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The Role of the News Media in Unequal Political Conflicts: From the *Intifada* to the Gulf War and Back Again

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THE ROLE OF THE NEWS MEDIA IN UNEQUAL POLITICAL CONFLICTS: From the *Intifada* to the Gulf War and Back Again

The role of the news media in political conflicts is a topic that has received more public attention than academic study. Discussions of this issue have themselves become a routine part of news stories and public discussions about such conflicts. The discourse often centers on such issues as the need for security versus the public's right to know or whether or not the news media reports the news or creates it. The most recent examples of this phenomenon can be found by noting the amount of public debate which surrounded media coverage of the Falklands, Grenada, the student uprising in China, the massive protests throughout the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising), and the Gulf War.

Social scientists have generated very little theory on this issue. This scarcity can be attributed, at least in part, to artificial distinctions that have been created by studying different forms of conflict. The role of the media has been looked at in reference to protest (Gamson, 1990; Gitlin, 1980; Goldenberg, 1975; Lipsky 1970; Olien, Tichenor, and Donohue 1989; Wolfsfeld, 1984a, 1984b), terrorism (for reviews see: Alexander, 1990; Paletz, 1991; Picard and Sheets, 1987a, 1987b), and war (Gannett, 1991; Gervasi, 1982; Glasgow University Media Group 1985; Hallin, 1987, 1986, 1984; Knightly, 1975; Mandelbaum, 1982; Patterson, 1984; Twentieth Century Fund, 1985) but there has been no serious attempt to develop a theory which could offer a more general view of the issue.

There are at least two necessary conditions for achieving a broader perspective on the role of the news media in political conflicts. The first is the development of a theoretical model that explains how the role of the media varies among and within different types of conflict. Secondly, we need a growing list of case studies that allows us to offer comparative evidence about the strengths and weaknesses of that model.

The goal of this piece is to show how the role of the news media changes over time and circumstances. The major research question which will guide the discussion is as follows: Under what conditions are the news media most likely to play an independent role in political conflicts? The answer to this question, it will be argued, is best answered by employing a *transactional model* (Wolfsfeld, 1991) which focusses on changes in the interactions between antagonists and the news media.

The theoretical discussion in this piece will focus more specifically on *unequal political conflicts*, which are defined as those public confrontations between a government and at least one other antagonist and in which the state (or one of the states) has a significantly superior amount of coercive resources at its disposal. A great many conflicts fall under this category including protests, terrorist acts, riots, revolutions (both successful and attempted), and all-out war between a powerful country and a weaker one.

The first part of our discussion will attempt to outline the basic principles of the model. The transactional model will then be used in three case studies to explain the changing role of the press in three recent conflicts in the Middle East. This part of the argument will start by considering the role of the news media in the *intifada*, and then move on to look at the role of the press in two facets of the Gulf War: the major conflict between the United States and Iraq and the less conspicuous but nonetheless revealing confrontation between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The plan is to use these three cases to illustrate the advantages of employing a transactional model as a means of explaining how the role of the press changes over time and circumstance.

Some Initial Principles

The role of the news media in unequal conflicts can be better understood if we begin by considering the strategic needs of the two sides. The weaker side in the conflict—the challenger—must find a means of bringing third parties into the conflict on its side in order to create a more equal balance of power. "If a fight starts, watch the crowd," Schattschneider (1960) advised us more than 30 years ago. The scope of the conflict, he observed, frequently changes

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during its course and the introduction and subtraction of players alters the power relations among the contestants. Where the scope is narrow, the weaker party has much to gain and little to lose by broadening the scope, drawing third parties into the conflict as mediators or partisans.

The news media, especially in recent years, often play a critical role in this process; they are often the only means for bringing the case of the weaker side to other parties. In order to accomplish this, the challenger must successfully promote its frames of the conflict to the news media (Gamson and Stuart, 1992; Ryan, 1991). Once the issue is on the pubic agenda, it puts pressure on third parties to respond.

The more powerful side in such conflicts approaches the news media from a somewhat different strategic perspective. Powerful governments often attempt to dominate the informational environment in order to either neutralize the role of the news media by keeping the conflict off the public agenda or in more serious challenges to insure that the official voice drowns out all others. In these cases, which may be the rule rather than the exception, the conflict usually takes its natural course, with the powerful defeating the weak.

Thus, when the news media, by choice or by compulsion, adopt the frame being promoted by the more powerful antagonist, they are less likely to play a central role in unequal political conflicts. As an analogy one can consider a conflict between a rich landlord and a group of poor tenants. If a large sum of money were given by an interested party to the wealthy landlord it would be unlikely to have much of an effect on either the behavior of the parties or the course of the conflict. If, on the other hand, that same amount of money were given to the poor tenants it could have a dramatic impact on the behavior of the antagonists and on the course of the conflict. The tenants would be able to carry out a much more sophisticated mobilization effort and hire professionals such as lawyers and public relations people to aid their cause.

The same principle holds for the distribution of favorable media coverage: the more positive attention which is given to resource poor antagonists, the more dramatic its effects. Even a balanced type of coverage will offer the weaker antagonist important opportunities to challenge the dominant frames. Resources given equally to both parties will still be a more significant development for the weak than for the powerful.

A great deal has been written by scholars about the institutional advantages enjoyed by the powerful in gaining access to the news media (see especially: Bennett, 1990; Gans, 1979; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Paletz and Entman, 1981; Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, 1980; Wolfsfeld, 1991). Governments do have significant advantages over weaker challengers in such critical areas as organization, resources, and in their ability to selectively reward and punish journalists. Perhaps the most important advantage is that the powerful are given automatic standing while weaker antagonists often have to prove their newsworthiness in order to achieve public standing.

There is, however, another side to this story, one that has been virtually ignored in the literature. The fact is that the ability of the powerful to manage news stories tends to *vary over time and circumstance* and the key to understanding these differences can be best explained by their ability to *take control of the informational environment*. The greater the powerful's monopoly on information, the greater its value as a news source, and the less likely the news media is to turn to alternative sources of information. This, we shall argue, is the key situational variable which determines whether or not the news media will play an independent role in any particular conflict.

It can be said that the ability of the more powerful antagonist to control the informational environment in a political conflict will depend on three factors. The first factor is the *powerful antagonist's relative ability to initiate and control events*. When the situation is under control, so is the story. Governments are in a much better position to coordinate their press relations when they can anticipate the events which will be covered. When, on the other hand, the powerful are forced to *react* to events, it suggests that others are setting and framing the media's agenda. Consider, for example how much easier it was for the Reagan administration to control the informational environment during the invasion of Grenada in 1983 (Sharkey, 1991), when compared with the very difficult situation they faced when the Marines were forced to deal with Shi'ite guerrillas in Lebanon.

A second variable that determines the extent of dominance over the informational environment is the willingness and ability of the more powerful antagonist to *regulate the flow of information* to the press. Governments, both democratic and non-democratic, often find compelling reasons to employ censorship during political conflicts and this increases the value of

official sources of information by eliminating competition. Powerful antagonists also have other means of controlling the flow of information such as denying access or accreditation to journalists (or specific journalists) expelling them, shutting down press agencies working for the other antagonist, or even placing rival news sources or journalists under arrest.

The ability of the powerful to regulate the flow of information to the press is also affected by the nature of the *logistic and geographic* environment. Powerful governments prefer to operate under conditions in which they can isolate the areas of actual conflict and regulate the entry and exit of journalists. But the powerful are not always in a position to choose the sites of conflict and this can have a critical effect on their ability to control the informational environment. While the physical circumstances of certain locales tend to facilitate government control, others are more porous and offer easier access for reporters and this increases the level of journalistic independence. An illustration of this point can be made by comparing the ability of the British to control the press during the Falklands/Malvinas campaign (Glasgow University Media Group, 1985; Morrison & Tumber, 1988) with the difficulties they face attempting to regulate information about their conflict with the I.R.A. in both London and Northern Ireland.

The third and final factor which determines the powerful's level of control over the informational environment is *the degree of political dispute among elites* about the conflict. When the various factions within a government are promoting different frames about a conflict it is more difficult to control the informational environment because journalists are able to choose among a variety of sources. When, on the other hand, the official frame is the only frame available among the elites, journalists will have little choice but to also adopt that frame.

