

# news media & foreign relations

**A MULTIFACETED  
PERSPECTIVE**

---

**EDITED BY  
ABBAS MALEK**

*news media and foreign relations:  
a multifaceted perspective*

*edited by*  
*Abbas Malek*  
Howard University



Ablex Publishing Corporation  
Normood, New Jersey

Copyright © 1997 by Ablex Publishing Corporation

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording or otherwise, without permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

News media and foreign relations : a multifaceted perspective / Abbas  
Malek, editor.

p. cm. — (Communication, culture & information studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-56750-272-5 (cloth). — ISBN 1-56750-273-3 (paper)

1. Mass media—Political aspects. 2. Press and politics.

3. International relations. I. Malek, Abbas. II. Series: Ablex  
communication, culture & information series.

P95.8.N48 1996

302.23—dc20

96-32254  
CIP

Ablex Publishing Corporation  
355 Chestnut Street  
Norwood, New Jersey 07648

# acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank two important teachers, mentors, advisors, and friends, Professors Hamid Mowlana and Majid Teheranian. Dr. Mowlana introduced me to the International Communication Program at The American University while visiting us in Iran in the late 1970s. He was my advisor during my Ph.D. Program, chaired my dissertation committee, and mentored me throughout. He has been a good friend and has made valuable contributions to my professional development. Dr. Teheranian was my teacher and boss during my Masters program in Iran while, at the same time, I was working for him at Iran Communication and Development Institute. He was responsible for my coming to the U.S. and doing my Ph.D. I consider these two professors the two most important individuals in my academic life and want to thank them sincerely for all they have taught me.

As the editor, I would like to thank all the contributors to this volume and express my appreciation for their effort in meeting the deadline for the project.

My special thanks go to Dr. Florence Setzer for her continued reading of almost all my writings with strong critical views for many years. I would also like to thank Tina Patterson, my research assistant for several years, who assisted me in developing the proposal for this project. She worked on several research projects including the very last chapter in this volume.

Editors and the staff at Ablex, especially Kim Burgos and Anne Trowbridge, who worked hard on this project, deserve a very special and sincere thank you for their good work.

—*Abbas Malek*  
*Washington, DC*  
*Fall 1996*

## about the editor

**Abbas Malek**, is an associate professor at the Department of Radio, Television, and Film, School of Communications, Howard University, Washington, DC. He is president of International Communication Section of IAMCR. Dr. Malek teaching and writings are in the area of telecommunication management, international/ crosscultural communication, and news media and foreign policy. Among his most recent publications are: "Islam and the West: Cultural Encounter," in *The U.S. Media and the Middle East: Image and Perception*, 1995; "Mass Media in Iran" in *Mass Media in the Middle East*, 1994; "Over Covered... Under Reported: Mandela's Visit to the United States" in *African American Communications: An Anthology in Traditional and Contemporary Studies*.

# introduction

Abbas Malek

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the United States encountered several major foreign policy challenges—the Iranian Revolution—followed by the hostage crisis and the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan. Although the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was perceived as an important international crisis, the revolution in Iran and the American hostages remaining in captivity for 444 days became a major foreign policy issue facing U.S. government. At the same time, the degree to which the American media became involved in a foreign policy issue probably was unprecedented in recent history of the U.S., including during the Vietnam War.

At the time, I was a doctoral student at The School of International Service at The American University in Washington, DC. As a foreign student from Iran studying international communication in the nation's capital, I could not ask for a better chance to observe and study the role that media play in American democracy.

Having worked for and studied the media in an authoritarian society, Iran, in which throughout the history all social institutions including the media are restricted in their performance by the government, initially I was extremely impressed by the degree of freedom that American media could exercise in their coverage of American politics. Such an impression, however, withered away rather quickly after I learned more and began to examine closely the relationship between the media and government in American democracy, specifically on foreign policy issues.

