

ON THE MEDIATIZATION OF WAR

A Review Article

Denis McQuail

Nancy Palmer (ed.), *Terrorism, War and the Press*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. 316 pp.

Howard Tumber and Jerry Palmer, *Media at War: The Iraq Crisis*. London: Sage, 2004. 188 pp.

Judith Sylvester and Suzanne Huffman, *Reporting From the Front: The Media and the Military*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. 266 pp.

Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer (eds), *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime*. London: Routledge, 2004. 374 pp.

Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture*. London: Routledge, 2005. 203 pp.

Yahya R. Kamalipour and Nancy Snow (eds), *War, Media, and Propaganda: A Global Perspective*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004. 261 pp.

Lee Artz and Yahya R. Kamalipour (eds), *Bring 'Em On: Media and Politics in the Iraq War*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. 268 pp.

Daya Kishan Thussu and Des Freedman (eds), *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7*. London: Sage, 2003. 266 pp.

David Miller (ed.), *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq*. London: Pluto Press, 2004.

The titles listed for review are only a selection from a larger number of books that have been stimulated by recent (western) wars, especially the invasion of Iraq in 2003. No doubt there is also a large volume of publications in other forms. All these books have their primary origin in the two main belligerent countries – the United States and United Kingdom – and for the most part they take a critical position in relation to the conflicts they deal with, the policies of leading western governments and the part played by mainstream mass media in reporting the conflicts. The authors of the material are mainly academics or journalists and, aside from necessary description, the main purposes of publication are either to expose the alleged failings of governments, the military and the media, or to derive some lessons for better performance. Presumably somewhere there are books written in praise of

war and of the media, as well as fiction taking recent wars as its setting or subject matter, but they are not covered in this essay on recent war literature. The aim of the essay is both to review the books in a conventional way, but also to reflect on where we stand after an intensive period of attention to the relationship between the media on the one hand and government and military leaders on the other in relation to matters of war, terrorism and organized violence.

Since the end of the Second World War and of the colonial wars that followed it, warfare has been largely conducted under a new set of conditions. Compared to a previous era of national total war, it has been framed in terms of global ideological antagonisms, first relating to a Communist 'threat' and now to an Islamic extremist threat. There are numerous 'small wars' rather than total wars between great powers; much warfare is carried out by proxy by client states with indirect control or support from great powers; the line between war and 'terrorism' has become unclear; and large-scale total wars are inhibited by the availability of atomic weapons. As far as the media are concerned, the predominant conditions of this 'new order' involve five main aspects: more powerful media institutions with a notional independence from war-making states; a presumption of access by media to the reporting of war; an internationalization of media organization and distribution, coupled with strong trends to concentration in relatively few corporate hands; an assumption that the conduct of warfare requires an effective public communication strategy and some means to control formally free media in conflict zones that cannot be fully closed. It is arguable that warfare of the kind described also requires more support in public opinion than past warfare and that the media are the key to obtaining this support.

These general introductory remarks are supported by the literature under review. However, there are many other crucial points and issues that emerge from the reading. First, the books can be briefly characterized and assessed. Most of them are edited collections, with many and varied individual contributors that cannot all be credited here.

Nancy Palmer's volume was published after the start of hostilities in Iraq, but its contents comprise essays written before the Iraq crisis came to a head and mainly before the 9/11 assault on New York. They were originally papers written by (mainly) visiting fellows to the Joan Shorenstein Center at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, on topics relevant to the media coverage of 'terrorism' and war with particular reference to Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, the Balkans and the 'first' Gulf War (an epithet that conveniently forgets the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s). The perspectives adopted are mainly either 'from journalism' or from the point of view of authorities challenged by terrorism and requiring support from the media. Views represented are almost entirely from the 'west'. However, there is also a chapter (by R. Singh) that compares Indian, Pakistani and US press coverage of post-9/11 conflict and which is critical of the US media for subordinating professionalism to patriotism. Nick Gowing's contribution as a UK television journalist examines and largely rejects the alleged 'CNN effect' that sees government foreign policy as influencing and distorting policy decisions. Gadi Wolfsfeld's chapter is one of very few in the whole set of books under review that tries to

formulate any theory concerning the role of media. This deals specifically with conflicts in which the participants are unequal in power.

