

THE MEDIA-PUBLIC OPINION-POLICY NEXUS  
IN GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

# AICGS GERMAN-AMERICAN ISSUES

# 05

Bernd Gäbler  
Mary N. Hampton  
Susan D. Moeller  
Clay Ramsay  
Jeff Rosenberg

**AMERICAN INSTITUTE  
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	03
About the Authors	06
Trends in U.S. Media	09
Some Remarkable Features of the Journalistic Landscape in Germany	16
In Search of Anti-Americanism in European Publics	24
Re-creating the World: An Examination of Public Opinion, the Media, and Foreign Policy in the United States and Germany	31
International Broadcasting and Public Diplomacy: Not Just for Governments Anymore	38

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## FOREWORD

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The starkly different media images and rhetoric that appeared in German and American news outlets during the Iraq conflict reflected the degree of political tension between the two countries. Germans and Americans both were disturbed by the negative stereotyping and inaccuracies in each others' news media, prompting a debate about the sources of these contradictory images and whether the media itself had become part of the problem in transatlantic relations.

In response to these questions, AICGS developed a research initiative to examine the relationship between media and politics, focusing on the links between the media, the public it serves, and the policy community on whom the media is dependent for the information it transmits to the public. With the support of The German Marshall Fund of the United States, two workshops were conducted in Berlin and Washington, D.C. to examine various dimensions of the media-opinion-policy nexus. Conclusions and recommendations based on the discussions in the workshops have been published in AICGS Policy Report #20 *The Media, Perceptions, and Policy in German-American Relations*. This edited volume is a companion piece to this Policy Report. Five essays, written by German and American journalists and policy experts, discuss overall trends in the German and American media landscapes as well as specific aspects of the media-opinion-policy relationship.

The volume begins with two essays, written by Susan Moeller and Bernd Gäbler, that present a broad view of future trends in U.S. and German media. Moeller focuses on an issue that goes to the heart of American journalism—its role as an independent watchdog. In her assessment, by catering to the government and the powerful, the media have abdicated their mediating role, lost their credibility, and damaged their authority.

There are reasons for the media's rather weak and ineffectual playing of their watchdog role, such as the appeal of fast, breaking news that almost by necessity jettisons nuance and context, and a fragmented news environment where the media no longer control the news agenda nor the players. The media must be willing to address these failings in order to regain their credibility. The media must be more transparent—in their news reporting, their sourcing of stories, and in what the media know and do not know. And they must, in Moeller's view, take back their independent role and not permit the government a veto on the content of news. It is not an easy task, since the question is tied up in larger concerns over how to balance news content in an age of instantaneous global communications against the needs of governments to protect their citizens in an age of global terrorism.

Bernd Gäbler's contribution encompasses a more general overview of trends in the German media, revealing both differences and similarities with trends in the U.S. media. With regard to print media, while it is true that

more Germans still read newspapers, readership has declined overall, as it has in the United States. German papers also face similar demographic challenges (an older readership, with no growth among youth). In contrast, Germany has a dual system of both public and commercial broadcasting, with public broadcasting more dominant in Germany than in the United States. But public broadcasting has been losing ground to commercial broadcasters. Here, the similarities with American media emerge: a growing trend toward news as entertainment, more emotive images, and an emphasis on political personalities rather than on politics itself. This shift has led to a growing equalization between the public and commercial broadcasting institutions in Germany. Online journalism is not as advanced in Germany as it is in the United States, though one is beginning to see major German newspapers and new magazines moving into this area. Thus, while Gäbler is more confident about the future of the German print media, he is less sanguine about German broadcasting and still cautious in his assessment of the potential impact of online journalism.

The third essay, a contribution by Mary N. Hampton, takes a comparative approach to understanding the relationship between media and public opinion in the United States and Germany, with a focus on foreign policy. Hampton looks at both process and identity, where similarities and differences in the media-opinion relationship in the United States and Germany are discernible.

Hampton examines first the impact of media and public opinion on the foreign policy process. Generally, the American case was always thought to have approximated a more bottom-up model. The U.S. presidential system, with weak party institutions and a strong executive, is highly fragmented, and this fragmentation creates more points of access for public opinion to influence the policy process. The German case was seen as a top-down model, since parliamentary systems have stronger parties and weaker executives. Arguably, this implies that parties play a more central role in channeling public opinion into the policy process, with little direct input from the public below. Hampton shows that these rules of thumb do not necessarily hold true anymore. Empirical evidence has shown that German public opinion can, in fact, influence or constrain the political elite more than was previously assumed, and that in the United States, the foreign policy elite, particularly the executive branch, can often dominate the foreign policy process, limiting public input.

Hampton then turns to a discussion of cultural identity and its effect on public opinion and the media. For both the United States and Germany, cultural and national identities form the bedrock of values and principles on which the public relies for its opinion formation. It is the American sense of exceptionalism and its moral compass that guides Americans' outlooks on foreign policy, while Germany's cultural and national identity has been shaped by its historical experiences of war and defeat. The current tensions in German-American relations are a reflection of these differing national narratives.

In the fourth essay, Clay Ramsay examines one dimension of the public opinion-media relationship: anti-Americanism. Ramsay argues that the debate on anti-Americanism is often muddled by the absence of a working definition, and he sets out first to rectify this by delineating three dimensions implicit in the use of the term. In his analysis of mass public opinion, anti-Americanism is a complex mix of negative feelings toward the United States; of beliefs about what America is (e.g. capitalist, imperialist); and of policy attitudes toward decisions made by American governments. Citing survey data, Ramsay reveals that the anti-American sentiment that has resulted in significant declines in positive views of the United States in the last two years has its roots not in anti-American feelings, but in significant opposition to U.S. policies under the current administration. Anti-Bush and anti-U.S. foreign policy views do not influence the otherwise positive feelings that Germans and other Europeans show for the American people. But as Ramsay points out, anti-Americanism as a cultural critique, a predisposition in the political elite, or even a bias in the media, still exists, beyond the definition used to describe the dynamics of mass public opinion.

