

# THE KNOWN WORLD OF BROADCAST NEWS

International News  
and the Electronic Media

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and  
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## Which news and why? Understanding the forces that shape the news

Three military conflicts from the 1980s, the Falklands conflict in 1982, the invasion of Grenada in 1983 and the American bombing of Tripoli in 1986 offer dramatic evidence of how foreign news reporting has changed in the wake of the political, economic, and technological developments of that decade.

In the Falklands conflict between Britain and Argentina, the UK government literally took selected members of the media to the scene; board, lodging, and sea-sickness pills, c/o Her Majesty's Navy. Reporting back was heavily controlled. The media in the UK found it easier to get material distributed by satellite out of Argentina, but that presented problems of usage and reliability. It was, after all, the enemy's version. What's more, any mention back home on the BBC of opposition to the Falklands venture was decried as treason by certain political groups.

The task of balancing demands from the Government and the military with the professional journalists' standards of impartiality and reliability was almost impossible. Mrs Thatcher and her advisers were involved in a gamble that could have gone wrong. The Argentine move into the Falklands/Malvinas Islands was primarily intended to boost the morale of the ruling military junta and direct its citizens' attention away from other aspects of domestic importance in Argentina. The balancing act, particularly in relation to the Thatcher government, created significant instability within the BBC, the effects of which are still evident (Milne 1988).

Then, in 1983, came the Reagan decision to invade the tiny

Caribbean island of Grenada, a decision publicly based on the fear that Grenada would become another Cuba, bringing the "evil of communism" closer to America's shores. Much to the infuriation of the US media, they were kept out of the action during the first few hours of the invasion. In fact, enterprising journalists who attempted to reach the tiny island by private boat were turned away by armed American naval warships. Former CBS Head of News, Ed Joyce, quotes statements from officers at the Pentagon that they had, "learned a lesson from the British in the Falklands" (Joyce 1988: 285). This comparison, though, is hardly correct. The British Government took reporters across half the world to the Falklands and then exercised "news management." The Pentagon, on the other hand, simply denied media access to the Grenada exercise until it suited them.

British television reports of the Grenada episode were confusing, despite what one would have expected to be an advantage from a former colonial presence in the Caribbean. After all, here was the USA invading a member of the British Commonwealth. Hetherington (1985: 101-09) chronicled the confusion that ensued: the doubts about what Cubans were doing on the island, the facts that took so long to emerge about the number of US casualties resulting from marines shooting each other by mistake, and the unintentional bombing of a mental hospital. He found that the BBC had followed official US information sources far more faithfully than did the rival ITN.

The lessons in manipulating one another that the media and governments learned from Grenada and the Falklands were ultimately applied in our final military skirmish, the bombing of Tripoli. This event best illustrates both the possibilities and difficulties of reporting on international military activities and the political aftermaths.

The attack occurred in the early morning of Tuesday 15 April 1986. It was in reprisal for the bombing deaths of US servicemen in a West German discothèque, an event Reagan blamed on Gadaffi-supported terrorists.

The British Government allowed the use of US bases in the UK for launching the attack. Its official position was that the attack was "a necessary and defensive action against a military dictator who was using the resources of his state to carry out acts of barbarous terrorism against innocent people in foreign countries" (Conservative Party Document 1986: 1).

According to a series of newspaper articles printed in the

American press, the main aim of the action was to murder the Libyan leader, Gadaffi (Hersh 1987). Gadaffi survived but members of his family were injured and his adopted daughter was killed.

In the course of the raid, the French Embassy in Tripoli was mistakenly bombed, as was a residential area, resulting in numerous civilian casualties. These errors were at first denied by Caspar Weinberger, the US Secretary of Defense, but were soon proved to be fact thanks to television pictures received by the BBC and the US networks from satellite transmissions emanating from Libyan ground stations. The incident became the basis of a claim by the British Conservative Party that the BBC "took a number of editorial decisions the effect of which was to enlist the sympathy of the audience for the Libyans and to antagonize them against the Americans" (Conservative Party Document 1986: 4), a claim which the BBC rejected.

Coverage of the Libyan bombing is enlightening because it demonstrates the impact of the technological, organizational and political factors on foreign news reporting.

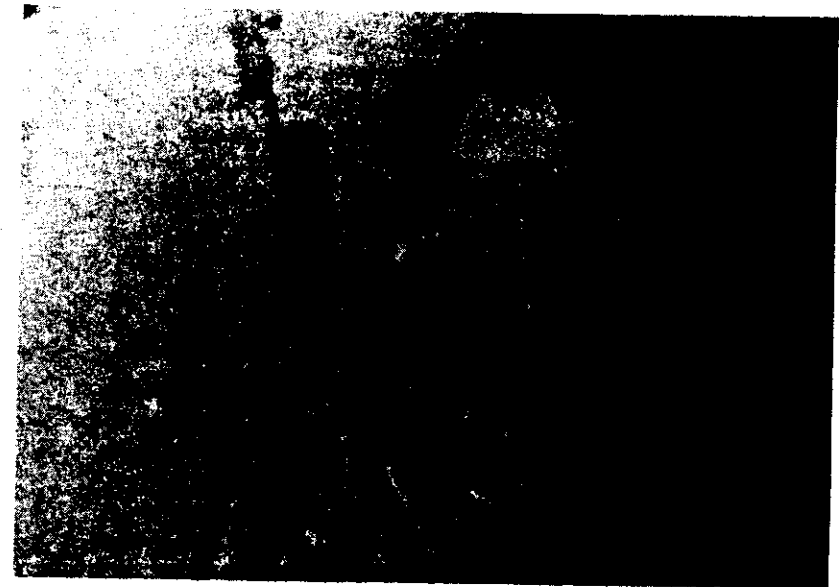
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— Access to functioning technology, everything from ordinary telephone lines to satellite links, provided the means for journalists to feed material out of Libya. The White House no doubt had overlooked their potential; Casper Weinberger would otherwise not have made his early categorical statements on the success of the raid and his denial of civilian casualties.

Kate Adie, the BBC reporter in Lybia during the attack, recalled,

Telephones in to the hotel worked. Telephones out were a problem. It had been like that for four years ever since an attempted coup. There were four lines into our hotel which worked for the next five days (after the raid). One was the NBC line, one was the BBC line, one was used by ABC and there was one left for all the other journalists. The BBC held their line open. Once it was up it was held open for two and a half days. A large organization can do things like that.

She also detailed how access to the scene and the technical facilities were dependent on the approval of and help from the Libyans. "We had to get out of the hotel, which was a problem," she said.

We knew bombs had dropped nearby, half a mile away. We



9 Kate Adie reporting for BBC Television from Tripoli. A still taken from a video tape in a bombed building at 4:00 a.m., just a few hours after the US bombing of the Libyan capital

knew the area but were physically prevented by armed people. It was very chaotic in the dark. Then at 4 a.m., to our great surprise, the Libyans turned up with transport. We asked ourselves, "are we going to see what we want to see?" There's no doubt we saw what we should have seen. We were allowed to go to the area of greatest devastation (which we knew about because we had seen it from the hotel balcony). It was a residential area which has the embassies. We saw part of the French Embassy flattened. I've been in it. I knew it.

The Libyans assisted the filming of civilian casualties, restricted access to military areas, and then facilitated transmission out of the country. "We weren't allowed to go to the barracks," she continued. "We went to the hospitals; there were no restrictions on who we could talk to. We brought the material back to the hotel, edited it and by mid-morning had got the local television station to open up. That was unusual. Usually, there's no one there until midday." By shortly after 10:00 in the morning, Libyan time, a ground station was feeding BBC material back to London.

Kate Adie again.

They are part of the Eurovision satellite network. They can also send by ground links. They have all the facilities, excellent equipment just like any European station has. They are incompetent at using it at times, but it's rarely been subjected to censorship. We got out everything we wanted that first morning, with endless caveats about what might have happened and what we might not have seen. We were careful not to speculate. I knew Gadaffi was alive an hour-and-a-half after the raid, both from a contact and from the fact that the army would have been on the streets if he had been dead. They weren't, there was general calm. The technology functioned as well as it might have done anywhere in the West. We got everything across. The technology pushed it out, and it caught a lot of people by surprise.

The journalists thus found themselves in the position where they knew more, apparently, than the US administration and had their own eyewitness observations and sound and visual documentation to prove it.

