

CJR AMERICA'S PREMIER MEDIA MONITOR COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

PERSPECTIVES ON WAR Different Cultures, Different Coverage

BY NEIL HICKEY

For a rough comparison between coverage on Al Jazeera, which feeds the interests of its 35 million Arabic-speaking viewers, with coverage in the West, cjr chose a handful of recent news events. Al Jazeera provided tapes of its handling of those events. The BBC did the same for its own reporting. We acquired transcripts of coverage by CNN and the three major broadcast networks. George Saliba, professor of Arabic and Islamic Science at Columbia University's department of Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures, translated and analyzed the Al Jazeera videotapes. In addition, a cjr contributor in Jerusalem, Stephen Franklin, videotaped four days chosen at random (January 14, 15, 17, 18) on Al Jazeera's principal daily newscast, Hassad al Yawm, and wrote detailed summaries. In the U.S., we compiled transcripts of the ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN evening news broadcasts for those same dates. The results provide some perspective. A few examples:

The Bombing Campaign Begins, October 7:

CNN's reports on that dramatic afternoon came from correspondents in remote parts of Afghanistan who were far removed from the bomb targets. The news was "filtering out very slowly because of the lack of communication and infrastructure," a CNN correspondent told anchor Aaron Brown. The network aired reaction to the bombing from Shimon Peres, Israel's foreign minister; from the French president, Jacques Chirac; from New York's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani; and from leaders of the U.S. Congress. Other reports came from the White House and the Pentagon.

Meanwhile, Al Jazeera's cameras and correspondents were in the very streets of Kabul, shooting tape of the rubble, interviewing citizens whose homes had been destroyed. Al Jazeera's great advantage in covering the Afghan war is that it has been a presence in the country for years, with unique access to its splintered factions and warlords. The network was allowed to remain in Kabul after the Taliban ordered Western journalists out. And it speaks the language of Afghanis at the street level.

Al Jazeera's anchorman described the air assault on Taliban forces, but then quickly shifted viewers' attention to how the bombing had affected Kabul's civilians in poor neighborhoods. People displaced from their homes wondered to Al Jazeera if they would survive later bombardments, and where their food would come from. "Though the U.S. and British attacks supposedly have been focused on specific targets," the voice-over declared, "they don't always hit those targets." One old man was pictured squatting on the rubble of his house, and throwing fistfuls of dirt

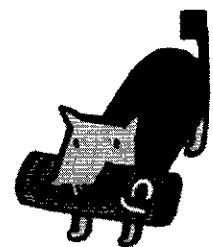
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toward the camera in frustration. The U.S. has advised its people to be patient during a long campaign, said the reporter. But the people of Kabul have nothing to be patient about except their own poverty and hunger, he said — a patience they have been known for throughout history.

On that October 7, Peter Jennings used Al Jazeera's reports on the bombing's progress, before turning to ABC's hired military analysts in the U.S., and to a phone interview from Pakistan with Ahmed Rashid, an expert on the Taliban; another phoner with former national security adviser Sandy Berger in Shanghai, and live chats with correspondents Bob Woodruff in Quetta, Pakistan, and David Wright, somewhere with the Northern Alliance. "We're just whistling in the wind" about the extent of the bombing, Jennings admitted, "until we get an official briefing from the Pentagon."

Correspondents at the other U.S. networks had a comparable, distant view of the action. NBC's Tom Aspell was forty miles from Kabul watching "some flashes of anti-aircraft fire a long way to the south of us." CBS's Jim Axelrod said he was speaking "from a mountain path about twenty miles northeast of Kabul." Both networks had other war news from the White House and the Pentagon. But, as worthy as the American reporting was, Al Jazeera's — on that occasion at least — conveyed far more of the human truth of a massive bombing attack and its effects at ground zero.

The Fall of Kabul, November 13:

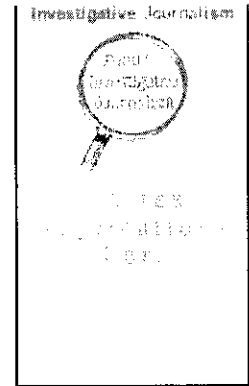
Once again, Al Jazeera's cameras mingle with the crowds for close-in pictures of Afghan faces, some of them joyous as Northern Alliance forces take control of the city; others bewildered, as they see alliance soldiers kicking the bodies of dead Taliban fighters and angrily yanking the beards of others. Says Professor Saliba, watching the videotape: "Al Jazeera's focus shifts quickly from the military people as they enter the city, to the Kabul population, who are seen immediately in the midst of war, trying to find a way to survive in these very chaotic conditions."

For the BBC, correspondent John Simpson had himself filmed striding along the road toward Kabul like a conquering hero, surrounded by happy children, and announcing (rather prematurely) "the end of the Taliban, the most extreme religious system anywhere on earth." Under the Taliban, he explained, young girls had been denied an education, men could be whipped for shaving, music and chess were banned. "Freedom is in the air here," he declared grandly.

CNN's Matthew Chance in Kabul offered more context than either Al Jazeera or the BBC, predicting correctly that the city might return to the "bitter ethnic factional infighting" that had ravaged it before the Taliban took over in 1996. And NBC's Aspell — after reporting that Taliban fighters were lynched, stoned, and left in ditches — announced that Al Jazeera's own headquarters in Kabul had suffered damage, "not by looting crowds, but from American bombs. Overnight, U.S. missiles struck the station." It was accidental, American officials said later.

Terrorist Bombings In Jerusalem, December 1:

When two suicide bombs and a car bomb exploded near a pedestrian mall in Jerusalem within an hour, eight Israelis were left dead and more than 180 injured.



Al Jazeera's coverage focused more on subsequent events in Palestine — the arrest by Palestinian police of people suspected of having a connection to the bombings — than on the scene of terror in Jerusalem's streets and the images of bloodied victims. Is this because the network's cameras are not wholly welcome in Jewish neighborhoods, or for reasons connected to the sentiments of the viewers?

A spokesman for Yasir Arafat's Palestinian Authority declares that the group observes the rule of law, and that one cannot be a bomber and presume he's acting in the Authority's best interests. Al Jazeera's reporter puts the bombings in the context of a retaliation for an earlier assassination by Israelis of a Hamas leader. "What the reporter tries to keep impressing upon us," says Professor Saliba, "is that there is a sequence to these events. The viewer comes away with the understanding that there is a vicious cycle — a retaliation. The Al Jazeera reporter reminds you that we are in that cycle of viciousness."

CNN, for its part, showed exclusive videotape of the devastation, the fear and the hysteria in the streets of Jerusalem, residents fleeing for safety, the bloodied victims on gurneys en route to hospitals, the efforts of police and firefighters to contain the damage. Then: reactions from Israeli and Palestinian officials. "What difference between Arafat's regime and the Taliban?" asks Anan Gissin, a spokesman for the Israeli prime minister. "He has the largest terrorist coalition from here to Afghanistan, with Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, all of which have tentacles around the world." But hasn't Arafat arrested Palestinian suspects in the Jerusalem bombings, CNN's man inquires? "He arrests retired terrorists," Gissin answers. "He leaves the active ones to continue."

Saeb Erakat, chief Palestinian negotiator, is at pains to insist that Arafat has indeed condemned "these attacks tonight," but he reminds CNN that Palestinians "are under total Israel siege. We have our people being killed. We have more settlements being built." Negotiation, he says, is the only way to end the cycle of "violence and counter-violence."

On ABC, retired general Anthony Zinni, the American negotiator, was calling the bombings "the lowest form of inhumanity that can be imagined." NBC's Keith Miller in Tel Aviv said time was running out for Arafat. The BBC's man on the scene said, "There is a sense here that this conflict is slipping beyond hope."

Arafat Banned from Bethlehem, December 24:

In solidarity with Palestine's 50,000 Christians, Arafat traditionally has accompanied Christian leaders and clergy to midnight Mass on Christmas Eve in Bethlehem. In December, he was prevented from doing so — held in virtual house arrest in Ramallah by the Israelis following the wave of suicide bombings against Israel earlier in the month. When high-level Christian clergy visited Arafat to wish him well before proceeding to Bethlehem, Al Jazeera's cameras showed Monsignor Michel Sabbah, the ranking Roman Catholic prelate in the Holy Land, addressing an outdoor gathering and expressing the hope that the Christmas season would help lead to "peace and justice." As an expression of dismay over Arafat's exclusion from Bethlehem, the clergyman seized the moment to send a message to the Israeli population. The capacity to bring peace was in their hands, he said, since they are the most powerful force in the region. Al Jazeera filmed the clerics departing Ramallah in their cars, which were inspected by Israeli forces to assure that Arafat

was not being smuggled to Bethlehem.

Reporting later from Bethlehem, Al Jazeera's correspondent said the Christmas festivities were more somber than in past years because of the heightened tensions. His videotape showed bullet marks and other signs of destruction on the town's buildings; nothing could disguise the intensity, he said, of earlier Israeli bombardment. Nevertheless, the hostilities "could not wipe the smiles from the faces of children who, on this major feast day, are hoping for the feast of their own independence."

The American networks reported the facts with less tilt toward Palestinian emotions, and with comment from Israeli officials. "You can't harbor terrorists and at the same time present yourself as the champion of Christianity and peace," the Israeli spokesman Gissen told ABC. "Words, words, words from Yasir Arafat!" an aide to prime minister Ariel Sharon complained to CNN. In failing to arrest known Palestinian extremists, the PLO leader had shown himself to be "a master of words, but no action."

