

The Canadian media, domestic interest groups, and Middle East reporting: the effects of structural bias

The Arab-Israeli conflict has excited intense passion and partisanship. It is natural that media coverage of the events often is seen in these terms as well. Political bias inevitably will remain the acid test for many of those interested in the media's coverage of the Middle East. News organizations as varied as the *New York Times*, *Le Monde*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Le Devoir*, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) have all been accused of having a political perspective which colours their reporting on the Middle East. According to this view, news outlets can be characterized as pro-Israel or pro-Arab, and these political orientations are embedded in organizational memory and hiring practices. Individual journalists are also seen as having the power to slant news. While we do not deny that some degree of political bias exists, we would argue that structural bias is at least as important in explaining Middle East coverage. Non-political criteria, it will be argued, dictate the volume, substance, and tone of much of the reporting.

Since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict domestic interest groups have attempted with varying degrees of success to influence Canada's Middle East policy. Often pressure group influence is exercised most effectively when it is applied discreetly 'behind the scenes.' But interest groups have sometimes sought to rally broad public support for their positions with the

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hope that this might enhance their power and influence with decision-makers in Ottawa. There are two broad issues here: first, how do these groups convey information through the media over which they exercise little control? second, does media reporting have an effect among the ultimate targets of interest groups, the policy-makers? The first issue, the choice of tactics for wielding influence, is beyond the scope of this paper. We would argue, however, that interest groups which choose to resort to media-based tactics can enhance the public exposure to their positions by understanding and using the forces that govern news reporting.

Three critical events in Canadian-Middle East relations will be used to illustrate both the strength of the structural bias explanation for media reports and the interaction between interest groups and the media. The events are the Arab campaign to impose an economic boycott on Canadian companies doing business with Israel, Joe Clark's Jerusalem embassy initiative, and the Lebanon war of 1982. Because news stories about the Middle East tend to arouse intense political reactions, the use of these case-studies offers an especially appropriate vehicle for demonstrating the merits of the structural bias approach.

STRUCTURAL BIAS IN NEWS REPORTING

According to Herbert Gans, media coverage can be assessed from at least three perspectives.¹ The first, the journalist-centred view, maintains that journalists themselves have the power to determine news content. Their professional judgments and political perceptions are the 'filtration' system through which news emerges. This view became popular during the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal when individual reporters broke major news stories and were acclaimed as virtual folk heroes in the United States. Several recent studies have focussed on the backgrounds and beliefs of journalists, the central premise being that liberal and leftist views are increasingly reflected in the

1 Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News* (New York: Random House 1979), 78-80.

news.² Much of the debate about Middle East reporting has revolved around the question of bias on the part of individual journalists and the development of a 'pack' mentality. This was especially evident during the Lebanon war of 1982 when the journalistic community was accused of having allowed political prejudice to affect its reporting of events.³

A second approach to media coverage contends that news content is influenced largely by the nature of the events being covered. Space launches, terrorist attacks, elections, and natural disasters all have inherent characteristics that dictate how they will be reported. News is therefore driven by events, and the events themselves determine the extent and nature of coverage. Consequently, it can be argued that because much of the reporting about the Middle East deals with bloodshed and the use of force, that coverage will follow a distinct pattern that arises from the characteristics of violent conflict. Those studying media coverage of the Middle East rarely have taken this perspective.

A third explanation suggests that news is essentially the product of the needs and routines of news organizations. Networks and newspapers must adapt to government regulations, legal constraints, economic forces, and audience demands. These forces condition editorial practices and the working environment of journalists.⁴ For example, most news organizations exist

² See, for instance, Stanley Rothman and Robert Lichter, 'Media and business elites: two classes in conflict?' *Public Interest*, no 69 (fall 1982), 117-25; Barry Cooper, 'Bias on the c.b.c.: a study of network a.m. radio,' a paper presented to the Canadian Communications Association meetings, Winnipeg, June 1986.

³ See, for instance, Joshua Muravchik, 'Misreporting Lebanon,' *Policy Review*, no 23 (winter 1983), 11-66; Edward Alexander, 'The journalists' war against Israel,' *Encounter* 59 (September/October 1982), 87-97; Martin Peretz, 'Lebanon eyewitness,' *New Republic* (2 August 1982), 15-23; Itzhak Roeh, 'Israel in Lebanon: language and images of storytelling,' in William Adams, ed., *Television Coverage of the Middle East* (Norwood NJ: Ablex 1981), 76-88; Ze'ev Chafetz, *Double Vision* (New York: William Morrow 1985), 295-315; Landrum R. Bolling, ed., *Reporters under Fire: U.S. Media Coverage of Conflicts in Lebanon and Central America* (Boulder CO: Westview 1985).

⁴ Leon Sigal, *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking* (Lexington MA: Heath 1973).

because they are able to sell the size and in some cases the quality of their audiences to advertisers. Even the publicly financed CBC in Canada relies on advertising revenue for a significant portion of its operating budget. The battle for audiences therefore dictates much of the form and content of news reporting. Further, news organizations are obliged to create a similar product every day regardless of circumstances. In discussions of Middle East reporting, however, the emphasis remains on the political orientation of news organizations, and there have been few efforts to develop organizational explanations for news coverage.