In this case, rather than offering an illustration of how this varies among conflicts, we shall point to an example which shows how the informational environment can also change in the course of a conflict. Hallin's (1986) work on the Vietnam War offers an excellent case study of how media coverage is affected by the amount of consensus among the elite. In the early years of the Vietnam War there was very little disagreement within Washington about either the goals of the war or the methods being used to achieve those aims. The Cold War frame which dominated media discourse in the those years of the war was never really replaced by competing frames, but as the consensus among the political elite began to break down, other less positive frames of the war also began to emerge. As Hallin points out, it was not that the press stopped relying on elite sources for guidance and information, but rather that the anti-war movement had made serious inroads within that elite.

The ability of the underdog to compete successfully with more powerful antagonists will depend to a large extent on their ability to exploit these opportunities. Some measure of success in this area will come to those challengers who are able to initiate and control events which are considered newsworthy, to find innovative ways to circumvent the powerful's control over the flow of information, and to make serious inroads among political elites.

There is, however, another catch. There are basically two doors for gaining access to the news media (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; Wolfsfeld, 1991). The front door is reserved for the powerful who are considered to be *inherently* newsworthy and are not required to carry out any overly sensational behavior in order to gain admittance. The weak must enter through the back door, a gateway especially designed for deviants. In order to gain public standing, the weak are often forced to create some form of drama, and this often entails what might best be called the "dues of disorder." While challengers can increase their level of news value through such acts, they often pay an extremely heavy price in the cultural domain by being framed as either deviant and/or dangerous (Alinsky, 1971; Bennett, 1990, Gans, 1979; Goldenberg, 1975; Paletz and Entman, 1981; Shoemaker 1982, 1984, Wolfsfeld, 1984a, 1988).

The most successful challengers are those who overcome this dilemma by creating newsworthy events which are dramatic yet positive. A strategy of civil disobedience, such as that employed by Ghandi (Ahluwallia, 1960; Barrier, 1976; Brown, 1977) and Martin Luther King (see especially: Garrow, 1978) is a good example of this type of tactic for such actions are seen as newsworthy but not aggressive. These methods are especially effective when the more powerful antagonist responds violently because the ensuing stories and images frame the weak as victims.[1] This however brings us to a separate discussion about the struggle over symbols and meaning, a topic which goes beyond the scope of the present paper.

The Independence of the News Media

As stated earlier the goal of this piece is to ask about the circumstances under which the news media will play an independent role in political conflicts. The question of independence refers to the extent to which the press becomes an active agent in a given conflict rather than a passive conveyer of political information. The central issue is the extent to which the press is *willing* and *able* to use professional discretion in making genuine *choices* about how to collect and publicize news. This notion of independence implies that press freedom can just as easily be surrendered as taken away.

It is possible to examine the course of a conflict and establish whether the news media takes an independent role by asking about such factors as: 1) The extent to which the news media use exclusively official sources for information. 2) The extent to which journalists appear to be *initiating* stories rather than simply transmitting stories which were planted by the authorities. 3) The extent to which the antagonists appear to be unprepared or surprised by the coverage they are receiving. The degree of press independence is seen as a variable which changes over time and circumstances, including those which were discussed earlier.

It is important to make a distinction between *independent* media effects, where the news media play an active role in the conflict, and *transmissional effects*, in which the press serves as a mere conduit for messages being sent by the antagonists. As an example, let us assume that a political leader decides to use the news media in order to announce to the world that (s)he intends to escalate a particular conflict, say by sending more troops. Let us further assume that the opposing leader, as a direct result of this message, decides to also mobilize troops. The news media clearly did not have an independent influence on this conflict.

If, on the other hand, the first leader had intended to keep the escalation a secret, and certain journalists managed to discover that information and to publicize it, any subsequent outcomes could legitimately be classified as an independent effect of the news media. The question centers on whether the news media took an *active* role in either obtaining the information or in framing it in a particular manner. While such a distinction may be much easier to make in theory than in practice, researchers must attempt to trace the flow of influence between the antagonists and the news media.

The Significance of Media Effects

It is helpful to make a distinction between three possible scenarios for media effects. One would cover those cases in which the news media had virtually no effect on either the major players or on the conflict itself. The second would deal with those cases when the media do seem to be having an important effect on the conflict, but mostly in a passive, transmissional manner where one or both of the antagonists have successfully taken control of the press and used it as a tool of influence. The final scenario is the most interesting one: where the role of the news media is both independent and significant.

It is important, therefore, to consider both the significance of the news media's role as well as their level of independence. Even when the media do achieve a certain amount of autonomy in a conflict one still has to ask whether or not they had an important influence on either the behavior of the antagonists and/or the course of the conflict. There are certainly instances in which the press covers political strife in a relatively independent manner, but has no real impact on the conflict.

In order to decide whether or not the media played a significant role, the researcher needs to ask two basic questions: 1) To what extent do the antagonists appear to be adapting their behavior as a result of either the presence of the media or the manner in which the press is covering the conflict? 2) To what extent does the conflict appear to be taking a certain course for reasons which can at least partially be attributed to media presence or coverage?

In this particular piece we are focussing more specifically on those occasions in which the news media offer a significant amount of time or space to the weaker side of an unequal conflict and thus increase the probability of third party intervention. Knightly (1975) offers an excellent example of such a case which occurred in the nineteenth century in which news began to reach Constantinople of atrocities committed by the Turkish army against the Christian population in Southern Bulgaria. Reports suggested that over 12,000 men, women and children had been killed and the *London Daily News* sent a reporter by the name of Janaurius Aloysius MacGahan. He reported:

> I think I came in a fair and impartial frame of mind ... I fear I am no longer impartial, and I am certainly no longer cool ... There are things too horrible to allow anything like calm inquiry; things the vileness of which the eye refuses to look upon, and which the mind refuses to contemplate... (p. 50).

According to Knightly, MacGahan's stories caused such worldwide indignation against the Turks that: "Russia decided that his disclosures justified a war and on April 29, 1877, began hostilities against Turkey." (p. 51).

Knightly also writes about the case of Haile Selassie who used a similar strategy when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935. Selassie hoped that news of civilian casualties would arouse world opinion and the League of Nations to stop the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.

It is important to remember that the question of whether or not the news media plays an important role in such conflicts should always be examined from a comparative perspective. The questions being raised in this paper ask about the *degree* of press independence and the *extent* of actual effects. The best strategy therefore is to always attempt to answer these questions by contrasting conflicts and attempting to ascertain how the role of the news media varies.

Researchers should also bear in mind that the news media are not monolithic. The extent to which each news medium will depend on or influence each antagonist will vary as will the degree of influence it will have on the conflict. This particular essay will leave aside this issue in the interest of brevity, but a fuller discussion must also consider variations among the news media (for some initial ideas in this direction see: Wolfsfeld 1991).

In sum, the role of the news media in unequal political conflicts is often determined by the ability of the more powerful antagonist to control the informational environment. This control, it is argued, is related to three variables: the powerful's ability to initiate and control conflict events, the ability to regulate the flow of information, and the extent of consensus among elites. The news media are more likely to play an independent role when the powerful lose control because it allows the weaker side a better platform for the promotion of its frame of the conflict and increases the probability for third parties to intervene. The discussion turns then to the three case studies.

Methodology

As stated, we will be attempting to apply the model to the *intifada* and two different aspects of the Gulf War: the major conflict between the Allies and Iraq and the less prominent conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The use of such different conflicts should offer some useful insights into both the strengths and weaknesses of the theory.

The major methodology for collecting empirical data on these issues is through in-depth interviews with journalists and official sources who interacted during each of these conflicts. It is important to bear in mind however, that these interviews often serve to illustrate and detail what is already publicly known about these conflicts. The news media themselves have offered hundreds of articles and broadcasts on the role of the press in each of these conflicts. The educated public generally knows, for example, about the differences in the intensity of the two clashes and the very different levels of consensus surrounding the two conflicts.