Media at War, co-edited by Howard Tumber and Jerry Palmer, consists of two main parts, one reviewing the main events and issues of what they call 'Gulf War II', from the perspective of journalists, the other reporting the results of a content analysis of selected British newspapers during the immediate pre- and post-invasion periods as well as during the war itself. A third part of the book gives an account of the conflict between the government and the BBC over the disputed issues of WMDs. It also deals with the Hutton Inquiry, which formally vindicated the government but failed to allay widespread public scepticism about government truthfulness. The content analysis reflects the very mixed, even polarized state of public attitudes to the war. Drawing on other data, the authors position the British media response to the war as somewhere between the US media support and continental European media opposition. The journalistic issues dealt with mainly concern the reasons for and the consequences of 'embedding' reporters with the military and the close management of media coverage by US and UK authorities, designed to deflect criticism and minimize negative images. The tone of the book is even-handed, but the overall message is clear enough. The conclusions largely support theory that views the mainstream media as constrained within a sphere of consensus that is largely delimited by political elites and shaped by an agenda predominantly in the hands of official sources (Bennett, 1990; Hallin, 1986).

Sylvester and Huffman's book, *Reporting From the Front*, is a somewhat curious construction that does not fully explain its own format. However, it reveals itself as a series of accounts, or reports, of interviews with American journalists who covered the Iraq War, especially focusing on the role of journalists as 'embeds' in military units. Some informants give accounts of the origin and implementation of the embedding policy. The chapters are a mixture of quotation and summary of views on a number of issues about the experience. The book is organized to deal with the official view, the media management view and then different media – photo-journalism, radio, press and television. There is much interesting detail and little editorial comment or input by the book's authors. By their own account, the embedded journalists seem to have been rather satisfied with the deal they made in accepting the embed role and experienced few if any ethical problems or perceptions of being unduly censored. An appendix reproduces the highly restrictive rules and regulations under which correspondents were allowed to do their work. These help to explain why so much of the resulting coverage was characterized by most observers as both 'sanitized' and implicitly supportive of the invasion, hardly a cause of much satisfaction. An appendix also usefully reproduces a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists detailing the cases of 24 journalists who lost their lives between March 2003 and March 2004, mostly killed by US forces.

Perhaps the most nourishing of the various edited collections reviewed here is Allan and Zelizer's *Reporting War*. It contains 19 full-length chapters by established authors from both sides of the Atlantic dealing with journalistic issues across a wide spectrum, not confined to the Iraq war. Oliver Boyd-Barrett offers thoughtful reflections on the ways and the reasons why war reporting has been almost always

inadequate. These reasons lie both within and without journalism itself. He cites Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model favourably but also points out that much is achieved quite directly by government and military by 'buying out' media influence and by the active penetration of media by intelligence services. Richard Keeble makes a convincing case for regarding the Iraq war as a largely mythical event created by its perpetrators with media help, a point originally made by Jean Baudrillard in relation to the 1991 Gulf conflict. There were no real causes of war, no real battles, no powerful enemy, few casualties for the invading forces, no heroes (except Private Lynch) and, as it turns out, no end to the 'war'. Piers Robinson usefully revisits the hypothesis of a CNN effect, with particular reference to media developments, including the Internet, 24-hour news and globalization. While technology does not seem to have made much difference, the 1990s discourse of 'humanitarian' war (which may not have survived the 9/11 conflicts) built a new bridge between media and political action. Susan Carruthers examines this concept in more detail, especially by noting the contrast between media constructions of 'western humanitarianism' and 'African savagery', as witnessed by events in Rwanda. Philip Hammond writes about the conflicts in the Balkans, with reference also to the new doctrine of 'illegal but moral' intervention, largely supported by the media. He offers a significant reality check to the events surrounding the final phase of the Balkan tragedy, in which the media proved completely unable to report what was going on except in the most simplified and distorted terms. Accounts of the reporting of the war in Iraq are given by Michael Bromley from Australia, Stephen Reese from the US, Terhi Rantanen in respect of European news agencies and Justin Lewis and Rod Brookes from Britain. The book closes with three valuable chapters on non-mainstream media: Adel Askandar and Mohammed el-Nawaway on Al-Jazeera; Patricia Auferheide on some alternative (online) US media; and Stuart Allan on online reporting of the Iraq war more generally. The first of these focuses on the notion of 'contextual objectivity' as developed by Al-Jazeera as a way of combining some of the virtues of traditional objectivity with the realities of situations in which there are strong partisan loyalties and also emotional engagements. Stuart Allan looks in particular at the significance of the various 'warblogs' that at least offered (to Americans in particular) some alternative point of view on events.