A study of news content must incorporate elements from each of these perspectives. The interaction of journalistic latitude, event-driven coverage, and organizational imperatives leads to a two-part selection process. First, news stories are chosen according to certain criteria. Second, the aspects of news stories which led to their selection are amplified so that they dominate coverage of the event. Gitlin uses the term 'framing'.⁵ We favour the term *structural bias* because the net effect is a distortion which many attribute - incorrectly - to political bias.

There is now a rich scholarly literature on the attributes of a news story. Galtung and Ruge, for example, have produced an exhaustive list of story attributes.⁶ For the sake of brevity, however, we have chosen a number of criteria which we believe to be the essential ones in the selection of news items. In general, the media want news items to be clear-cut and involve conflict, to be easily condensed, to emphasize individual actors, to be

⁵ Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1980). Gitlin defines media frames (p 7) as 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual.'

⁶ Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge, 'The structure of foreign news,' in Jeremy Tunstall, ed., *Media Sociology* (London: Constable Press 1970), 259-98. In addition to the works of Gans, Gitlin, and Sigal cited above, important contributions include Edward Jay Epstein, *News from Nowhere* (New York: Random House 1973); Thomas Patterson, *The Mass Media Election* (New York: Praeger 1980); and Austin Ranney, *Channels of Power* (New York: Basic Books 1983).

readily labelled, and to contain new facts or angles. In general, the premium is on stories that can capture attention, are dramatic, and have 'spin'. For newspapers a certain degree of sensationalism is often required. Television in particular demands a high level of drama, and good visuals with action are critical. In an often quoted memo written in 1963, Reuven Frank, then executive producer and later president of NBC news, wrote: 'The highest power of television journalism is not in the transmission of information but in the transmission of experience ... joy, sorrow, shock, fear. These are the stuff of news.' Thus: 'Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end. These are not only the essentials of drama; they are the essentials of narrative.'⁷ A standard criticism of television news, however, is that it imposes drama on situations with little inherent drama and seeks out dramatic stories at the expense of less dramatic ones. This tendency is the result of structural bias.

What attributes create drama? One attribute of news content that is mentioned repeatedly in the scholarly literature is the media's preference for clear-cut issues which neatly divide political parties, interest groups, politicians, and newsmakers into two opposing camps. Epstein argues with regard to American television that the Federal Communications Commission's 'fairness doctrine,' which requires that both sides of a story be shown, was the principal motivation for the development of this format.⁸ Canadian radio and television has operated under similar fairness guidelines since the controversy surrounding the 'Mr Sage' broadcasts of the 1930s when the Conservatives under R.B. Bennett bought CBC air time to launch a series of savage attacks on Mackenzie King during the 1935 election. Newspapers have long since abandoned the overt partisanship that so

⁷ Quoted in Epstein, *News from Nowhere*, 4-5, 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-78.

characterized Canadian journalism before World War II. The desire today to appeal to a large number of readers makes for the avoidance of political stands that might alienate significant constituencies.

The 'pro and con' or 'conflict' model is appealing for its dramatic effect as well as for its objective style. Stories that do not fit this model because they portray complex relationships are not as desirable. One CBC producer has complained: 'We look for confrontation often to the exclusion of the story. Sometimes a story deserves to be told even if there isn't a fight.'⁹ As Middle East events often involve bitter conflict and sharp contrasts, they are attractive stories from the media's perspective.

A second criterion, stressed by Ranney, is that 'the main players are individuals.'¹⁰ Drama can be enhanced and issues simplified if the focus is on conflict between individuals. Indeed, much of the reporting on the Middle East has stressed the roles of charismatic leaders such as Sadat, Begin, Khomeini, and Qadhafi at the expense of broader developments and forces. For instance, a study of how the Camp David talks between Egypt and Israel were conveyed on American television found that these nations became 'embodied fully in key leaders.'¹¹

A third attribute noted in the literature is that the media require stories that can be condensed and labelled easily. The average television news story is less than two minutes in length, with between 200 and 300 words of narration. Walter Cronkite once described television as only 'a headline service' and complained about the difficulty of 'showing a hundred pounds of news into a one-pound bag every evening.'¹² While newspaper

⁹ Interview with CBC producer, Toronto, 21 May 1986.

¹⁰ Ranney, *Channels of Power*, 55-8.

¹¹ William Spragens, 'Camp David and the networks: reflections on coverage of the 1979 summit,' in William C. Adams, ed., *Television Coverage of International Affairs* (Norwood NJ: Ablex 1982), 122.

¹² Quoted in William A. Henry III, 'News as entertainment: the search for dramatic unity,' Elie Abel, ed., *What's News* (San Francisco CA: Institute for Contemporary Studies 1981), 135, and Fraser Kelly, 'Television: does the image reflect reality?' *Politics and the Media: An Examination of the Issues Raised by the Quebec*

stories have greater length and breadth, Canada's 1981 Royal Commission on Newspapers (the Kent Commission) was critical of the fact that the 'news hole,' the proportion of space devoted to news as against advertising, had decreased alarmingly.¹³ There is also evidence that the television style of reporting is now more prevalent in newspapers. Even the more tradition-bound newspapers have been forced to make their stories sharper and more concise. In addition, if stories can be given convenient labels as was the case with Watergate, the Iran hostage crisis, or the Jerusalem embassy affair, they can be more readily put into context for the audience. Once an event is 'labelled,' there is little need for readers and viewers to be given background information.