Caspar Weinberger in his first press conference said, shortly after the air raid, that there had been no civilian casualties and that the only damage to the US forces had been the loss of part of a wing of a plane. He lied, because there was no doubt from our very first reports reaching London via telephone, literally while the raid was on, that civilian areas had been hit. The American network people told us that there was jubilation in the US where it was regarded as a brilliant military strike, without any civilian losses. We had just seen corpses. It was the biggest credibility gap you can imagine

was reporter Adie's postscript on the event.

Major news organizations have not only the money to pay for telephone lines open days on end, but they also have personnel resources that allow them to have staff in place. The fact that BBC radio and television both had correspondents in Libya was the result of a suspicion that some sort of action was afoot, action which would be newsworthy. All three US television networks made the same judgement.

There had been a lot of activity over US air bases in Britain during the day before the raid, but this was dismissed as "routine exercise" by the British Ministry of Defence and this information

never reached Kate Adie in Tripoli. The BBC Arabic Service (World Service), however, did receive a tip regarding the time of the raid and the intended targets twenty-four hours beforehand from a stringer in Washington. He claimed to have gleaned the information from sources in the Pentagon. The World Service did not deem this information to be sufficiently reliable to warrant transmission. "If we had done so, they [the Americans] probably would have had to change the time and the targets anyway," explained senior news editor David Spaul.

*Politics* influenced not only media coverage, but the timing of the attack as well. Domestic publicity took priority over military considerations. The scheduling of the bombing was chosen to coincide with the American networks' evening news shows so that President Reagan's account would have maximum domestic political impact. The BBC's Adie noted,

Shortly before 2 a.m. in the morning we got a call from the BBC in London saying they had received a tip-off from the networks in Washington that something big was afoot — President Reagan had apparently asked for time on television. Then the raid started at exactly 2 a.m. Later it turned out that this was not what the Pentagon had wanted; they wanted a raid at 4 a.m. local time, when people are most drowsy, when the streets are empty, the time in the middle of a military shift. Why did it happen at 2 a.m.? Because that was prime time newstime in New York and Washington, 19:00 hours. It was the politicians' desire to use the media dictating the Pentagon. It was specifically timed, rather cynically, not to use maximum military advantage, which is cynical because any military person will want to minimize casualties or dangers to themselves. If you try to maximize the PR, at danger to your own men, that is a cynical use of it.

The USIA, in particular its director, Charles Z. Wick, was also involved on the political and propaganda front. As soon as the bombs started dropping over Tripoli, an editorial was read on the Voice of America that included the following exhortation:

Colonel Gadaffi is your head of state. So long as Libyans accept his orders, then they must also accept the consequences. Colonel Gadaffi is your tragic burden. If you permit Colonel Gadaffi to continue with the present conflict, then you must share some collective responsibility for his actions. (Alexandre 1987)

Colonel Gadaffi survived the attack. The US "proof" that the Libyan leader was directly responsible for an attack on the American servicemen in Berlin has never been made public; the West German police have laid the blame on the Syrians. But Charles Z. Wick was not satisfied with the treatment received from British media, particularly the BBC. Its footage coming out of Libya had made the White House publicity exercise look rather silly. A senior BBC news editor in London told us that Wick personally complained about a commentary by the BBC's man in Washington, Martin Bell, on US reactions to the bombing and its legality in international law. When asked why the BBC should be concerned about the opinions of the USIA Director, the editor ominously replied, "Charles Wick is a close friend of Ronald Reagan." One source also claimed that, prior to the bombing, Mr Wick had asked for and received a positive assessment from high-ranking members of Britain's ruling Conservative Party on the British media's likely reaction to an attack on Libya originating from British soil.

Like Wick, the Conservative Party was not satisfied with the BBC's performance. In October it published its report accusing the BBC of bias, naming eight different BBC reporters but strangely enough, avoiding any direct mention of either Kate Adie or Martin Bell, a point emphasized by the then BBC Director General, Alasdair Milne (1988: 191). Presumably these two reporters enjoy such status in Britain that the attack was aimed at the institution of the BBC rather than at particular individuals.

The Conservative Party report, "Media Monitoring: The US Raid on Libya," consisted of a textual analysis comparing individual BBC headlines and pieces of comment with those of the rival ITN "News at Ten." The Conservatives explained that their study was the result of "a growing wave of correspondence and telephone calls complaining about various aspects of the BBC." They did not specify how many complaints had been received, when they were received, or their nature. The fact that ITN tried, as the Conservative Party saw it, to mitigate chagrin over the fact of civilian casualties by reporting that they were caused by "bombs meant for terrorists" was praised by the report. "Only in the last breath did the BBC make any reference to *Libyan Terrorists*" (1986: 6).

The BBC responded with a line by line rebuttal which was returned to the Conservative Party and the leader of its anti-

BBC campaign, former minister Norman Tebbit. The bickering persisted for a while. Tebbit countered with a new analysis of the BBC defence from an unidentified "independent, non-political source." Ultimately, the squabble died when an academic study conducted by Nottingham University demonstrated that there was, to quote Kate Adie, "not an iota of truth in the suggestion that we had been some sort of Libyan agents." The BBC did, however, admit to some minor error of judgement in news copy written in the newsroom in London; but no factual errors could be found in any of the reports from correspondents abroad.

Reporter Kate Adie, though, did not avoid having her personal reputation questioned in public. The *Daily Express* newspaper, with Conservative Party sympathies, accused her of providing coverage sympathetic to Colonel Gadaffi, claiming that, as a result, she had been granted facilities not available to other broadcasters. She took legal action against Express Newspapers and, in an out of court settlement, was vindicated, winning substantial damages (The *Guardian* 1988).

Was the attack on the BBC an example of close co-operation between the Reagan and Thatcher regimes? Kate doubts it.

I think it began to coincide with the Americans' feelings once it got going, but this is part of something which has been observed by everyone. There has been a sustained campaign, not only from certain political quarters, but also from commercial quarters, from people with commercial interests which they wish to expand. These are people who own stakes in newspapers, who own parts of huge conglomerates, entrepreneurs, who wish for a slice of the television audience in the UK and find it very difficult to get it. The BBC is the big animal they would like to slice up.

Kate Adie's description provides a good illustration of the complex, conflicting web of pressures on both broadcasting organizations as a whole and individuals within them (conflicting with their professional standards of factual reporting). Those supporting the Reagan administration's position on the Libya bombing might indeed claim that she and her colleagues were manipulated by Gadaffi. The decision to allow all foreign news teams satellite facilities in Tripoli may well have been based on a desire to create positive publicity for Libya by showing civilian casualties to the world. But how different is this from the US administration's manipulation of the network news?

For the traditional broadcasting organizations, both public service BBC and the American commercial networks, the changing mode of political pressure as well as the emergence of new groups trying to exercise control has created considerable upheaval. With deregulation entrenched in the USA and the philosophy of protected Public Service broadcasting being challenged in Europe, a mixture of pressure, mistrust, and jealousy among the political power centres is shaking the roots of these institutions.

### Borrowing models from organizational theory

How would traditional mass communication theory explain these convoluted events and their possible outcomes? Functional approaches (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956, for example) would focus on the media's performance. Effects perspectives would offer insight into how the culture might respond (Meyrowitz 1985) or how individuals would come to understand the workings of important public institutions (Berger and Luckman 1967; Gerbner *et al.* 1982). But what both would no doubt miss is the fact that news media are organizations. They are bureaucracies. Many are institutions with all the structures that years of survival produce. Their aim may not necessarily be to simply maximize audiences (or profits); organizational researchers have long held that even straightforward manufacturing companies are not merely driven by profit-maximization goals (Dean 1951). In all organizations, a process of "institutionalization" occurs over time, with *survival* a value in itself for management and other members (Selznick 1957). Above all, organizations are not isolated entities; they are always dependent on an environment where other organizations and groups compete for resources, place demands, and offer rewards.

In the 1930s, such observations led to the emergence of Chester Barnard's *equilibrium theory* (Barnard 1938). He saw the survival of a company as dependent on the continued contributions from different groups of "participants" on which the organization depended for its survival (customers, owners, suppliers, etc.). Later, the sociologist Philip Selznick's interest in the institutionalization processes led to a focus on how managements perceive the conditions necessary for survival, i.e., which *strategies* they adopt (Selznick 1957). Strategies can change, but only at a rate compatible with internal institutional factors.