Mirzoeff's *Watching Babylon* is a study of the visual culture in which the television reporting of the Iraq war is embedded and of which it is itself a prime example. The book seeks to link the everyday context of American suburban life with the distant events portrayed on television in an imaginative and illuminating way, even if the mode of analysis is quite different from that of the other books reviewed. There is much incidental information and wide-ranging historical and literary reference (see in particular the section on the 'empire of the camps'), as well as detailed discussion of several of the main images to emerge from the Iraq war, including the (staged) toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue and the (also staged) saving of Private Lynch. The absence of memorable images from the Iraq war is remarked on, but the book seems to have been completed too early to deal adequately with the rather memorable and unstaged scenes from Abu Ghraib prison. Mirzoeff shares the view noted earlier, that the war was largely a fake,

remarking with reference to the re-use of Abu Ghraib as a torture centre and the appointment of a former Republican Guard general to the command of Fallujah, that it was as if 'the Marines have suddenly become students of Baudrillard, determined to show that the war never happened' (p. 180).

Kamalipour and Snow, in their edited collection of 24 original essays, *War, Media, and Propaganda*, provide a range of critical views from different parts of the world on recent wars, although the main object of interest remains the US itself and most of the authors are also American. The goal espoused by the book is to work towards a more peaceful world. Early chapters deal with information management and in particular the key notions of 'information dominance' (David Miller) and 'public diplomacy' (Nancy Snow), two new terms for control of the information environment by way of state propaganda. There are several revealing chapters on media management and the connections between corporate goals, mainstream US media and government objectives. Norman Solomon describes the fawning attention paid by US PBS *News Hour* to Henry Kissinger with no reference to his sinister role in Vietnam war policy and in relation to the fall of Allende in Chile and the rise of Pinochet. Such memories do not count, not for the media and certainly not for the architects of new warlike interventions. The war as a propaganda spectacle on US television is described by Douglas Kellner, and Lee Artz reports a study of the visual coverage of the Iraq war in *The New York Times* in the first full week of the attack (24–8 March 2003). This produced 241 graphic images, overwhelmingly supportive of the war. Of the total, only 13 photos indicated that the Iraqis were involved in the fighting at all. Of 68 photographs showing US or UK soldiers, not a single one 'pictured soldiers shooting, firing artillery, throwing grenades or engaging in any other violent act directed at an enemy target'. It all seems to support the Baudrillardian hypothesis referred to earlier. Not surprisingly (or perhaps to the contrary), death and destruction were not pictured at all. The various international perspectives dealt with in later chapters derive variously from Muslim countries, China, Iran, South Africa and Latin America. There are some materials here of interest and value, although the contents do not follow any clear structure and several of the contributions are very slight or even inadequate. Majid Teheranian provides a short epilogue in which he offers several propositions on the role of media in war, noting especially that 'the structure is the message' (pace McLuhan and referring to the corporate control of commercial media) and that 'US media have evolved from war critics to war captives'. He also names 'ten commandments for peace journalism' that sound, inevitably perhaps, either pious or platitudinous.

A subsequent volume with one of the same editors (Yahya Kamalipour) and from the same stable and publisher offers another 15 original essays without explanation of any relation to the book just reviewed. However, the focus is said to be on political processes involving media, military and government within the US, rather than on propaganda itself. Even so, the boundaries are unclear and other topics intrude, including the marketing of war in Australia (Jakubowicz and Jacka), the construction of Arabs as enemies (Debra Merskin) and the rhetoric of heroism and sacrifice (Timothy Cole). Some attention is also given to web-based independent media (Lisa Broton).