Still, the U.S. coverage was even more expansive than Al Jazeera's in reporting the alleged insult to Arafat and the Christian Palestinians. The Israelis even ignored an appeal from the Pope to let Arafat go to Bethlehem, CBS told its viewers. The Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, according to CBS's man in Bethlehem, called Israel's decision "an affront to the dignity of all Palestinians and hardly in the Christmas spirit."

Four Days in January:

By mid-January, the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces had largely been routed in Afghanistan. Al Jazeera and Western TV news organizations shifted most of their attention elsewhere, with Al Jazeera resuming its heavy emphasis on coverage of Palestine. On January 14, for example, the network's lead story was about the car-bomb assassination by the Israelis, and burial, of Raed Karmi, a leading member of the militant Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. The network's reporter failed to mention Israeli accusations about how many people Karmi had killed, which would have provided a context for the story. Videotape showed the destroyed car, Karmi's body, and his fellow fighters kissing his body and touching their fingers to his blood. A top Palestinian activist calls Karmi "one of the most respected leaders of the Al Aqsa Brigade" and condemns the Israelis for breaking the cease-fire.

ABC's Gillian Findlay in Jerusalem, recalling that Karmi had been number one on Israel's Most Wanted list, reported he'd admitted killing Israeli civilians. An Israeli spokesman is shown saying: "I think this accident which happened to him is a nice end to his career." Israel declined to admit, Findlay noted, that it had planted the bomb that killed Karmi. The Brigade announced it would no longer abide by Arafat's cease-fire agreement. "Three hours later," she reported, "two Israeli soldiers were shot — one killed — not far from where Raed Karmi died." On CBS, anchorman John Roberts said that Israel's only comment on the Karmi assassination was: "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword."

Near the close of Al Jazeera's newscast that day, the anchorman showed a photo of President Bush, saying he had choked and fainted after eating what the newsman called "a salty cookie."

The next day, January 15, the U.S networks were heavy with news about John

Walker Lindh, the American-born Taliban fighter, but Al Jazeera showed zero interest in that story in favor of a full menu of Palestine-based reports: the arrest by Palestinians themselves of Ahmet Saadat, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, whose group allegedly had assassinated Rehavam Zeevi, a member of the Israeli Knesset. That story reverberated with Palestinians because many harbor anger about the rounding up of their own militants under pressure from the Israelis.

Also: an interview in Washington with Judith Kipper at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on American policies in the Middle East; a report on a Washington press conference held by African-Americans who support the Palestinian cause; plus several stories from Lebanon of clear interest to Islamic activists in Palestine. Thus, there was no overlap that day between Al Jazeera's catering to its audience's special interests, and that of American TV newscasts.

All three of the major U.S. broadcast networks plus CNN gave important coverage on January 17 to the release of videotapes showing five young Islamists vowing to commit future suicide terrorist attacks. The tapes were discovered in the Kabul house of a top bin Laden aide killed in November. The Justice Department released the tapes worldwide in the hope that the five men might be apprehended before they had a chance to conduct terrorist acts in the U.S.

A second major story on American networks that night: the murder of six Israelis and the wounding of thirty others at a bat mitzvah party, when a terrorist connected to the Al Aqsa Brigade burst into the banquet room and sprayed the celebrants with gunfire. He was shot dead. The attack was revenge for Israel's assassination earlier in the week of Raed Karmi.

Al Jazeera treated both of those stories eventually, but on January 17 the al Hasad newscast opted for a list of stories about Palestine and other hot spots in the Arab world: Ahmet Quera, a spokesman for moderate Palestinians, expressed disappointment that Anthony Zinni was not returning to the region. (The reason, which went unremarked by Al Jazeera, was American frustration with the collapse of the cease-fire, which U.S. diplomats, rightly or wrongly, blamed on the Palestinians.) Colonel Jibril Rajoub, an intelligence expert, tells Al Jazeera: "The cancellation of Zinni's visit is the result of the impact of the Jewish lobby on the U.S. administration."

Other stories that day on Al Jazeera: from Islamabad, on the Pakistan-India hostilities. From Damascus, a condemnation by George Habash, the aged leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, of the arrest of a PFLP leader in the West Bank under "the direction of the Americans and the Israelis." From Saudi Arabia, a complaint about the way Saudi citizens are being treated in the U.S. in the wake of September 11. From Baghdad, pictures of Sadaam Hussein addressing crowds on the anniversary of the Gulf War. ("America will have to change the way it behaves toward the world," he says.)

Near the top of its January 18 newscast, Hassad al Yawm reported the suicide attack in Hadera, but offered few details, failing to note that the victims were attending a bat mitzvah and that the gunman crashed the event at a crowded banquet hall. Reporting the Israeli retaliation for that bloodshed — an air attack by F-16 warplanes on a Palestinian security compound in Tulkarem — Al Jazeera quoted a moderate Palestinian spokesperson, Hanan Ashrawi, calling the Israeli air

strike an "escalation" of the hostilities.

U.S. networks showed amateur video of the bat mitzvah massacre, and also a video made earlier by the Palestinian killer, twenty-four-year-old Abdel Salam Hassouna, who is seen declaring: "I am doing this to avenge all the Palestinian martyrs."

NBC's Martin Fletcher in Hadera ended his report that night: "Israelis and Palestinians are still living by that famous verse from Exodus, 'an eye for an eye.' Less well known, though, are the opening words of that verse, 'a life for a life.'"

In comparing Al Jazeera with Western news outlets, it is perilous to base definitive conclusions on the foregoing, anecdotal evidence. Still, these are snapshots of news coverage done by journalists of East and West having the deepest imaginable cultural differences, and catering, subtly or blatantly, to the biases of their discrete audiences. Al Jazeera is excoriated by some for pandering to the prejudices of its Arab-world viewers. American networks are regularly castigated for uncritical reporting on U.S. policy decisions, especially in wartime. Al Jazeera haters are implacable in their reaction to the network's benevolence toward Arab and Muslim geopolitical goals. Others are pleased that it's a powerful voice for what they see as the legitimate aspirations of Arab/Muslims, especially those in Palestine. That twain may never meet.

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CJR AMERICA'S PREMIER MEDIA MONITOR COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

VOICES One War, Two Channels

A Young Arab-American Keeps One Finger on the Remote

BY RHONDA ROUMANI

Watching the news at my parents' house, in their Arab-styled living room in Pasadena, California, isn't easy these days. We have two mammoth remote controls that we just can't figure out. Our mission: to switch between the satellite television that airs al-Jazeera and American broadcast outlets like CNN and ABC. Switching channels shouldn't be so hard.

My parents installed satellite TV a few years ago so they could tune into a popular Syrian soap. During the war in Iraq, however, they found it hard to revel in nostalgia. By virtue of similar experience, language, and culture, the Iraqi people are their brethren, under a dictatorship similar to what they faced growing up in Syria. Every night, with two remotes in hand, they flipped between al-Jazeera and CNN, sometimes successfully, hoping to get a sense of what was really happening on the ground.

When al-Jazeera first aired in the U.S., my father was ecstatic that an independent Arab news outlet existed, one not overtly run by a state. Al-Jazeera criticized the untouchables — Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. It brought on guests who debated controversial topics and criticized government leaders. It challenged both Arab governments and U.S. policies, something that my parents and other Arab-Americans believe U.S.-based channels fail to do.

But Arab-American opinion about al-Jazeera has become more complex and polarized in wartime. Detroit residents attacked an al-Jazeera correspondent because they believed the network's coverage to be too anti-American. Meanwhile, other Arab-Americans believe that the al-Jazeera offices in both Iraq and Afghanistan were deliberately targeted by the U.S. military. Some even believe al-Jazeera is in cahoots with the American and Israeli governments, airing Osama bin Laden videos at moments beneficial to U.S. interests. Still, even those who are critical of it continue to watch. It's one of the few news channels that show images of wounded Palestinians and Iraqis. On al-Jazeera, at least, Arab life seems to matter.

I now live in New York, and al-Jazeera is no longer a daily staple for me. I have to go to smoky shee-sha or hookah bars or to friends' houses to watch the popular and controversial al-Jazeera.

The Egyptian Café in Astoria, Queens, is one such place. Arab men — Egyptians, Palestinians, Yemenis, Syrians — and occasionally women, visit the café after a long

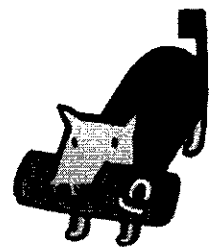
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day at work to sip mint tea, play backgammon, and smoke fruit-flavored shee-shas. Lime-green and pink walls adorned with gold-framed mirrors remind the visitor of Cairo. In the corner, a large, flat-screen television blares al-Jazeera.

I visited the café on the day that the Iraqi regime seemed to have fallen — when the statue of Saddam Hussein in al-Fardus Square was toppled. On U.S. channels the statue's fall was shown all day long. On al-Jazeera, it was only a small part of a big picture. The Arab channel conveyed the chaos of the streets, broadcasting images of people both celebrating and looting. Al-Jazeera even made sure to show a picture of an Iraqi man celebrating by waving a picture of Dick Cheney. But it also showed the anguish of Iraqi civilians: images from Basra of a wounded boy, his face partially burned off.