The interviewees should be seen as expert informants who can shed a significant amount of light on: 1) How the four central variables affected their own behavior and the behavior of others during the conflict. 2) The nature of their interactions with the other actors. 3) Some of the outcomes of this process of interactions. We do not, on the other hand, consider these professionals to be reliable authorities on more general questions such as the role of the media in the mobilization of public opinion. These case studies will focus therefore more specifically on the interactions between the antagonists and the news media and possible outcomes of this process for each of the parties.

Twenty interviews were carried out with informants about their experiences in the *intifada*. Interviews were conducted with reporters from a variety of newspapers and television stations (both foreign and local), with the first and second army spokesmen to deal with the *intifada* and representatives of their office, with the political advisor to the Minister of Defence, and with a number of Palestinian leaders who had ongoing contacts with the press.[2] Most of these interviews were carried out during the first year of violence (1988), although some were carried out in the following years. The time frame being studied is this first year of the *intifada* in which the conflict received the most amount of media attention. The role of the news media no doubt declined after that point, but we do not consider that issue within the present discussion.

Fifteen interviews were conducted with military press officers and journalists about their role in the Gulf War. Interviews were carried out with American print and television journalists who were based in Saudi Arabia during the war as well as several who covered the war from the Pentagon. Most of the Public Information Officers who were interviewed also served in

Saudi Arabia during the war, although one was based in Washington. The officers represented the Army, Navy, and Marines and two held senior positions on General Shwartzkopf's staff. Interviews about the Gulf War were conducted in Jerusalem in the spring of 1991 and in the Pentagon in the summer of that same year.

Twelve interviews were carried out with people who had something to say about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the Gulf War. The sources included Israeli government officials, foreign and local journalists, and several Palestinians. It is also worth noting that some of the foreign correspondents who were interviewed because they spent time in the Gulf also spent some time covering the Israeli side of this story. These interviews were carried out in Israel in the fall of 1991 and during the first half of 1992.[3]

All of the interviews used a flexible format with discussions centering on the same core issues: the influence of media presence and coverage on the antagonists, antagonist strategies for controlling, manipulating, or accommodating the news media, the logistical and normative environment which characterized the two conflicts, the centrality of the media in antagonist strategy, the ways in which the role of the media changed during the course of the conflict, the nature of the relationship between the actors and journalists, attempts at punishment and rewards of actors and reporters, how "fair" and "representative" was the coverage antagonists were given, and what lessons can be learned from their own experience about the role of the news media in such conflicts. All of the interviews lasted about an hour.

The researcher also carried out a number of direct observations about the *intifada* by traveling in the territories with reporters as they were covering these events. We shall also refer to some content analyses of media coverage about the conflicts which were either published by other researchers or carried out for the purposes of this study.

The Intifada

The Palestinian *intifada* began in December of 1987. The role of the news media in this conflict quickly became a major controversy both in Israel and abroad. At the beginning of the uprising many Israelis felt that the presence of the media was the major cause of violence and called for banning the press from the territories. A great deal of the initial debate within the Israeli government centered on what should be "done" about the media (Lederman, 1992).

The argument here is that the news media did play an independent role in the *intifada* due to the particular nature of the conflict. It is critical to emphasize, however, that this does not mean that the news media "caused" the *intifada*. The central reasons for the uprising are best found by examining the social and political history of the Arab-Israeli conflict; Palestinian violence came from a genuine sense of anger and frustration. Nevertheless, the nature, direction, and intensity of this particular stage of this conflict were certainly affected by both the presence of the news media, the reports which were filed, and the international reactions to that coverage.

The *intifada* offers an almost textbook case of how a seemingly weaker challenger can successfully promote its frames to the news media. The Israeli army was totally incapable of controlling the informational environment and found it virtually impossible to promote its "law and order" frame of the conflict to the international news media.[4] The scenes of armed Israeli soldiers battling stone-throwing youths produced a very vivid image of injustice which resonated around the world. These images, we shall argue, had significant effects on the behavior of both Israelis and Palestinians and the course of the conflict.

A Complete Lack of Control

The model discussed earlier pointed to three factors determining the ability of the powerful antagonist to control the informational environment: the ability to initiate and control conflict events, the ability to regulate the flow of information, and the degree of consensus among political elites. All three of these factors worked against the Israeli government and thus the press played an especially independent and significant role in this conflict.The events that defined the news story in the initial months of the *intifada* were massive protests of unarmed Palestinians defying the occupying army. Protests were breaking out all over the West Bank and Gaza and the spokesperson's office was attempting to offer the army's perspective on what was happening in the field. The incidents themselves were controlled by the protesters and the spokesperson's office found themselves trying to keep up with the pace of events. As they described it, their basic media strategy was one of "damage control," as best illustrated in the

following comments by a very senior officer in the Army spokesperson's office.

> Whereas the Palestinians' main objective is to attract media attention, our main objective is to PLAY IT DOWN [said in English]. We have no interest in getting attention. People come to me all the time and say "why don't you initiate something?" "Initiate—what exactly should I initiate." The ideal story from my point of view is to be able to say: "Today nothing happened in the field."

The major news stories centered on incidents in which Israeli soldiers were accused of brutality in dealing with Palestinian rioters. The story that came out in later trials was one of general confusion, in which field soldiers were never sure about how much force to use in suppressing the riots and this contributed to the government's lack of control over developments. In addition, while responding to charges of brutality is never an agreeable task, it is made especially difficult because of the military's need to investigate each story before issuing a response. These investigations usually take days and the news media are not in the business of waiting.

The Israeli military also found it extremely difficult to regulate the flow of information to the news media for both political and geographic reasons. The army initiated a number of policies which were designed to gain control over the flow of information about the *intifada*. The press were often prohibited from entering certain areas which made it more difficult for them to film the violence.[5] The Israeli government also shut down the Palestinian Press Service which was providing journalists with beepers which kept them informed of any protests which were breaking out in the territories. The effects of these policies however, were probably minimal.

Israel is a basically open society and any attempts to limit the flow of information from the territories is both politically and geographically impossible. It is especially difficult to shut off physical access to the West Bank. Journalists can normally take an Arab taxi from East Jerusalem to anywhere in the West Bank, cover a story, and be back within a few hours to send the reports overseas. Another reason why the Israelis were reluctant to completely seal off the territories was their fear that Palestinians would be supplied with video cameras and produce footage which would not only be more damaging to Israel but would also get more attention because it was smuggled out in secret.[6]

The army spokesperson talked about the development of military policy on how to handle the news media during the *intifada*:

> It was a process, perhaps an evolution. . .There was no decision by the senior staff which said that on this day of the riots we will act this way and on another day differently. I must say that when the issue of the media came up in the first days of the discussion, I insisted that the areas will stay open, and that's for three reasons: First, because of the principle, and I believe in that principle that we must have freedom of the press in a democratic country, and one has to pay a price for that. . . Secondly, if we close the area we are only making it worse for ourselves, because as it is there is very unsymmetrical reporting. This would give complete advantage to the Palestinian side and they [the media] wouldn't be willing to hear our side if we closed the area. The third reason is practical, we have no way to hermetically seal the area, and we'd have to use a great deal of forces to close it.

The Israeli army was unable then, to control either the events themselves or the flow of information about them. It found itself "running after the story" and thus unable to have almost any effect on media frames of the conflict which were being broadcast around the world. This lack of control led to a more active and independent news media.

A Lack of Political Consensus among Elites

There is little need to dwell on the lack of national or international consensus surrounding Israel's occupation in the territories. The issue over what to do about the territories has been the major political issue dividing the Israeli polity since the early seventies, and the major source of friction between Israel and the rest of the world for an equally long period of time.

On the face of it, however, the period when the *intifada* broke out should have been a time of political consensus among Israeli elites for the country was being ruled by a "national unity government." The two major political parties, Labour and Likud had decided to join together in a single government and therefore the Minister of Defence (Yitzhak Rabin) was from the Labor party while the Prime Minister (Yitzhak Shamir) was from Likud. Nevertheless, Israel has a multiparty political system, and the smaller parties from the left and the right formed a very vocal opposition to government policy in the territories.[7] While the right wing Knesset members

were demanding a much tougher stand towards Palestinian rioters, the left was talking about the corruption of the Israeli army and the need to end the occupation.