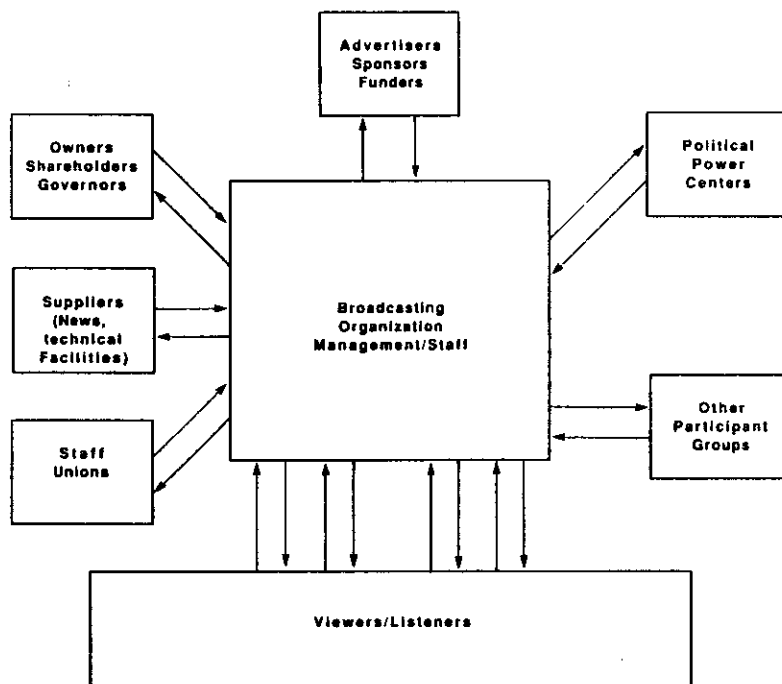
Institutionalization produces strength, loyalty, and predictability, but also sluggishness in certain situations where change is required. In a firmly established institution, change requires a strong measure of consensus about the *need* for change. Otherwise, attempts to move the organization in another direction will be painful or unsuccessful.

Barnard's participation model, like all models, is an oversimplification. The different groups associated with an organization, making contributions and placing demands, are not always totally free to come and go. Staff cannot walk out of the door the moment something doesn't satisfy them. Nor can an organization engage in random firing as soon as a management decides on a change of direction. This theoretical approach, however, is useful, particularly if we regard the organization as seeking to attain equilibrium through balancing demands and rewards of different participant groups.

A broadcasters' overall goal, in other words, is not merely to maximize audiences, even if this is an important factor. Our interviews with staff at both CBS, the BBC, and a small local television station in California showed this to be the case. The organization is involved in a constant process of balancing the demands of owners, power centres, professional principles of journalism held by the staff, etc. Strategies are altered as management perceive and react to changes in such balances.

A Swedish researcher, Lars Engvall, used a similar approach when studying how newspapers adapt to changing environments. He studied how publication/editorial policy changed when a newspaper's initial goal of political advocacy evolved as it was becoming a general company (Engvall 1986). He followed strategy changes aimed at providing rewards which would attract and/or retain more readers, noting varying policies on the inclusion of lighter/heavier material, as well as the newspapers' handling of two different types of customers (readers and advertisers).

This is not so different from the organizational dynamics of the news media we have described in previous chapters. Management can oscillate between strategies of *entertaining* and *informing*, depending on how they perceive the demands of the consumer of news programmes (the hunt for consumer loyalty is related both to short-term success and long-term survival). In large broadcast news organizations, periods of what we might term trivialization have often been followed by an emphasis on a more "serious" or



8.1 A broadcasting organization and some participants. A system of demand-rewards relationships seeking equilibrium

“pedagogical” approach. Both CBS Network News and BBC Television News have demonstrated the phenomena of changing policies, not necessarily in terms of a permanent drift, but rather as attempts to adjust the balance of participants’ demands and rewards as the environment changes. This drift in strategies and emphases over time helps explain changes in principles of news selection.

**Technological, economical, and political factors at work in and on the organization**

We can now knit together the complex web of factors that determine the international news gathering, selection and presentation process. From there we can predict opportunities and problems that are likely to develop. We start with

Table 8.1 *Significant technological developments and some of their effects on foreign news gathering, processing, and presentation*

Decade	Changing roles and methods in foreign news gathering
50/60s	Few foreign correspondents but with fixed bases abroad. Use radio correspondents/wire services for news material. Television reports mainly film in the cinema Newsreel tradition. Film freighted to homebase by air. Film cameras and fairly large crews required. Even radio reporters still sometimes have sound engineers who accompany them.
70/80s	Video technology replaces film. Satellite ground stations in 30 per cent of nations by 1972 up to 76 per cent by 1981. Airfreight replaced by satellite links. Telephone lines improved quality, facilitating radio reports from virtually anywhere. Increased opportunities for censorship (pulling the satellite “plug”). Deregulation cuts satellite link costs in the USA and allows for SNG.  Foreign-based correspondents replaced to a certain extent by travelling “firemen” or “super star reporters” using possibility of speedy air travel.  Development of digital techniques for editing and graphic designs. Small, low-cost amateur video equipment comes on the market, allowing news gathering when large crews not possible.  CNN network provides real time coverage of large events; available in most newsrooms. Requires monitoring and editing resources for best use.
90s	Digital development continues. Radio reporters can transmit tape recorder quality reports using broad-band, standard telecommunication links (over the phone not via expensive, unique music quality lines)  Oligopoly of big agencies will use two or three person crews to cover much of the world. Lone reporters with high-quality small video cameras provide more unique film. More “tourist” journalism with pictures taken by travellers/businessmen/diplomats, etc. Portable ground stations facilitate links via satellite from anywhere. Monitoring of television programmes from other countries also facilitated as more use satellites for domestic distribution. More local monitoring and taping of unique local output as part of news borrowing exercises.  Expansion and fragmentation of audiences increases demand on specialist news programmes, with specialist material. Demands on speed of editing increase even further

technology, by charting how foreign news gathering has followed technological developments over time, as well as making some predictions as to likely developments during the next decade.

Technology can both *assist* and *impair* news gathering. A "technological drive" exists, forcing the use of the latest equipment or methods. Much news technology is concerned with speeding up the process of news gathering and selection. Instant access can range from CNN covering a press conference live to local area computer networks (LANs) providing immediate summaries of hot stories and speedy access to the organization's institutional memory. This puts a new sort of pressure on news selection decisions (everybody wants to be first with a news flash) and affects the production process.

After news terminals were introduced to the NPR newsroom in Washington, for example, one of the editors said that journalists tended to concentrate more on spot news and to be less analytical and less willing to move to other, non-terminal-delivered stories as a result. The "newness" of the technology increased its salience. With a high level of competition (everybody watching everybody else), the concentration on *speed* can also lead to journalistic errors. A rumour becomes a fact and starts off a chain reaction.

The rumour that North Korean leader Kim Il Sung had died, which was initiated by a US agency monitoring North Korean radio, virtually became fact and was carried by all in a "follow the leader" fashion in November 1986. With CNN-type non-stop news stations aiming for speed and enjoying a presence in all newsrooms thanks to modern satellite technology, accuracy enters a risky duel with urgency. If one usually reliable source makes an error, false statements can get picked up and spiral. Deadlines and the increased quantity and frequency of news bulletins can enhance the dangers. When things were slower, when it took two days to get reels of film back to the home base, broadcast journalists had more time and opportunity to compare different sources, including the printed press. A foreign correspondent can still get a call which goes like this: "Daniel, there's an interesting piece in this morning's *Guardian*, should we do something on it?" But this happens noticeably less often than in the not too distant past. On the whole, the technology of instant news access seems to be replacing the report-initiating status of the serious press for the broadcast media.

### The false second Chernobyl

On 3 February 1988, at one minute past 3:00 p.m., the Swedish News Agency, TT, sent out a flash that there had been another nuclear power station disaster in the Soviet Union. The story, which had apparently originated in financial circles in London, had come to the attention of the BBC earlier the same morning. They ignored it. The TT flash, however, was picked up by Reuters (with which TT co-operates closely) and soon after, by CNN. According to a Swedish study by the official Board for Psychological Defence, 42 per cent of the Swedes had heard of the false accident with thirty minutes. An hour later, Swedish national radio news was still referring to details of "the Soviet nuclear accident." In the USA, the "rumours swept the market and pushed up the dollar" according to the Reuter's wire.

Some local radio stations in Sweden, however, had what the Swedes idiomatically refer to as "ice in their stomachs." Radio Uppland, in the same region as the Swedish Forsmark nuclear power station, took the precaution of phoning the engineers at Forsmark. It was there that measurements had first indicated the Chernobyl accident in 1986. This time, Forsmark had noticed nothing unusual in its sensitive measuring devices, and Radio Uppland refrained from carrying the accident telegram from TT.