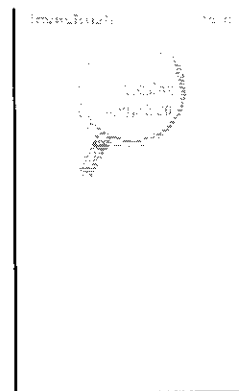
In the café, a Somali woman with a red velvet hat and burgundy wrap elegantly smoked her shee-sha, glancing occasionally at the screen. When the soldier draped an American flag on the face of the statue, she sighed. "I stopped watching this — it's so depressing," she said, though she kept watching.

Nabil Mohamad, an architect who has been in the U.S. for twenty-five years, announced that al-Jazeera is the only channel not influenced by the supporters of Israel. "It tells you the truth and it's not controlled by the Jews, like the media here," he asserted. He watches the satellite channel at home every night.

"You can't believe any station," said another man, an Egyptian archeologist named Hassan who works in a thrift shop in Flushing and who said he watches all news outlets. "When you watch al-Jazeera, you see what they do to the people, not what the army is doing. Al-Jazeera shows the bad side of America. CNN shows you the bad side of the Iraqi government. I watch CNN — nobody gets killed. I watch al-Jazeera — it's like a tragedy."

When I visit my parents back in Pasadena, I still struggle with the two remotes, as I am struggling with the two worlds of al-Jazeera and CNN. Hassan just might be right when he concludes that "something is missing" from both of them.

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BEYOND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

WEAPONS OF MASS COMMUNICATION

"How can a man in a cave outcommunicate the world's leading communications society?" This question, plaintively posed by long-time U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke, has been puzzling many Americans. Osama bin Laden apparently still enjoys widespread public approval in the Muslim world (witness the skepticism in many Muslim countries toward the videotaped bin Laden "confession" released by the White House in December). Indeed, the world's superpower is losing the propaganda war.

"Winning the hearts and minds" of Arab and Muslim populations has quite understandably risen to the top of the Bush administration's agenda. Military operations abroad and new security measures at home do nothing to address the virulent anti-Americanism of government-supported media, mullahs, and madrassas (Islamic schools). Moreover, as the Israelis have discovered, terrorism thrives on a cruel paradox: The more force is used to retaliate, the more fuel is added to the terrorists' cause.

But slick marketing techniques and legions of U.S. spokespersons on satellite television will not be sufficient to stem the tide of xenophobia sweeping through the Islamic world. When antiterrorist ads produced by the U.S. government were shown recently to focus groups in Jordan, the majority of respondents were simply puzzled, protesting, "But bin Laden is a holy man." The widespread antagonism to U.S. regional policies themselves further limits what public diplomacy can achieve. Until these policies are addressed, argues American University's R. S. Zaharna, "American efforts to intensify its message are more likely to hurt than help."

As the United States adds weapons of mass communication to weapons of war, therefore, it must also take on the more important job of supporting indigenous open media, democracy, and civil society in the Muslim world. Even though many Muslims disagree with U.S. foreign policy, particularly toward the Middle East, they yearn for freedom of speech and access to information. U.S. national security is enhanced to the degree that other nations share these freedoms. And it is endangered by nations that practice propaganda, encourage their media to spew hatred, and deny freedom of expression.

TERROR, LIES, AND VIDEOTAPE

Washington's immediate response to the attacks of September 11 was to try to figure out how best to spin its message. The chair of the House International Relations Committee, Henry Hyde (R.-Ill.), called for the State Department to consult "those in the private sector whose careers have focused on images both here and around the world." As a result, former advertising executive Charlotte Beers has been appointed undersecretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, and even the Pentagon has hired a strategic communications firm to advise it.

Once the stepchild of diplomats, public diplomacy has only recently taken its rightful place at the table of national security. The communications revolution has made diplomacy more public, exposing the once-secret work of diplomats to the global fishbowl of life in the twenty-first century. Moreover, the cast of

actors in international affairs now includes nongovernmental organizations, businesses, lobbyists, journalists, and Internet activists. In an era of mass communications and electronic transmission, the public matters. The "street" is a potent force and can undermine even the best-crafted peace agreement.

Fully aware that the war on terrorism requires the cooperation of both world leaders and the Western and Muslim "streets," Washington turned to the news media to disseminate its message. At home, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice persuaded U.S. networks to limit videotaped broadcasts from bin Laden. And abroad, Secretary of State Colin Powell and Vice President Dick Cheney took turns strong-arming the emir of Qatar to rein in the transnational satellite TV channel al Jazeera, which the emirate partly funds. When Voice of America broadcast an interview with the Taliban leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, its acting chief was quickly replaced. U.S. psy-ops (psychological operations) radio messages to Afghans -- broadcast over Afghan airwaves from transmitters on converted ec-130 aircraft -- sounded like the Cold War rhetoric of a 1950s-era comic book.

Rather than resorting to censorship and counterpropaganda, Washington should make use of the greatest weapon it has in its arsenal: the values enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The State Department should make the promotion of independent media a major priority in those countries where oppression breeds terrorism. It is no coincidence that countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, where the public has little access to outside information or free and independent news media, are the very places where terrorism is bred. Indeed, the unrelenting and unquestioned anti-Western propaganda in those countries' media creates fertile ground for suicide bombers and would-be martyrs. The State Department should therefore apply strong diplomatic pressure, including perhaps the threat of making future aid conditioned on compliance, to influence governments in these countries to adopt laws and policies that promote greater media freedom.

Congress has begun to realize the importance of media in reaching the Arab public, and it is considering appropriating \$500 million to launch a 24-hour Arab-language satellite television station to compete with al Jazeera and the half-dozen other Arab satellite stations that are gaining in popularity. Ironically, Arab states are equally concerned that their own message is not reaching Americans. A week after the September 11 attacks, information ministers from the Persian Gulf states (Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen) gathered in Bahrain to discuss launching a new English-language satellite television channel. One only has to imagine the improbability of such a channel's succeeding in the U.S. market to predict the reaction to an American satellite channel among Arabs. Moreover, even when effective, overseas broadcasts leave no rudimentary foundations in place on which the democratization of Arab and Muslim societies can begin.

In contrast to the resentment and suspicion that would likely greet a U.S.-sponsored satellite channel, however, a large market does exist in the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world for home-grown, independent media. People who have been propagandized all their lives welcome the alternative of fact-based news -- as experience in the former Soviet territories and post-Suharto Indonesia attests. Although having open media does not automatically guarantee moderation, it does at least open new space for moderate voices that can combat anti-Western propaganda. A free press can also become the advance guard for democracy by facilitating multiparty elections, freedom of expression, transparency of both government and business, improved human rights, and better treatment for women and disenfranchised minorities. In the World Bank's World Development Report 2002, an analysis of some 97 countries found that those with privately owned, local, independent media outlets had less corruption, more transparent economies, and higher indices of education and health.

THE DAMNATION OF FAUST

Since September 11, Americans have faced the grim reality that hatred of the United States has become endemic in many countries around the world. U.S.-backed repressive rulers such as the House of Saud in Saudi Arabia, Suharto in Indonesia, and General Sani Abacha in Nigeria, while discreetly making deals with their American patrons and often enriching themselves from oil revenues, have proven their piety to the masses by encouraging the state-controlled press to demonize America. The media have thus provided the government a safety valve through which to redirect anger from local social and political failures. U.S. policymakers, meanwhile, have willfully ignored this growing time bomb of popular discontent as long as the oil has kept flowing and friendly regimes have remained in place. This Faustian bargain threatens both the United States and its Middle Eastern allies in the long run, as the events of September 11 amply demonstrated. America has been made captive to the repressive domestic policies of these authoritarian regimes.

Nowhere is this threat greater than in Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden is, in many ways, that country's true son, a product of the contradiction between the sheikdom's support for U.S. strategic interests and the virulent anti-Americanism that the Saudis cultivate and export from their mosques and madrassas. After the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were set aflame, al Qaeda's publicist-in-chief set light to the tinderbox that is the Arab street.

For someone who scorned modernity and globalization, and who took refuge in an Islamic state that banned television, bin Laden proved remarkably adept at public diplomacy. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, bin Laden turned to al Jazeera to reach the two audiences that were essential to his plans -- the Western news media and the Arab masses. Uncensored and unconstrained by any of the countries where it is received, al Jazeera's satellite signal delivered bin Laden's exhortations directly to some 34 million potential viewers across the Middle East, northern Africa, and Europe. Americans watched, mesmerized, as al Jazeera's exclusive access to bin Laden and the al Qaeda leadership in Afghanistan scooped the suddenly impotent Western news media. The Bush administration, not knowing quite how to react, has alternately courted and vilified the network (and even reportedly bombed its offices in Kabul).

Most Americans have heard of only al Jazeera -- and that only since it became the sole conduit of bin Laden's taped exhortations. In fact, however, a half-dozen other Arab-owned, transnational satellite channels had begun broadcasting to the Middle East five years before al Jazeera went on the air. The dowdy Saudi-financed Middle Eastern Broadcasting Centre (MBC), a direct-broadcast satellite channel run out of London, attracts a slightly larger audience than al Jazeera's for its news programs and twice the audience overall.

And al Jazeera's access to the most wanted man in America has led many pundits to exaggerate the impact of satellite broadcasters in the Middle East. Although many television watchers in the Middle East choose satellite TV because it is less censored, the prohibitive cost continues to depress viewership. In addition, the international satellite stations cannot offer the local and national news that viewers want. Finally, the reach of print media is limited by low literacy rates. These drawbacks leave state television and radio channels the more practical and popular alternative.