The fact that many Israeli opinion leaders were themselves condemning the actions of the military created an ideological environment which was as open as the geographic one. News sources of varying political views were all pressing to be heard, holding press conferences and staging demonstrations. When the issue became an international one it allowed for an even greater diversity of news sources as leaders from around the world and the United Nations were all expressing their views on Israeli behavior. Naturally, these positions were given extensive coverage in the Israeli press and the controversy became more intense.

In sum, three factors led to Israel's inability to control the informational environment: its inability to control or initiate events in the field, its inability to regulate the flow of information to the news media, and the lack of consensus about the conflict among the elite in Israel. These are the major reasons why the news media was able to play an independent role in the *intifada*. The discussion turns then to the question of whether the news media's role was also significant.

Behavioral and Political Outcomes

In order to assess whether the news media played an important role in changing the course of an unequal political conflict it is useful to focus on two classes of outcomes: those associated with changes in the behavior of the antagonists, and those better categorized as changes in the overall balance of power.

When looking at changes in behavior one attempts to determine the extent to which antagonist actions can be attributed either to the presence of the news media or to the ways in which the conflict was covered. This relationship can be demonstrated with evidence suggesting that antagonist actions were based on either a *reaction* to the news media or in *anticipation* of how the news media might deal with certain behaviors. Media power need not be *overtly* exercised in order to have an effect. When political leaders plant intentional sound bites into their speeches it is a sign of their dependency on the news media and thus can legitimately be considered an effect of the news media on political behavior. The central question is whether either or both of the antagonists *adapted* their behavior because of the news media.

Although there is some controversy about this point, the conclusion of this study is that both the Palestinians and the Israeli army were very sensitive to both the presence of the news media and the coverage the *intifada* received. The majority of interviews point to the fact that the presence of the news media tended to increase the level of Palestinian militancy and decrease the amount of force used by Israeli soldiers. The two antagonists were attempting to send very different messages to the world and because these confrontations were being played out in public each adapted their behavior accordingly.

There can be little doubt that both antagonists were very aware of the importance of the news media in the conflict. One of the people who participated in many of the general planning sessions of the Israeli army was asked how often the subject of the news media came up:

> Very often, very often. People talk about what is being said in the media, and everyone talks about what happened before and after what was shown. And whenever there is a decision to carry out some type of operation there is a decision whether or not to close it to the media or not. The major reason for closing the area is that the media causes a great deal of problems.

It is more difficult to obtain a similar assessment about the importance of media considerations in Palestinian planning, but there is a good deal of evidence about the degree of media awareness among Palestinian residents. One of the reporters offered a particularly telling example:

> I was in a very remote village not so long ago and I can't even remember the name. According to what the villagers say, it seems that the soldiers carried out a bit of vandalism there. There was one house where they had been conducting a search and had wrecked the place pretty badly. Anyway, we came to the place about two days after this happened, and they hadn't touched anything—the house was totally upside down and there must be at least twenty people living in that house. People live there and it is clear that the mess really bothered them—even the refrigerator in the kitchen was upside down. We asked them: "Why didn't you straighten things up after it happened?" They said: "We were waiting for the televisions to come, we were waiting for somebody to take a picture of it."

One of the most controversial issues during the early months of the *intifada* was whether the presence of news cameras had a significant effect on the extent of violence in Palestinian demonstrations. This study cannot offer a definitive answer to that question, but it can offer some perspective. In general, the Israeli army claimed that the presence of the news media had a clear and direct effect on the level of violence while Palestinians maintained that press influence was minimal. Clearly each side has a political stake in their position: the Palestinians wanted to emphasize the authenticity of their struggle while the Israelis would have liked to dismiss the *intifada* as a mere show for the media.[8]

The deciding vote is best cast by the journalists who covered the events. They also have an interest in minimizing the influence of the cameras ("we cover the news—we don't create it"), yet most of those interviewed admitted that the cameras did have an escalatory influence on the events themselves.[9] As many pointed out, there are very few people, whether they be protesters, politicians, or ordinary citizens, who are *not* affected by the presence of television cameras. One reporter claimed that if he wanted he could start a demonstration in five minutes simply by taking his camera out.[10]

It is important to reemphasize, however, that asserting the existence of such a relationship says absolutely nothing about the authenticity of the protests. Protesters who change their behavior when the media arrives do so because they are attempting to send a political message to the public. The media's influence on the level of political violence is *self-imposed* by the actors in order to achieve political goals. It is also useful to remember that political violence exists without the presence of the news media; it may however take on a somewhat different shape and direction.

The extent of media influence on the behavior of Israeli soldiers is a much less controversial issue. Military officials, journalists, and Palestinians who were interviewed all agreed that the presence of cameras had an *inhibitory* influence on the use of force by soldiers. The officers and the enlisted men were all very aware of the international implications when "beating scenes" were broadcast around the world. Indeed, the influence of the news media on Israeli behavior is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that many training sessions for soldiers going into the territories soon included clips of these news broadcasts as a vivid reminder of the risks of such behavior.

These indicators suggest then that both of the antagonists considered the news media to be an important element in the *intifada*. It was taken into account in planning and there is solid evidence which points to the fact that the presence and coverage of the news media also had an effect on their behavior.

Gauging *political* changes attributable to the news media is a much trickier business. The clearest way for the news media to have a political effect on an unequal conflict is to adopt the frame being promoted by the weaker party which increases the level of political legitimacy attributed to that challenger. An increase in political legitimacy will usually lead to an increase in political support and increases the likelihood of third party intervention. It is difficult to measure political legitimacy and even more problematic to ascertain whether or not any changes should be attributed to news coverage. We can rely in part, however, on the testimonies of some of those who were involved in the conflict.

It is only fair to point out that some of the Palestinians who were interviewed tended to discount the importance of the news media in their struggle. Some felt that putting too much emphasis on the news media somehow cheapened the genuine sacrifices they had made in standing up to the Israeli army. All agreed however that the media had helped place them on a more equal footing with Israel. The words of one of these skeptics is fairly typical.

> What it [the press] mainly did was to expose Israel. Something that Israel is not used to. Israel got used to getting away with everything here. Now, even the Israeli reporters cover what is happening in those towns...You expose them. The mass media is an advantage to you; the important thing is that you are equal to them [the Israelis]. And secondly when we talk about public opinion, do you know that it took us twenty-one years to convince the world that we are under occupation. And after twenty-one years Mr. Shultz comes here to speak of improving the plight of the occupied.

If one believes that the struggle over the public agenda is a competitive one, then the choices made by the news media have important effects on the political process. Another Palestinian talked about the feeling among the leadership after the first year of the *intifada*.

> They [the Palestinians] feel they have gained what they deserve, this is the normal way of

> thinking. At least the world is willing to listen to what the Palestinians have to say and not only to what the Israelis have to say. So now the balance is more even. In this respect, of course, we have succeeded.

There is also good reason to suspect that the news media's focus on the *intifada* had at least something to do with mobilizing a number of third parties into the conflict. This is again a difficult point to prove because it is never easy to separate the effects of the incidents themselves—say Israeli soldiers beating Palestinian protesters—from the effects which can be attributed to the way the incidents were covered. U.S. officials who were interviewed about these issues do suggest that media coverage of the *intifada* played a "key contributing factor" to Secretary of State Shultz's decision to intervene in the dispute (Makovsky, 1989). The point is that it is virtually impossible for political leaders to ignore any political conflict which is being placed so high on the public agenda.

In sum, the bulk of evidence suggests that the news media did play an independent and significant role in the early stages of the *intifada*. Their independence is demonstrated by the inability of the Israelis to control their presence or the coverage and by the decision of the international press to offer an unusually large amount of sympathetic coverage to the Palestinian story. The centrality of the news media is illustrated by the ways in which the behavior of both Israelis and the Palestinians was altered by the news media and the evidence which suggests that the amount of press attention altered the political balance of power between the two sides.