Our final criterion is that news is almost always 'present tense'. Only changes that have occurred since the previous report can be news. The shelf life of news stories is brief, and consequently the use of detailed explanation and historical analysis is limited. Such was the case with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, when news stories barely mentioned the previous years of civil war and the Syrian occupation of Lebanon.

These attributes of the desirable news story suggest that certain types of news events are consistently selected and given greater play than others. As Gitlin has observed: 'news concerns the event, not the underlying condition; the person, not the group; conflict, not consensus; the fact that "advances the story," not the one that explains it.'¹⁴ Stories that lack these qualities, that are diffuse and complicated or without conflict and drama, are simply not as attractive to the media. 'Priming' and 'agenda setting' are the terms normally used to describe the political consequences of certain issues being covered more extensively

than others.¹⁵ While most studies have focussed on how politicians are affected, this article will describe the consequences of structural bias on the coverage of positions of pressure groups. Three case-studies in Canadian foreign policy towards the Middle East will be used to test our hypotheses.¹⁶

THE ARAB ECONOMIC BOYCOTT 1976-9

Arab countries acting under the auspices of the Arab League have long maintained a boycott against companies doing business first with Jewish Palestine and later with Israel. The boycott had little impact on Canada, however, until the quadrupling of oil prices triggered by the October War of 1973. As the Arab oil-producing countries began to enjoy unprecedented prosperity, Canadian banks and corporations started to cultivate Arab clients. By 1975 the enforcement of the Arabs' boycott policy became a matter of concern to Canada's Jewish community and an obstacle to the smooth development of trade between Canada and the Arab world.

In May 1975 the Canadian Jewish community launched a campaign to have anti-boycott legislation enacted by parliament.¹⁷ The issue received little attention until a series of articles appeared in the *Globe and Mail* in August 1976. On 6 August the *Globe* ran a front-page story with the headline 'Pro-Israel lobby exaggerates harm of Arab boycott, cabinet is told. Secret memo gives policy options.' The following day an article entitled

¹⁵ S. Iyengar et al, 'Experimental demonstrations of the "not-so-minimal" consequences of television news programs,' in Graber, ed, *Media Power in Politics*, 54-60; Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, *The Emergence of American Political Issues: The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press* (St Paul MI: West Publishing 1977).

¹⁶ For our case-studies, we attempted to gather examples of news items that were both representative of the climate of news reporting and illustrated the points being stressed in this article. An on-line computer search of all newspaper items appearing on the Middle East from 1978 to 1983, inclusive, was conducted.

¹⁷ The principal source for the media's coverage of this issue is Howard Stanslawski, 'Elites, Domestic Interest Groups, and International Interests in the Canadian Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process: the Arab Economic Boycott of Canadians and Canadian Companies Doing Business with Israel,' doctoral dissertation, Brandon University, 1981.

Referendum and the 1979 and 1980 Federal Elections (Toronto: Reader's Digest Foundation of Canada and Erindale College, University of Toronto, 1981), 38.

¹³ Canada, Royal Commission on Newspapers, *Report* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada 1981), 69.

¹⁴ Todd Gitlin, 'Making protest movements newsworthy,' in Doris Graber, ed, *Media Power in Politics* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press 1984), 244.

'Arabs' Israel boycott gets Canadian compliance. Governments, airlines, publications observe some terms,' by Arnold Bruner appeared. Bruner's article refuted the claims made in the government memo by exposing compliance with the boycott by the Department of External Affairs and other government agencies. The opposition Conservatives were quick to seize the issue. A statement condemning the government by the Conservative external affairs critic, Claude Wagner, was widely reported. Editorial opinion which followed on the heels of Wagner's statement was virtually unanimous in condemning the government.

More coverage was generated in January 1977 when a citizens' Commission on Economic Coercion and Discrimination, headed by a McGill University law professor, Irwin Cotler, released its report. It found that a number of leading Canadian banks and corporations were complying with the boycott. The report was the lead item on national television newscasts and a front-page story in most newspapers. Editorials harshly condemned the boycott and were highly critical of the government. For example, the *Montreal Star* of 15 January described the practice as 'disgusting ... a moral affront to this country and a classic example of a process which should be unacceptable to any decent society.' On the same day an editorial in the *Montreal Gazette* described the boycott as 'a pervasive cancer,' while the *Toronto Globe and Mail* insisted that 'in the name of decency, Canada must prohibit compliance with the boycott, now.' The *Ottawa Citizen* echoed these sentiments. A day earlier, the *Toronto Star* had called for strict anti-boycott legislation arguing that 'before the situation gets worse, make clear to the Arab League that sovereignty is not for sale and that morality still overrides profits.' Diverse outlets such as the *Financial Times* and *La Presse* also called for anti-boycott legislation.