That al Jazeera would one day come to be the chosen vehicle for anti-American terrorists would have seemed improbable when the station first went on the air in November 1996. After years of strictly censored, state-controlled television channels in the Arab Middle East, taboo-breaking interviews with Israeli leaders and criticism of Arab regimes made al Jazeera seem, at first, like the Arab equivalent of CNN. After the second intifada began in September 2000, however, the network's coverage veered sharply toward the incendiary. As Professor Fouad Ajami argued in *The New York Times Magazine*, "the channel has been unabashedly one-sided. Compared with other Arab media outlets, Al Jazeera may be more independent -- but it is also more inflammatory. ... Day in and day out, Al Jazeera deliberately fans the flames of Muslim outrage."

But al Jazeera is far from the worst of the Arab and Muslim news media outlets, which generally see their role as "mobilizational" vehicles for an Islamic society under siege from the forces of Western globalization, U.S. hegemony, and Israeli domination of Palestine. Western journalists such as Thomas Friedman have highlighted some of the most egregious examples of the kind of partisan, inflammatory stories emanating from the Middle East. These include editorials in Egypt's leading newspaper, al Ahram, suggesting that the United States deliberately poisoned relief packages and dropped them in heavily mined areas of Afghanistan. Other oft-repeated stories assert that Jews were warned to stay away from the World Trade Center before September 11 and that leather belts exported by the United States could sap male potency.

The obstacles to winning the propaganda war in such a context are formidable. Ajami enumerates them: "The enmity runs too deep. ... An American leader being interviewed on Al Jazeera will hardly be able to grasp the insinuations, the hidden meanings, suggested by its hostile reporters. No matter how hard we try, we cannot beat Al Jazeera at its own game."

MEDIA FRENZY

The best way for Washington to reverse the tide in the propaganda war is to support those forces in the Muslim community that are struggling to create modern democracies and institutionalize the rule of law. That the majority of the Muslim world disagrees with many aspects of U.S. policy does not preclude those same people from also craving more independent and pluralistic media based on Western-style objective journalism. In many Muslim countries, globalization and the communications revolution are opening up new opportunities for independent media that local journalists and media entrepreneurs are eager to seize. Even

repressive governments will find this pressure hard to resist, because modern media are essential gateways to the globalized economy.

Media are also directly embroiled in the Middle East's love-hate relationship with America. Young people in particular -- and the majority of the populations of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran, and Iraq are under 25 - - are simultaneously seduced and repelled by American culture. The most popular show on MBC is *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* The same youths who shout "death to America" go home to read contraband copies of Hollywood magazines. What the Iranian philosopher Daryush Shayegan refers to as Islam's "cultural schizophrenia" -- the struggle between tradition and Western secular modernity, between fundamentalism and globalization -- haunts the souls of many Muslims and sometimes erupts in factional violence, as in Algeria or in the Palestinian territories.

Iran, a country still dominated by fundamentalist clerics, where the conservative judiciary has suspended or closed at least 52 newspapers and magazines and jailed their most outspoken editors since 1997, provides a strong example of the pent-up demand for open media. When fully 80 percent of Iranians voted for the reformist President Muhammad Khatami in August 1997, they indirectly cast their ballots for the freedom of expression he champions.

This demand for more media diversity will only increase throughout the Middle East and South Asia as regional satellite television and radio channels continue to encroach on the sovereign space of Muslim nations. Pakistan is grappling with several Urdu satellite TV channels that emanate from its rival, India. Satellite broadcasts produced in Los Angeles by the son of the former shah of Iran reportedly sparked riots in his homeland after a loss by Iran's national soccer team. The French-based Canal Horizons satellite network has millions of subscribers across northern Africa. Faced with competition from satellite television, many Muslim states have been forced to reconsider their monopoly control over the media. State television channels, freed from government censorship, would be well positioned to recapture audience share for their national news programs.

In addition, as Western influences inevitably penetrate traditional Muslim culture -- through film, satellite television, international radio broadcasts, and the Internet -- citizens in these societies are starting to notice the shortfalls of their state media's stodgy, rigidly censored, and propagandistic news. And these viewers are voting with their remote controls. When relatively independent and objective news reports were first broadcast on Russia's *Itogi* news program, for example, the program became an overnight sensation.

Under pressure from both satellite stations and foreign media, many countries with large Muslim populations have reluctantly recognized the need to open their media space to privately owned, independent channels. Lebanon, Jordan, and several of the Persian Gulf states are now introducing new commercial broadcast laws. Thirty independent television channels and 11 independent radio stations operate in the West Bank. Even Syria has allowed its first-ever privately owned and operated newspapers to start publishing. Indonesia is licensing its first independent local television channels, and the Nigerian parliament has authorized, though not yet implemented, a law to introduce commercial radio.

But will stronger local media simply add to the chorus of anti-Americanism and strengthen fundamentalist Islamic voices? Might empowering the independent press have unintended consequences, such as the fall of friendly regimes? True, the road toward free expression leads to many uncertainties. But there is ample evidence, from the Sandinistas of Nicaragua to the Albanian rebels in Macedonia, that bringing opposition groups into the body politic provides nonviolent alternatives to civil strife. Even some members of the Saudi ruling family are coming to understand the logic of free expression as a more effective safety valve than militant propaganda. In a recent interview with *The New York Times*, Prince Al-Walid bin Talal bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia said, "If people speak more freely and get involved more in the political process, you can really contain them and make them part of the process."

The question, moreover, is not whether a more pluralistic media will open the airwaves to Islamic fundamentalists; that cat is already out of the bag. In several Middle Eastern countries, Islamists already operate their own stations. *Al Manar* television in Lebanon and *al Mustaqbal* in the West Bank town of Hebron are closely affiliated with Hezbollah and Hamas, respectively. Because these stations employ higher standards of journalism than local state-run media, they have enjoyed sizeable audiences who come to them for the quality of the news, if not the Islamist messages and propaganda they scatter within. Citizens not necessarily sympathetic to Hezbollah tune into *al Manar* to balance the official lines they hear from Beirut and Damascus.

The real issue, then, is whether moderate voices can be equipped to compete with these radical and

government forces in the Muslim world. Those in the Middle East who espouse alternatives to militant Islamism must begin to compete at the same level, or they will be left without audiences.

GATEWAY TO DEMOCRACY

Experience in eastern Europe suggests that providing assistance to local, independent media is a vital way to promote freedom and democracy. As Soviet power waned in the late 1980s, maverick local broadcasters took to the airwaves with unlicensed broadcasts, often pirating programs from Western satellites or playing bootleg videotapes. In 1989 the first pirate station, Kanal X, in Leipzig, East Germany, went on the air from a transmitter on the roof of Freedom House, after state television had stopped broadcasting for the evening. As the Soviet Union began to disintegrate, dozens and then hundreds of pirate stations in eastern Europe and the Soviet republics sprouted up in basements, factories, and apartment complexes. The media revolution was on.

Joining the fight, Internews, a nongovernmental media organization, created a news exchange linking six independent television stations in Russia. With training, equipment, and technical advice, these barely viable stations began to grow and attract audiences. For the first time, people in Russia and the other former Soviet republics were able to see local news, not just the broadcasts from Moscow.

U.S. government assistance for independent broadcast media began in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and grew rapidly during the 1990s. In that decade, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided \$175 million in media assistance in eastern Europe and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. All told, more than 1,600 broadcasters and 30,000 journalists and media professionals have benefited from U.S.-sponsored training and technical assistance programs. More than a dozen national television networks emerged from these efforts, reaching more than 200 million viewers. As a result, citizens in every city of the former Soviet Union now have a variety of channels from which to choose.

Of course, there have also been serious setbacks on the road to media freedom. As independent broadcasters in the region become stronger and reach larger audiences, they face increasing pressure from local authoritarian governments. In April 2001, Russian President Vladimir Putin's government engineered the hostile takeover of NTV, that country's main national independent television channel, and this January, a Russian court ordered the closure of TV6, the last remaining independent national broadcaster. In Ukraine, President Leonid Kuchma has been implicated in the gruesome murder of an on-line journalist, Heorhiy Gongadze, who had been critical of the regime. And free media outlets continue to be repressed in the Central Asian republics and the Caucasus.

Despite these setbacks, independent media remain a force for democratization in each of the former Soviet republics. The power of local, independent television is perhaps best illustrated by events in Georgia on October 30, 2001. When Rustavi-2, an enterprising station in Tbilisi whose reporters had been trained in investigative journalism by Internews, uncovered allegations of corruption and drug trading in the Ministry of the Interior, the government tried to shut it down. But as officers from the Ministry of State Security arrived at the station, the news director broadcast the action live. Hundreds and then thousands of people poured into the streets in protest. Two days later, President Eduard Shevardnadze was forced to dismiss the entire government. And Rustavi-2 is still on the air today.

In the Balkans, where Slobodan Milosevic's seizure of the TV transmitters surrounding Sarajevo precipitated the civil war in Bosnia, independent radio and television stations, supported by the Soros Foundation, USAID, European governments, and others, played critical roles in maintaining democratic opposition. Radio stations braved constant harassment to bring alternative views and news from outside the region, making it impossible for Milosevic to maintain his control on information -- or, ultimately, of his own country.