The Gulf War

The Gulf War offers a stark contrast to the *intifada* in terms of the ability of the more powerful antagonist to control the informational environment. The lack of independence experienced by the press is already well documented (Fialka, 1991; Gannett Foundation, 1991). The purpose of this essay is to argue that the lack of independence can be better understood by examining the three factors which have been emphasized throughout this work. In addition, we also want to point to some exceptions in which the allied domination over the news media faltered because such variations offer critical insights about how the role of the news media can change over the course of a conflict.

The Initiation and Control of Events

In direct contrast to the situation that characterized the *intifada*, the United States and its allies had a great deal of control over the Gulf War. It was the allies who decided when the air war would begin, when the ground war would start, and when the war would end. With the possible exception of the battle of Khafji, the Iraqis spent most of the war buried in their bunkers. The ability to control the battlefield offers antagonists an important advantage in planning information campaigns because all of the press releases and briefings can be prepared in advance. Jack Nelson, the Washington bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, made a similar point in a roundtable discussion about the media held soon after the end of the war.

> . . .I think the priorities about what to cover were clearly laid down in the briefing sessions. One day you had to focus on particular kinds of air-raids, another day you had to focus on polluting the gulf or the burning of Kuwait, another day you had to focus on the prisoners of war. The initiative came from the government itself, or from the military (Gannett Foundation, 1991, p. 73).

In the case of the Gulf War it was the Iraqis who were reacting, or, more accurately, not reacting to the actions of the allies. One of the senior officers who dealt with the news media during the Gulf War was able to actually plan months in advance the types of news stories which the press cover during different phases of the campaign. Thus, he had his staff prepare personal interest stories about the troops during the buildup stage and to find the proper air force films highlighting the latest technology during the air war. The allies were rarely surprised by the events in the Gulf War, and this insured that they were also seldom surprised by media coverage of the war.

Regulating the Flow of Information

The level of informational control applied by the allies and the Iraqis is well known. Indeed, these press restrictions were the major "media story" of the war. The news media complained bitterly and publicly about the constraints being placed on their coverage. This story appeared for example in *Time* magazine on January 21, 1991 and is typical of the genre:

> As soon as the Pentagon rules for dealing with the news media were made final, the presidents of the four major U.S. television news networks sent a letter of protest to Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney. So did editors of the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Time* and the Associated Press, while the *New York Times* issued a similar statement. The network presidents charged that the rules "go far beyond what is required to protect troop safety and mission security...and raise the specter of government censorship of a free press."

The methods of information control were both direct and effective. All contacts with the reporters were centralized through "JIBs": Journalist Information Bureaus. Pools were organized to insure that the flow of information could be strictly regulated and all stories had to be submitted to the military censor for approval. Reporters were forced to sign secrecy agreements in which they agreed, among other things, not to send any pictures of American casualties without censor approval.[11] The vast majority of the information was provided in briefing sessions in Dhahran and Riad, where the military supplied not only all of the information, but also many of the films which would be shown around the world.

The journalists were extremely frustrated by their lack of independence but there was little they could do about it. One journalist said he'd never known reporters under such pressure to explain to their editors why they couldn't get to the story. It was impossible to check the accuracy of the facts that they were being given. The journalists' anger was hardly diminished after the war was over, when many discovered how many stories they had gotten wrong. One reporter was asked whether he felt that their stories were influenced by the need to side with the allies:

> No, I really think the information was simply not available. In a lot of the stories I was writing at the last day or two of the ground war and the week afterward, every single one of those stories is wrong with regard to every single fact. I reported, for example that the war stopped because the Americans ran out of targets, and it simply wasn't true. If I was told there were a hundred facts, maybe ninety of them have proven false.

The exact statistics are less important than the sense of frustration which lies behind them. The evidence suggests that conventional wisdom is quite accurate: the allies in the Gulf War were able to exercise a remarkable amount of informational control. As Lawrence Grossman, a former president of NBC News and PBS, put it—"the press was held captive" (Gannett Foundation, 1991).

As suggested earlier, a good deal of the journalists' problems were related to the geography of the area, which made it almost impossible for them to leave the briefing sessions. They needed military vehicles to get to the scenes of battles; a number of reporters who went out on their own got lost, and Bob Simon was captured by the Iraqis. One of the senior press officers compared the situation in the Gulf with his experience in Vietnam.

> For those reporters who I had escorted as a young lieutenant in Vietnam it was a very nostalgic trip for both of us. They realized that this was not Vietnam, the size of California where you could run out and get a quick fire fight, come back to the Hotel Rex, file your story and that was the end of it.

The difficulty in obtaining information was not just a matter of geography, however, for the situation in Washington was not much better. One of the correspondents describes the effects of the war on the flow of information in the Pentagon.

> This building tightened up like a ship at war. It went to general quarters. You just couldn't talk to people. Nobody returned phone calls. People wouldn't go for walks with you like they sometimes do to give a sense of what was going on, because they just didn't know what was happening, because the information was so tightly controlled and funnelled from the Central Command right to the war room, that I don't know what else we could have done. . .I think that as long as there is an environment like the one this war occurred in, with the short, very rigid, chain of command and with a powerful press spokesman, we are just going to have to accept the facts as the Pentagon tells us here at the briefing.

A Few Cracks in the Wall

While the ability of the allies to regulate the flow of information was extraordinary, there were several points during the war in which the news media did achieve some degree of indepen-

dence. An examination of these exceptions offers important lessons about how situational variables can alter the role of the news media. One of the most revealing of these examples is the change in the media's ability to collect information as the allies moved from the air war to a ground war. In an air war, the inability of journalists to accompany the military into battle severely limits their independence and enhances the capability of the government to control the informational environment. Knightly (1975) reports a similar set of circumstances during the latter stages of the Vietnam War in which the bombing of North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia was given much less publicity than the ground war despite the enormous difference in the amount of devastation carried out in the two arenas.

The ground war in the Gulf conflict was extremely brief. Nevertheless, all of the journalists and military people who were interviewed agreed that the control over correspondents began to break down when the army and the marines began to move into Kuwait and Iraq (see also Fialka, 1991; Young, 1991). The military was especially concerned with the increasing number of "unilaterals" who were breaking away from the pools and independently collecting information. One of the officers in charge of dealing with the media talked about this change.

> The only breakdown I felt occurred was once the ground war started; you had unilateral out there on their own and actually providing some pretty decent coverage in cases. What we had anticipated that never occurred was that once the ground war started, the entire country would be a kind of garrison. That is to say, that there would not be unrestricted travel on the roads of Saudi Arabia, that news media who were trying to get into the battlefield would essentially be stopped on the road. Well that didn't happen. . .Our great fear was that pool reporters seeing that would say, why do I have to put up with these pool restrictions which most of them hated.

The journalists were well aware of the opportunities which the ground war offered even before it began. Consider the following comments by one of the television reporters who covered the war:

> I was one who did not feel that it was worth all the risks before the ground war started. . . in terms of breaking the pool rules because I thought the time to break them would be the time when you'd actually get something out of breaking them, which would be during the ground war. I thought the ground war would go on for some weeks and this would be the time to go out. . . So I felt the time to break them was when the ground war started and then just say "fuck you" to the Army and do whatever you wanted to do. And by then things would be too chaotic to really deal with it.

In the final analysis this had very little impact on the role of the media because the ground war was so short. It is a critical reminder, however, that the informational environment is subject to change, and with it the level of antagonist control and media dependence.

There were also three other incidents in which the allies lost control over the flow of information, and one of them may have played an important role in the war ending when it did. The three events which we would include in this category would be: the bombing of what the Iraqis claimed was a baby milk factory, the destruction of the bunker in Baghdad, and at the very end of the war, the "Highway of Death" in which about a thousand Iraqi army vehicles were trapped and destroyed by allied aircraft.