In the wake of this coverage, the issue was again picked up by the Conservatives. The leader of the opposition, Joe Clark, took the lead in assailing the government for not pressing forward with legislation. Media interest soon subsided, however. Aside from a three-part series in the *Winnipeg Tribune* and new

revelations in the *Globe and Mail*, coverage was intermittent at best. The issue quickly faded from public consciousness.

The release of a second set of reports by the Cotler Commission, and a news conference held in late May 1977 by the Canada-Israel Committee (CIC), the Canadian Jewish community's lobbying arm and spokesman on all matters concerning Israel, was an attempt to rekindle the media's interest. Another barrage of editorials condemning the government's inaction followed. Amid the furor, Jack Horner, the minister of industry, trade and commerce, told a national radio audience that an anti-boycott bill would likely damage prospects for increased trade with and investment from the Arab world. Despite intensive lobbying by the Jewish community to have legislation enacted and a major campaign by Canadian corporations led by Bell Canada to prevent legislation, media interest again evaporated quickly.

The media strategies of the contending interest groups differed considerably. The Jewish community wanted the issue to receive as much publicity as possible, believing that this would embarrass the government into taking action. The CIC therefore mounted a persistent campaign to keep the issue 'hot'. Canadian corporations did not wish to have their compliance with the boycott terms widely revealed. Their efforts, though forceful, tended to be behind the scenes and low key.

A third wave of news coverage coincided with the government's introduction of bill C-32 in 1978, a bill intended to ensure that corporations would at least report on boycott-related activity. The bill was seen by observers as an attempt to 'clear the decks' in preparation for an election. There were also a number of widely reported statements about the boycott made by Prime Minister Trudeau, by Ontario's premier, William Davis, and by the Saudi oil minister, Sheik Yamani, during a visit to Canada. Sheik Yamani's visit received substantial television coverage although commentators did not link his visit to the boycott issue. The introduction of bill C-32 also brought a strong editorial response. Most editorials expressed displeasure with what

was seen as a calculated political gesture that had more to do with the government's public relations and concern for the Jewish vote than with any real commitment to preventing complicity with the boycott. With a bill introduced and Ottawa gripped by election fever, the media's interest in the boycott virtually ceased. The election call and the dissolution of the House of Commons on 22 March 1979 meant that bill C-32 died on the order paper with little notice having been taken.

One can argue that the media did take a partisan position on the boycott issue. Editorials were hard-hitting and unequivocal in their condemnations of the government. Indeed their tone was angry and insistent. Yet the government, because of the thin volume and intermittent nature of the coverage, was not under significant media pressure. In its view the issue did not merit anything more than symbolic action.

Clearly the boycott issue did not have the attributes necessary to make it a leading news story. No major public personalities were identified with the issue. It was complex and legalistic. There was little disagreement among the political parties, especially after a bill had been tabled, and there was little action or drama. The visuals needed for television were lacking, and the story was slow to unfold with few new developments to report as the days passed. It would seem, therefore, that structural bias favouring minimal coverage was a far more compelling factor in determining the amount of attention given to the issue than the media's political sympathies which supported action against the boycott. Although the Jewish community made repeated efforts to publicize the issue, the media's requirement for conflict and drama made it very difficult for the community to achieve more than limited results. Without concerted pressure from the media, the government could not be challenged in a meaningful way. Although its rhetoric changed, its policies did not.

THE JERUSALEM EMBASSY AFFAIR

On 25 April 1979, in the midst of the federal election campaign, Joe Clark, the leader of the Progressive Conservative party,

promised that if elected he would move the Canadian embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The proposal was a controversial one because few nations have been willing to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital given Arab territorial claims over the city. While the promise was not made at the behest of the Jewish community, it was a blatant appeal for Jewish votes.¹⁸ The Liberals immediately seized upon the Clark pledge as a campaign issue. Prime Minister Trudeau denounced the Jerusalem promise at a news conference on 27 April, at a rally on 28 April, and at another news conference on 30 April. He took great delight in ridiculing the initiative, and these attacks were soon incorporated into his regular campaign speech. Both the announcement by Mr Clark and the Liberal reaction received extensive media coverage.

An important factor in that coverage was that journalists tended to see Mr Clark as inexperienced and bumbling. A disastrous foreign trip in 1978, during which his luggage had been lost and he appeared unprepared and unsophisticated, had severely tarnished his image. The so-called wimp watch was under way. Reporters came to expect mistakes and gaffes, and there is wide suspicion that editors and television producers actually solicited stories about Clark's blunders, knowing that these items would be popular with readers and audiences. As Desmond Morton has argued: 'Whoever it was who decided that Joe Clark was a wimp established a framework of interpretation in which every action, in victory or defeat, could be located. The image, at least in my view, preceded the evidence and distorted it.'¹⁹ It is significant that while editorial opinion on the embassy move was at first cautious, the tone of much of the reporting suggested that Mr Clark had made a major error in judgment.

¹⁸ For information on this issue, see George Takach, 'Clark and the Jerusalem embassy affair: initiative and constraint in Canadian foreign policy,' in David Taras and David Goldberg, eds, *The Domestic Battleground: Canada and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, forthcoming).