Lee Artz suggests that acceptance of the war was made easier by a receptive and passive popular spectator culture used to video games (echoing Mirzoeff). Despite Germany's official distance from the conflict, Tanja Thomas and Fabian Virchow are also concerned that a culture of militarism might re-emerge in their country. Sue Curry Jensen is revealing about the public diplomacy (propaganda) efforts of the US and their difficulty in grappling with the notion that America might not be as loved in the wider world as Americans love to think. Attempts to put this right by PR were based on the basic misconception that widespread dislike of America policy must be the result of ignorance.

Robert Jensen highlights the 'problem with patriotism' for supposedly objective journalism, taking as starting point the declaration by Dan Rather of CBS that, in essence, he is an American first and a journalist second. The problem is fairly clear, the solution less so, but the issue needs more attention than it usually gets. William Hart and Fran Haasenscahl contribute to the study of visual communication by analysing nearly 1300 war-related cartoons appearing in US newspapers in a two-month period in January to March 2003. The great majority of these cartoons were found to be 'dehumanizing' of Iraq and Iraqis in a variety of ways, including pictorial presentation as animals, desecrators, torturers, barbarians, criminals, abstractions, faceless, greedy, etc. It seems that the rhetoric of President Bush and other leaders was a major source for the images used. Despite the relative formlessness of the collection as a whole, the contributions are generally solid, often insightful and all informed by a shared critical spirit. However, not all are rigorous and analytic. One good collection could have been made out of these two books, but editorial rigour seems to have been lacking.

The remaining two books in this list are also both edited collections of (seemingly) original pieces on various aspects of war and media, both emanating from the UK. *War and the Media*, edited by Daya Thussu and Des Freedman, consists of five main sections dealing with: general issues of communication and conflict in the recent times, with particular reference to how things are named and the implications of the 'war on terrorism' (see especially the work of Aijaz Ahmad); management of conflict by controlling information; the implications of 24-hour coverage for conflict reporting; the representation of conflict after 9/11; and the problems and consequences for journalists arising from the need to report conflict under prevailing conditions of control. A number of the familiar topics that have been raised in this review also appear within this framework. Somewhat new (in this sense) are: an attention to psychological warfare during the Afghanistan campaign (operation 'Enduring Freedom') by Philip Taylor; a study by way of interviews of news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Greg Philo et al.); a study of the reception of Al-Jazeera in the Arab world; and a chapter on gender and war news (Jane Rodgers). This book was published in 2003 and presumably written before the Iraq war had begun, so its emphasis is on the post-9/11 climate in which the war was planned.

Finally, *Tell Me Lies*, edited by David Miller, and taking its title from Adrian Mitchell's poem 'Tell Me Lies About Vietnam', is perhaps the most unashamedly engaged of the books reviewed. The book was composed in the summer of 2003 as a response to the Iraq war and has numerous contributions, with five reproducing

the work of the crusading journalist John Pilger. More than half the contributors are journalists and quite a few of the chapters have appeared in various forms, in the British press and elsewhere. Among academic contributors, there are well-known names, perhaps the usual suspects, including Douglas Kellner, Edward Herman, Greg Philo and Noam Chomsky (by way of interview). All in all, this is a valuable resource for the critics of media at war and a useful record of the mood of 2003, although the contents are of widely varying depth and potential sustenance. Phillip Knightley is scathing about the attacks on journalists by US forces and the uselessness of the Qatar press briefings. He also highlights the inability of the media to resist manipulation, such is their need for war news. He quotes one rebellious US correspondent, Michael Wolff, who asked the question 'What if they gave a war and the media didn't come?' But of course they can't say no. Most of the lies told, relayed through the media, and often quickly discredited, were never properly withdrawn or corrected, the story having moved on. Justin Lewis and Rod Brookes recount part of the results of their important study of UK television coverage of the Iraq war. The news was more than twice as likely to show Iraqi people as pro the invasion than against. The study also refutes the charge that the BBC was differentially critical of the war. Even so, by comparison with US television, as Douglas Kellner records, UK television was rather even-handed. The former overwhelmingly supported the war and sanitized its coverage of the effects of war in line with government propaganda. The coverage by National Public Radio was little different. Patricia Holland tells the story of Little Ali, a child who lost his hands in the April bombing of Baghdad and whose rescue and medical treatment were made much of for propaganda purposes and also for counterpropaganda in the British press. The image of the child is another of those that emerged from the war charged with meanings and open to varied interpretations (recalling the toppling statue and the captured Saddam). The book concludes with several chapters dealing with various alternatives, including Al-Jazeera, the Internet and anti-war activism within the media.