In each of these cases the pictures of destruction and devastation offered a very different frame of the war than that which was promoted by the allies. The Iraqis were providing a certain amount of information to the press throughout the war, especially through Peter Arnett, the CNN correspondent in Baghdad. Nevertheless, the images coming out of these three incidents were far more vivid and powerful and the United States found itself very much on the defensive in its attempt to discount Iraqi claims about the brutality of the American attack. One reporter was asked whether in his opinion these pictures had any effect on American policy:

> Oh yeah. I think the military and the administration realized right away that they couldn't stand to make more of these. That the public was so gungho on the war that they'd overlook the first couple, but it became clear that if there were a lot of images of civilians killed, that wasn't going to work. I think they were hypersensitive about that. I think it may have affected what Bush did when he ended the war, brought it to a close and saved the Iraqi army from a massacre. He knew the media images of a massacre wouldn't be helpful.

The fact that reporters and photographers were able to reach Highway Six near the end of the war certainly had an effect on the tone of war

coverage. The pictures of charred bodies strewn over a wide space of land and the decision by the news media to label the roadway the "Highway of Death" certainly had an important effect on media frames of the war. There is at least one serious piece of investigative reporting (*Newsweek*, January 20, 1992) which offers convincing evidence that the images which were being shown from the "Highway of Death" did indeed have an important effect on the recommendation of Joint Chiefs Chairman Colin Powell to stop the allied attack. The decisions leaders must make in these situations must be based not only on the objective question of whether more bloodshed is militarily justified, but also the effects such pictures could have on public opinion.

More than anything else, these exceptions illustrate how quickly the role of the news media can change. The Iraqis depended on the news media to mobilize international opinion against the American attack. As the far weaker antagonist, it was their only way of defending themselves against a far superior war machine. Although there were brief moments of success in this area, the Americans' overall control over the informational environment precluded any independent and significant role for the news media. The conflict, for the most part, ran its expected course with the far more powerful allied forces defeating the Iraqis.

The Extent of Consensus Among the Elite

It is extremely revealing to examine the *changing* level of political consensus among elites in the United States about the Gulf War and its effects on news coverage. An important key to understanding media coverage of this conflict can be found by examining the changing amount of congressional opposition to the war. The great debate about whether or not to allow the President to go to war was a fairly close one, and the news media offered a great deal of coverage of that controversy. The final vote in the Senate took place on January 13, 1991 when the President was given the green light, by a vote of 52 to 47, to use military force. The Congress was mostly silent, however, after the outbreak of the war, apart from expressing support for the troops.

This change in political consensus is reflected directly in the way the news media covered the conflict. A *Tyndall Report* published by ADT research (Gannett Foundation, 1991) conducted a content analysis of television news stories which appeared before and after the outbreak of war. They found that in the three weeks prior to the war "controversy stories" outnumbered "yellow ribbon" stories (in support of the troops) by 45 to 8, but in the following six weeks "ribbon" stories dominated 36 to 19.

One of the journalists who was based in Washington talked about the difference between covering the story during "Desert Shield" (the buildup period) and "Desert Storm." When asked whether or not it was easier to get information before the war broke out, he replied:

> Yes, because more people had opinions. There were more critics, critics in the Congress, critics in the think tanks. But once there was a declaration of war basically because Congress voted and the U.S. committed its young men and women to fight, the critics were no longer critical. They immediately turned to support the Commander in Chief. In some ways it was a nice thing to see and feel but if the war would have lasted longer, I think people would have raised more questions about what we were doing.

It is important to bear in mind that even when there was a good deal of dispute among the American elite, there was never any disagreement about the need to stop Saddam Hussein. The injustice frame which was being promoted by Iraq never even competed with the American claims about Iraqi aggression. The debate within the United States centered on the most effective *means* of carrying out that goal: economic sanctions or military intervention. These were the competing frames which appeared in the Western news media and neither could offer much help to Iraq in its attempt to mobilize support from third parties.

Behavioral and Political Outcomes

It is not clear which is the more difficult task: to demonstrate that the media did have an influence on a conflict or to prove that they did not. The notion of a significant media influence, it will be recalled, is based on whether or not the political condition or the behavior of the antagonists appears to have been altered by the presence of the news media or the coverage which was given to the conflict. The basic question is whether or not the news media had any effect on American behavior, Iraqi behavior, or on the course of conflict.

None of the interviewees could point to incidents in which either the presence of the

news media-or press coverage had an effect on the allied military operations in the Gulf. The direction of influence seems to have been one sided: the allies seem to have had a great deal of impact on the news media, but the media does not seem to have any influence on either of the antagonists. While it is difficult to be certain as to whether the allied war plan was changed due to any media coverage, there is no logical reason why it should have. As discussed, Western press coverage was generally supportive of the allies and the discussion of "collateral" damage was limited.

The cases of the bunker and the "Highway of Death" may again stand as exceptions to this rule because, as discussed, there were several reports in the news media which suggested that the military command had carried out some changes in policy (e.g. less bombing of bunkers) because of these incidents. In general, however, it appears that the allies carried out their basic war plan without interruption from either the news media or Iraq.

Another piece of evidence which supports the claim of minimal effects is that Iraq was unable to use the news media to mobilize third parties into the conflict. Western public opinion remained highly supportive of the war effort throughout the war.[12] Although the Arab press may have been much less enthusiastic about the war, none of the Arab coalition partners abandoned the cause, and no new antagonists joined the battle after it had begun. There were protests in several Arab capitals which may have been accelerated through extensive coverage of Iraqi casualties in some of the Arab press. Even here however, there is no reason to believe that any of these events had any effect on the course of the war.

In short, the Gulf War took its predictable course with the powerful allied forces defeating the weak Iraqis. The specific conditions of the Gulf War provided the allies almost total control over the informational environment and this precluded an autonomous role for the news media. The press may have served as a useful tool for defeating the Iraqis but had no independent effect on either the course of the war or its outcome.

Israelis and Palestinians During the Gulf War

The discussion now returns to the role of the news media in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but moves forward in time to the period of the Gulf War. The reason for choosing this case is to show once again how the role of the news media can change over time and circumstance. The central players in this conflict remained the same but the political context changed dramatically and with it the ability of Israel to control the informational environment. The role of the news media changed accordingly; the American and Israeli press who had been so independent and active during the early stages of the *intifada* became mere electronic bulletin boards for the promotion of Israeli frames of the conflict.

It is helpful to begin by placing these events in historic and political context. In the years following the early stages of the *intifada*, the story was no longer considered newsworthy. The Palestinian protests and the Israeli reaction had all but disappeared from the American press and had been driven off the front pages of the Israeli newspapers as well. As with all such conflicts, the *intifada* had become routine and the international news media had moved on to cover other parts of the world.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990 brought the Palestinian issue back to international attention but within a very different political context. Saddam Hussein attempted to link the solution of the Gulf crisis to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict implying that he would withdraw from Kuwait if the Israelis would also withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza. The P.L.O.'s decision to support Iraq's stand against the Western world helped complete the frame in which the Iraqis and the Palestinians were the enemies of the West while Israel found itself firmly in the Western camp.

The Palestinian issue no longer had an independent media frame. The Palestinian story had become a secondary subplot within the major story of the Gulf crisis. This, as well as the three factors we have been stressing throughout this essay, all had an important impact on the ability of the Israelis to take control of the informational environment.

The Control over Events and the Flow of Information

The Israelis took complete control over the territories during the Gulf War in order to ensure that there would be no Palestinian actions. The Israeli authorities had several reasons for concern in this area. A few months before the outbreak of the war the Palestinians had carried out a large protest on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem which had resulted in the deaths of

twenty-two Palestinians and a storm of protests from the outside world. In addition, several Palestinian spokespeople had also suggested that they would be carrying out terrorist actions against Israel and the United States if war were to break out with Iraq.

The Israeli government initiated a curfew lasting for most of the war. The Palestinians remained in their homes with occasional respites for getting food and water. Although the curfew was mainly intended as a means of preventing any Palestinian sabotage, it also created an extremely effective means of regulating the flow of information about the Palestinian issue. As a closed military area, reporters were not allowed to travel without military escorts.

There was, however, another important factor which allowed the Israelis to take control of the flow of information during the Gulf War. The major Israeli story of the war was the Iraqi SCUDs falling on the cities of Israel. In anticipation of the war, the Israelis had spent months setting up large press centers in both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem which were designed to serve as the exclusive sources of information for all arriving journalists. The centers were staffed on a twenty-four hour basis with official spokespeople and contained a large variety of technological hardware designed to allow the international press to receive and distribute the Israeli perspective on the war in the most efficient way possible.