¹⁹ Desmond Morton, 'Television: does the image reflect reality?' in *Politics and the Media*, 43-4.

At his first press conference after becoming prime minister, Joe Clark strongly reaffirmed his intention to move the embassy. The Arab reaction was immediate. In the weeks that followed, Arab governments and institutions threatened Canada with severe economic retaliation if the embassy was moved. These threats received front-page coverage across Canada. The most alarmist headline appeared in the *Toronto Sun* on 7 June: 'Arabs threaten us with economic war.' A front-page story on the same day in the *Toronto Star* was entitled 'Arab fury turns on Canada.' These stories contained ominous forecasts about lost business and investments and even of a possible cut-off in oil supplies. Wide play was also given to the possibility of terrorist retaliation against Canada. A statement by the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasir Arafat, that 'our Arab nations must teach the Canadian scoundrels a lesson' became a leading story. The fears of Canadian companies doing business in the Arab world were reported extensively. On 13 June the *Toronto Star* carried a front-page story with the headline: 'Firm fears huge Arab deal lost.' On the following day the *Montreal Star* had a front-page story entitled 'Billions at stake: firms protest embassy plan.' The *Calgary Herald* had a front-page story on 19 June: 'Canada boycotted by Arab investors.' Television coverage was equally intense. Scenes of Prime Minister Clark and the new secretary of state for external affairs, Flora MacDonald, fielding questions or making statements about the embassy move became part of television's regular diet of news coverage during the Conservative government's first month in power.

Although only in office for a brief period, the Clark government now found itself in the midst of crisis. Other proposals and initiatives were overshadowed by the torrent of coverage given to the Jerusalem embassy issue. The government came under persistent questioning and attack from the opposition, corporate interests, and in the international community.

On the editorial front a different situation prevailed. A number of leading newspapers now favoured Clark's perse-

vering with the Jerusalem move. The *Globe and Mail*, for instance, did not want to see the government give in to intimidation. Its editorial on 20 June argued that 'even Canadians who disagree with the Government's position will not want to see it give in to outright arrogance.' The *Toronto Star* was even more vehement in denouncing Arab pressure tactics. An editorial on 23 June entitled 'Tell the Arabs where to go' warned: 'The Arab governments and hucksters will not let the matter die easily. They seem intent on bringing Canada to its knees as a lesson to other nations. And they don't really care what disgraceful means they use to achieve that goal.' The *Toronto Sun* and the *Ottawa Citizen* took similar positions.

Again the interest groups involved in the controversy had different strategies. In contrast to its approach on the boycott issue, the Jewish community kept a low profile. Once the government had endorsed the Jerusalem move, quiet encouragement was deemed to be more appropriate than sabre rattling or promises that the Jewish vote would be delivered. The CIC, which always viewed itself as bipartisan, could not openly support the Conservative party. Arab governments and major corporate interests wanted the decision reversed, however. It was in their interest to shower the issue with as much publicity as possible. Only widespread coverage could put 'heat' on the government.

With the appointment on 23 June of Robert Stanfield to conduct a one-man inquiry into Canada's Middle East policy, media interest subsided. The Stanfield mission was designed to de-fuse the mounting political pressures and in so doing to dampen the media's appetite.

There was to be a last flurry of coverage when the Clark government, on Stanfield's recommendation, reversed its decision to move the embassy. The government was forced to endure a humiliating retreat. The view expressed in a *Toronto Star* article of 3 November that 'Clark tripped himself up on Israel' was reflected in editorials across the country. Stanfield made his final report after the 1980 election. He expressed

astonishment at the media's lack of interest. As he told an academic gathering in June 1980:

Well, my report was virtually unreported (and I understand this with respect to the television people because I was not prepared to make myself available ...) ... Whether my views were right or not ... these were issues of very great concern to Canadian generally and to our foreign policy. I think that the citizen has a right to hear something about the report. *Le Devoir* was the only paper, to my knowledge, that did anything in any depth about it. The Canadian Press ran something on it. *La Presse* had an editorial. But really there was nothing that, with all my generosity to the press, I could consider to be reporting of what I was recommending.²⁰

The media's saturation coverage of the embassy affair left a permanent and indelible stain on Clark's political prospects. As Jeffrey Simpson was to write: 'Of all the errors Joe Clark made as leader of the Conservative Party, none rivalled his promise to move the Canadian embassy ... Through a numbing mixture of unforgivable stupidity and crass politics, Clark stumbled into a promise that was to haunt him through all his days as Prime Minister.'²¹ During the 1980 election campaign, Pierre Trudeau would again remind voters of the Clark promise, this time characterizing it as a 'flip flop'. The change of policy was also mentioned by the Liberals in two of the campaign's more successful television commercials, 'The Magician' and 'Embassy'. The shadow cast by the embassy affair continued to haunt Clark.