Recent warlike events have evidently provoked an ever-growing media attention and a secondary literature of critical commentary, of which this set of publications is probably quite representative, reflecting the extent of public and journalistic concern and also the continuing growth of media studies. The latter shows up in various forms, including content analysis of news coverage, analyses of the cultural features that feed into and feed off distant conflicts, attention to the latest developments in propaganda and information management, and speculation (for the most part) about the added contribution of the Internet. The forms of publication reviewed here do not on the whole lend themselves to much fundamental rethinking of what we already know about the relations between media, war and the main actors engaged in the events (especially governments and the military). Most of the books have been rapidly put together, driven by strong feelings and the urgency of events. It is arguable that too much has been happening too quickly for communication academics and practitioners to achieve much more than this kind of outcome, without time for sustained reflection. The problem is not the engagement of authors as such, but lies in the number and complexity of the issues that have been posed, often in novel forms. As is often said of war itself, media

theory and research is still dealing with (rather than fighting) the 'last war', perhaps even quite a few wars ago. The world, at least that inhabited by most of the authors under review, did change in 2001 when war was declared on 'terrorism'.

Western 'communication science' does not offer any clear framework for collecting and interpreting observations and information about contemporary war situations, only a disparate set of issues and formulations, in varying states of development and supported only in varying degrees by effective methodologies. Early considerations of war and media drew mainly on the historical case of national total war (the First and Second World Wars), subsequently on the Cold War and its 'hot' outbursts, as in Korea and Vietnam. Largely neglected were the colonial wars of post-Second World War and the many bitter conflicts that did not directly impinge on western interests or responsibilities. Under these conditions, academic attention to the media has been largely confined to issues of propaganda (not always critically), censorship (especially ways and means), bias and objectivity in media content and potential influence on public opinion (especially support for a given war). While each of these still figures in the overall problem, their formulations have changed, new complexities have been added and new conditions obtain. The books reviewed, despite their limitations, do between them provide a source for sketching contemporary issues and conditions, even though they do not offer any overall theoretical vision.

The historical conditions are now such that war is not primarily a struggle between armed and willing nation-states, but a series of conflicts that can be better made sense of in terms of global economic and strategic interests, broadly between the haves and have-nots (although potentially still between different 'haves'), sometimes specifically about resources such as oil, minerals or other forms of property. This broad struggle may sometimes come in the guise of (or alternatively conceals) ideological formulas relating to freedom, human rights, religious or other values and beliefs. War is no longer fought by mass conscript armies who feel and make public the pain, but by specialist professionals using high technology, often insulated from the horrors of war, just as (western) publics tend to be insulated from the realities and any personal consequences. However, the new situation does require a much higher degree of control of the information environment and, indirectly via this, the consent of relatively passive publics.

The changing media conditions relate mainly to: the continuing expansion and globalization of the media and their main forms as news and entertainment, creating a voracious demand for content as well as audiences; commercialization and conglomeration of media, although without much loss of national attachments in terms of production and audience; and competing new web-based and other media forms, often on the way to incorporation as mass media. The introduction of new technology for instant reporting from battlefield locations has opened new possibilities, but also brought new vulnerabilities and dependencies and new demands for results.