As a matter of fact, my interest in the subject developed so deeply that I began a systematic study of this subject in the early stages of my doctoral work. My first study was to see whether there was a difference between the way that the free American and controlled Iranian media were covering an issue that concerned both countries, the hostage crisis. For a simple research paper for a class project a classmate, Judy Weddle, and I examined the content of two elite newspapers, one in the U.S.—*The New York Times*—and one in Iran—*Kayhan*. We discovered that the coverage in both newspapers was similar to their respective governments' official policy on the issue. From the Iranian point of view, the hostages were there for a very legitimate reason. The Iranians wanted to pressure the American government to turn over the Shah, who was in the U.S. at the time. They also wanted a guarantee against U.S. interference in the Iranian affairs of the sort that had occurred for several decades under the Shah. Another reason for hostages not being released, according to the Iranian press, was

the demand for recognition of the legitimacy of the Islamic regime in Iran. From the American point of view, the first priority naturally was unconditional release of all the hostages; then came other concerns.

The findings on the Iranian press did not surprise me, knowing the traditional practices of the press in that society. However, for me it was quite interesting to note how, when it came to a critical foreign policy issue such as the hostage crisis, even an elite American paper ignored many other aspects of the issue and pursued the official governmental line. Maybe that behavior illustrates what Mowlana in this volume calls the "foreign policy culture" of the media.

The findings of this very limited study made me truly interested in the relationship between the media and government and how these two institutions act and interact in American democracy. This subject later became my major research interest. I did my dissertation on this subject, and I published several articles and presented several papers in different conferences based on these findings. As a matter of fact, the last chapter in this book is a continuation of that research.

My studies of the news media and foreign policy have convinced me that the subject matter is one of the least systematically explored areas in the field of international relations and international communication. I decided, therefore, to design a course exclusively on news media and foreign policy while I was still a Ph.D. student. The course was approved, and I have been teaching it at The American University every semester since then.

The longer I teach, research, and write about news media and foreign policy, the more I realize how important this subject is, and how scarce the resources are. This book is an attempt to add to a limited existing literature on the subject matter.

As the list of contributors to this book demonstrates, the study of news media and foreign relations does not belong to any one discipline. Studying this subject, like many other subjects in international communication and other areas of communication, requires a multi-disciplinary approach that goes beyond any one discipline. And that is why I decided to invite scholars with diverse backgrounds to contribute to this book.

The existing limited literature on the media and foreign policy is very scattered at its best. As a matter of fact, a big part of the literature is produced by scholars and professionals outside of the field of media and/or foreign policy. At the same time, a close review of the literature reveals that no theoretical framework exists to provide a focus to these studies. These points are well demonstrated in the first chapter by Malek and Wiegand. As a matter of fact, one of the purposes of the first chapter in this book is to demonstrate the state of confusion in the study of the relationship between the media and foreign policy decision-making.

The book is divided into two sections: theoretical and empirical. The purpose of the first section of the book is to lay the foundation for analysis of the role of the media in foreign relations, and the purpose of the second part is, through empirical studies, to demonstrate some of these relationships in a variety of cases. It is not the claim of this book, nor was it its intention, to be an exhaustive source, if that is possible at all.

The purpose was to present focused and diverse theoretical and empirical studies on the role that media play in foreign relations.

In the first chapter, Malek and Wiegand demonstrate the chaotic state of scholarly work and the level of disagreement among writers in the field. The next two chapters are an attempt to produce a theoretical framework for analysis. In chapter two Professor Mowlana suggests that "the study of the media and foreign policy should take into account the multifaced nature of the phenomenon by focusing on" several dimensions: "1) the culture of foreign policy, 2) the decision-making process, 3) public opinion and interest groups, 4) modern communication technology, 5) security, peace and war, 6) economic and trade as foreign policy, and 7) culture and information as foreign policy." Professor Ebo in chapter three examines the dynamic between media diplomacy and foreign policy in the context of national identity, international image and global political power. He argues that, although the primary goal of foreign policy remains the promotion of national interests in the international arena, the strategies have changed. The ability of a nation to use the media to construct an international image is the major focus of the chapter, and the shift from military power to "information power" forms the major thesis of his chapter.

Chapters four demonstrates the use, and to some extent the abuse, of modern media technologies in the conduct of foreign relations. Professor Venturelli argues that "information liberalization applied through the emerging framework of the 'global information highway' is one of the most important forces for advancing the political aims of liberal internationalism which predominantly favor the reconstitution of the world system on the basis of the large-scale proprietary interests." She warns us of the urgency of "assessing the regulatory framework of the information age, which will fix the structures of public communications for the next century."