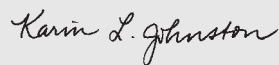
Turning to the other side of the media-opinion-policy nexus, the final essay by Jeff Rosenberg looks at one dimension of the media-policy nexus, that of public diplomacy. Numerous reports have been published outlining the crisis in U.S. public diplomacy, but there is little consensus on how to address the problem. Meanwhile, the advent of cable news, the Internet, and blogs have challenged the ways in which governments can reach out to foreign audiences.

This is an important point, because these technological advances also created a new type of consumer. The resulting fragmentation of news sources means that people need not rely on one source of news, government-sponsored or otherwise; they have an infinite menu of choices at their fingertips. It is the reality of this global news market that demands more than pop music to win the hearts and minds of foreign audiences.

In looking for solutions, Rosenberg argues for candor, transparency, and creativity: “The new global environment demands new and innovative solutions for getting audiences to understand us, not to ‘buy’ us.” In his experience, foreign audiences want to know more about the United States, but they want “honest,” unadulterated news. One way to achieve this is to provide news stories that Americans themselves hear, stories that reflect all dimensions of American life, both good and bad.

And while Rosenberg’s focus is on the United States, workshop discussions revealed that there is not much difference in the demands and challenges of public diplomacy when comparing the German and American cases. The point, as Rosenberg stresses, is that the United States—or any country—is a “work in progress,” and that the goal of public diplomacy is not to convince people to think of us in a particular way as much as it is an effort to help audiences understand us, as much as we are trying to understand ourselves.

We would like to express our gratitude to The German Marshall Fund of the United States for its generous support of this project, and to the five contributors to this volume for providing insight and clarity to many complex issues. Special thanks also goes to Ilonka Oszvald, the Institute’s Publications Coordinator, for her assistance, patience, and good humor. We hope that this publication will encourage further dialogue on the impact of the media on public and elite opinion and perceptions, on policy and policy debates in Germany and the United States, and on the bilateral relationship.



KARIN L. JOHNSTON  
Research Associate

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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BERND GÄBLER was Director of the Adolf Grimme Institute in Marl from 2001-2004. Prior to that he led the department responsible for media issues for *Die Woche* (1997-2001). From 1998-2001 Gäbler served as a television journalist, with editorial responsibilities ranging from entertainment shows in commercial television, such as “Schreinemakers live,” (comparable to Oprah Winfrey) to journalistic discussion programs, such as the ARD “Presseclub” (comparable to “Meet the Press”). A historian by training, Gäbler is a frequent speaker and writer on the history and effectiveness of the media for publications such as the *Tagesspiegel* and *Geo Wissen*. He is a welcome guest on many television shows and is often called on to moderate events and political debates. Gäbler also has worked on many book publications. He is a member of the German UNESCO Commission (DUK), the Hamburg Film Commission (Hamburger Filmförderung), and the German Academy for Football Culture (Deutsche Akademie für Fußballkultur) in Nürnberg. Gäbler’s areas of interest are: the history of media, media theory, the social impact and relevance of television to society, critical analyses of the television/broadcast medium, sports in the media, media and politics, and the influence of media and its “staging” of politics.

MARY N. HAMPTON is Professor of National Security at Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. She was an Assistant, then Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Utah from 1989-2003. From 2000-2002, she was a visiting Professor at Air War College. Hampton has been a NATO Research Fellow in Germany (1997-98), a Fulbright pre-doctoral student in Germany (1984-85), a Ford Foundation Fellow at Harvard University’s Center for Foreign and International Affairs (CFIA, 1986-87), a CFIA Associate (1992-93), and a MacArthur Fellow at the Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt, Germany (1990). She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from UCLA and has published widely on NATO, German foreign, domestic, and security policy, and U.S. foreign and security policy. Her most recent publications include: “Germany and Peacekeeping: Explaining German Power Projection ‘Lite,’” in David S. Sorenson and Pia Christina Wood, eds., *The Politics of Peacekeeping in the Post-Cold War Era*, (Frank Cass Publishers, 2005); “Ladies Choice: Women and the Reelection of the Schroeder Government,” in David Conradt, et al. eds. *Germany and the 2002 Election* (Berghahn, 2005); “Community Breakdown? Germany, NATO, and the Guns of September,” in James Sperling, ed. *Germany at 55* (University of Manchester, 2004); “Joschka Fischer: From Rebel to Wilsonian?” in Mareike Koenig/ Matthias Schulz, eds. *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und die europäische Einigung 1949-2000*. (Franz Steiner, Summer 2004); *Reinventing the German Military*, AICGS Policy Report 11 with Stephen F. Szabo, (January 2004); and “German Positive/Negative Identity in NATO and the EU,” with James Sperling, *Journal of European Integration* (Winter 2002).

SUSAN D. MOELLER is an Associate Professor of Media and International Affairs in the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland and an affiliated faculty member at the School of Public Policy. She is the author of *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* and *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat*. Moeller was formerly the director of the Journalism Program at Brandeis University. She has also been a fellow in the International Security Program and at the Joan Shorenstein Center for the Press, Politics and Public Policy, both at Harvard University, and a Fulbright Scholar in Pakistan and in Thailand. She has taught at Princeton University and Pacific Lutheran University.