The contrast from the days of the *intifada* was a striking one. The journalists had all moved from the occupied territories to the official press centers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The Israelis, instead of reacting to negative stories, were now in full command of the press who were eagerly awaiting every briefing. The number of reporters covering Israel went from three hundred to over a thousand; the new arrivals were especially dependent on official sources of information due to their lack of contacts in the area. One of the reporters who covered both the *intifada* and the present stage of the conflict commented on the change.

> . . .During the *intifada* things had become strained, but always cordial and professional. During the war, Israel had a story that it was happy to tell the world. They also had a lot of fresh journalists here to sort of sell the story to. They made a big effort to keep journalists busy with half-way decent briefings all the time. They always had events for them. They would have these briefings, sometimes two a day. And if they had it in Tel Aviv they would simulcast it back to Jerusalem. I could see they were fairly well attended. It was a good vehicle to get the message out, to get the right spin on the story.

The Israelis had understandably become a much more valued source of information than the Palestinians. Thus, not only were journalists less *able* to gather information about the Palestinian perspective, they were also less *willing* to do so. This had an important effect on the quantity and quality of their interactions with the Palestinians. The territories had become one of the minor stories of the war and those few foreign reporters who were assigned to the territories considered it a bad break for their careers.

The fact that the territories had such low news value may also explain why there was so little protest from the international press about their inability to independently travel in the territories and collect information. Again this is in direct contrast to the days of the *intifada* in which any restrictions on press movements brought scores of protest from around the word. There are of course other explanations for this lack of concern over the closing of the territories, but judgments about the relative unimportance of Palestinian sources certainly played a part in this process.[13]

The Extent of Consensus Among the Elite

The level of consensus among the political elite within Israel and the international community was also very different than that which characterized the *intifada*. The left and right in Israel were not only in agreement with the government's decision to exercise restraint against Iraq, there was also a wide consensus of antagonism against the Palestinians for their support of Iraq. The most well-known example of this phenomenon was when Knesset member Yosi Sarid, an established member of the left wing opposition, came out with a public statement saying that the Palestinians would have to "look for him" when the war was over.

The Palestinians were attempting to promote two major frames during the war. The first was the linkage frame which they hoped would be adopted as part of the final peace agreement between Iraq and the Allies. The second frame might be best labelled "the curfew as oppression" frame; it was a plea for help to ease the burden of the curfew which had, for all intents and purposes, placed the Palestinian population

under house arrest for the duration of the war. Neither of these frames had any domestic sponsors in Israel and there were also very few international sponsors outside of the country.

The third frame is perhaps best called the "dancing on the roofs" frame, which calls attention to the joy Palestinians felt at the sight of SCUDs raining down on Israeli cities. One of the ironic twists of this war is that the Palestinians seemed no less enthusiastic about this frame than the Israelis (although they might not agree with the frame's title). Palestinian sources frequently called up Israeli and foreign reporters to cheer the SCUD attacks on Israel and sent in photographs and video tapes of such actions as the building of large cardboard SCUDs in honor of Saddam Hussein. Although some Palestinian leaders did express some reservations about the pro-Iraqi position, their voices were drowned out by the overwhelming majority of sources.

All of this served to increase the consensus among the Israeli elite and the news media against the Palestinians. Some of the more revealing interviews took place with the Israeli correspondents who cover the Palestinian beat. These journalists, all of whom speak fluent Arabic, are normally quite sympathetic to the Palestinian case. Consider however the words of one of the leading reporters in this field.

> I think something happened to all the journalists during the war. We all became part of the Israeli consensus. Everyone had their own political views and every one received a slap in the face. We suddenly felt ourselves part of the consensus of the whole country. It was war, with SCUDs falling all over the place. Suddenly we began to look at them differently, as people, and as sources. Suddenly, these people who we talk to day in and day out seemed different and we were no longer buying the images they were selling.

A Lack of Outcomes

It can be stated then that the Gulf War offered the Israelis an almost unprecedented control over the informational environment. The news value of Israeli officials had risen to a much greater extent than their Palestinian counterparts, and it was the Israeli story of destruction —not Palestinian suffering—which dominated press reports coming out of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. In carrying out a curfew, the Israelis insured that the Palestinians could not divert the world's attention from the story of the SCUDs.

It is important to stress however that the Palestinian angle could have developed differently if the Israelis had not been able to take control of the territories. Massive protests in the occupied territories followed by Israeli reprisals could have led to many more incidents such as the Temple Mount, and the calls for linkage might have multiplied. Questions of morality aside, when one controls the territory one also controls the story.

In order to assess the relative success of the antagonists in promoting their frames to the news media, it is important to consider the strategic goals of each side. The Palestinians and the Iraqis both hoped to make the Israeli occupation a major issue of the Gulf conflict, while the allies and the Israelis wanted to keep the world focussed on the invasion of Kuwait. The Iraqis hoped to use the Palestinian issue as a wedge to divide the coalition, and the international news media were an important element in this strategy. While the chances of such a strategy succeeding were never great, Israel's ability to keep the Palestinians off the news agenda made it even more difficult.[14]

The results of this struggle can be better assessed by looking at how Palestinians were covered during the war. The *New York Times* will serve as an example for this exercise.[15] An examination of the news and editorials about Palestinians which were published in that paper during the actual war shows that by far the most important frame was the strategic one in which some type of reference was made to the Palestinian support of Iraq. There are over two hundred and fifty stories in which this link was made (albeit often as an aside) and this serves as an important reminder of how specific frames are shaped by the more general political context.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict received relatively little attention during the war, despite the attempts of Iraq and the P.L.O. The news items and editorials which dealt with this issue can be classified under three major categories. There were fifteen articles which dealt with the hardships Palestinians were enduring under the curfew and about an equal number which talked about Palestinians cheering the SCUD attacks on Israel.[16] Finally, there were only seventeen articles which talked about whether or not to link the Palestinian problem to Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait. Revealingly, the vast majority of these pieces were devoted to reporting about a variety of Western leaders who had rejected such a linkage.

This distribution of coverage highlights the American perspective on the Gulf War: The major question for the United States concerned

the array of forces who were allied with each side. The *New York Times* was clearly reflecting this perspective and thus the Palestinians are only newsworthy within the more general political context. The Palestinian story was certainly linked to the Gulf conflict, but not in a particularly sympathetic frame. This line of argument could lead us to conclude that the major reason for the lack of sympathy for the Palestinians in the American press at this time was that—in direct contrast to the *intifada*—the Americans and the Israelis were on the same side. Whereas the Americans had good control over the press at this time, any successes in this area should be attributed to American power rather than anything which was going on in Israel or the occupied territories.

There is much truth to this claim but it does not negate the more central argument which has been made throughout this piece. The high level of international consensus was indeed one of the factors which made it much more difficult for both the Iraqis and the Palestinians to promote their frames to the western news media. The Israelis control over the informational environment in their part of the world was simply one more element in the more general process of emasculating the press which took place during the Gulf War. The Americans and the Israelis worked together on a number of fronts during this period and the news front was an important one.

The point of all this is to show how the role of the news media changes along with political circumstance. Palestinian hardships, and the evils of occupation, which under different circumstances could have been a major news story, became a relatively marginal item in the Western coverage of the war. The news media did not play an important role in this stage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There was no international pressure on Israel to ease the Palestinian burden, the Palestinians remained under curfew for the duration of the war, and the possibility of linkage remained off of the international agenda.

What lessons can we draw from this case when compared to the others which have been discussed? We would suggest two. First, the situational variables we have been emphasizing throughout this paper are directly related to the more general political process. The ability of the challenger to initiate events, the flow of information from the antagonists to the news media, and the extent of consensus among elites all depend on the nature of the political climate at the time of the transactions. The differences between the role of the news media in the *intifada* and in this later stage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are best understood by looking at the effects of the political process on the informational environment. The transactions among the Israelis, the Palestinians, and the news media were completely altered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and the international crisis which followed.