The section closes with Professor Rivenburgh's chapter, in which she argues that "the study of social identification offers a largely unexplored framework for analyzing media within the foreign policy process. The general logic to this recommendation comes from the view that the analysis of foreign policy is essentially the study of social or intergroup behavior—in this case the relations among nation-states."

The second section of the book opens with a general discussion of the relationship among three institutions in the American political system: the President, Congress, and the media. Professor Bonafede, a long term scholar and practitioner of media, in this chapter discusses how the separate institutions share power in the conduct of American foreign policy. He also demonstrates that how "the emergence of advanced mass communications technology following World War II, with its emphasis on imagery and symbolism... compelled foreign policy decision-makers to be skilled communicators and to establish a symbiotic relationship with an increasingly pervasive news media." In chapter seven Professor Barton provides us with a specific historical analysis of how policy-makers interpret the portrayals of public opinion by the media and use them "to construct an internal rhetoric within the policy-making culture to persuade colleagues about a policy direction, and a corresponding externally directed communications strategy that serves as



public relations for the policy.” In chapter eight Professor Hackett takes another look at the coverage of the Persian Gulf War by the media in the Canadian and American cases. He assesses the relationship between the press and foreign policy by examining “how the press treats opposition to the State’s foreign policy.” Professor Cassara in Chapter nine examines one specific foreign policy issue—human rights in Central and South America—during the Carter Administration. In this chapter she explores “the connection between the Carter human rights policy and newspaper coverage of Central and South America.” The study is set “to examine one aspect of the interaction of presidential foreign policy initiatives and American press coverage of foreign news.” In chapter ten Professor Carrier discusses the “the danger and merits of the global news systems.” She presents two schools of thought on the effects of globalization and domestication of global news services and the implications of each system for the national and foreign policy of a nation. Professor Grosswiler, in chapter eleven presents a study of prominent U.S. newspapers editorial coverage of the remaining Communist states in the Post-Cold War era. “Now that the Cold War has ended, the loss of this ideology, its symbols and images may affect the relationship of the media and government in the foreign policy process,” he hypothesizes. Then he argues that “the media help shape the way that the public perceives political issues, whether those media symbols are real or imagined.” Professor Zaffiro in chapter twelve “investigates [the] relationship between news media and foreign policy in the Republic of Botswana, a France-sized, Southern African democracy of 1.4 million people.” Professor Zaffiro demonstrates the difference between the analysis of the relationship between the news media and government in an African country and a Western nation. And in the last chapter, Malek closes the book with a discussion of how, in contrast to the popular belief, the media (here *The New York Times*) have not learned from the past. He details and compares the coverage by the *NYT* of the Iranian revolution and, later on, of the Iran–Iraq war, concluding that “the press, to a great extent, merely reflects the U.S. government’s policy toward a particular international issue or event.” And if such a finding can be generalized, then one may question the theoretical foundations of belief concerning American media as they relate to the relationship between media and government.

# Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
About the Editor	x
Introduction	xi

## part I. theoretical perspective

1. <i>News Media and Foreign Policy: An Integrated Review</i> Abbas Malek and Krista E. Wiegand	3
2. <i>The Media and Foreign Policy: A Framework of Analysis</i> Hamid Mowlana	29
3. <i>Media Diplomacy and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Framework</i> Bosah Ebo	43
4. <i>Information Liberalization and the Restructuring of International Relations</i> Shalini Venturelli	59
5. <i>Social Identification and Media Coverage of Foreign Relations</i> Nancy K. Rivenburgh	79

## part II. empirical studies

6. <i>The President, Congress, and the Media in Global Affairs</i> Dom Bonafede	95
7. <i>Appropriating the "Public Mood" of Other Nations in Press-Foreign Policy Management: A Case Study from Canadian/American Relations</i> Richard L. Barton	121
8. <i>The Press and Foreign Policy Dissent: The Case of the Gulf War</i> Robert A. Hackett	141

9. <i>Presidential Initiatives and Foreign News: The Carter Human Rights Policy and Coverage of Central and South America</i> Catherine Cassara	161
10. <i>Global News and Domestic Needs: Reflections and Adaptations of World Information to fit National Policies and Audience Needs</i> Rebecca Carrier	177
11. <i>The Impact of Media and Images on Foreign Policy: Elite U.S. Newspaper Editorial Coverage of Surviving Communist Countries in the Post-Cold War Era</i> Paul Grosswiler	195
12. <i>African News Media and Foreign Policy: The Case of Botswana</i> James J. Zaffiro	211
13. <i>New York Times' Editorial Position and U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of Iran Revisited</i> Abbas Malek	225
About the Contributors	249
Author Index	251
Subject Index	257

*part I*

# *theoretical perspectives*



chapter I

*news media and foreign policy:  
an integrated review*

*Abbas Malek*  
*Howard University*

*Krista E. Wiegand*  
*The American University*

—These capabilities of modern media to be immediate, sensational, and persuasive are unsettling the conduct of foreign affairs.