Moeller received her Ph.D. and A.M. from Harvard and her B.A. from Yale University. Moeller has special expertise in U.S. and global media affairs, especially with regard to international relations, violence and conflict, terrorism and WMD, human rights, and visual communications. She has authored numerous major media studies, including *Media Coverage of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (CISSM, University of Maryland), and *Government, Media and Human Rights* (International Council on Human Rights Policy, Geneva), and has written on topics related to media and public policy. Moeller regularly consults on issues relating to the media, terrorism, and conflict and is a frequent commentator in the media. She has been interviewed on “Nightline” and “ABC News,” CNN International, the “Lehrer NewsHour,” the BBC World Service, CBC-TV and on radio programs on NPR and Public Radio International [PRI] and has been quoted on the topic of WMD and terrorism in such U.S. newspapers and magazines as *The Atlanta-Journal Constitution*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Miami Herald*, *National Journal*, *Newsday*, *The New York Times*, and *The Seattle Times*.

CLAY RAMSAY is Research Director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), which conducts research on U.S. and world public opinion on international issues. PIPA is a joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland, where Ramsay is also a research fellow. With a background in history and psychology, Ramsay has focused on the study of ideology and mass psychology in his work at PIPA. PIPA has published reports on a wide range of topics, from the role of the United States in the world, to foreign aid, U.S. defense spending, global warming, and transatlantic issues, including: “Americans on the Darfur Crisis and the International Criminal Court,” (1 March 2005); “The Hall of Mirrors: Perceptions and Misperceptions in the Congressional Foreign Policy Process,” (1 October 2004); “19 Nation Poll on Global Issues,” (4 June 2004); and “Americans on Foreign Aid and World Hunger,” (2 February 2001). Ramsay is the co-author, with Steven Kull and Evan Lewis, of “Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 118, no. 4, Winter 2003-2004; and with Steven Kull, “The Myth of the Reactive Public,” in *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force*, edited by Philip Everts and Pierangelo Isernia (New York: Routledge) 2001. PIPA currently partners with the international polling firm GlobeScan to produce the BBC World Service poll. Prior to his tenure at PIPA, Ramsay was a historian of modern Europe, specializing in the French revolution. He received his Ph.D. in History from Stanford University and has taught at Oberlin College. He is the author of the book, *The Ideology of the Great Fear* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press) 1992.

JEFF ROSENBERG has served as one of the senior producers in the news and events department at NPR for more than three decades, with responsibility extending into all areas of coverage, especially international events. For twenty years he has been responsible, on a rotation basis, for U.S. radio network pool planning and production of coverage of presidential trips overseas. Although he currently retains some of the news production duties, his principal assignment is as Director of NPR Worldwide, the export branch of NPR's programming. NPR is unique among American radio news broadcasters in that it sends all of its domestic output to listeners around the world without any changes for overseas consumption. NPR's programs are rebroadcast by stations overseas as well as fed to satellite and cable distribution outlets. NPR is a nonprofit, noncommercial broadcaster, and it does not use government funds for distribution overseas. Throughout his career in public broadcasting, he has been an active participant on public diplomacy issues. He was one of the founding members of the Indo-U.S. Joint Media Advisory Committee (USIA) for more than a decade, an NEH Fellow at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and a participant in a number of international exchange programs through the German government and the European Parliament.





## ESSAYS

## TRENDS IN U.S. MEDIA

SUSAN D. MOELLER

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Sydney Schanberg, media columnist for *The Village Voice*, has been on a recent campaign to get the American press to “clean up its house and vigorously fight for its traditional role in this democracy.”<sup>1</sup> Schanberg, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the fall of Cambodia, has argued that the press has been culpable in its own problems: “We haven’t gotten across why people need us or why what we do is important to the functioning of a free nation. We haven’t effectively gotten our readers to understand that if they get lied to by their government or other power centers, and we—or some other watchdogs—don’t quickly show them the lie, bad things can happen. People can lose their health insurance or have their homes seized by the bank. And wars can happen and people can die.”<sup>2</sup> The press threatens to become the “national piñata,” he argues, laid low by damaging blows from all directions.

In 2001, the media’s live coverage of the events of 9/11 allowed the profession to shine: reporters rose to the occasion of the unprecedented national tragedy, providing news to their audiences with competence and compassion. The immediate and voracious hunger of Americans for information gave back to the media a power and credibility that they had not had for years. Then the Bush administration’s declaration of a “War on Terror” compelled Americans to give further attention to the news. The battles for public opinion at home and abroad were waged in large measure through the media—on air, online, and in print. Being a journalist mattered again.

Then came a series of self-inflicted blows—not just the flurry of plagiarism cases, or the spectacular fabrications of Jayson Blair, Stephen Glass, or Jack Kelley, or,

later, CBS News’ circulation of the forged Bush-National Guard documents. Those demonstrated a laxity about the editing process, a complacency about the work done by “star” reporters and columnists, a hubris about the need of major media institutions to rigorously demand adherence to stated news standards.