In addition to the independent broadcasters that are on the front lines of conflict and are often shut down for their troubles, thousands of other stations contribute to the building of a culture of democracy and civil society in more banal, quotidian ways. Josh Machleder, an American advising TV-Orbita in Angren, Uzbekistan, explains, "Residents of the town call in when they have problems. The TV station does a news piece about it, it gets shown to the town, and to the authorities, and usually the problems are resolved. Thus, the station makes government work. When the authorities tried to close the station for broadcasting critical material, there was such a protest from sponsors and residents, that the station began working again within three days."

This kind of independent local broadcaster could help open the closed societies of the Muslim world to democratic culture. Exposing journalists to international news standards can develop habits that will moderate the tone of news reporting. If experience in non-Muslim countries is any indication, well-produced, objective, indigenous journalism will get higher ratings than either exhortative reports from state news organs or more distant news from satellite broadcasters. Ultimately, audience will always drive the media.

LETTING MUSLIMS SPEAK

In the aftermath of the military victory over the Taliban, the United States should move swiftly to help establish diverse and democratic media in Afghanistan. Given the weak infrastructure and the fragmentation of Afghan society, there is a clear danger that rival warlords will promote their own separate radio and television channels, exacerbating ethnic and other social divisions. An international broadcasting commission, under the auspices of the United Nations, will need to be established to work with the transitional government to license broadcasters, assign frequencies, and regulate content to preclude incendiary messages. Regulating hate broadcasting is a contentious issue, but this kind of authority proved especially useful in postwar Bosnia and Kosovo in preventing ultranationalist political factions from using the media to foment violence.

Only indigenous news outlets can provide Afghanistan with what it most needs -- independent sources of news and information that Afghan citizens from any ethnic group will recognize as fair and impartial. A congressional proposal for a Radio Free Afghanistan made sense when the Taliban still controlled the country, but the United States must now turn its attention and resources to helping local Afghans develop their own media outlets. Having a Radio Free Afghanistan up and running would make it much more difficult to create successful local media enterprises, because the U.S.-run station would drain limited resources, inflate local salaries, lower advertising rates, and compete for talent and programming. For the same reason, the United Nations should also avoid the temptation to set up its own channels, as it did rather unsuccessfully in Cambodia, East Timor, and Bosnia.

The international community should therefore support an indigenous state radio and television channel such as Radio Kabul, which is already operating, to unify the country and reestablish national identity. The interim government will initially not enjoy widespread legitimacy as an objective news source, so the national broadcaster should be established as a public channel, editorially separate and insulated from the government.

Local stations will also have an important role to play, providing the community news on which civil societies are built and making a dynamic contribution to local economies. The United States and the international community should help train and finance other nongovernmental, independent channels that could set the standard for good journalism and lead through competition. Finally, the international community must be prepared to underwrite Afghan media, both public and private, since the economy cannot be expected to generate sufficient advertising revenue for many years to come. Otherwise, the media will become a tool for control by local warlords.

As the war on terrorism moves beyond Afghanistan, the Bush administration should likewise extend the media assistance program that the United States first pioneered in eastern Europe to the Middle East. In completely closed societies such as Iraq, Iran, and Libya, foreign broadcasting will continue to be essential to providing outside information -- as it did in the Taliban's Afghanistan, where two-thirds of Afghan men reportedly listened to the BBC and Voice of America. But in other countries where the opportunities for alternative local media exist, the United States should assist the development of independent newspapers, Internet service providers, on-line content providers, and local radio and television channels.

To promote more balanced and moderate media, the United States can provide expert assistance in media law and regulatory reform and provide journalistic training and technical assistance. Americans should lend their help with no strings attached, however -- even when those media criticize America. The United States will appear duplicitous if it tries to support independent news outlets while simultaneously manipulating information or engaging in counterpropaganda. America falters when it does not keep faith with its democratic ideals. U.S. government support for independent media in eastern Europe has been scrupulous in this regard. American support for media in Muslim countries should be held to the same high standard, especially given the suspicion with which the United States is viewed there.

Freedom of speech and exchange of information are not just luxuries; they are the currency on which global commerce, politics, and culture increasingly depend. If the peoples of the Muslim world are to

participate in the global marketplace of goods and ideas, they will need access to information, freedom of expression, and a voice for women and disenfranchised minorities. That, more than any number of advertisements about American values, is what will bring light to the darkness from which terrorism has come.

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By David Hoffman, David Hoffman is President of Internews Network

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## Whose Right to Communicate: Al-Jazeera or CRTC?

Aliaa I. Dakrouy  
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### Introduction

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In July 2004, the Canadian federal broadcast regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), approved the distribution of the controversial Arabic network Al-Jazeera to Canadian audiences. This station, known as the "CNN of the Arab world," was approved despite the many stormy debates that surrounded this decision in the Canadian public sphere. According to many Canadians, allowing the broadcasting of Al-Jazeera programming encourages the airing of hate speech, especially in programming depicting Jews, Americans, and westerners in general. In the CRTC's appendix to the Broadcasting approval for Al-Jazeera, it provides some examples of statements made by Al-Jazeera supplied by parties commenting and objecting this decision. For example, the Canadian Jewish Council (CJC) says that:

Faisal Al-Qassam, host of *Opposite Direction*, a call-in show, stated, on 10 July 2001: "Hezbollah' is a beautiful, mighty name, and as many have said, it succeeded in expelling the Zionists from southern [Lebanon] like dogs - my apologies to the dogs..." (CRTC-2004-51, at <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Notices/2004/pb2004-51.htm>).

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Despite this view, many Canadians of Middle-Eastern origin believe that it is their right to view programs in their language, and about their cultures, as well as using this network as a diasporic medium to link them to their homelands' political, social, cultural, and economic discourses. Article (3), section (1-a) from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (R.S. 1985, c. 24 (4th Supp.)) reinforces this idea, clearly stating that:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to:

(a) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage; (Department of Justice Canada, 1985).

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Adopting a human rights lenses, the problematic of this paper is to answer the question of "whose right to communicate: Al-Jazeera or CRTC?". In other words, one should think about how can we draw a line between a free practice of the human right to communicate, which involves the recipients' choice of the message, its sender, and its possible consequences on the one hand, and a possible social censorship against hate speech, and propaganda on the other.

The paper will adopt the Habermasian notion of the Ideal Speech Situation articulated in his Theory of Communicative Action as its theoretical background, in which he argues that in an ideal speech situation, the sender should consider the recipients while composing, and sending his/her messages. The question remains, what are the criteria of an ideal speech situation according to the CRTC, and will Al-Jazeera be able to maintain the purity, sincerity, and truthfulness in its messages, or not? On the methodological level, the paper will be divided into two main sections: the first is a historical overview of the "right to communicate" concept arguing that it is not merely the product of the various declarations and covenants in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but rather is a thought that is born out of the work of many intellectuals, such as that of John Stuart Mill, John Locke, Jeremy Bentham, and Voltaire among others. After providing the reader with a brief historical background of the emergence of the Al-Jazeera network during the 1991 Gulf War, the paper will analyze the CRTC's "code of ethics" in which it stated that Al-Jazeera should not fall into "the trap of propaganda and speculation" (CRTC-2004-51, at <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Notices/2004/pb2004-51.htm>).

One of the important reasons for choosing this topic is my belief in the importance of the ethical assessment and appraisal of media messages principally from the side of the sender which will inform communication studies by differentiating between "freedom of speech" and "hate speech" on the one hand, and to underscore the various barriers to applying CRTC decisions in real life on the other. However, more importantly, I chose this topic to highlight the importance of the concept of "the right to communicate," especially in the Canadian communication studies sphere.

### Al-Jazeera in Canada: The Problematic

First launched in November 1993, Al-Jazeera, or the "island" in English, was characterized by its breaking of most of

the traditional ways of Arab news reporting. In an interview with Abdallah Schleifer Editor of the Transnational Broadcasting Studies, Mohammed Jasim Al-Ali the Managing Director of Al-Jazeera said that "the reputation of the media in the Middle East is that the news is censored and controlled by the government. All media business in the Middle East is controlled by the government. The leaders of Qatar wanted to change that; they want to have a satellite channel with the aim of no longer hiding any information" (2000, at <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall00/al-Ali.htm>).

Collectively, it might be argued that beginning in the late 1990s, there are three different types of political communication in the Arab region; as Ayish argues, they are: 1) the traditional government-controlled television pattern (such as the Syrian Satellite Channel), 2) the reformist government-controlled television pattern (such as Abu Dhabi Satellite Channel), and 3) the liberal commercial television pattern (such as Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel) (2002, pp. 140-143).

Meanwhile, no one can deny that the Al-Jazeera network really represented a "change", a new trend in journalistic techniques and news reporting in the Arab world: "Before Al-Jazeera, most Arab regimes' broadcasting dedicated a steady diet of mind-numbing entertainment and bland, often harmless news and talk shows" (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 29). The issues that are most tackled by Al-Jazeera programs and reporting are what have been considered as the Arabs' taboos, issues such as governmental power concerning their nations, women's rights, sexuality, and Islamic extremists problems, among many other controversial issues, issues not touched on before in this region by an Arabic broadcasting channel. Interestingly, before the arrival of Al-Jazeera many Arab audiences tended to rely on Western short-wave radio broadcasting in Arabic in the region, such as Radio Monte-Carlo Middle East and the BBC World Service Arabic Language, for more "accurate, objective, and comprehensive" news reporting (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2003, p. 39).