—James F. Hoge, Jr., 1994, p. 136

—A daily assembly line of proposals, tips, press releases, documents, and interviews rolls out of the White House and the various federal departments.

In a matter of hours, the networks, wire services, and major dailies are telling the public what the government wants them to hear.

—Michael Parenti, 1986, p. 229

—We can put aside myths that the press in reporting foreign policy is either a left-wing (or right wing), pushy, opinion-molding, policy destroying political participant, or a patsy, malleable, myopic sponge under the sway of crafty public officials.

—Nicholas Berry, 1990, p. xiv

**A**re the media truly influential enough to sway not only public opinion, but foreign policy itself? Or is it the government that not only manipulates, but controls the media's every statement about foreign policy? Perhaps the media and the government coordinate their manipulation of public opinion of foreign policy. It is even possible that neither the media nor the government purposely intend to sway each other; rather, the system is controlled by chance.

Regardless of the possible framework into which the current relationship of the

media and the foreign policy establishment fits, the relationship itself has always been rough. Only in the last few decades has this complex relationship gained real notice among scholars, foreign policymakers, journalists, and the public. Until the late 1960s, in fact, the media's relationship with foreign policy was limited in many ways. Thus, research about this relationship was close to nonexistent. Rather, existing research focused primarily on the role of the media in domestic affairs.

### **INFLUENCING POLICY: DOMESTIC VERSUS FOREIGN**

There is a distinct difference between the media's involvement in domestic policy and their role in the foreign policy process. Too many scholars and journalists have made faulty assumptions about the media's role in the foreign policy process based on studies of the media's reporting of domestic policy. According to several scholars who are aware of the distinction, there are a number of reasons why studies of the media's involvement in domestic policy have little relevance to the foreign policy realm.

Grabner pointed out that political pressure on the media is greater in the realm of foreign affairs than on domestic issues (1989, p. 336). Berry explained that foreign policy issues are much more removed from the minds of the public, and the process in which the media participate is much different in regards to foreign policy. According to Paletz and Entman, domestic issues are simply better understood by the public than foreign issues. Additionally, Paletz and Entman claimed that the media seem to allow themselves to be manipulated by powerful government elites whose interest is to further manipulate public opinion (1981, p. 231).

### **AN EVOLUTION IN THOUGHT**

Until Lippmann wrote about the media's influence on public opinion in 1922, the relationship between the media and the foreign policy process was barely researched. Many possible reasons existed, including: a lack of access to information about foreign policy by the media, a lack of public interest in foreign affairs, a less developed state of media technology, a lack of media expertise in foreign affairs, and the fact that during this period the media were not a well developed social institution as far as the field of international affairs was concerned.

Early research about relationship between the media and foreign policy focused primarily on two related issues—the influence of the media on public opinion and the role of the media in foreign policy decision making. In 1922, long before the electronic revolution in communication, Lippmann wrote about the apprehension concerning the impact of the media's coverage of foreign affairs on public perception, stating that the pictures formed in the public's minds by the media were the leading source from which public opinion was formed. The media's influence on public opinion in regards to foreign policy issues has been one of the main concerns

of scholars in the field through the century.

Other early scholars in the field believed that the media wielded great influence in the foreign policy-making process. Douglass and Bomer (1932) viewed the media as a "key factor in international relations" (Qtd. in Chang, 1993, p. 24). Stowe (1936) noted that the media played a crucial role in every international conflict, and Coggeshall (1934) indicated that the media have strong diplomatic influence (Chang, 1993, p. 24).

Cohen's pathbreaking study *The Press and Foreign Policy* (1963), which concluded early-on that the media defined and performed their job by themselves, put into perspective the relevance of the media-government relationship. Representing scholars of a new era, Cohen observed reporters as having two simultaneous roles, among others—that of informing the public and explaining foreign policy, and that of participating in the foreign policy process by questioning and criticizing the government decision makers.