Those blows to the public trust in the journalism profession have been bad enough. But worse harm—long-term harm to the media’s essential function in a democracy—has been caused by the media’s abdication of their independent role, their capitulation to the White House demand that they fall in with the “patriotic” message, as evidenced by their stenographic reporting of the White House and Congress’s agenda. Within a year after 9/11, for example, most

news organizations had docilely accepted President George Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's linkage of terrorism to Iraq and weapons of mass destruction. Most news outlets did not report evidence that might have helped readers, listeners, and viewers to challenge the Bush administration's argument that weapons of mass destruction were inseparably part of a global terrorism matrix or its suggestion that there were direct links between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. media have always emphasized the policy directives of the White House, but since 9/11, this administration has raised secrecy and information control to a level never before seen in Washington.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence of the news management, reporting on the president has amplified the administration's voice even more than political coverage has in the past. On the repeated occasions when President Bush told Americans that they were vulnerable to WMD in the hands of terrorists, for example, verbatim coverage of those statements not only disseminated, but validated the president's message. In front-page and top-of-the-news stories, the media led with White House statements. When alternative perspectives were presented as part of the coverage, that evidence and analysis tended to be buried.<sup>5</sup>

By the president's "Mission Accomplished" speech on 1 May 2003 declaring an end to major combat operations in Iraq, more journalists were seeking independent confirmation of the White House's and Pentagon's pronouncements. Still, the press, as a whole, has continued to show, through their reporting of the war and other policy issues, that the administration's set of priorities is still the dominant narrative. When the White House characterizes a particular event as important, so too do the media. And when the White House ignores a story (or a particular angle on a story), the media are likely to do so as well.<sup>6</sup> Robert Fisk, the leftist journalist for the *Independent of London* cattily observed that *The New York Times* should rename itself "American Officials Say."<sup>7</sup>

The biddable behavior of the media has made them especially vulnerable to being scapegoated for crises not (or not entirely) of their own making. The recent *Newsweek* debacle is a case in point. The Bush administration blamed the magazine's inadequately

sourced 300-word story in its "Periscopes" section relating that U.S. interrogators "in an attempt to rattle suspects, flushed a Koran down a toilet" for riots in Afghanistan and Pakistan in which at least fifteen people died. "They cannot retract the damage they have done to this nation or those who were viciously attacked by those false allegations," said Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman.<sup>8</sup>

But, countered Henrik Hertzman, writing the lead article in the *New Yorker's* "Talk of the Town" section, "Is it really necessary at this late date to point out that the problem is torture and abuse, not dubiously sourced reports of torture and abuse?"<sup>9</sup> And *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson noted sourly: "That was an awfully neat parlor trick the Bush administration performed last week, focusing attention on the reporting and editing process at *Newsweek* and away from more inconvenient facts: the copiously well-documented physical and psychological abuse of Muslim prisoners; the way this abuse has poisoned hearts and minds against America over the past three years; and the eruption of deadly riots in Afghanistan, a country we were supposed to have fixed!"<sup>10</sup>

Why have the media been so weak in their response to these internal and external threats to their own authority and integrity? There are a number of causes:

- There is no media anymore that can afford to be truly deliberative always. The public demands its news "now," anytime, around the clock. The new technology and the ubiquity of the Internet has, on one hand, augmented investigative reporters' ability to rapidly locate facts and draw information from a broad range of sources, but that same pace too often turns hysterical, blurring solid reporting with rumor and rants into an indistinguishable and at times toxic slurry;
- Daily iterative journalism, much less hourly or minute-by-minute instant journalism, is wholly inadequate to tackle the complicated nuances of life-and-death events. Prioritizing "breaking" news over other genres unavoidably curtails the time or amount of attention a news organization can give to background, history, context, or multiple alternative perspectives;

- The real-time ability of journalists to take high-resolution color images from Kirkuk in northern Iraq or from the beach of a tsunami-wracked Aceh and send them instantly around the globe has helped to feed the 24/7 beast. The live coverage has addicted its global audience to “being there”; it has given a new look to a world formerly covered by journalists who used to have to stop, set-up, broadcast, and break down every time they filed a report. Correspondents can now report on the fly. But they can still only see what is in front of their faces;
- Cable and the Internet have made mass communication exponentially faster and exponentially more accessible to anyone who cares to speak out. As a result, traditional media are less in control of the news agenda than ever before. Bricks-and-mortar news organizations are no longer essential; the old media are not needed to mediate.

There are various ways in which the president can speak directly to the American public, for instance, and many of them are end runs around traditional media and traditional platforms. Yet the freedom that allows an administration to marginalize a major media institution if it so chooses has also brought marginal players into the center of major events and issues. Digital cameras, photo phones, and the Internet have put the means of direct communication into the hands of terrorists in Karachi, soldiers at Abu Ghraib, and tourists in Phuket.

- Americans' knowledge of the world is dramatically different than that of citizens of Europe, the Middle East, and countries elsewhere around the globe. In their coverage of the Iraq War, for example, the U.S. and Arab media emphasized radically different concerns.<sup>11</sup> On American television, the Iraq War's mission was paramount—it was about “regime change,” it was a “war of liberation,” part of the “War on Terror.” Al Jazeera, together with other Arab satellite channels—the professed more detached and fact-driven Abu Dhabi, Al Arabiya, and Al Hayat/LBC networks—adopted a Tarantino-esque perspective on the fighting: violence was the defining element of the conflict. Not only did Al Jazeera and the others not flinch from the showing of wailing mothers and close-ups of wounded chil-

dren, but the aesthetics of the telling, the shots that lingered on the injured and dead, were essential to the story they unfolded.