Later, it was suggested that the rumour originated from someone getting access to a series of coded test telexes which the International Atomic Energy Agency (the IAEA) in Vienna had sent to member countries as part of a test of international preparedness for accidents. The IAEA, however, though agreeing that such telexes had been distributed, denied that they included the words "nuclear" or "accident."

### The Arafat-American Jews meeting in Sweden

Yassar Arafat came to Stockholm in December 1988 to meet up with a small group of prominent American Jews and discuss the Palestinian situation. The meeting was unique in many ways; US Jewish organizations had previously dismissed the PLO as a terrorist organization and refused to have any dealings with Arafat. The meeting had been organized by the Swedish Government; few knew at the time that it was acting as a go-between for the US. The actual aim was an attempt to get the

PLO leader to be more specific about his stance on terrorism and Israel's right to exist.

The actual wording of what was said at the final press conference was of crucial political importance. There were some interesting aspects of the technologies used for covering it.

Many radio and press journalists are now issued cellular radio telephones. A representative from one of the major wire services who was at the conference used such a device. When Arafat said something he deemed to be of interest, he would jot it down, move into a corner and ring it into his office (presumably missing what was said while he was phoning). This was the only way he could be expected to work; for him the technology and the situation demanded it. Afterwards there was much discussion on semantics regarding what Arafat had actually said. Different wire services had differing accounts. Different quotes were already circulating in bulletins before those who had recorded the whole conference on tape, the BBC for example, had a chance to select the most relevant statements (those in which Arafat was most specific).

### Opportunities, logistics and that precious commodity, time

John Mahony, BBC Foreign News Editor, discussed another difficulty inherent in new technologies, the problems of using them once you have them. "Television is totally logistics dominated," he said.

Logistics often get in the way of the story. Arrangements for satellite transmissions are very onerous and complicated. That's the big problem in using the technology. When a correspondent has to spend the bulk of the time making arrangements, and is not on the story, then you have a very uncomfortable situation and so does he. Sometimes, we send along a back-up person who just deals with logistics. Even your own portable ground stations which are getting smaller are not always easy to use. Governments are getting more sensitive. We took our ground-to-satellite station to Gibraltar for the IRA inquest (three suspected IRA terrorists were shot there by British security officers in 1988). Even there it took quite a bit of negotiating to get frequencies we could use. ITN had similar problems in the Sudan, when they were there for the flooding; they had a hell of a fight with the authorities to set it up.

Even if satellite news gathering has been developed into a fine art by companies like Conus in the USA, internationally it is far from easy to use, even with your own 800 kilos of ground station equipment and 50 boxes. High-cost technology means high operational costs as well. Mahony estimated the cost of maintaining a film team with a portable satellite up-link for two weeks in the Sudan to be about £35,000.

### Technology and relationships with participant groups

In 1974, Herbert Gans, writing primarily about domestic news in the USA, observed that the news media can be viewed as a communication channel which various interest groups and sub-cultures of American society attempt to fill with news that positively presents their viewpoints and those of their opponents negatively. Whoever gains the most access to this channel secures the best chance to influence the audience (Gans 1974: 39).

In 1989, technology has proved Gans' observations true in the realm of international news reporting. Modern communications technology opens up new ways for participant (i.e., interested) groups to:

- 1 check quickly what the journalists produce
- 2 increase their demands on the news organization or its individual members by offering facilities or threatening sanctions, and
- 3 at times unilaterally affect news output.

Consider this example related by a BBC World Service reporter who was following the Contra-Sandinista peace talks in Managua, Nicaragua, in March 1988. After a press conference he observed the reporters from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* tapping away at their portable computers and then feeding copy via modems over phone lines to the USA. They then retired to the bar for some drinks. An hour or so later, Sandinista officials approached them with telefax copies of their articles, taken from latest editions in New York and faxed back to Managua, and started discussing their contents with them.

Portable computers, phone lines, and fax machines allowed the quick checking of these reporters' work, and that instant evaluation would not have been possible had the authorities not been satisfied with their output. Apparently the Sandinistas were satisfied enough not to unilaterally affect the news; that is,

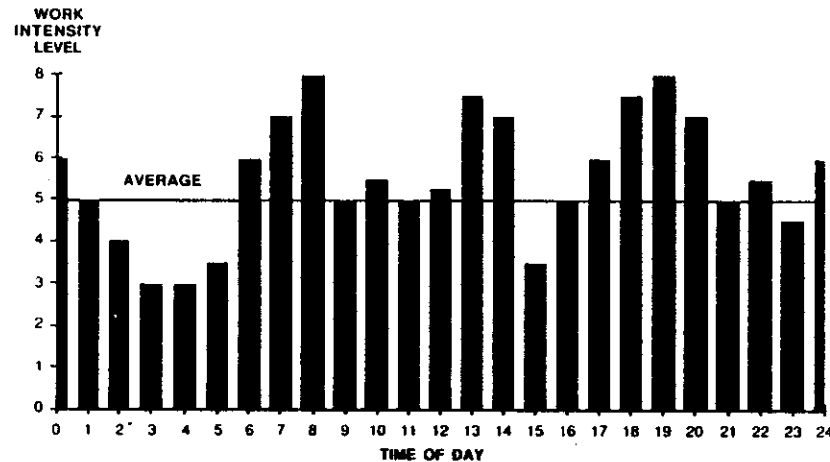
pull the plug on these newsmen. The same was not true, however, for CNN and the American television networks in May 1989. They were in China to cover the historic meeting between Gorbachev and Chinese Communist leaders. That presence soon became an embarrassment to the Chinese government as the massive student demonstrations became the focal point of American coverage. Originally invited to show the world Sino-Soviet friendship, the modern electronic broadcasters had the plug pulled (all satellite up-links were denied them) just as martial law was declared.

**Economic and political factors influencing news selection**

Unless something exceptionally unusual happens, news bulletins on radio and television are on at fixed times. They are the end station of a news-flow process. Their durations are fairly stable; a thirty-minute programme has to be filled with thirty minutes of "news."

All foreign correspondents have heard the phrase, "a slow day," signifying that stories which would not normally raise an eyebrow might get on the air. Sometimes the opposite is true.

With a steady flow of material feeding regular broadcast outlets, decisions on "deadlines" comprise one of the most sensitive points in the selection and production process. Ideally,



8.2 A steady flow of news through the production process includes periods of high intensity preparing for bulletins

final decisions on the make-up of a newscast should be made as late as the technology and editorial work allows. This provides the flexibility to be "first with the news." But an urge to be first can lead to less than perfect decisions as far as fact checking is concerned. Because the deadline decisions have to be made, the organization becomes somewhat vulnerable to influences from outside.

A common trick of "news management," for example, is to feed a good story or tip to a news organization as near the deadline decision time as possible. Swedish radio faced this problem in covering the issue of possible illegal arms deliveries from the Bofors company to countries banned for Swedish military exports. The story had been something of an ongoing saga throughout the 1980s, but came to a head in 1987 when Swedish Radio disclosed that money had been paid by Bofors to numbered accounts in Swiss banks in connection with a billion-dollar deal for field-guns to India. A grass-roots peace organization in Sweden that had spent most of the decade trying to expose more about sales of Swedish arms to forbidden places, then took upon itself the task of feeding Swedish Radio with more news (much of it gleaned from moles within Bofors and the Civil Service). Their enthusiasm and clever use of publicity led to a minor conflict with some of the journalists at Swedish Radio, but not because they were opposed to the disclosures: they simply resented being manipulated.

Two senior radio news reporters claimed that the Swedish peace organization in question had "cleverly utilized every opportunity in a situation which placed the organization in the center of things." Press conferences were held and new "disclosures" were released shortly before main newscasts on radio and television. This made it impossible for the broadcasters to thoroughly or even sufficiently check the peace organization's claims (Remdahl and Mosander 1987: 16). The reporters also claimed that internal competition between different news programmes had led to representatives from the peace organization receiving financial rewards for exclusive news items. They never maintained that the information was incorrect, merely that the situation, exploiting a weakness in the production process, was not acceptable.

**Big stories interrupting the steady flow of news**

The steady-flow model (with certain ups and downs) can, of course, be interrupted by a sudden event which is deemed particularly newsworthy. The death of a Prime Minister at the hands of an assassin, for example, would totally disrupt the picture above.