The most critical issues among many that arise in these kinds of situation can be summarized as follows, in relation to the main sets of actors. For those who make and execute 'war policy' and have to manage the dimensions of public

information, nationally and internationally, there are new tasks in the presentation of arguments for war that can reconcile competing values and can be expressed and defended in the prevailing journalistic discourse. New forms of propaganda and access to media on favourable terms have to be found and are mainly sought by offering the benefits of war coverage to chosen media on their own terms and denying it to others.

For journalists there are potential dilemmas about this Faustian choice, although the pressures from managements of commercial media and the news values favouring action and excitement for audiences largely settle the dilemma without much struggle. Journalists, if they think at all about such matters and have an allegiance to a war-making state, are exposed to a tension between 'patriotism' (or just a fellow feeling with co-nationals who happen to be combatants) and the notional demands of professional 'objectivity'. For the most part this does not seem to be experienced as a problem, except for a few sensitive individuals, others having absented themselves from the situation. War coverage seems to become largely detached from moral or ethical issues and reduced to meeting demands for usable content, according to the conventions of the genre.

Of increasing salience in the 'mediatized' environment in which the policies of states are formulated, debated and presented to the public is the question of a reverse effect from media, free to roam the world and report its ailments and problems, on states, especially by way of public pressure for action to remedy some apparently intolerable situation. The media have been thought (not very certainly) able to stop wars (at least one war, that of the US in Vietnam) and also to start them. The thought is not so new, recalling the Spanish American war in 1898, but has been revived in the age of global satellite news in the form of a potential 'CNN effect'. The accumulated evidence, much sifted over, has led to no clear conclusion beyond the fact that media are much more implicated than before in such decisions about starting and continuing conflicts. Although the media do have some vested interest in war as content commodity, they have no concerted policy in or across national societies. The whole hypothesis also rests on an assumption of potentially strong effects on public opinion. This has always been the weakest or most uncertain link in all chains of reasoning about the media and war and the literature reviewed here is no exception. While the tendency of public attitudes and the direction of opinion in news and comment can now both be measured with some reliability, the hidden complexities that lie between these two measures have vitiated any clear conclusion about the direction and strength of influence on public opinion. On the other hand, much more is known or predictable about the links between public cognitions (what people think they know about situations and events) and the informational patterns of media news. It is on this basis that information policies of war makers and the arguments of critics have their surest ground.

In this context, reference can also be made to certain regularities of inadequate 'performance' of media, for which there is much supporting evidence. Media reportage of war is typically thin on explanation, extremely selective, oversimplified, implicitly biased for or against one or other party (only two sides can be handled), restricted in the frames within which information is placed, emphasizing spectacle

and action, and disinclined to dwell on the death and destruction, especially as it affects non-combatants. The essence of the case can be summed up in terms of several more or less inescapable limitations that attach to the attempt to report the conduct of war in any objective or comprehensible way. Even where the will to report does exist, media are hindered by the chaotic nature of war itself, by the mortal danger involved, by a near total dependence for access and information on sources that have no commitment to the truth and by supposed demands of audiences and certainly of editors for material that fits the needs of whatever medium is involved, the imperative to match and exceed whatever competing media are doing. Truly independent and truthful reporting is largely unattainable. The conditions of 'war on terror' have also appeared to increase the physical risks to journalists from a military released from the old-fashioned rules of good conduct towards the press.

Despite the relative failure of media theory to keep up with developments in the media-war relationship, the elements of an overall framework can be pieced together from the many different observations and insights that the Iraq war in particular has given rise to. The anchor of most thinking about media-state relations seems to be one or other version of indexing theory, first proposed by Lance Bennett (1990), according to which the mainstream media of any country involved in war (and probably elsewhere) see their role as largely limited by the range of views and terms of debate as established by relevant political and social elites at a given point in time. This indicates what is deemed relevant for public reporting, what voices merit access, where loyalties (if any) should lie and where criticism can legitimately and safely be voiced. A secondary guideline can be found by the media in their own assessment of public opinion, which also legitimates the degree and kind of support for war that is called for from media that profess no partisan or ideological agenda of their own (the greater part of all media now). This central observation can be supplemented by reference to various other minority or alternative media and some potential 'non-elite' voices that find ways to claim attention or to be newsworthy. For the most part, the arena of operation of media for mass publics is still the nation-state, and global and alternative perspectives make their way in with difficulty and usually only with help from mainstream media.