- American comprehension of the human costs of war and disaster is minimal and easily set aside. In early 1938, in its coverage of the Spanish Civil War, *LIFE* magazine introduced a photo essay by already famed photographer Robert Capa with these words:

Once again *LIFE* prints grim pictures of War, well knowing that once again they will dismay and outrage thousands and thousands of readers. But today's two great continuing news events are two wars—one in China, one in Spain. ... Obviously *LIFE* cannot ignore nor suppress these two great news events in pictures. As events, they have an authority far more potent than any editors' policy or readers' squeamishness. But *LIFE* could conceivably choose to show pictures of these events that make them look attractive. They are not, however, attractive events. ... Americans' noble and sensible dislike of war is largely based on ignorance of what modern war really is. ... The love of peace has no meaning or no stamina unless it is based on a knowledge of war's terrors. ... Dead men have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them.<sup>12</sup>

As the United States staggered through the opening years of World War II, *LIFE* magazine continued to run grim photographs. In the late summer of 1942, *LIFE* published images taken in the Western Desert. Readers wrote in to complain. “I would like to enter my protest,” said one woman from Washington, D.C., “against such depressing realism which only the most morbid among us can find interesting.” “I have just purchased the August 31 *LIFE*,” another woman wrote, “and will destroy it, having seen the pictures which are disgusting in their graphic portrayal of the horrible side of the life our soldiers are forced to lead.” In response, *LIFE* reiterated its statement from the 1938 issue: “Dead men have indeed died in vain if live men refuse to look at them! *LIFE* still maintains that position.”<sup>13</sup>

Today, over sixty years later, as wars and disasters continue to convulse the globe, most American media have caved into their audiences' demand to go lightly

on the “depressing realism,” whether from Abu Ghraib, Aceh, or Darfur. *The Los Angeles Times* analyzed six months of print media coverage from Iraq—from 1 September 2004 through 28 February 2005—a timeframe that included the U.S. assault on Fallujah and the violence before the January election. Despite the considerable number of casualties, seven publications—*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *The Washington Post*, *Time* and *Newsweek*—did not publish a single picture of a dead U.S. serviceman during that time. *The Seattle Times* ran a photo three days before Christmas of the covered body of a soldier killed in the mess hall bombing. Over that same six months, both *The New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* published ten pictures of wounded in the war zone, an average of one every 2 1/2 weeks. The other six publications ran a total of twenty-four photographs of American wounded.<sup>14</sup>

There is a “squeamishness about the carnage that is war’s chief byproduct,” *The New York Times* media critic David Carr earlier wrote in explaining the U.S. media’s hesitancy to show Iraqi civilian casualties:

During an era when popular culture is filled with depictions of violence and death, and the combination of technology and battlefield access for reporters has put the public in the middle of a shooting war, the images that many Americans are seeing are remarkably bloodless. The heroic narrative is shaped in part by what editors and producers view as a need to maintain standards and not offend their audience. But some cultural critics say that the relatively softened imagery has more to do with a political need to celebrate victory without dwelling on its price.<sup>15</sup>

■ Not only do Americans shy away from “depressing realism” in favor of the “heroic narrative,” but even when they do engage, compassion fatigue can set in. In a June 2005 *Washington Post* editorial calling for international support for the United Nations’ appeal for more aid money to stop the genocide in Darfur, the editors observed—with detectable frustration—that the need for greater aid is “simple”:

“The Darfur crisis, which threatens to slide off the radar screen as people grow tired of hearing about it, is quietly getting worse.”<sup>16</sup>

■ Very few broadcast, print, or online media undertake the expense of in-depth investigative reporting. Most are in the rather more facile business of repackaging news, not discovering it. In lieu of a substantive accumulation of facts or reasoned thought or veteran authoritative perceptions, media outlets, especially cable news and what has become known as the “blogosphere,” have moved towards unedited, impulsive, often stream-of-perhaps-you-could-call-it-consciousness talk. A rumor becomes something to report: “people start to talk about it,” said CNN anchor Aaron Brown, “and then Fox News talks about it, and all of the sudden something that has absolutely no basis in fact becomes part of a story.” That is, of course, what often makes those outlets interesting. But that is also what makes those outlets destructive when their product is confused with the more collaborative product (of reporter, editor, producer, etc.) at more “traditional” media institutions. “Today,” said Brown, “we just kind of vomit out information—I mean the Net does—and it seeps its way into broader media coverage dangerously.”<sup>17</sup>

■ Due to mergers and the consequent demand that news operations see profit and not public service as their bottom line, broadcast and even print news outlets are increasingly part—and understood to be part—of the entertainment circus that the “media” business has become.

Audiences are shrinking, if not disappearing for traditional news outlets. Fifty-three percent of adults in the United States read a daily newspaper, down from 62 percent in the late 1980s. The total number of viewers on the three networks of ABC, CBS, and NBC has declined 28.4 percent since 1991—some watchers have moved over to cable outlets such as Fox News Channel, CNN, and MSNBC, while others—especially younger audiences—have been lost, content to grab their news via web servers, blogs, and email alerts, and, increasingly, the narrow-casting channels of satellite radio.<sup>18</sup>

■ Sourcing of stories is a huge problem. On the one hand, there are the experts who are trotted out on the nightly news programs—they are predictably white and male—especially when the topic is foreign affairs, and especially when the medium is cable news.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand there's the ubiquitous unnamed "expert"—*The New York Times* has estimated that half of the front-page stories in leading newspapers rely on anonymous sources.<sup>20</sup> Daniel Okrent, former public editor at the *The New York Times*, has railed against their use. Sometimes they add "useful wisdom or perspective," he has written. In many other cases, they achieve "the opposite of what the writers intended"—they make readers wonder whether they are "being conned."<sup>21</sup> The problem is "deniability." "Welcome, in other words, to Washington," he wrote, "where 'senior State Department officials,' 'White House aides' and other familiar wraiths can say what they want without ever being held accountable for it."<sup>22</sup>

There is a distinctive divide between how journalists think of their relationship to government and how the public considers it. A May 2005 study from the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Public Policy Center found that only 6 percent of journalists said that the government "sometimes" has the "right to limit the right of the press to report a story." No surveyed journalist said that the government "always" had that right. Yet 37 percent of the public said that the government "sometimes" had the right, and 14 percent of the public said the government "always" had the right—a total of 51 percent.<sup>23</sup>

The public's willingness to allow the government to control the media is a direct effect of its view of the media. A 2005 report by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press discovered that 45 percent of Americans polled said they believed "little or nothing of what they read" in their daily newspapers. In a 2005 Harris poll, only 12 percent of the public reported "high confidence" in the media—ranking it only ahead of law firms. And a 2003 Pew poll found that 32 percent of those surveyed considered news organizations to be immoral.<sup>24</sup>

These attitudes will be hard to turn around—and perhaps impossible if the media themselves do not re-examine their behavior.