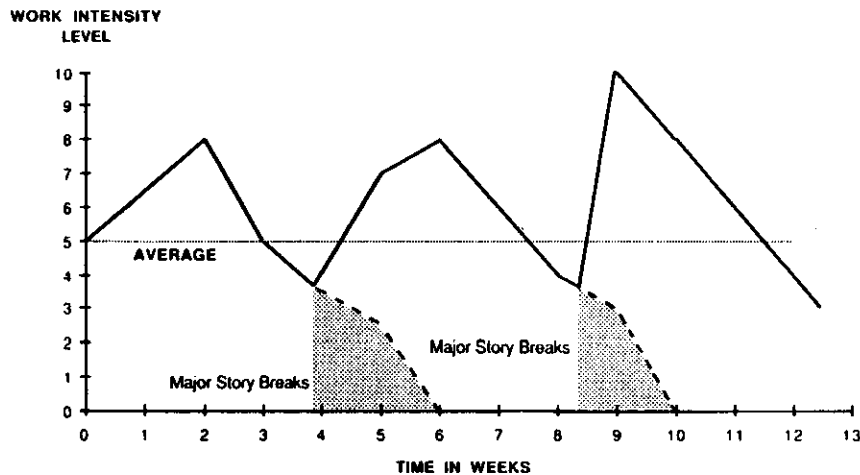
Over a longer period of time, the bigger news events do produce peaks of intensity in the news gathering and presentation process. The organizational problem here is that a new peak (a new important story) can take over before another one has been completed. This creates a somewhat schizophrenic situation. To move from an on-going story to a new, fast-breaking one is like reading a detective story with the last page ripped out. But journalists cannot ignore the next major event.

Organizational changes within news organizations can also affect news flow priorities. BBC television is starting up specialist units, the majority of which are concerned primarily with domestic issues. This could impinge on the relative importance of foreign news in the flow. John Mahony expressed this concern,

My worry is getting my second foreign line story on; it will always lose out to a good home story. That's a worry with the trend towards specialization. If we've got all these home specialists pitching good stories, there will be less time for my good and worthwhile story from abroad.

Foreign News Editor Mahony's primary concern may be the exclusion of foreign news items, but embedded in his lament is a second problem of flow, the sheer amount of foreign news. Our study of the relative importance of foreign news (as opposed to domestic) in chapter 7 showed that foreign news items, as a rule, were shorter than domestic ones. On television, they are often bundled together in a few short bursts, with pictures to suit. An up-tempo collage of foreign news visuals adds to the slickness of a television bulletin. It adds drama, a sense of urgency, and gives the impression that a professional job has been done. It gives the "around the world in 30 seconds" feeling. Style tends to dominate; the substance becomes almost irrelevant. In such an environment, the serious broadcasters, wishing to provide analysis, endeavouring to give the viewer time to digest the significance of the items, have a tough task ahead.

We were in Kuwait in February of 1988 and watched, of course, the local evening television news. Much of the foreign content (and there was a substantial amount) was clearly semi-edited material from the major agencies. One item concerned a major pile-up on an icy, foggy Dutch motorway. The filmed story ran for almost two-and-a-half minutes (an eternity in television news). But a minute into the drama we began to study the material in a different fashion. It wasn't just another multiple accident. There were all the different aspects: the human suffering, the cost, the inefficiency, the dangers involved in such modes of transport under such weather conditions. It was an interesting and unusual media experience, one which would have been impossible in a high-tempo, slick "headline news" type of broadcast. Such a use of video material in TV News becomes less likely as the debate on blood and violence (fictional and real) in the small screen progresses. New BBC producers' guidelines, for instance, stress that TV News should not linger too long on pictures which are likely to cause distress to the viewers.



8.3 Unpredictable major events lead to peaks of intensity. Sometimes newpeaks "take over" before details referring to the previous peak have been processed. The shaded area requires resource reserves for the sake of continuity and clarity

**A model for news flow**

The selection of news items and the choice of mode of presentation is carried out by members of organizations, that is, human beings. They have personal feelings about what is important in the same way as their organizations have norms and traditions governing their relative priorities. Outside the organization there are also groups and interested parties holding their own values and looking to apply them.

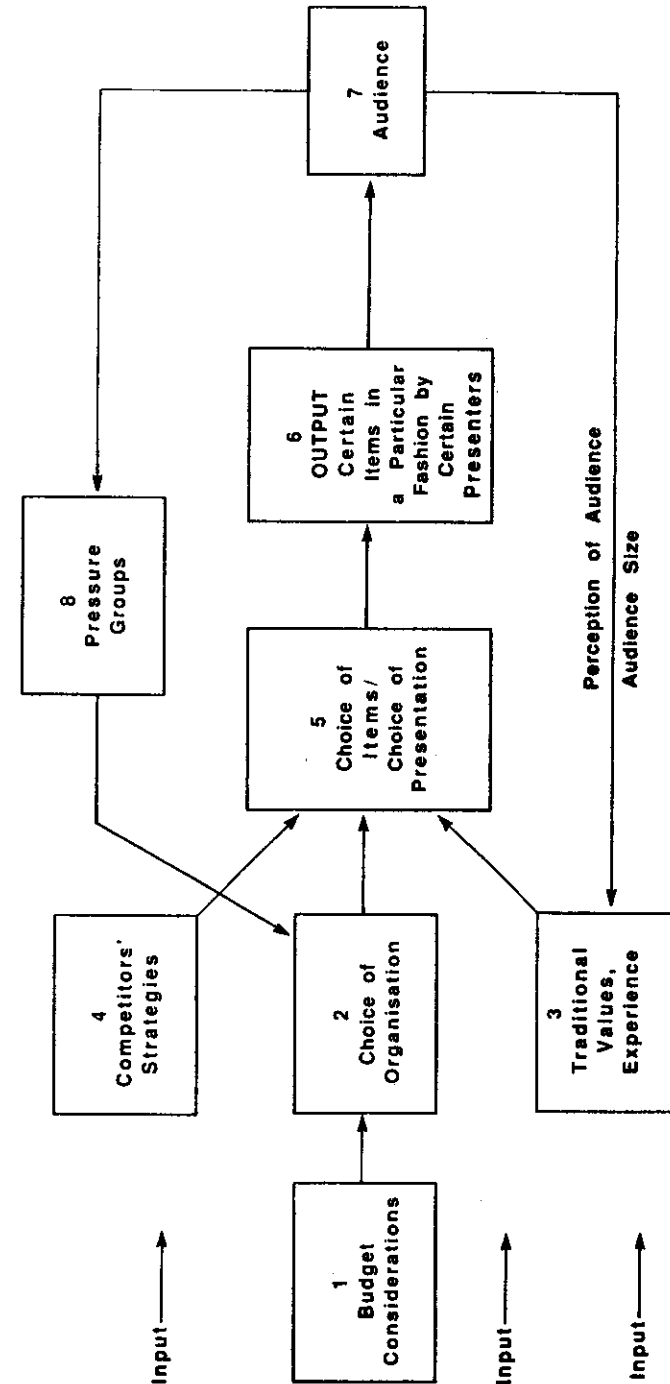
The resulting output is in part a result of interaction between different personal beliefs, collective norms and external pressures. The stronger the news organization is in terms of such factors as audience support, financial independence, and institutional cohesion, the less the selection process will be affected by complaints or pressures from interested outside participant groups.

The following diagram illustrates the types of influences and decisions which characterize a news organization's handling of the information it receives about the changeable world it seeks to describe.

Budget considerations (1) fix an overall frame of reference for the operation of the news organization. The actual structure (2) the organization develops (number and type of staff, number of foreign correspondents and their location, co-operation with other news gathering agencies, etc.), is based on a combination of factors. These include past experience, the traditions and expertise which the organization has developed (3) as well as input from the competitive environment (4), what the opposition does or is thought to be thinking of doing. The organization which is created (2) then gets on with the business of choice of subjects to be covered (5), thus triggering further news gathering and a choice of how each subject or item shall be covered and presented.

All the way along, the process is guided by those formal and informal rules which society as a whole applies (the legal framework, libel and other laws, respect for and expectations of the press and media). The competitive environment (4) also plays a particular role; some events become "must-carry" stories, simply because everyone else is giving them exposure.

The actual choice of items and the choice of treatment (5) are obviously related to what is actually happening in the world, but it is also tied to priorities set in the news organization. One BBC



8.4 Newsflow in terms of decision-making and strategy

seminar agreed that "stories are sometimes overplayed, but it was also pointed out that the newsroom does not set priorities. Human Rights was an issue under the Carter presidency because of President Carter, not because of the Newsroom" (Buerk *et al.* 1988).

The audience also plays a role in the process (7), partly directly through measurements of audience size but also indirectly, via the organization's perception of audience expectations and interests. Pressure groups (8) emerge which can affect not only the choice of items and their presentation (5, 6), but, if they are powerful enough, even the choice of organization (2).

