
Which One Is Applicable?*

In recent years, from a post-Watergate and post-Pentagon Papers retrospective, the adversary model of government-media relations, has come to be regarded as the accepted norm. Even on foreign policy issues, it has become common for the media to assume an adversary position. Whether or not such positions are borne out by the actual performance of reporters and editors, in the course of their daily working relations with policy makers, has not been sufficiently investigated [48].⁴ However, there seems to be little evidence to warrant a description of media personnel engaged in the coverage of foreign policy matters as independent actors in the process of policy formation. Least of all is this the case where the newsmedia appear to be involved directly in the very process of policy in the making, in what has come to be known as *media diplomacy*. As the result of what seems to be an utter confusion between investigative reporting as practiced by reporters of the printed press, and the on-camera performance of TV personalities who interview political figures, Thomas Griffith (1978) writing in the "Newswatch" section of *Time* magazine, had this to say on the subject: "Perhaps we are witnessing the final reversal of the Watergate era, when the press corps had a hectoring ascendancy over public figures. . . . Currently, in the ongoing contest between leaders who want to put their own viewpoint across and journalists who seek to pin them down or draw them out, the offense prevails." Griffith suggests that this has to do with the fact that "since anchor people are no longer kept at the door or at the curbside but are invited in, deferred to and first-named by heads of state, they may feel themselves part of the diplomatic process, and may be fearful of derailing it. The imperial presidency and jet age diplomacy are producing a matching elite of imperial commentators." [49]

It is our contention that, while "being deferred to and first-named by heads of

state" may be distinctions reserved for the more celebrated television interviewers, reporters, both for the printed and the electronic media who "may feel themselves part of the diplomatic process" are the norm, rather than an exception.

The social eminence and considerable visibility enjoyed by these reporters do not, however, protect them from being manipulated on occasion by the policy makers concerned.

However, the propensity of reporters to be manipulated by decision makers, in order to serve the latter's policy ends is only part of a much larger problem. It is the problem of the press's overall dependence on official sources in the area of foreign policy. Using the term "dependence" does not only mean that in this area of coverage reporters are mostly confined to exchanges with official sources, although this, no doubt, is the case. What we have in mind is a much more pervasive dependence, one which results in the creation of a veritable vicious circle. As one observer has pointed out, "News stories reinforced the preoccupations of the Administration largely because most of the stories dealt with activities and comments of those involved in the decision making" [50]. Such dependence does not necessarily prevent the press from criticizing the government. What it does is to reduce the conceptual level of such criticism. Since the press has little or no access to sources capable of independent assessments of the policies under consideration, all that the press can do is to criticize the manner in which policy is implemented.

Notwithstanding the fact that, at least in the foreign policy area, the press is almost structurally dependent on sources who belong within the policy making system,⁵ [51] the subjective assessments of both journalists and decision makers—at least up to a certain level—tend to view their mutual relationship as one which is more or less balanced. Bernard Cohen (1973) has shown that decision makers in the area of foreign policy—i.e., State Department officials—rely on the newsmedia and on the press in particular, and regard them as an opinion source. One-third of the respondents interviewed in Cohen's study singled out "the substantive coverage of issues and events in the press as a prime source . . . of information on what others think are important questions of the day." An equal number of Cohen's respondents viewed the journalists themselves as a source of public opinion, or rather as "representatives of informed American opinion" [52]. In his earlier work, Cohen (1963) had shown that officials at both the State Department and the Department of Defense, at least up to the level of Assistant Secretary, were updated on events in foreign countries by means of news agency tickers installed in their offices [53]. In addition, it should also be kept in mind that a substantial part of what diplomats stationed abroad include in the reports which eventually reach the desks of decision makers at the Department of State, is based on the local press in the countries where they are stationed. Foreign correspondents usually use the same sources [54].

It is by no means clear at what level of the decision making hierarchy there no

longer is such a dependence on the news media for factual information. The literature abounds in sweeping statements to the effect that the media have a direct impact on presidential decisions. Morton Halperin, in a statement already referred to, believes that the mass media have a direct impact on the shaping of presidential decisions and that it is for this reason that bureaucrats manipulate the press [55]. James Reston (1967) attributes the tendency to be influenced by the media only to some presidents, who as a result are extremely conscious of what both the newswriters and the editorial writers have to say (56). President Johnson, it will be recalled, had had three television sets installed so that he could simultaneously follow the three networks.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages, I have tried to examine some of the assumptions on which the democratic model of media performance is based. We have seen that, on the one hand, the belief in the power of public opinion and in the capacity of the press to influence it, is not necessarily the result of an adherence to the democratic model of government. On the other hand, in the case of democracies, we have seen that some of the more important manifestations of the power of public opinion were divorced from the democratic model, according to which, public opinion intervenes in the policy making process as the result of having been supplied by the press with politically relevant information.