In order to outline the differing views surrounding Al-Jazeera and its practices, not only in the Middle-East but also on the international scale, it is important to note that despite the view mentioned above that asserts the innovation and pioneering efforts of Al-Jazeera in producing non-biased, accurate, and free news-reporting, some views oppose that, arguing that this channel is a tool of propaganda, voicing hate speech, and an effective medium of terrorism. From its very first day on air, Al-Jazeera was considered controversial by both the Western and even the Arabs. La Guardia, in his review titled "Channel of Terror," repeatedly reminds his readers of common images associated with threats of suicide bombings and terrorism aired by Al-Jazeera, and moreover accuses the channel of being the key source of information for "militants" who are not reachable by, or accepting of, Western media:

Remember the sight of Saddam Hussein's palaces exploding in flames at night? They were recorded by the Arab satellite news channel al-Jazeera. Remember the videos of Osama Bin Laden taunting the west? They first appeared on al-Jazeera. Remember Yasser Arafat telling the world that he wanted to die as "a martyr, a martyr, a martyr"? He said it to al-Jazeera"

(2005, p. 51).

Al-Jazeera also has its critics in the Arab world, as a result of its critique of censorship and emergency laws, dictatorship, and the non-democratic environment that violates political and social rights for the Arab citizens through its features, news reporting, programs and even interviews that have really angered not only Arab political leadership, but the Arab public sphere and opinions of common Arab citizens, such as their interview with former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Therefore, it was not surprising that many of Al-Jazeera's offices were closed in many countries around the region, accusing it of being agents of the CIA or the United States, of promoting a natural relationship with Israel, anti-Islam, and yet, at the same time, of anti-Semitism! La Guardia adds that the motto of is true: "Al-Jazeera: the only Arab network with no offices in the Arab world" (2005, p. 52).

However, linking Al-Jazeera's background and problematic status on the global level to our case study in this paper; its broadcast in Canada, one must take note of Article (6) from its code of ethics, where it is stated that its programming should:

Recognise diversity in human societies with all their races, cultures and beliefs and their values and intrinsic individualities in order to present unbiased and faithful reflection of them (Al-Jazeera, at: <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/5D7F956E-6B52-46D9-8D17-448856D01CDB.htm>)

"Hence, was this criteria the reason behind the CRTC's approval for the airing of Al-Jazeera's programs, and for giving them the right to communicate in Canada? In order to answer this question plainly, it is helpful to provide a general historical and theoretical background of the origins and development of the "right to communicate" concept, then to draw a link between it and the CRTC decision in hand.

### **The Right to Communicate: Origin and Development**

Many scholars argue that the concept of the right to communicate (RTC) is the legal child of the twentieth century's various languages and legislations starting from the Post World War II period. They consider Article (19) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* adopted by the United Nations in December 1948, as the first launching of that concept, in which it is stated 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.

Thus, it is evident that this article affirmed not only an individual freedom of expression but also a collective right that requires cooperation between human beings for it to be practiced in real life. This includes the right to send, receive, and impart any kind of information, ideas, and thoughts using any type of media without any barriers. It was then included, with slightly altered wording to emphasize the right of humans to choose their medium of information, in the

*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)* in 1966, which entered into force ten years later:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; the right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

There is a notable difference in the wording of this article, eighteen years after the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: many new technologies emerged in the post-WWII era in the world of communications, and "any other media of his choice" implies the future developments in this area. From a communication standpoint, this covenant "receives greater weight than the . . . declaration, especially because [it] introduces essential specification to the freedom of information concept as understood in the Universal Declaration" (Nordenstreng & Hannikainen, 1984, p. 134).

However, the term "right to communicate" was not clearly realized in real life until a renewed debate was sparked by Jean d'Arcy's 1969 article "Direct broadcast satellites and the right to communicate" in the *European Broadcasting Union Review*, where he claimed that :

The time will come when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will have to encompass a more extensive right than man's right to information, first laid down twenty-one years ago in Article 19. This is the right of man to communicate. This is the angle from which the future development of communications will have to be considered if it is to be fully understood.

(1977a, p. 1)

However, I have argued elsewhere that the RTC is not a recent one, but rather is rooted in the ideas of certain thinkers of the Age of Reason beginning in the seventeenth century, such as John Milton, John Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill; I suggest that the RTC begins with the work of the 17th century English writer and poet John Milton (1608-1674). In his speech addressed to the English Parliament, Milton defended several types of freedoms and liberties that combine a possible right to communicate; he said in his landmark *Areopagitica*:

If it be desired to know the immediate cause of all this free writing and free speaking . . . it is liberty, Lords and Commons. . . liberty which is the nurse of all great wits; this is that which hath rarefied and enlightened our spirits like the influence of heaven. . . give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.

(1644, reprinted 1951, pp. 48-49)

Many human rights theorists and thinkers believe that John Locke's work constitutes the foundation of the modern conception of human rights. Central to his philosophy is the concept of "freedom"; the main focus of any discussion of human rights, that every human being is free to act reasonably according to his own will and belief. Included here is an adept example Locke's perception of the concept:

Freedom being the foundation of all the rest; as he that, in the state of society, would take away the freedom belonging to those of that society or commonwealth, must be supposed to design to take away from them every thing else.

(*Two Treatises of Government* 1690, reprinted 1940, p. 463)

Voltaire (1694-1778) is also considered to be one of the greatest advocates for an absolute right to communicate, evident in one of his famous dialogues "I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it." Finally, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) argued for the freedom of thought as an inseparable human right, and at the same time promotes the importance of individuality, emphasizing the treatment of one's opinion as one's own "personal property". This apparently unlimited freedom is not, in fact, the freedom to express "heretical" statements and opinions; rather, Mill suggests that freedom of thought, and opinion could be channeled into the well-being of society as a whole through the individual ability to criticize the "corrupt" government.

Furthermore, the legal language of eighteenth-century philosophy, the *Virginia Declaration*, June 12, 1776, the *Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776, and the *American Bill of Rights*, 1789, appeared to place great emphasis on freedom through the use of phrases such as 'by nature free,' 'inherent rights,' 'enjoyment of life and liberty,' 'no men be deprived of this liberty,' 'unalienable right,' and 'pursuit of happiness.' For example, Article (1) of the *Virginia Declaration* stated:

That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot by any compact deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life, liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.

Even if historically the American Revolution precedes the French, many scholars argue that, in many ways, the French Revolution represented a more radical social change than the American, especially for the realization of the ideals of democracy and freedom as well as for the realization of the right to communicate and its embodied freedoms of speech, expression and so on. This idea may be due to the radical changes effected by the French Revolution on the beliefs, structures, and policies of society. The Declarations spawned by the American Revolution are conceived as extensions of the Magna Carta and the English Bills of rights; as a former British colony, America's main aim in the Revolution was independence from British sovereignty. However, *La Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, or the Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen (1789) was undeniably a turning point – especially in the history of the idea of treating communication as a basic human right – as it synthesized from the Enlightenment thinkers the concepts of "freedom," "liberty," and "fraternity" in expressing opinions and attitudes. It was the first formal realization of the right to "unrestrained" communication as a "sacred" right of human beings. In

addition, the Declaration formally states in Article (11) the importance of an "unrestrained" and "free" communication for every man and citizen. It also mentioned different formats of communication (opinions and attitudes, etc.) and different media (speaking, writing, etc.):

The unrestrained communication of thoughts and opinions being one of the most precious rights of man, every citizen may speak, write, and publish freely, provided he is responsible for the abuse of this liberty, in cases determined by the law.

Although several international declarations have proclaimed communication as a basic and universal right for all human beings without any kind of qualification, I argue that there are many kinds of communication that make these proclamations problematic. The cases of hate speech, pornography, the use of internet to voice hatred, use of offensive signs and gestures are seen for their practitioners a sign and an illustration of their "right to communicate" their ideas regardless of other members of society's right to communicate too. In other words, does Al-Jazeera, for example, have a right to communicate their news and programs in Canada despite the fact that many Canadians consider this news to be "hate speech"? Moreover, how can we define, at least theoretically, a right to communicate for a controversial channel such as Al-Jazeera?

From the forgoing discussion, one can see that early work regarding communication by Milton, Locke, Voltaire, and Mill generally recognized such problematic cases; however it is questionable whether they provided a satisfactory way of resolving the difficulties these raise. I argued that German philosopher Jürgen Habermas offer a more helpful approach to the dilemmas in question and provides a sounder basis for considering communication as a human right by setting-up criteria of what could be defined as a "right to communicate" (Dakroury, 2003, pp.88-97).

### Jürgen Habermas: A right to "undistorted" communication

Habermas's philosophy offers a possible approach to investigating communication as a possible human right through his Theory of Communicative Action in which he offers a way of handling controversial practices of communication. Habermas synthesized ideas from, and was inspired by, many intellectuals and movements that preceded him; among these were religious Protestantism, the Enlightenment, Kant, Marx, and American pragmatism, especially the work of Herbert Mead and John Dewey. Habermas was greatly inspired by the Protestant culture; for him, Protestantism "gave birth to a concept of community constituted of independent moral actors bound by voluntaristic commitment to common ethical norms" (Antonio, 1989, p. 730). He sees Protestantism as embodying three main values, 'scientific,' 'artistic,' and 'ethical,' which form the basis for his "Universal Validity Claims (truth, beauty/authenticity, [and] normative rightness)" (Antonio, 1989, pp. 730-731).