Given this prevailing situation, the 'event promoters' (in Molotch and Lester's [1974] terms) framing war policy can use their considerable resources as primary sources of information and wielders of PR expertise to guide and constrain media conduct, especially during the active phase of combat. While there are potential vulnerabilities, especially when reality moves too far from the dominant narrative, or where a catastrophic intrusion takes place (for instance the Abu Ghraib disclosures) the task of information control by way of mass media has not become much more difficult than it was in a simpler past, although it has become more imperative. Perhaps most important is still the fact that mainstream media do not on the whole represent any real threat to governments that can plausibly claim to be acting in the national interest and with public support.

This version of the case can be filled out by reference to the relatively detailed matters of interpretative frames, definitions of the situation and subnarratives that both fit 'media logic' and the interests of authorities (and interest of audiences).

This rather depressing account is incomplete without reference to various unpredictable components in the scheme of things as described, leading to failures and reversals of manipulative plans, as long as some degree of openness and independence remains. Elites can fall out and be replaced. So-called 'non-elites' can rise to prominence on a wave of popular support. New frames of interpretation can be interpolated quite rapidly. Seemingly small items of credible key information can undo the accumulated effects of official lies and half-truths. Central here is the fact already pointed out that the correlation between media opinion and tendency and public opinion is far from precise and its direction uncertain. During and since the Iraq war, various national publics showed an independence of thought and a resistance to the influence of media that leant towards war on grounds perceived to be insufficient. The carefully constructed edifice of public information control is built on shifting foundations. Small amounts of convincing contrary information falling on receptive ears can undo massive efforts at deception.

It is reasonable to conclude that the various mass media institutions that figure in these many fragmentary but also wide-ranging reports for the most part lack much in the way of purpose of their own. They do not generally aspire to any distinct role, beyond a general task of funnelling into the public arena whatever their familiar sources provide or what their chosen audiences seem interested in and willing to pay for with their attention and money. On the one hand, this minimal conception of purpose is quite well understood and legitimized. On the other hand, it is well short of frequently voiced journalistic ideals and even routine norms of performance and its very emptiness exposes the media to forms of subversion or incorporation that run counter to basic requirements of reliable information. It is not sufficient to assert that the full spectrum of journalism in any country or internationally does also accommodate a wide range of purposes, with minority media pursuing ideals for minority audiences. This is true enough, but is also a confession of failure and abdication of responsibility or larger social purpose. There is no space to pursue the matter here, but it is clear that we need more than a theory of media power, but also a theory of media responsibility that sets higher standards than are generally aimed for or achieved at present.

It is not just a matter of responsibility on the part of the media, who are not, after all, the principal actors in warlike events. Political and military leaders still dispense with any obligation to speak the truth under conditions they unilaterally determine. The culture of large organizations hardly recognizes any restraint of morality or principle in their public communications. Not all these matters can be addressed in books of this kind, but more attention could be expected (it is not completely absent) to issues of our responsibility as members of publics and citizens. There is quite clearly a widespread public acquiescence in the public enjoyment of war as a spectacle, especially if it is safe for the spectators, and media both promote and respond to public demand. This needs to be taken account of in any attempt to explain the cases under discussion here.

The picture is not all disheartening for those who hoped for some improvement from a more democratic and enlightened century, leaving aside the encouraging fact that neither leaders nor media hold decisive sway over public opinion and

sentiment. There was much public revulsion in combatant countries at what was going on and, with all their failings, the media did provide the essential materials for informing the public. The additional information and criticisms contained in literature of the kind reviewed are not based on secret knowledge or deep research. In the case of the last Iraq war, the apparatus of deception was visible to the world from the beginning even in the mainstream media of the US, for those who cared enough to see. There is no doubt that the media have become more involved in issues of war and peace, but they are not the main source of the problem and they do show some potential to contribute to solutions.

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