### Collective and individual norms of the news broadcasters

Whether the organization and its members' perceptions of that audience are correct or not is immaterial. The fact is, they contribute to the general norms and values of the staff. Perceptions of the audience may make only a small contribution to those norms. Other norms, developed within the organization, reflecting the collective and individual values of the newspeople, certainly contribute more. The newsroom, for instance, collectively develops rules for what to cover. "People with headphones on don't make good television," one local television news producer in the States said, explaining why he was not enthusiastic about covering debates in the UN, even when they concerned the USA. Group norms also affect the news gathering process abroad. The tougher the task, the more likely foreign journalists are to co-operate, pooling information and sometimes dividing up different story lines, though the latter is more common among printed-press journalists on competing papers.

Radio and television reporters working in Moscow, for instance, have traditionally lived a very cloistered life, establishing security through internal co-operation. This reality tends to produce a streamlining of output. The same can be said for Eastern block journalists working in the West. They tend to stay within their own groups, relating closely to their embassies. Once again, *perestroika* can slowly change this equation.

That difficulties in gathering foreign news lead to increased journalistic co-operation among correspondents stationed together is obvious from this Kenyan example. Most of the foreign media representatives in Kenya have their offices in the same corridor of the same building in central Nairobi. BBC stringer Lindsey Hilsum observed that,

Other journalists passing through are sometimes surprised at how much we do collaborate with each other. I think it's vital, simply because it's so difficult to get any information out of anybody. Getting anything out of Government is really getting blood from stone. If you do get anything, you will obviously want to get in first, but then you will want to share it. So much of it is luck rather than skill. If you've been lucky, you tend to share because it works the other way as well. Obviously you check out the information as far as possible, but it's the same here as anywhere else; you know who the good journalists are. You know who not to trust as well. The local papers, for instance, are the seed of many stories, but you never take them as truth.

Collective norms not only affect selection, they impact modes of processing and presenting news as well. The news gatherers and processors develop standards for describing different phenomena which sometimes can act as a bias against understanding in the audience. The journalists' shorthand habit of labelling actors in the news and their choice of vocabulary become important elements of their presentations, as this example from the BBC South Africa seminar shows:

It was also felt that there were problems over vocabulary, the meaning of *nationalist* or *Conservative*, particularly in specific cases. . . . In the Crossroads squatter's camp, those opposed to the UDF-supported vigilantes might more accurately be described as "elderly and middle-aged gangsters, running protection rackets while fed and protected by the South African security forces." There was no consensus over labelling except to say that it was useful but frequently misleading, especially in terms of blacks. (Buerk *et al.* 1988)

Collective norms and actions of journalists can even lead to situations where they create uniform expectations when presenting forthcoming events, and, in some cases, make sure that those expectations are satisfied (irrespective of actual courses of events). The media, in other words, can mould reality. We propose that the tendency to do this is greater with foreign than with domestic news events, since a) immediate response to inaccuracies is less common – foreign authorities trying to redress inaccuracies are less likely to have an impact than domestic authorities – and b) collecting correct information is often harder in a foreign country than at home. The visit of some

English football fans to the Swedish capital in September 1989 presents a good example.

*Football "Riots" in Stockholm 1989*

"WAR IN STOCKHOLM" was the headline in some of the British tabloids the day after England and Sweden drew in a World Cup qualifying match on Wednesday, 6 September 1989. Even radio, television and the serious press gave an impression of a devastated city, although there was not a single picture to show actual damage or even personal injuries. The impression the general public must have got, both in Britain and Sweden, as well as the rest of Europe, was that English football hooligans were at it again, causing trouble, ruining the game, and Britain's reputation. Comparing the reporting with the facts as they emerged in retrospect raises some interesting points.

In response to previous problems involving English fans at European matches, the English Football Association had refused to sell any tickets to British fans for this away game, saying that all tickets had been sold in Sweden. This manoeuvre was intended to deter fans, in particular those classified loosely as "football hooligans," from going to Stockholm. Some diehards did make the trip to Scandinavia. A few hundred bought tickets to the match which were freely available through ticket agencies in the Swedish capital.

The game was on a Wednesday evening. Reports started filling the European news media on Monday 4 September, with accounts of several hundred fans rampaging on a ferry bound for Gothenburg on Sweden's west coast. The ferry had to return to its English port, Harwich, where a large police reception committee was waiting. *Facts:* there was some rowdy behaviour on the boat, though many passengers noticed little more than the return to port. In one serious incident a passenger fell overboard and drowned. Manslaughter or murder was suspected; this was why the ferry turned back to England. At the end of the week, only 50 football fans arrived in Gothenburg to take the ferry back to the UK. Assuming that most outward passengers would have bought cheap return tickets, then reports of several hundred fans on board rioting would seem to be a clear exaggeration.

By Tuesday, radio and TV media in Britain were reporting that fans had been arrested in Stockholm for fighting and would

appear in court to face charges. On Wednesday, the day of the match, journalists in Stockholm were quoting the number of English fans as high as 2,000. A bus had been overturned – some said it had been set on fire. The soccer hooligans had charged into a large downtown department store and looted its contents. There was media consensus that there had been no trouble inside the ground, even though those English fans who had not managed to get tickets had been allowed in by Swedish officials. After the match, which ended in an uneventful draw, a uniform media reported that fullscale warfare had ensued in central Stockholm involving the police, and English and Swedish soccer fans. Damage to property was said to be considerable. Several hundred Brits had been arrested. Official British government reaction was swift. Mrs Thatcher expressed concern, demanding that hooligans should be resolutely dealt with. The Sports Minister asked the English FA to cancel a match against Holland planned for later that year (which they did). And when the Swedes released all the fans without bringing any charges, concern was expressed in London that Sweden had given a mass amnesty to hooligans who deserved to be punished. A week later, the British Home Secretary announced the creation of a new special police force for dealing with football hooliganism, citing, according to a report in the *Independent* (12 September 1989) "Last week's events in Stockholm" as reinforcing "the need for a unit such as this".

*Facts:*

- A small group of fans who congregated near Stockholm's central station did behave in a fairly offensive, and particularly noisy fashion. Their deviance included drinking lots of beer (though complaining about the price) and testing out the reaction of the average Stockholmer to swear words and annoying gestures (Nazi signs and the like). Many Swedes on their way home from work probably were frightened by this unusual sight. But no bus was turned over. No windows were broken.
- The manager of the big store which was said to have been looted said afterwards that he had experienced no trouble whatsoever. A group of English youths had passed by, but had not tried to enter the store. Possibly one or two pedestrians might have been "bumped into."
- Of the total of 283 persons who were temporarily detained by

the police, 181 were Swedes, most of whom admitted they had gone along to see some action. There were no regular arrests on the day of the match. The police – almost 500 of them in riot gear – applied the controversial Swedish “temporary detention law.” This allows an officer to detain a person in custody for a few hours without filing charges if there are reasonable grounds for believing that the suspect would otherwise disturb the peace. English fans interviewed on Swedish TV after their release from police cells gave the impression of being sheepish, embarrassed adolescents rather than thuggish hooligans. Many complained that they had been provoked by jeers from Swedish counterparts.

- The day after the night before left *no* traces of a war in Stockholm. The City Works and Roads Department confirmed that there had been no mess to clear up. Their biggest problem had been to help close off certain streets because the police expected trouble.
- A British diplomat who had been liaising with the police summed it up: “the media came here looking for a story; they made sure they got one.” The same diplomat estimated that the total number of fans who travelled to Sweden was well under 500, possibly as low as 300. Journalists quoting estimates in the thousands must have either been in the world of fantasy, or had failed to note that some 11,000 British citizens live in Sweden, mostly in Stockholm – many went to the match. The Swedish Minister for Home Affairs told Swedish radio that he had discussed the events of the week with his British colleague who wanted assurances that no amnesty had been granted to troublemakers. The British Government, he said, did not seem to be aware of the use by the police of preventive detention, allowed under Swedish Law.

Why was the reporting from Stockholm so out of proportion to what really happened? Several facts could have been checked; a phone call to the big store confirmed that they had not been looted. The local bus company confirmed that they had not lost a bus. The Works department’s number is in the phone book. It’s good to have at least a rough understanding of the law when reporting on police actions in a foreign country. Few of the visiting journalists seemed to be aware that Swedish police can apprehend a person even if a crime has not been committed, i.e. merely on the suspicion that a misdemeanour is intended or

likely to occur. The police used this to defuse the situation, a fact the British embassy in Stockholm made clear to anyone who asked.