The second lesson comes from the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was framed by the Western press as a minor story during the Gulf War. Indeed, as alluded to earlier, the question of whether or not to include this issue as a central part of the Gulf conflict was a major bone of contention between the allies and Iraq. This teaches us that those who look at the role of the media in such conflicts should be just as conscious of what is left out as what is included. Many challengers are simply ignored by the news media and in these cases the powerful are under no pressure to even rebut the arguments of their rival. The agenda-setting function of the news media not only tells us what to think about, but also what to ignore.

While the allies were able to mobilize the news media in the war against Iraq, the Israelis managed to neutralize the news media by turning the Palestinian question into a non-issue.[17] This was especially easy during this period for the world was clearly focussed on the Gulf.[18] It will be remembered that during the *intifada*, some Israeli officials suggested that the best they could hope for was no news at all. In the case of the Gulf War, they finally got their wish.

Conclusion

In any unequal conflict the weaker side's only chance of victory is to mobilize third parties to intervene on its behalf. Protesters hope to find others to support them, terrorists hope to shock the world into reacting, and weaker countries seek international support against the strong. The struggle over the news media is a critical element in this process and it is perhaps ironic that those who need the news media the most also find it the hardest to enlist.

The point of this paper has been to move beyond this truism and ask about the conditions under which the news media play an independent and significant role in such conflicts. The ability of the powerful to frame the story, it has been argued, is directly related to its ability to take control of the informational environment.

This control, in turn, depends on three factors: the ability to initiate and control conflict events, the ability to regulate the flow of information, and the degree of consensus among elites.

The case studies illustrated how the role of the news media varies: whereas they played an independent and significant role in the *intifada*, their role in the two facets of the Gulf War was much more marginal. As a final teaser, let us consider one more unequal conflict in which the news media seems to have played a significant role. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, a serious conflict emerged between the Kurds and the Iraqis in Northern Iraq. The Kurds, assumedly with American encouragement, were carrying out a rebellion against Saddam Hussein. Hussein responded in force and the Kurds were being routed by the Iraqi army.

At this point of the strife the Bush administration had no intention of intervening in the conflict. The important point to bear in mind is that neither Iraq nor the United States was able to take control of the informational environment. The news media which had been shackled during the war was now covering the Kurdish story with almost complete independence. The reporters were free to roam around the area, talk to whoever they pleased, and the TV cameras were brought out in force. Here, as in the case of the *intifada*, the news media placed a major emphasis on the Kurds as victims, and Bush was being blamed for the Kurdish plight. *Newsweek* (April 15, 1991), for example, featured a destitute Kurdish child on their cover with the caption "Why won't he help us?"

The tragic pictures which were being sent around the world may very well have had something to do with Bush's change of heart when he reluctantly decided to intervene in that conflict (Schorr, 1991). Daniel Schorr puts it very directly based on his own observations of the process:

> Score one for the power of the media, especially television, as a policy-making force. Coverage of the massacre and exodus of the Kurds generated public pressures that were instrumental in slowing the hasty American military withdrawal from Iraq and forcing a return to help guard and care for the victims of Saddam Hussein's vengeance (p. 21).

If these assertions are accurate, the media played an important equalizing role in that conflict by serving as a catalyst for the mobilization of third parties. In order to add one more twist to this story it is useful to think back to the Kurdish rebellion in 1988, when even more Kurds were killed. The news media were not able to cover those events and the conflict took its expected course with the Iraqis defeating the Kurds.

The point of these final musings is to illustrate the complexity of the problem. The role of the news media tends to vary over time and circumstance, and theory must deal with these changes. Hopefully the ideas which were presented in this piece will contribute to a more systematic approach to the issue.

Endnotes

This monograph was written in the fall of 1992, while I was a Fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. I wish to thank the entire staff of the Center for the warm and gracious support they provided during my stay there. I want to especially thank Marvin Kalb, the director of the Center, for all of his guidance, Fred Schauer, who provided a detailed critique of this piece, and Edith Holway, who was willing and able to leap over every conceivable administrative hurdle to help.

I also want to single out Bill Gamson who worked very closely with me on this project. He was a constant source of ideas and criticism and contributed countless hours going over earlier drafts of this piece. This study was also presented at a seminar of the Boston College Media Research and Action Project, which is directed by Bill together with Charlotte Ryan. I want to thank the members of the seminar, especially David Ryan, for all of their comments which proved helpful in writing the final version of the paper.

1. This statement is not meant to imply that leaders who carry out civil disobedience aspire to be beaten, but that those with experience in this area realize the costs and benefits of such events.

2. Due to the delicate nature of the interviews we promised all interviewees total confidentiality.

3. Those who might be concerned about the relatively small number of interviews will be reassured by the

fact that the observations expressed by these informants were remarkably consistent. In all three cases the interviews were not stopped so much because of a lack of time or resources but rather due to the fact that they had become mostly repetitive.

4. The law and order frame did resonate much better in the Israeli press (Roeh and Nir, 1993; Collins and Clark, 1993; Wolfsfeld, 1993).

5. The army justified the bans by arguing that the presence of reporters tended to increase the level of violence. Indeed, most of the television reporters who were interviewed acknowledge that the cameras did have an effect on the level of protest violence.

6. Such cameras were in fact distributed to Palestinians during later stages of the *intifada*.

7. Due to the dependency of journalists on elected officials one might argue that a multi-party system offers somewhat more independence for journalists than a two-party system.

8. It is noteworthy that the claims about the influence on the media on the *intifada* have all but disappeared. The *intifada* continues in a rather different format and the Western media rarely covers it. The fact that the *intifada* continues without much media coverage does not however negate the possibility of media influence in the early stages of the protest. It merely reinforces the idea that the news media is not the sole reason for violence and that the relative centrality of the media is always subject to change.

9. Those who disagree with this conclusion point to the fact that many very violent demonstrations also occurred *without* the news media. This is certainly the case but does not contradict the argument being made here for two reasons. First, the press is only *one* of the factors which can have an effect on the intensity of protest and the fact that demonstrations also occur for other reasons does not discount its importance. Secondly, the level of violence used by soldiers is likely to *increase* when the news media is absent, and this is still a media effect. This is an especially important point to bear in mind when one attempts to measure the amount of violence on the basis of the number of dead and injured among protesters. Where possible, therefore, researchers should attempt to distinguish between the effects of the news media on protest violence and on the violence carried out by the police or the military.

10. There is an important distinction between the electronic media and the print media in this regard. Most of those interviewed argued that the electronic media have a much greater effect on protests. We would offer two explanations for this phenomenon. One is that the electronic media, especially television, are seen as more powerful and therefore people are more likely to respond to their presence. The second explanation is that protesters understand the need to give television some type of action to film.

11. Part of the reason for this regulation was concern that relatives might learn about the casualties from the news media before the military could inform them.

12. It could be argued that the media helped the U.S. government maintain this high level of international support but that would not be an *independent* effect.

13. Other reasons given by the correspondents were that they were much more willing to accept such restrictions when Israel was involved in a genuine war and that one could hardly complain when the Americans were doing the exact same thing in the Gulf. It should also be remembered that it was considered dangerous to travel far from home during the war for one never wanted to be too far from a sealed room.

14. Those who would mock the Iraqi strategy should bear in mind that both France and the U.S.S.R. proposed peace plans which accepted the link between the two issues. It should also be remembered that Saddam Hussein received more favorable coverage in many non-Western countries, such as Jordan and India.

15. The Nexis archive was used to conduct a search for all articles (including editorials) in which the words Palestinian(s) and Iraq (or Saddam Hussein) were found within 30 words of each other during the actual war. A similar procedure was used for the other results which are presented below.

16. There were also a number of articles about the arrest of Sari Nusseibeh, a Palestinian leader accused of supplying Iraq with information about the location of SCUD attacks on Israel.

17. The Israelis did supply the news media with considerable amounts of information about Palestinians "dancing on the roofs." This became a major story in Israel, but was understandably less salient in the American press.

18. The Syrians also exploited the situation to move further into Lebanon while the Russians carried out an attack on Latvia.

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