We have also examined what results a doctrinaire adherence to the democratic model might have, and have seen that these range from a naive belief in the power of public opinion to an exaggerated preoccupation with the impacts of what might be called "world public opinion" and with the nature of the "images" nations are said to hold of each other.

An essential component of the model is the independence of the journalistic actors from the system in which they operate. Our examination of their position among the elites who influence the making of policy, particularly in the area of foreign relations, has somewhat undermined the validity of their assuming an adversary posture in relation to the makers of policy.

Although the above analysis is concerned with refuting the democratic model of the function of the newsmedia in democratic regimes, I do not believe that the role of the media is merely of a symbolic nature. To know more about their true function, we shall have to overcome some very difficult obstacles. These concern the patterns of media consumption on the part of policy makers. For one thing, there is little data on the matter. It would probably be possible to cull some information on the subject by carefully screening the personal recollections of major political actors and journalists. Such material, however, would be mostly anecdotal and therefore could hardly contribute to a systematic approach to the problem at hand. There is, furthermore, a problem of credibility involved, since, by virtue of the role assigned to the news media according to the accepted demo-

cratic belief system, political leaders may feel bound to show concern for what the media have to say, even when they do not actually do so. In more than one way, a political actor's media behavior is, at present, part of his public image. His interaction with media figures such as interviewers and reporters, to the extent that it gets exposure on the media, is only part of this image. What is known, and often deliberately circulated by the politician's public relations apparatus, about his habits of watching TV and newspaper reading, is also part of that image. In some cases, notably that of Richard Nixon, a political figure's subjective interpretation of the media's attitudes toward him, may constitute an independent input into his process of decision making. On rare occasions, a process of this kind is actually demonstrated.

Also, there is the difficulty of isolating what is the political figure's genuine media behavior from the layers added to it by his own media specialists—namely, his spokesman, and perhaps no less important, whoever is in charge of collecting the press clippings, which are routinely presented to political leaders as a mirror not only of media opinion, but also as a reflection of public opinion as such.

Even though we do not know much about the true pattern of media consumption on the part of top echelon policy makers, we do know that, unlike lower placed officials, they do, or can have, access to all the information available within the system which they head. According to Joseph Frankel (1963), access to important sources not generally available is, in fact, among the criteria which define top-level status [57]. Although this access does not in and of itself guarantee that decision makers of the top level will always have at their disposal all the information pertinent to their decisions, it seems doubtful that what information they lack should be found in the newsmedia. In other words, it is hard to maintain that policy makers of the top echelon depend on the newsmedia for any substantive informational inputs.

However, as has been shown by researchers involved in the exploration of political decision making, decisions—particularly in the area of foreign policy—are not necessarily based on rational information-seeking processes only. As has been pointed out by Roberta Wohlstetter (1965), in writing about the Cuban missile crisis, "... Once a predisposition about the opponent's behavior becomes settled, it is very hard to shake. In this case... it was reinforced not only by expert authority but also by knowledge, both conscious and unconscious, that the White House had set down a policy for relaxation of tension... this policy background was much more subtle in its influence than documents or diplomatic experience..." [58]. Robert Jervis (1977) has shown that the search for information, on the part of decision makers, is in itself limited by the cognitive processes of inference which they employ in order to construct balanced belief systems. In the interest of maintaining this balance, decision makers, once having accepted an organizing assumption, then limit their search for additional information [59]. Some of the processes described by Jervis in his

discussion of how decision makers perceive reality and organize their information search, bear what we believe to be very interesting similarities to how journalists perform their own tasks. Although the two perform under very different conditions, these similarities deserve further elucidation, in the course of which some of the subtler modes in which the news media influence decision making, might become apparent. Thus, for example, it might prove interesting to compare the way journalists distort their presentation of reality to comply with accepted news values [60] with the way decision makers act when, after having accepted certain assumptions, they limit their information seeking to what is consistent with these assumptions. Both journalists and decision makers are often subject to the same inclination to simplify, to engage in unwarranted deductions, and to submit to premature closure. The extent to which the decision makers' continuing exposure as media consumers, to processes of deduction as practiced by journalists, may have an effect on their own deductive powers could however only be verified empirically. Another interesting similarity concerns the tendency of both journalists and decision makers to engage in what Jervis defines as the "personification function". In the case of reporters, particularly those who work for the electronic media, personification is a routine convention justified by both stylistic needs and organizational convenience. For decision makers, it serves, according to Jervis, as an aid to decision making in complex situations where, by means of "vicarious identification" it helps them to speculate on how their adversaries might react.