Was the reason that much of the reporting was done by sports reporters whose real job was to talk about football, but who have become hooligan specialists? If so, why didn’t the checks and balances function back home? One slightly mitigating circumstance should be mentioned. Reporters in Stockholm and desk staff back in London were somewhat misled (or rather, allowed their expectations to be confirmed) by statements from Swedish police spokespersons, who *also* seemed to be caught up in the euphoria of the media-high. The police gladly confirmed the seriousness of the situation, even though they were not capable of quantifying exactly the extent of any damage to persons or property (there wasn’t any). Swedish police interviewed by journalists also seemed to be unaware of the need to distinguish between the words “detain” and “arrest.” Despite this, it is amazing that checks, balances, and standard practices of inquisitive journalism did not lead to correct reporting.

The sequence of events outlined here is not unique in media history. In fact it’s almost a carbon copy of the observations of those who studied phenomena such as media coverage of riots in the 60s between the so-called “Mods” and “Rockers” in Britain. Stanley Cohen wrote in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972: 162):

If one is in a group of twenty, being stared at by hundreds of adults and being pointed at by two or three cameras, the temptation to do something – even if only to shout an obscenity, make a rude gesture or throw a stone – is very great and is made greater by the knowledge that one actions will be recorded for others to see.

There were plenty of examples of this in Stockholm. Other parallels can be drawn. Cohen describes how the British media exaggerated out of all proportion the devastation of the seaside resort of Brighton after Mods and Rockers moved in during the Whitsun holiday in 1964. Actual damage was later estimated to £400, and costs for police overtime to £2,000. In Stockholm, damage caused by the fans was negligible – the police action cost £50,000 (or \$90,000). Stanley Cohen shows how the media, in such situations of deviant behaviour, tend to amplify that deviance by a) creating expectations and b) exaggerating reports

of deviance. Control systems (e.g. police presence and actions) also unintentionally, but inevitably contribute to this amplification effect. Even though the actual numbers of deviants, or to be more precise, ringleaders, might be very small, the parameters of the system involve the majority. The whole thing becomes a vicious circle. To paraphrase Cohen's flow process (Cohen 1972: 143): initial deviance leads to an inventory stage (what are the characteristics of the deviance?), followed by sensitization. The public identifies the stereotype hooligan. The latter two phases feed back on each other to produce an *over-estimation* of the deviance, often with the help of the media. This produces an escalation in the control culture (societal control via police actions, administrative regulations, etc.) which in turn can serve to amplify the deviance. The media's role here, as a catalyst – via exaggerated reports and rumour spreading – was patently obvious in Stockholm during that first week of September 1989. Surprisingly, even the "quality" media (electronic and print), both Swedish and British, were caught up in this process when reporting on English soccer fans in Sweden. The rumour that a big store had been blasted by the fans apparently originated in the afternoon radio magazine programme, *After 3* (see our earlier chapter on Swedish Radio). It became fact and was even printed as such in Sweden's largest morning daily the next day. Swedish foreign correspondents stationed in Britain managed to introduce a new term into the Swedish language, "Hooliganer" (= "hooligans") to describe English soccer fans. Swedish youths also learned what the media expected of them and did their best to comply.

In conclusion to this contemporary media story we can but note that history repeats itself. In 1972, Stanley Cohen rounded off his book on the Mods and Rockers riots with the telling prediction that the ways in which moral panics are produced and disseminated by the media do not date. Stockholm was another example of what can happen when the starlings on the wire all fly off, blindly following any directions they can get from a rumoured leader. In Stockholm, group dynamics in the foreign correspondent collective (albeit with a few sports reporters included) overruled demands of responsibility and restraint.

The regular BBC reporter in Stockholm (Roger Wallis) was out of town for the first two days of this drama. He took over reporting in the early hours of the morning after the match. A last report out of Stockholm read as follows:

Official figures are now available for the number of people detained by Stockholm police in their bid to thwart disturbances among football supporters in the City centre. Of the 283 taken into temporary custody, only 102 were British. All were held for a few hours and then released. No charges have been brought. The police say that most of the minor scuffles between English and Swedish supporters were provoked by Swedish youths trying to pick a fight. There is no evidence to confirm earlier reports of English soccer fans looting in stores and vandalising property. The general impression one gets in Stockholm is that the so-called riot was more a figment of the imagination than real. Nervousness, an enormous police presence of at least one officer per visiting English fan and expectations of trouble explain the many detentions. Rowdy English fans drinking copious amounts of strong beer certainly frightened the people of Stockholm. There was no riot or vandalism.

This was the final report filed to the BBC from Stockholm, on Friday 8 September. Over the weekend, the British government finalized plans for a special intelligence unit within the police to deal with football hooligans. Events in Stockholm, as we have noted, were quoted as a reason for the urgency of this move.

#### From collective to individual norms affecting news selection

Individuals in institutions not only are aware of the organization's commonly held norms, but they also have personal feelings about a whole range of worldly issues. Hetherington (1985: 21) observed, "Journalists may often be unaware of the way their own social or personal backgrounds affect their judgements or their phrasing." Indeed, a hermetic sealing off from personal emotions and commitments would be an inhuman demand on reporters; it is an impossibility. Where issues are contentious, personal feelings are likely to impinge on the selection/presentation process to a greater degree.

Apartheid, specifically, or racism in general is an obvious such area. Hanging and/or the death penalty is another. A third, the Palestinian issue, offers us an illuminating story concerning a reporter who was filing for a US news programme on statements made by Yassir Arafat about the PLO's position on terrorism. An

editor's strong emotional tie to the State of Israel clashed with his report. Our reporter had referred to Arafat's refusal to condemn the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories (Ghaza/West Bank) in his report from the Stockholm meeting between the PLO leader and a group of American Jews. The item had been recorded. A few minutes later, the US newsroom phoned back and one of the intake editors asked for a re-read with a few changes in the script. One request was for the replacement of the words "Arafat refused to condemn the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories" with "Arafat refused to condemn acts of violence against Israeli officials in the occupied territories." When the correspondent remonstrated, complaining that this was not what Arafat had actually said, he heard, "I know, but I have a senior colleague who feels very strongly about this and it would help get them off my back!"

Out in the field, of course, foreign correspondents have to have strong faith in what they are doing. Life can be difficult. Tales of danger, harassment, and loneliness abound. Foreign reporters rely heavily on moral support not only from the collective at home (Hammerberg 1981) but they are forced to draw strength from their own commitment to their craft. People like Kate Adie, sitting in a Tripoli hotel, waiting for American bombs to fall about her can't let fear intervene. They need an almost insatiable curiosity.

Lindsey Hilsum, the BBC stringer in Nairobi, went to the University one morning in 1988 when Kenyan students were protesting. "I heard there were demonstrations at the University and the students were throwing stones," she recounted,

so I went up there, arriving before the rest of the journalists because I got a lift. I went round the back and found some students to interview. While I was showing them my ID card to prove who I was, the police arrived. The students ran off and I ran to the side and hid behind a wall (not wishing to be amongst students being chased by the police; I could have got shot). Basically I was just trying to get out of the way of the police running after the students. I crouched down but the police spotted me and four or five of them came up and started beating me with heavy clubs. I just started shouting, "I'm a journalist, you can't do this to me, I work for the BBC," which was rather a pathetic thing to say when there's five enormous men bashing you with clubs. Eventually they stopped, arrested me and took me in for three hours of questioning.



10 Lindsey Hilsum, BBC reporter who was beaten up by Kenyan police during student demonstrations. "It's just like falling off a horse. You just get back on again," was her reason for returning to Kenya after the incident

The injuries Lindsey sustained led to complaints from the BBC, the British High Commissioner and various journalist organizations. A Kenyan "enquiry" led nowhere. The President of that country later implied that there was something fishy about journalists knowing about the students' riots and that it was their own fault for being there (three other foreign journalists were also arrested). After the event, Lindsey Hilsum left Kenya for a while, but then returned. Her reasoning, "It's like falling off a horse. You just get on again."

#### Balancing demands and rewards

Technological, economic, and political factors affect news selection as we've seen. Now we need to return to the issue of how this relates to the organization's survival strategy when confronted by different demands from different participant groups. Strong audience support (high ratings/large income) offers insulation from outside pressure groups hoping to affect selection. It can also lead to a sense of "over security," producing an air of

paternalism, verging, at times on *arrogance*. This is when rumours don't get properly checked and fiction finds it easy to become fact.

So emboldened, journalists are sometimes tempted to bend the rule of faithfully reporting reality (even as they see it) in the hunt for a "good story." Here's a BBC anecdote, related by Ann Sloman from her days with a television documentary unit.