Today, scholars of diverse points of view are more concerned about the media's foreign policy role not only because the media themselves have changed over the decades, but also because, according to some scholars, the foreign policy establishment has changed as well. As Judis wrote, "American foreign policy, once the realm of the gods, has become the domain of mere influence peddlers" (1992, p. 55). Herman and Chomsky (1988) agreed, claiming that the elite of the United States are now more consistently reluctant to face the public on the issue of foreign policy conflicts, thus depending on the media to play this role.

### THREE PERSPECTIVES OF MEDIA INFLUENCE: ACTIVE, PASSIVE, NEUTRAL

At one end of the spectrum are scholars who believe that the media play a highly active role in influencing decisions made in the foreign policy arena, viewing the media as "a watchdog, an independent observer, an active participant, or a catalyst" (e.g. Cohen, 1963). This opinion is supported by journalists, themselves, as well as scholars whose approach is practical and focuses on mass communication more than foreign policy and political science (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956). Moyers (1969) viewed the media as having "the privilege of trying to find out all it can about what is going on" in the government (p. 36). This notion of an all-powerful, authoritative media enthralled journalists and supporters of the news media (Chang, 1993, p. 7).

At the other end of the spectrum are scholars in the same field who view the media as "no more than a pawn in the political game played by the powerful political authority and establishment in Washington" (Chang, 1993, p. 7). Proponents of this view believe that the media, structurally, serve as an instrument in the actual implementation of foreign policy. Nimmo & Combs (1980) viewed the notion of an adversarial media as a "political myth." Rather, the media tend to support the elite class and already existing political initiatives, as discussed by Altschull (1984) Gitlin (1980), Hallin (1987), and Tuchman (1974), all of whom lean toward the notion that the news media only val-



idate the government's decisions by deferring to authority. Some writers have taken this view one step further by asserting that the media act as part of a "propaganda model" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Naturally, there does lie a middle ground. Scholars differ widely in their backgrounds and opinions, but most tend to fall between the two extremes. Whether these approaches should and can be integrated into a formative approach is a question of whether such integration would limit the ability of the field to continue introducing ever changing concepts, challenging the elites.

Scholars who fall into this middle category include Hero (1959), Cohen (1963), Allison (1971), Davision (1974), Batscha (1975), Kern, Levering, & Levering (1983), Ciofi-Revilla, Merritt, & Zinnes (1987), Herman and Chomsky (1988), Berry (1990), and Serfaty (1990). These writers, to one degree or another, argue that neither the media nor the government are as manipulative as extreme positions suggest, nor do they work together to manipulate public opinion. In addition, other scholars, journalists, and representatives of the foreign policy establishment have presented other points of view that do not fit neatly into these categories.

## GOVERNMENT MANIPULATION OF THE MEDIA

Those who believe that the government manipulates the media question whether the foreign policy establishment's strong influence on the media limits diversity of opinions about controversial foreign policy issues (Brown and Vincent, 1995). Regardless of the answer, several scholars in the field have claimed that the government, and specifically the Executive Branch, manipulates the media so that its own policy agendas are protected and portrayed positively to the public (see Sigal, 1973; Deakin, 1984; Denton and Woodward, 1985; Tebbel and Watts, 1985; Bennett, 1988; Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Hertsgaard, 1988; and Streitmatter, 1988).

The media's "deference to authority" concerning the foreign policy establishment is an issue raised by other scholars as well. Trattner wrote that the government influences "how, even whether, a story is written" (1982, p. 104), especially because the media tend to depend greatly on official government news sources (Nimmo, 1978). Rourke argued that only the government is capable of gratifying "the hunger of the communications media for news about public affairs" (1961, pp. 197-198). Perhaps the most extreme viewpoint is represented by Herman and Chomsky, who described their "propaganda model" as a system in which news is filtered through money and power, meeting the interests of the elite and not of the public (1988).

In effect, the "elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents" (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2) occurs in such a way that the media, as other scholars have noted, become unaware of the self-screening which they are conducting, convincing themselves of their supposed objectivity. The media's "societal role" becomes one of defending the economic, political, and social goals of the dominating elite, whose private interests dominate the agenda. The media are not adversarial, but instead