Unlike the boycott issue, the Jerusalem embassy affair had the attributes needed to make it a leading news story. The pledge came at the height of an election campaign when the media were searching for issues that would define the differences between the parties. When the Liberals opposed the move,

two clear and easily discernible positions emerged. The focus was on an individual, Joe Clark, whose political fortunes became linked to the Jerusalem promise. Indeed, the issue became symbolic of his leadership. There were also the necessary visuals for television as Mr Clark and his ministers could be seen delivering statements, fielding questions, or being attacked by the opposition. There were sensational charges and threats which underscored the dramatic elements. Rhetoric and threats from the Middle East, cries of distress by Canadian business, and frequent statements from politicians kept the media supplied with news for weeks.

As mentioned, several groups – the opposition Liberals, Arab governments, and Canadian corporations doing business in the Middle East – had an interest in stoking the controversy and in ensuring that the issue remained alive. Their agenda coincided with that of the media. The media were receptive to highly exaggerated and politically motivated announcements coming from these sources and gave these stories enormous play. There are few better examples of interest groups and foreign governments using the Canadian media so effectively.

Structural bias was again more important than political bias in determining coverage, however. It is almost forgotten today that editorials at first were quite cautious in pronouncing on the intended move and that a number of prominent newspapers wanted Mr Clark to press ahead with the move rather than submit to threats and heavy-handed pressure tactics. These same papers, however, by giving the issue highly sensational coverage, succeeded in making Arab threats seem far more ominous than they were. Mr Clark's image suffered as a direct result of the attention given to the opponents of the embassy move.

THE LEBANON WAR OF 1982

The Canadian media's coverage of Israel's invasion of Lebanon has aroused a great deal of controversy. Seldom have the media been accused of so much political bias and journalistic distortion. These charges came mainly from supporters of Israel who

²⁰ Robert Stanfield, 'Summing up,' in *Politics and the Media*, 123.

²¹ Jeffrey Simpson, *Discipline of Power: The Conservative Interlude and the Liberal Restoration* (Toronto: Personal Library 1980), 146.

felt that the news coverage 'vilified' Israel by reporting grossly exaggerated casualty figures, showing graphic films of destruction and suffering, and labelling Israel as the attacker while Syria, the occupying power in Lebanon, received little blame or attention. In the war's aftermath several scholarly articles and commentaries in leading magazines made similar accusations about the coverage of the American media (on which much Canadian coverage was based). Perhaps the most searing indictment appeared in the *New Republic* and was entitled 'Lebanon Eyewitness' by Martin Peretz. Peretz wrote:

Much of what you have read in the newspapers and newsmagazines about the war in Lebanon — and even more of what you have seen and heard on television — is simply not true. At best, the routine reportorial fare, to say nothing of editorial or columnists' commentary, has been wrenched out of context, detached from history, exaggerated, distorted. Then, there are the deliberate and systematic falsifications: remarkably little of what has been alleged in various published protest statements against the Israeli action in Lebanon is fact. I know; I was there."²²

In Canada, the Ontario Press Council, an institution financed and controlled by the major newspaper chains, found that unsubstantiated stories had been given credence and banner headlines in the *Toronto Star*.

The most complete study to date of the Canadian media's coverage of the war is by David Dewitt and John Kirton.²³ They argue that the direction and intensity of coverage influenced the basic assumptions that members of parliament had about Israel and as a result Canada's traditional Middle East policy came close to being overturned. Members came to see Israel in a negative light and an attempt was made in the Liberal party caucus to press for a policy that would be more sympathetic to the PLO.

²² Peretz, 'Lebanon eyewitness', 15.

²³ David Dewitt and John Kirton, 'Canadian foreign policymaking toward the Middle East: parliament, the media and the 1982 war in Lebanon,' in Taras and Goldberg, eds, *The Domestic Battleground*.

There can be no doubt that the war received an extraordinarily high volume of prominent coverage. It was a front-page story in the *Globe and Mail* almost daily for the first month of fighting. Israel's invasion accounted for over 20 per cent of all news items on the CBC's nightly news programme, 'The National,' in June. During the first week, fabricated claims about civilian casualties which originated from pro-PLO sources were widely reported. Estimates of as many as 10,000 dead and 600,000 homeless were leading news items on television and in several newspapers. For example, the *Toronto Star* published a story on 11 June entitled '8000 dead or wounded mostly women, kids — PLO.' On television there were graphic scenes of destruction. Some of these, however, were of cities and towns that had been damaged during previous fighting between Lebanese factions. 'The National' also indicated on the screen when the tape being shown had been censored by Israeli authorities. This practice was not applied to film originating from the Arab side or to film of the Falklands war which was still going on. The image presented in the first weeks of coverage was that Israel had launched a massive invasion in an attempt to eradicate a small and relatively insignificant force of Palestinian fighters and that civilians were bearing the brunt of the attack. Large-scale air and tank battles being waged in eastern Lebanon between Israel and Syria were not widely reported.

A number of stories with a Canadian link received substantial play in the media. The first involved a Canadian doctor, Dr Christopher Giannou, who was working in a hospital in southern Lebanon when Israel invaded. Dr Giannou claimed that he had witnessed the brutal beating of detainees by Israeli soldiers. He described Israeli violence as 'blind, savage, and indiscriminate' and said that he had seen hundreds of civilians being killed.²⁴ This 'eyewitness' account was a leading item for several days and was highlighted in the *Toronto Star* in particular. The

²⁴ 'Destruction of southern Lebanon "blind, savage, indiscriminate" — Canadian doctor Giannou,' *Winnipeg Free Press*, 28 June 1982, 8; 'Canadian doctor Giannou saw hundreds die in Lebanon,' *Montreal Gazette*, 28 June 1982, B8.