At the heart of Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action lie an important and a fundamental idea: that is his assumption that all human speech includes what he refers to as 'validity claims'; and that an 'Ideal Speech Situation' assumed in the use of language. Here, the following questions are proposed: Could access to pornography be considered as a right to communication? Does a person have a right to use aggressive and offensive language to communicate with others using any medium such as disseminating hate speech? What possible approaches might Habermas offer to solve these problems? In this context, Habermas, motivated by his knowledge of psychological literature, was mainly concerned with answering the following question: "What would 'undistorted communication' be like?" (Giddens, 1985, p. 128). This is to some extent similar to the question proposed in the idea of a right to communicate: What type of communication could be considered universal and would be protected by the international, national, regional, and even personal regulations and laws, and could such communication be considered a basic human right?

In order to answer these questions, it is important to look at Habermas's emphasis on validity claims, and their being prerequisites for establishing undistorted communication between communicators. He says that in order to participate in a communicative process that is aiming towards achieving an 'understanding,' one can assume to have four basic validity claims:

I shall develop a thesis that anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims . . . insofar as he wants to participate in a process of reaching understanding, he cannot avoid raising the following . . . validity claims. He claims to be

- a. Uttering something understandably.
- b. Giving [the hearer] *something* to understand;
- c. Making *himself* thereby understandable; and
- d. Coming to an understanding *with another person*.

(Habermas, 1979, p. 2)

From this, one could infer that Habermas is proposing that a possible right to communication is not simply "sending" messages, claiming an absolute freedom of speech whatever the content of the message represents. Instead, he is presenting the basic characteristics for an 'undistorted communication,' where the message's sender has specific 'obligations' towards the hearer or the receiver: that he/she speaks comprehensibly and responsibly gives the receiver a plausible account of what he or she means. More importantly, the speaker is justifying his speech according to specific social norms and values. Hence, one could see that hate speech, for instance, could never be considered "communication" according to Habermas. Based on this point, and applying it to our case study here, one can argue that one of the important reasons that might be behind CRTC's approval for broadcasting Al-Jazeera is that it should be sending "undistorted" messages to the Canadian viewers:

The CCTA [Canadian Cable Television Association] and Vidéotron (the sponsors) . . . stated that the

Al Jazeera service focuses on news, information and expression of opinions, . . . [and] has a strong reputation worldwide, is a strong promoter of freedom of expression, and provides unbiased and accurate coverage. (CRTC 2004-51, <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Notices/2004/pb2004-51.htm>)

Clearly, one who voices hate speech is not, in any way, speaking truthfully, or sincerely, nor interpreting 'true,' or 'justified' facts. Habermas clarifies this point:

The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another, the speaker must have the intention of communicating a true proposition content . . . so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully so that the hearer can believe.

(1979, p. 2)

Giddens summarizes this position by explaining that for Habermas, "undistorted communication is language-use in which speakers can defend all four validity-claims —where what is said can be shown to be meaningful, true, justified and sincere" (1985, p. 129). Hence, in Habermas's view, the controversies and problems such as hate speech for example that depicts certain race, color or sex, could not be protected under the claim of the absolute or universal right of communication, because, lacking the Habermasian pre-conditions discussed above, these types of practices are not communication! Deception, manipulation, and cheating among communicators is certainly part of what he meant by 'distorted communication' and this is exactly what the CRTC needs Al-Jazeera to prove in its broadcast to Canadian viewers. In fact, this point is key in representing the views of those who are against the broadcasting of Al-Jazeera in Canada; CRTC notes that for them, "Al Jazeera has a pattern of broadcasting hate propaganda during its programming, largely targeted at Jewish people, in contravention of Canadian laws and broadcast standards" (CRTC 2004-51, <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Notices/2004/pb2004-51.htm>).

For this reason, it is important to clarify the significance of the "obligation" dimension in Habermas's point of view. The speaker, according to him, -- Al-Jazeera here—must meet specific obligations that the hearer is expecting he or she will fulfill. For Habermas,

The bond into which the speaker is willing to enter with the performance of an illocutionary act means a guarantee that, in consequence of his utterance, he will fulfill certain conditions.

(1979, p. 62)

Considering the previous Habermasian explanation, it can be argued that his communication prerequisites were, interestingly, the main position that CRTC adopted in its conditional acceptance on Al-Jazeera broadcast; section 8.1 of article (50) of the 2004-51 CRTC public notice states that:

No licensee shall distribute a programming service that the licensee originates and that contains

- (a) anything that contravenes any law;
- (b) any abusive comment or abusive pictorial representation that, when taken in context, tends to or is likely to expose an individual or group or class of individuals to hatred or contempt on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age or mental or physical disability;
- (c) any obscene or profane language or pictorial representation; or
- (d) any false or misleading news.

Accordingly, Canadian viewers have a right not to receive any "unacceptable" messages, sometimes thought to be "problematic" for their culture, norms, traditions, religion, race, sex, and social values. Habermas genuinely set up these claims by his notion of 'reciprocal' communication, where a sender (or speaker) may have a right to send, but under the condition that he or she meets the receiver's demands and expectations:

The speaker must choose an utterance that is right so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified.

(Habermas, 1979, p. 3)

Therefore, with regards to the question posed in this paper "whose right to communicate: Al-Jazeera or CRTC?," I shall argue that the right belongs to both the Canadian audience as represented by the CRTC (as the broadcasting regulator) and the Al-Jazeera channel which directs its programs to more than 500 thousand Canadians of Arab origin living in Canada. This population has the right to communicate their language, norms, and traditions on the one hand, while representing a sign of diversity — the core value in the Canadian multi-culture society — on the other. Obviously, CRTC documents in its decision that, according to a CAF online survey "98% of respondents wanted to receive Al Jazeera in Canada in order to keep in touch with political and cultural events in their countries of origin" (CRTC 2004-51, <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Notices/2004/pb2004-51.htm>).

To stress this point, one should clarify what the other conditions are for an acceptable communication that can be considered as a right to communicate, Habermas sets out another condition:

[A speech] act may be called "acceptable" if it satisfies the conditions that are necessary in order that

the hearer be allowed to take a "yes" position on the claim raised by the speaker. These conditions cannot be satisfied one-sidedly, either relative to the speaker or to the hearer.

(Habermas, 1984, p. 298)

Hence, and accordingly, if Al-Jazeera broadcasts an opinion that is not acceptable (a hate speech for example), it cannot claim a right to communicate since it is not the only participant in this communicative situation; there are other communicators involved: the hearers (the audience) of its programs, who do not take a "yes" position towards this speech. On the contrary, the receiver does not accept the speech because it does not fulfill his demands, nor his "right" to communicate. Therefore, a possible answer to the paper's core question is that Al-Jazeera does not have an absolute right to communicate, but rather has a right that is bound by his duties toward recipients of his speech to be just, true, justified and importantly, "acceptable."

Habermas, in other words, emphasizes the conjunction between the 'claim' or the expression and its 'content'; therefore, advocates for hate speech, pornography, and criminal autobiographies cannot claim the protection of the law, as they are not practicing communication in this sense. Here, Habermas clarifies that the content of the speaker's speech is a very important variable that leads the receiver to either accept it or not accept it:

With his "yes" the speaker accepts a speech-act offer and grounds an agreement; this agreement concerns the *content of the utterance*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, certain *guarantees immanent to speech acts* and certain *obligations relevant to the sequel of interaction*.

(Habermas, 1984, p. 296, italics in origi

Thus, the CRTC states in article (60) of its 2004-51 public notice that it is extremely important for ensuring Canadian values and at the same time prohibiting offensive comments that might target some persons living in Canada. Moreover, distribution of such messages are not only causing harm to the targeted persons, but also rupturing the cultural and social tissue among different cultural groups in the Canadian society. Therefore, the CRTC asserts that the Canadian broadcasting system should act as a "safeguard" to ensure the enrichment and strengthening of this multicultural value in Al-Jazeera's broadcasts. The CRTC adds that this regulation is not only aimed at protecting Jewish-Canadians, but also at protecting all Canadians including Arab-Canadians who in turn, rely on the CRTC to regulate Al-Jazeera but according to Canadian laws and regulations and broadcasting standards.

Generally, we can summarize the Habermasian contribution in the thought of communication as a possible human right through his assertion of both 'responsibility' and 'rationality.' Responsibility, as clarified before, is the obligation that makes the speaker committed to the receiver by providing him with a pure, true, and sincere pattern of communication. This pattern, according to Habermas, leads to 'understanding.' Therefore, we can eliminate hate speech as a pattern of communication. Can someone claim that hate speech is aiming towards understanding, rather than deceiving and manipulating? The same is applicable to pornography: Can pornographers claim that they plan to reach an understanding with receivers? In fact, Habermas summarizes his claim by pointing out that "only responsible persons can behave rationally" (Habermas, 1984, p.14) and that validity claims are intertwined with the notion of responsibility:

In the context of communicative action, only those persons count as responsible who, as members of a communication-community, can orient their actions to intersubjectively recognized validity claims.

(Habermas, 1984, p. 14)

It is interesting also to note here that although this is a somewhat abstract idea of communication, it implies the social role of communicators in the many levels of communication (e.g., personal, group, mass, etc.) and their responsibility for generating society's normative rules which are embodied, according to Habermas, in validity claims and moral prerequisites, including human rights. If people were to communicate using the Habermasian model of the *Ideal Speech Situation*, while practicing and producing communication as a human right, this would be the "ideal" and more powerful situation than one where the rules are merely followed without regard to the consequences (e.g., everyone has a universal right to free speech, even criminals).