Certainly there needs to be greater transparency in media as to their selection of news and their coverage of it—otherwise how are media to regain the trust of their audiences? Just as print news stories begin with a byline and a dateline and on-air reporters identify themselves at the end of the pieces by name and location, there should be other identifying information, easily accessible—in italics at the bottom of an article or on a linked website. It would add to the credibility of a news story if readers or viewers were told how long the reporter had had to gather the material—there are different sets of expectations for a piece batted out on a one-hour deadline or a piece that was reported over a number of days. It would add to the credibility of a story if the audience knew whether the reporter was an eyewitness to the event or was re-tooling information reported by another outlet. It would be helpful to learn about problems in access, and about the politics of language used ("mini-nukes" or "bunker busters," for example). In short, just as reviewers for scientific and other academic journals gauge the credibility of submitted articles by examining their research methodology, so too would journalists gain from exposing the parameters of their reporting.

Finally, journalists—or at least that group of journalists committed to original reporting on public policy—need to reassess the assumption made in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, that reporting in an era of terrorism necessitates allowing the government a de facto veto on the contents of news stories. The new public editor at *The New York Times*, Byron Calame, explained the system. He quoted Jill Abramson, a managing editor, speaking about the *Times*' editors' conversations with the CIA and other national security operations: "*Times* editors are willing to 'reconsider and re-evaluate' whether details in stories serve a 'compelling public need' or are 'just details for detail's sake,' she said. These pre-publication discussions have led to some changes in some of the articles since 9/11, she said, declining to be more specific."<sup>25</sup>

Because the policy that the media follow is unofficial, it does not have an Orwellian title. But, like the "Patriot Act," the informal policy asks the media to give up some of their freedoms for "the greater good." No respectable news organization has any interest in endangering some intelligence agent, much less compromising national security. Historically, American reporters have not jeopardized the lives of servicemen or given away secrets of military operations, covert or overt ones. But the devil is in the details and only a news organization that bravely reports what it knows, rather than what it is told is acceptable to say, is worth trusting.

## NOTES

1 Sydney H. Schanberg, "Show of Farce," *The Village Voice*, 24 May 2005.

2 Sydney H. Schanberg, "A Time for Disobedience," *The Village Voice*, 19 April 2005.

3 There were lone voices out there, however. In the case of the coverage of WMD, for instance, Barton Gellman, Walter Pincus, and Dana Milbank of *The Washington Post*, Bob Drogin of *The Los Angeles Times*, and David Johnston and James Risen of *The New York Times* provided perspective or challenged information, as did Warren Strobel, Jonathan Landay, and John Walcott of Knight Ridder. These reporters and a few others demonstrated a consistent level of skepticism in their coverage of WMD events and issues. They avoided stenographic coverage of White House statements. They worked to include more voices, articulating different policy options higher up in their stories. In the admittedly difficult WMD beat, they did not roll over on their coverage of intelligence and report verbatim, without qualifiers, the contentions of anonymous sources, including Iraqi exiles and defectors. They occasionally identified for their audiences the limitations and probable skew of stories when the main sources were anonymous. They at times explained the inherent uncertainties of intelligence gathering and distinguished between intelligence collection and intelligence analysis. Their stories made clear that evaluating a country's WMD status with incomplete data was both an intelligence problem and a policy problem.

4 In a column written in April 2005, Schanberg noted that "Bush was asked about his administration's secrecy controls ... in a question period after his speech to the American

Society of Newspaper Editors meeting in Washington.... he contended that all his secrecy policies were made necessary to keep from "jeopardizing the war on terror," in order not to "put somebody's life at risk." This was about as bald a falsehood as any president could tell. The public record shows that much of his information lockdown has to do with politics and with domestic issues that have no relation to terrorism or homeland security." Schanberg, "A Time for Disobedience," 19 April 2005.

5 For further details of the U.S. and UK media coverage of the Iraq War and especially their coverage of WMD, see Susan D. Moeller, "Media Coverage of Weapons of Mass Destruction," *CISSM Report*, University of Maryland, March 2004. (<http://www.cissm.umd.edu>)

6 Moeller, "Media Coverage of Weapons of Mass Destruction."

7 Daniel Okrent, "The Public Editor: Paper of Record? No Way, No Reason, No Thanks," *The New York Times*, 25 April 2004.

8 Howard Kurtz, "Newsweek Apologizes: Inaccurate Report on Koran Led to Riots," *The Washington Post*, 16 May 2005, A1.

9 Henrik Hertzman, "Talk of the Town: Big News Week," *The New Yorker*, 30 May 2005.

10 Eugene Robinson, "Using the Media for a Magic Trick," *The Washington Post*, 24 May 2005, A7.

11 For example, Mohammed el-Nawawy, "Whose 'Truth' Is Being Reported?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, 8 April 2003.