Star apparently made only one attempt to verify the story, by phoning an Israeli embassy official in Ottawa who denied Dr Giannou's statements. The Ontario Press Council received a complaint from a *Star* reader about seven stories about the war published in June 1982. The complaint was supported by evidence presented to the Council from a prominent Toronto lawyer who had provided the *Star* with two accounts of the events in Lebanon which demonstrated that the Giannou accusations were false. When the accounts were given to the *Star*, in late July and mid-September, the paper rejected them, saying that the Giannou story had been 'outdated by events in Lebanon'.⁸⁵ The Press Council upheld the complaint, however, arguing that although the *Star* acted properly in publishing the Giannou stories as soon as they were available, the newspaper was wrong in that it 'accepted the Giannou version without question, made no effort after publication to check on accuracy or to obtain Israeli comment, and decided against using another version when it became available.' It was not until late October 1983 that the council made its ruling. Although an article on the ruling appeared in the *Toronto Star* on 31 October, there were no publicized retractions in any media.

Another Canadian dimension was the predicament of the Canadian ambassador to Lebanon, Theodore Arcand, after Israel had laid siege to Beirut. From late June until the first week of August when he was finally evacuated, Mr Arcand was the focus of considerable coverage. This intensified after the ambassador's residence was destroyed by an Israeli bomb on 27 July. Greatly incensed, the ambassador lashed out at Israeli actions. A typical story about the incident was that featured on the front page of the *Montreal Gazette* on 29 July entitled 'Canada's envoy, Arcand: What has Beirut done to deserve this?' The *Calgary Herald* carried the item with the headline 'Canadian

ambassador to Lebanon is unflinching.' Television coverage was equally dramatic with cameras following the ambassador's movements for several days, capturing both his anguish and the forcefulness of his views. There was further publicity when the issue of his removal from Beirut was raised in the House of Commons and when the house passed a motion praising his courage.

According to Dewitt and Kirton, the war accounted for over 40 per cent of items on the CBC's 'The National' in late July and early August. During this period as many as four new visual items were shown on each newscast. In terms of content, the authors observed that 'the actual sequence of CBC stories ... presented a saga of hopes for a peaceful settlement, dashed by Israeli intransigence, and emphasizing a particular Canadian perspective and responsibility vis a vis the problem.'⁸⁶ A tone of moral indignation over Israeli actions was implicit in much of the coverage. This was certainly reflected in editorial opinion. Clearly, many in the media were convinced that Israel had gone too far in Lebanon and was acting against its own best interests and traditions.

As was the case with the Jerusalem embassy affair, the Lebanon war had the attributes required to make it a leading news story: bitter and intractable enemies, enormous stakes and drama, and graphic visual material. The story had important Canadian links, and there was a constant stream of new information that could be packaged into news stories. The last point may explain why there were so many flaws in the reporting. The need for detailed daily coverage left producers and editors with little opportunity to check facts or to verify the truth of the claims being made. It is significant that most of the distortion occurred early in the war, when the media were hungry for facts and would accept them from any source. This, of course, added to the sensationalism which is both a characteristic and a requirement of coverage. The Giannou incident, in particular, dem-

⁸⁵ A description of the events leading to the Ontario Press Council ruling on coverage of the Giannou accusations appeared with a summary of the ruling as 'Star stories on Israeli troop beatings ruled unbalanced,' in the *Toronto Star*, 31 October 1983.

⁸⁶ Dewitt and Kirton, 'Canadian foreign policymaking toward the Middle East.'

onstrated that timeliness was a more important requirement than accuracy.

Although the Canada-Israel Committee and Canadian Arab groups were active during the war, lobbying government and presenting their cases to the media, they had only a marginal impact. The media largely determined the agenda because of the sheer volume and intensity of coverage. They also had multiple sources of information - wire services, foreign correspondents, stringers, and so on. The CIC, for instance, was on the defensive throughout the war and uncomfortable about having to respond to the ghastly scenes of destruction reportedly caused by Israel which were being shown and written about. A behind-the-scenes approach was preferred in dealing with Ottawa. There were also significant divisions within the Jewish community over the war which would have been exacerbated by a full-blown public campaign. While Arab Canadian groups wanted publicity, their claims were overshadowed by more powerful reports coming directly from the Middle East. Moreover, as events in Lebanon moved quickly, the media were far ahead of these groups in terms of information gathering. Canadian interest groups were relegated to being consumers and not suppliers of news about the war's progress.