Collectively, one can argue that the philosophy of Habermas has significantly enriched the idea of a possible right to communication, as he defined validity claims in which the sender of a communicative message must meet the receiver's demands in order to engage with him or her in communication. In other words, Habermas stresses the interchangeable relationship between right-duty and demand-responsibility.

## A Right to Communicate: How?

Despite the CRTC's theoretical enforcement of a Canadian right to communicate through the allocation of the *Broadcasting Distribution Undertaking* (BDU) to delete and amend any of Al-Jazeera's programs for the sake of social stability, diversity, and multiculturalism, Brown, in *The Washington Post* reports that even before CRTC regularized Al-Jazeera, many Arab-Canadians watched its programs illegally through various satellite service providers. However, even after the CRTC's decision, these viewers remain unsatisfied, asserting that CRTC's decision censored their right to communicate the "whole" picture because of the BDU's editing or even cutting entirely Al-Jazeera programs. For example, Mostafa Elmnini who moved from Lebanon says, "we like it as it is. We get the full truth. . . . This is what keeps us connected back home" (Brown, 2004, emphasis is added). Similarly, an Arab-Canadian who rejects CRTC's decision asserts that: "I'm Iraqi and I do watch al-Jazeera. I don't know why they are making a big deal out of al-Jazeera. On 'The Simpsons,' they make fun of Arabs. They never ban those cartoons. But when it comes to al-Jazeera, it is not fair" (Brown, 2004).

In fact, one cannot deny that on a practical level, the CRTC's pre-requisites for Al-Jazeera's right to communicate are extremely difficult and perhaps even impossible to implement. It is the responsibility of the service providers to ensure

that Al-Jazeera is following the code of ethics guidelines, and not violating the rules of broadcasting in Canada. Still, the problem remains of how to organize and manage these procedures. Michael Hennessy of the Canadian Cable Television Association says clearly that this "decision is as good as saying no to al-Jazeera" (CTV, 2004). Evidently, Rogers Cable as one among the major service providers in Canada, admits that the CRTC rule is "too strict and it's unlikely they'll carry the channel [Al-Jazeera]" (CTV, 2004).

From the Al-Jazeera target audience's perspective, they oppose the obstacles that CRTC posed on airing Al-Jazeera broadcast; the president of *Reach Media*, the American-based company that is responsible for distributing Al-Jazeera, argues that this channel is legalized and has been aired everywhere in the United States since 1998, including into the White House and State Department (Brown, 2004).

However, while the CRTC realized that its decision is an undeniable restriction of both Al-Jazeera's right to communicate and the Arab-Canadian audience's right to freedom of expression, it states in Article (81) of its decision that it is justifiable to censor Al-Jazeera's programs in order to maintain an equal right to communicate for those who are not watching this channel, but who might be affected by some of its programs. It is worth quoting this article at length in order to summarize the controversy surrounding this issue:

The Commission recognizes that this measure is a restriction on the freedom of expression of BDUs and, potentially, of viewers of Al Jazeera. However, the right to freedom of expression is not absolute; it is subject to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. The Commission considers that this requirement is justified because it is demonstrably necessary, based on the record of this proceeding, to ensure that Al Jazeera programming distributed in Canada reflects the circumstances and aspirations of Canadians, including equal rights and the multicultural and multiracial nature of Canadian society. The Commission also considers that the requirement is minimally impairing. It does not deprive BDUs and Canadian viewers of the Al Jazeera service.

Thus, we can see that there are no easy answers to the question: Whose right to communicate" Al-Jazeera or CRTC? Barriers will still remain as to how CRTC will monitor Al-Jazeera broadcast in Canada, since it relies mainly on the broadcast providers as "censoring" agents... copying, editing, and deleting what is not convenient for Canadian viewers, and providing CRTC with full records of Al-Jazeera programs. Then, would CRTC be able to hire necessary human resources to analyze and record any violation of Al-Jazeera? Or it will rely on complaints and comments? Shortly, what are the mechanics of monitoring?. However, other argument can be made by Arab Canadian audience that Al-Jazeera's messages are "convenient", and perhaps more truthful and sincere than another western/Canadian medium. In both cases, each party will claim a right to communicate!

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**The author wished to thank both Paula Romanow, and Dr. William Birdsall for their inputs in this paper.**

**Specifically, Mohammed Jasim Al-Ali, the Managing Director of Al-Jazeera, gives some examples of the consequences of some Al-Jazeera's programs in some Arab countries: "as the saying goes, perfection is the unattainable dream of m . . . It happened that one of the guests was arrested by his country's authorities for doing nothing, only so he would not be able to show up for Al-Jazeera's program. Others were denied travel by their countries' authorities, or had their telephone lines disconnected. We've had the lines in our studios disconnected in some countries while on air. We do face such difficulties, but we stick to our stance and try to be balanced and fair as much as possible" (2000, at <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall00/al-Ali.htm>).**

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**Here, one should mention that Al-Jazeera is just this paper's case-study; however, the same question could be posed with other channels in the same society.**

**Habermas admitted, "I have for a long time identified myself with that radical democratic mentality which is present in the best American traditions and articulated in American pragmatism" (Shalin, 1992, p. 238).**

**The main point that attracted Habermas to American pragmatism's founder John Dewey's philosophy is "freedom of inquiry, toleration of diverse views, freedom of communication, the distribution of what is found out to every individual as the ultimate intellectual consumer, [and that these] are involved in the democratic as in the scientific method" (Shalin 1992, p. 246).**

**Among these oppositions is the "Jewish Women International of Canada (JWIC), Global Television**

Network Inc. (Global), B'Nai Brith Canada (B'Nai Brith), the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), Christian Friends of Israel – Canada Inc. (CFI-Canada), Mr. Robert Fattal, and Asian Television Network International Limited (ATN)" (CRTC 2004-51, <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Notices/2004/pb2004-51.htm>)

### **According to the Canadian Arab Federation (CAF)**

Given these validity claims, in reference to another problem raised concerning whether pornographers have the right to communicate, it can be seen that the Habermassian validity claims are lacking. No one could argue in Habermas's terms, then, that published pornographic materials (as messages), are 'right,' that the content of these pornographic materials is 'true,' that pornography represents 'truth,' or that pornography is 'justified' as following social rights and norms!

According to Article (78) of the CRTC 2004-51 decision, "the Commission would permit a BDU distributing Al Jazeera to alter or delete the programming service in the course of its distribution *solely* for the purpose of complying with the requirement" (CRTC 2004-51, <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/archive/ENG/Notices/2004/pb2004-51.htm>).

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**Inside Al-Jazeera**

**Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East** by Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar

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Al-Jazeera, the 24-hour Arab satellite station broadcasting from the tiny Gulf nation of Qatar, sprang to life as a direct result of the collapse of the Arabic TV division of the BBC News Service. When Saudi investors pulled the plug on the BBC service in 1996, Al-Jazeera "inherited not only most of the staff of the former BBC network but also," according to Mohammad El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar's informative primer, "its editorial spirit, freedom, and style." Additionally, it came by \$140 million in seed money from the reform-minded, but essentially despotic, government of Qatar.

*Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East*  
 By Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar  
 Westview Press, 228 pp., \$24  
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Today the station, broadcasting in classical Arabic, reaches an estimated 35 million viewers worldwide, who rely on it for coverage of Palestinian casualties in the second intifada. Even so, Al-Jazeera's policy of airing all sides of the story—interviewing Israeli leaders, and Western officials such as Tony Blair and Donald Rumsfeld in the wake of 9-11—leads some Arab viewers to perceive it as pro-Zionist, even pro-CIA. Its interview, debate, and talk-back forums—modeled after CNN's *Crossfire*—challenge religious orthodoxies and tend to air extreme views. Every Arab government has on occasion taken offense at Al-Jazeera's critical coverage.

Prior to 9-11, the U.S. State Department had viewed Al-Jazeera favorably. As the only network that considered Afghanistan sufficiently newsworthy to establish bureaus in Kabul and Kandahar in late 1999, it had been covering both sides of the war between the Northern Front and the Taliban. Powell, however, asked the emir of Qatar to tone down Al-Jazeera's rhetoric shortly before the U.S. air war began, betraying concern that coverage of the bombing might inflame Arab opinion. Though most journalists and security experts scoffed at suggestions that Al-Jazeera's October airing of its exclusive bin Laden tape might yield coded messages, in some quarters the erstwhile free media outlet was publicly accused of providing a forum for jihad.

Urging U.S. officials to use Al-Jazeera to make their "case for U.S. policy," El-Nawawy and Iskandar conspicuously avoid any speculation as to what that policy might be and how the Arab world will react to it. The U.S. has been relocating its Gulf headquarters from Saudi Arabia to the vast Al-Udeid air base in Qatar. It would be interesting to speculate how Al-Jazeera will cover unfolding events should the U.S. launch an attack against Iraq from there. In any event, this succinct history provides timely and much-needed background on Al-Jazeera.

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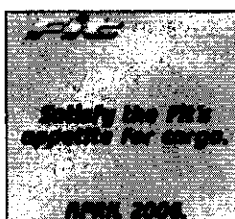
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