12 "The World's Two Wars: Teruel Falls and Tsingtao Burns," *Life*, 24 January 1938, 9.

13 Letters to the Editors, *Life*, 21 September 1942, 4.

14 "Unseen Pictures, Untold Stories," *The Los Angeles Times*, 21 May 2005.

15 David Carr, Jim Rutenberg, Jacques Steinberg, "Telling War's Deadly Story at Just Enough Distance," *The New York Times*, 7 April 2003, B13.

The sense that many observers have that American media shy away from showing the human costs of war was borne out by a team of researchers at George Washington University's School of Media and Public Affairs. The researchers analyzed

600 hours of Iraqi War coverage on CNN, Fox News Channel, and ABC from the start of the war on 20 March 2003 to the fall of Baghdad on 9 April 2003. They examined both the morning shows and afternoon and evening coverage, but, as they noted: "Instead of including every story they ran during that time (which would make percentages of casualty stories look artificially low because many stories weren't about fighting) we only examined stories that included images of battles (including artillery firing and bombs falling on Baghdad), casualties of any sort, or both."

Of 1710 stories the team analyzed, only 13.5 percent included any shots of dead or wounded coalition soldiers, Iraqi soldiers, or civilians. "And even when the dead were shown," wrote one of the lead researchers, "they were more likely to be hidden inside a coffin, under a sheet, or represented by some surrogate image such as a shoe." "In truth," the researcher wrote, "rather than showing viewers 'the price' of the Iraq war, television instead transformed a war with hundreds of coalition and tens of thousands of Iraqi casualties into something closer to a defense contractor's training video: a lot of action, but no consequences, as if shells simply disappeared into the air and an invisible enemy magically ceased to exist." Sean Aday, "The G-Rated War," *The Gadflyer*, 29 April 2004.  
<http://gadflyer.com/articles/print.php?ArticleID=90>

16 "The Donors and Darfur," *The Washington Post*, 20 June 2005, A14.

17 Dan Gilchrist, "The Man in the Chair," *Rake*, June 2005.

18 Jason Fry, "Intel CEO Extols Patience," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2005; *The Journal Report: Technology*, "How Old Media Can Survive in a New World," *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 May 2005, R1.

19 "The Gender Gap," *Project for Excellence in Journalism Report*, May 2005.  
<http://www.journalism.org/resources/research/reports/gender/default.asp>

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22 Daniel Okrent, "The Public Editor: An Electrician From the Ukrainian Town of Lutsk," *The New York Times*, 13 June 2004.

23 Joe Strupp, "Study: Journos, Public Hold Divergent Views on Media," *Editor & Publisher*, 24 May 2005.

24 Patrick Healy, "Believe It: The Media's Credibility Headache Gets Worse," *The New York Times*, 22 May 2005.

25 Byron Calame, "The Thinking Behind a Close Look at a C.I.A. Operation," *The New York Times*, 19 June 2005.



## SOME REMARKABLE FEATURES OF THE JOURNALISTIC LANDSCAPE IN GERMANY

BERND GÄBLER

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Whenever I show foreign visitors the most important German television news programs, they feel as if I am asking them to visit the excavation sites of Pompeii. The leading German news program has neither flash nor breaking news. It does not sound off with explosive headlines, and no important personalities are interviewed by the anchors—in fact, the program is not moderated by a journalist at all. Instead, it is serious to the point of boredom. It shows limousines out of which politicians emerge, shake hands, and say something important. Otherwise, news texts are read not from a teleprompter but, rather, from papers. I am talking about the *Tagesschau* (“Today’s News”) of the ARD, the publicly-governed network comprised of the ten state public broadcasting networks.

Since television became a mass phenomenon in Germany, this news program has been punctually broadcast at 8:00 p.m. every evening in up to ten million households. This dinosaur of a program has shaped television news journalism in Germany. Watching it has become a daily ritual for many people, like brushing teeth or saying one’s evening prayers. Afterwards, they feel informed, reasonably in the know, and can partake in discussions. *Tagesschau* separates day from night, and to this day, no one calls friends or acquaintances between 8:00 and 8:15 p.m. Although it has changed since the 1960s, when a third of the German audience was of the opinion that the news anchor was the representative of the government and older ladies dressed themselves up before the television because they believed the daily televised visitor to the living room could see them, this news program with one news reader and small vignettes is still setting the standard. It is viewed as something serious and believable.

It was only in the mid-1980s that the colorful landscape of commercial television in Germany began to

unfold. In order to be recognized as having a full slate of programs, every broadcast station needed a news program. Not much can be earned directly from news, however. There are strict regulations concerning commercials, which state that news programs may not be interrupted. At most, weather forecasts may be separated by a commercial break. The new commercial broadcast stations have undertaken all sorts of attempts to attack the ARD’s *Tagesschau* in order to knock it off its pedestal. They have installed other, more modern forms of news presentation, changed the content of their programs, and began their own competing 8:00 p.m. news programs. Virtual studios have been introduced, graphics have been improved, tabloid-like content has been presented, and journalistic anchors have been hired. But, in the end, the leading position of the *Tagesschau* has proven unshakable. All other stations now broadcast their main news programs in earlier time-slots. There are one public and two private news channels, and although the viewership of the *Tagesschau* has declined slightly since it has been simultaneously broadcast on most regional channels as well as two

specialized channels, its function remains untouched. Expressed in crude numbers, about one third of all viewers get their news from the *Tagesschau*. After that comes *heute*, the news program of the second public broadcast station with between a fourth and fifth of viewers; *RTL-aktuell* with just under 20 percent; and SAT-1 with just over 10 percent market share. All private stations begin their evening programs at 8:15 p.m. and have resignedly abandoned all attempts to establish new positions for themselves by focusing on nonpolitical news stories. Dr. Helmut Thoma, the first director of RTL, the largest commercial broadcast station, once summarized it this way: the *Tagesschau* could be read in Latin by candlelight, and in Germany it would still be the market leader. RTL, the commercial broadcaster with the largest viewership, possesses in Peter Kloeppe an anchor schooled in American journalism who personifies respectability and seriousness. Its main rival, SAT-1, acquired its new main news presenter from the public broadcaster ZDF.