Many feel that political bias determined much of the coverage of the Lebanon war. The media certainly exhibited a sharp distaste for Israel's actions. Whether producers and editors were influenced by the sensationalized images and reports of the war that they themselves selected in order to enhance the dramatic effect for media consumers merits some speculation. It may also be true that once organizations become committed to a certain story line or description of events, it is difficult to change course, admit mistakes, or retract positions. The media's requirement for timeliness during international crises also means that any delays necessary to verify the accuracy of news reports and sources are likely to be overridden by the need to meet deadlines and that later evidence of inaccurate stories is considered obsolete and no longer newsworthy. There is evi-

dence, however, in two separate studies of media coverage conducted after the Israeli invasion, that political viewpoints were not deeply ingrained or lingering and may not have been as important in the portrayal of the Lebanon war as is believed in some quarters. T.A. Keenleyside and his colleagues and John Kirton and his team both found that Israel was not depicted in an unfavourable light after the war.²⁷ In fact, the Kirton study of Canadian television coverage of the Middle East during the winter of 1982-3 concluded that Israel was portrayed as a democracy struggling to maintain high standards and ideals. One is tempted, therefore, to downplay political bias as a principal determinant of the media's coverage of Israel's invasion. It can be argued that it was the media's own agenda, their need for timeliness and sensationalism, that determined the nature of much of the coverage.

CONCLUSION

Structural bias may often be more convincing as an explanation of the nature of media coverage than is political bias. The media's insatiable hunger for colourful images, powerful personalities, dramatic confrontation, and new facts was evident in each of the three cases examined. This is not to diminish the role that political views can play in some circumstances, but to argue that prevailing organizational and journalistic codes are powerful determinants of how issues will be reported.

The effectiveness of interest groups in achieving coverage of their positions in the cases examined depended largely on whether their interests coincided with those of the media. The best positioned groups were those which could supply the media with fresh stories that met the media's requirements. Canadian corporations and Arab governments did a masterful job during

²⁷ T.A. Keenleyside, W.C. Soderlund, B.E. Burton, 'A tilt to indifference? The press and Canadian foreign policy in the Middle East, autumn 1982', *Middle East Focus* 8 (July 1985), 4-14, and John Kirton, J. Barci, and E. Smokum, 'A continuing concern: Canadian television news coverage of the Middle East in the winter of 1982-3', *Middle East Focus* 8 (July 1985), 15-20.

the Jerusalem embassy affair, being the main conduit for stories that the media desired. Interest groups, in tandem with opposition politicians, were able to force the government into an ignoble about-face. It is interesting to note that in all three cases the Jewish community was not particularly effective. It was unable to transform the complicated and slow-moving boycott issue in a leading news item, was outmanoeuvred on the Jerusalem issue by Arab and corporate actors, and was on the defensive during the Lebanon war.

Interest groups can increase their control over news content considerably by understanding the forces that shape media reporting. Media management techniques are now a major component of lobbying and seem to be a permanent feature of the political landscape.¹⁸ Some pressure groups are aware that the following tactics are likely to enhance their visibility:

- 1 have clearly defined and easily articulated positions;
- 2 have prominent and readily identifiable spokespersons;
- 3 be the gatekeepers of scarce information;
- 4 time the release of information so that it can have the most impact. For example, information might be more effective during the early stages of a crisis when images are just beginning to form;
- 5 provide formats that will generate good visual material;
- 6 find unique Canadian angles to international stories in order to accommodate the media's need to satisfy a national audience;
- 7 take extreme or provocative positions, or positions in direct opposition to other groups, individuals, or institutions.

As Anthony Westell has observed about the media: 'We need a story a day, we need colour, we need drama, we need accusations ... The great myth is that the media doesn't [*sic*] like being manipulated: we do, we live on it.'¹⁹

¹⁸ The use of media management techniques by prime ministers and other politicians is discussed in David Taras, 'Prime ministers and the media', in David Taras and Leslie Pal, eds, *Prime Ministers and Premiers* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall 1988).

¹⁹ Quoted in Clive Cocking, *Following the Leaders* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada 1980), 27.

The logic of Papandreou's foreign policy

Critical responses to the nationalist programme of Andreas Papandreou have ranged from suspicion to alarm. Dubbing him 'populist,' 'erratic,' 'pro-Soviet,' and 'anti-American,' critics have predicted that Greece's socialist premier would withdraw his country from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), sever its link with the European Community (EC), eject United States bases from its soil, and commit a number of other related 'sins'. Roy Macridis, for example, has set out a series of sombre predictions based on Papandreou's ideological profile and the radical platform of his party; while John Loulis has argued that Papandreou's strategy has exhibited 'inconsistent and perplexing shifts,' although remaining essentially within a framework of 'anti-American' sentiments and 'pro-Soviet' inclinations.¹ Clearly, if these dire forecasts were to come true, the consequences would be profound: the disintegration of NATO's southern flank, increased opportunities for the Soviet Union to isolate Turkey, and the transformation of the Balkans into the powder keg it used to be.

That none of these predictions has come to be suggests that they may have been founded on fallacies. Indeed, I will argue that Papandreou's critics have oversimplified, and hence distorted, his world view. Moreover, in personalizing their charges,

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¹ Roy C. Macridis, *Greek Politics at a Crossroads: What Kind of Socialism?* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press 1984). See also Peter Duignan's foreword, at page viii. John Loulis, 'Papandreou's foreign policy,' *Foreign Affairs* 63(winter 1984/85), 375-91.