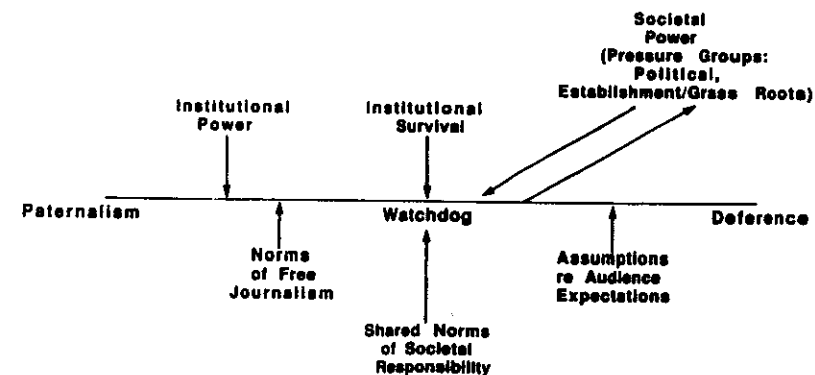
I remember a reporter who went out to do a story about private old people's homes in Eastbourne. He got down there and wanted to cover a funeral where nobody came. He got down too late. In fact there had been relations, one or two, there. After they had gone, he bribed the undertakers to dig up the coffin and stage it. I remember him coming back and telling this story. Everyone else was roaring with laughter. I thought it was so wicked. But that was an atmosphere that prevailed, an atmosphere of arrogance.

The opposite situation no doubt can develop, where editors shun sensitive stories, where outside pressure groups increase their influence, where the institution fears for its survival, and where a state of deference characterizes news selection. Most news organizations exist between these two extremes, but where they sit on the continuum varies with time, according to perceived (feared) and actual (available sanctions) participant demands.

Models such as this lead inevitably to semantic problems. Paternalism might be seen by some as arrogance, deference as subservience. Even the term "watchdog" is not without problems. BBC Head of Editorial development Richard Ayre said, "I don't like the term 'watchdog.' It suggests consumerism. I prefer 'reportage.' We are merely there to observe what others do. We don't have a mission to improve the world. It's up to others to set standards."

In a situation where a news organization has experienced strong pressure from political groups, categorical statements like this become understandable. A second BBC editor put it more pointedly, "This place isn't in the mood for taking any chances at the moment."

Politicians, as we have noted in countless previous examples, assume an interesting role in this scenario of demands and rewards. They have responsibilities, ambitions to be re-elected, opportunities to use the broadcast media for their own messages,



8.5 The pressure model. A strong institution provides a shield against various pressure groups. In practice there are movements along the scale, reflected in news selection/presentation resulting from competing participant demands as well as the technological and competitive environment

and specific and often powerful sanctions that can be applied.

Michael Grade, Head of the UK's fourth television network, Channel 4, for example, suggests that the current fragmentation and deregulation fervour in Britain can be related to government's mistrust of strong, national broadcast media. In a 1989 interview on Swedish television he admitted, "Part of it is technology-led. With all the satellites and other inventions, change has to be managed, after all there are still limited frequency spectra." But, according to the Channel 4 boss, deregulation/fragmentation also provides benefits to any government, not just Mrs Thatcher's.

It provides a wider range of views and filters through which the government's policies are questioned and put under the microscope. . . the more it (that scrutiny) is fragmented, the less powerful they think it will be. They also have a false perception of the media. All we do in fact is communicate. But they are politicians, concerned with getting re-elected. Somehow the unelected electronic media seem to be in their way most of the time. They rather despise us and would do anything to neutralise our power. One way to do that is to have a lot more broadcasting channels. Most politicians would be much happier if TV was a medium of entertainment and didn't do news and current affairs.

In terms of the pressure model, Grade might have argued that

the politicians' enthusiasm for fragmentation of the media is designed to move it toward the right pole of the model; that is, toward deference.

Campaigns against the electronic media, symbolized overtly by verbal attacks from the likes of the Helmes and the Irvines in the USA or Mr Tebbit and other ardent BBC monitors in the UK, all have their effect. Sometimes, one is surprised by the magnitude of the disturbances they create. The former British Conservative party Chairman, Norman Tebbit (active in the Libya story chronicled earlier in this chapter), launched a new attack on the BBC in February 1990, for using the word 'conservative' to describe, among others, those in the Kremlin opposed to *perestroika*. His inference was that this was a plot to miscredit those with a conservative political label in general. In a Tebbit talk to students at Oxford University (reported generally in the British press, e.g., the *Independent*, 22 February 1990), BBC journalists were referred to in terms of "insufferable, smug, sanctimonious, naive, guilt-ridden, wet, pink orthodoxy of that sunset home of the third-rate minds of that third-rate decade, the 1960s." Even if criticism of the BBC's use of the word 'conservative' can easily be dismissed by simply referring the critic to any good dictionary, such attacks do indeed function as disturbances. They reflect the desire of different power groups to both tame and utilize the power of the news media, tending to produce a move along the scale of our pressure model, unless the news organization in general, and management in particular, feel they have enough institutional strength to stand firm.

The pressure model embodies a number of assumptions. The right-left scale is *spatial*, and not related to the right/left of traditional political analysis; both right-wing conservatism and left-wing totalitarianism can seek the subservience of the media. Our pressure model proposes that the greater the power of various external groups (political, business, grass-roots/popular movements), the more to the right on the scale news media organizations will find themselves; unless, of course, there is significant external pressure for the development or maintenance of high standards of journalistic independence; unless, of course, what those groups mean by journalistic independence is coverage deferential to their own views. Thus, two arrows on the model's right extremity.

Power centres can manipulate or exert pressure on the news

organization by applying sanctions (governments can review franchises, pass laws limiting journalists' freedom, etc.), overt pressure (letter campaigns), or through more covert news management. The latter tactic is becoming more common. News management can be positive (supplying news, but in a form satisfactory to the giver) or negative (restricting access to information except under the giver's terms). As we observed in a previous chapter, the official civil servant spokesman who gave little, but reasonably accurate information is being replaced by the PR Officer with tons of information, all couched in terms intended for maximum selfish benefit.

A number of internal factors also affect the organization's position on the scale at various times. Norms of free journalism will exert pressure to move it toward the left on the scale, towards greater independence. Assumptions about audience expectations, as a rule, can be expected to push to the right (not wishing to offend or shock listeners and viewers). Norms of social responsibility – seeing itself as the responsible monitor of society – will support a more central position.

The concept of broadcast news organizations constantly changing their positions on the spatial left-right scale of our pressure model is a useful aid to understanding developments, particularly during periods of turmoil and realignment. Other parallel spatial scales can be linked to our model. When an organization is more to the left (strong and independent) then it will tend to build up permanent resources (both staff and equipment). When not so sure of itself and its future, i.e. when moving to the right in a period of realignment, the organization will tend to rely more on freelancers and short-term contracts. Rather than building up its own technical production resources, it will tend to purchase services from outside suppliers, thus increasing its flexibility and (as the management perceive it) its means of withstanding pressures from outside in the future. Such developments have been clearly noticeable in the BBC, the US networks, and Swedish radio and television over the past few years.

The static, two-dimensional nature of the printed picture of our model might seem to imply a worst case scenario, where media, even those with strong libertarian ideologies, move inexorably through a phase of social responsibility toward an organizational positioning that leaves them vulnerable to influence by strong, authoritarian power centres. But technology also offers a more

optimistic view of the media's development. The schizophrenic combination of internationalization (a few large international news suppliers closely interlinked) and localization (a multitude of smaller and/or independent broadcasters employing low cost technology or small elements of high technology) could produce just the opposite movement.

News might develop like the popular music industry has. A few large companies now provide the resources and technology for the international flow of recorded music. But they cannot monopolize it all. A plethora of small and/or independent producers is constantly active, occasionally using services provided by the giants, taking the risks in the market-place, and giving exposure to new and different content, content that the Bigs could not and would not touch (Wallis and Malm 1984).

In our epilogue we will touch on further parallels between broadcast news and the music media, including some of the varied conclusions such a comparison necessarily produces. One prediction can be made here, however; it will be the medium-sized, public service broadcasters and the larger independents with resources to invest in international news gathering that can be expected to produce the most unusual and adventurous forays into foreign news reporting. They will have the greatest need to develop unique, specific competences. The Bigs will be too involved in maintaining their status quo *vis-à-vis* competitors and other participant groups. On a lower level of magnitude, there will always be small, shoe-string budget operators interested primarily in minimizing costs and therefore buying their foreign news material from the cheapest sources.