Another fascinating aspect of interaction between news media and decision makers involves the time element. Although, as we have pointed out, decision makers rarely depend on information conveyed by the media, for their assessments of a given foreign policy issue, they may, particularly in the case of crisis situations, get their first intimidation of certain developments through the news media. Little is known about how the primacy thus gained by the news media in defining the issue, may influence decision makers in their subsequent processes of information search. The news media, or rather the timetable imposed by them, may influence decision making on yet another level. The fact that, at least in part, decision making in the area of foreign policy is exposed to news coverage on a continuing basis, may well constitute a constraint on the decision making process itself. Although the meeting of deadlines and the need to report new developments at fixed intervals are the concern of the reporter and not of the decision maker, the former's insistence may sometimes affect the latter's timetable as well. This is true especially in situations where policy makers, for a variety of reasons, find it convenient to engage in "media diplomacy," or to put it more generally, in "on the air" decision making.

No less interesting is the further exploration of the role of ambiguity in the context under discussion. Ambiguity may be said to be an almost inbuilt feature of the presentation of news. Although not usually conceived of in this manner, a so-called balanced presentation of issues, events or personalities, involves a large

measure of ambiguity. In pursuing the normative goal of objectivity, a reporter may often end up in presenting his readers or viewers with a series of conflicting statements which, in turn, will greatly hinder them in the process of making up their minds as to the merits of the case. Except for special cases, such as elections, the consumers of news are not expected to make decisions on the basis of information conveyed by the media. Continuing exposure to the ambiguous manner in which the news media present reality, however, may well enhance a tendency to abstain from clear-cut decisions.

The above are but a few examples of what we have in mind in referring to the subtler modes of interaction between news media and decision makers. Further empirical research is indicated, along the lines here suggested, which may call for a combined effort on the part of political scientists, sociologists, social psychologists, and experts in mass communication. The problems we have stated at the beginning of this paper can only be answered if and when such research is completed, for, in the last analysis, it would seem that the influence of the news media on policy making is to be judged mainly in terms of their impact on those who make the ultimate decisions.

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NOTES

1. Some particularly damaging evidence concerning the French press had been published in the mid 1920s by the then Socialist organ *L'Humanité*. On information supplied by the Soviets, it was shown how Count Islovsky, the Russian ambassador to Paris, had consistently paid French newspapers before World War One, to insert articles favorable to Russian policy. [18].

2. Although it is probably true that considerations of image were given an exaggerated importance in the course of the Vietnam War, efforts at manipulating image were addressed to the domestic audience of the United States, no less than to world opinion. On the domestic scene, insofar as the American newsmedia were concerned, these attempts were eventually proven to be counter-productive. Arendt's argument that a preoccupation with image is characteristic only of wars waged in a media-saturated age can also be challenged. Raymond Aron (1966) makes the distinction between what he calls *struggle for glory* and *struggle for power* and shows how military victory can become a goal to itself, causing political objectives to be forgotten. "The desire for absolute victory is often more the expression of a desire for glory than of a desire for force, and it derives from the amour-propre that animates men, once they measure themselves against other men" [31].

3. The editors of the O.E.D. say that they "have failed to discover confirmation of Carlyle's statement (1841) attributing to Burke the use of this phrase in the application now current. A correspondent of *Notes & Queries* . . . states that he heard Brougham use it in the House of Commons in 1823 and 1824 and that it was at that time considered original . . ."

4. With regard to at least one occasion, which occurred after Watergate, there exists ample documentation of how the newsmedia agreed, for a long period, to follow the CIA's directives and forego the publication of a news story which, among other things, also had foreign policy implications. We refer to their agreeing to keep out of print any reference to the attempts by the *Glomar*

Explorer to raise a Soviet submarine in the Pacific. These documents were eventually released under the Freedom of Information Act, in October, 1977 [48].

5. This should not be taken to mean that officials are the only sources reporters use in covering foreign affairs. Research institutes, think tanks, and academic institutions are among those who generate considerable information which journalists use when writing on foreign policy. Recently the term "foreign policy counterestablishment" has been coined to cover the activities of these bodies [51]. However, very little in the way of hard facts originates from these sources.

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