Accidents, disasters, and the personalization of politics still play a larger role with the commercial broadcasters, but broadcast stations must comply with standards governed by public laws that at least prevent the blatant overlap of politics and entertainment. This compliance preserves a certain distance between important news and exciting tabloid items, but it also contributes to a certain torpidity and lack of liveliness in TV news journalism. Young viewers increasingly avoid the news altogether.

The above does not imply that Germans are extraordinarily well informed. The topical spectrum of average German news programs is still quite broad, much broader than in U.S. news programs. Reports are also made from foreign countries—mainly but not exclusively about wars and disasters—and yet the results of empirical studies concerning news reception are becoming more critical.

According to a study by the University of Jena, the news reaches less than 30 percent of television viewers. Many do not understand the reports, deliberately avoid news programs, or can barely remember a single report after having watched a program.<sup>1</sup> Also, viewers often cannot specify which news program they have just seen; when in doubt, they believe it to

have been the *Tagesschau*—many understand that brand name as an entire genre. The author of this long-term study,<sup>2</sup> Professor Georg Ruhmann, elaborates:

The pictorial display of emotions, controversies, and conflicts has in the course of the ten-year study clearly gained in importance. And the public as well as the private broadcasters report more and more frequently about prominent or influential elites. Television news is becoming more apolitical.<sup>3</sup>

The notable result of the comparative surveys is that recipients simplify reports for themselves, identify with the prominent figures they recognize, and dramatize the sensations and conflicts even more strongly.<sup>4</sup> One could say that nothing terribly complex is occurring, but the viewers adopt the “relevant structures of news programs,” meaning that they identify the top themes as especially important. They absorb information more easily when a theme is already established. Spectacular pictures, fear, and even “human interest” stories play an ever increasing role.

In this respect an equalization of the press coverage between public and private broadcasters can be observed. The viewers also sense this, since they distinguish between formal differences, for example, between the ARD’s *Tagesschau* and *RTL-aktuell*, interestingly, and above all, in terms of content.<sup>5</sup> An even stronger indication of equalization than the main news programs can be found with the late news programs at midnight. Especially on RTL, late news programs are often more clearly political than the main news program, which is broadcast at 6:45 p.m. and is under more pressure to attract viewers.<sup>6</sup>

Scientific research accounts for the varying types of news recipients:

- “Older conservatives interested in the news” are better than average at reproducing news reports. This group accounts for 18 percent of viewers;
- About as strong is the group of well-qualified, young, and attentive news processors. However, they come principally from the “old states,” the former West Germany;

- About 15 percent are younger individuals focused predominantly on leisure who prefer private broadcasters. They can reproduce reports but are barely able to arrange them in terms of relevance;
- The group of “average recipients” is similarly predisposed (21percent);
- Together, about a third of viewers belong to the so-called “harmony-oriented news forgetters,” who avoid recalling bad news, or “news avoiders,” who consciously avoid all news programs.<sup>7</sup>

The degree to which Germans are informed is therefore not high. Television is the number one mass medium for them, but there is also a threat of a cleavage between educated readers and those viewers who are only visually oriented. And for the producers, the good old ground rule for television still applies, as German journalist Herbert Riehl-Heyse stated: “The rule is that good levels of viewership can appease the bad conscience of the television producers, and sometimes also serious newspaper editors.”<sup>8</sup>

### “Politainment”—Politics and Media

Even if we acknowledge an abiding solemnity in German television news, particularly when comparing it internationally, this does not mean that media and politics or politics and entertainment are strictly separate areas of German public life. They do not completely mix with each other, but in the current German media landscape, such intermingling, especially the production of entertaining broadcasts on political issues, play an ever increasing role. We Germans still cannot come up with an affair as entertaining as the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, but everything political is accessible or made accessible to citizens in different ways than was the case in the 1960s, when an “Americanization” of elections was not yet part of the discussion. Media scientist Andreas Dörner has attempted to conceptualize this process as “Politainment.” He defines this as follows:

Politainment denotes a certain form of the public mass media communication in which political themes, actors, processes, and interpretive patterns

are assembled into a new reality of the political. This new reality constitutes the realm of experience in which politics is typically accessible to citizens nowadays.<sup>9</sup>

Politics has been so personalized, robbed of its complexity, and even fictionalized, and yet, Dörner argues, it has not been fundamentally altered. He also sees in the new forms of political presentation clear elements of “citizen awareness” or models of societal engagement. He clarified this using the example of television series.

That democratic citizens are also voyeurs—that people not only want to be informed, consulted, and called upon to make a decision but, above all, want to be entertained—this is the lesson that politics has learned. A new relationship between politics and media has arisen, which in the extreme case can lead to a “colonization of politics by the media.”<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Meyer even observes a complete reversal of the original relationship between politics and media:

Within a pluralistic party democracy—in keeping with its model and practice—the media should observe politics, so that citizens can form intelligent opinions. In a media democracy the political actors observe the media system in order to learn what they must present and how to present it in order to achieve a secure place on the media stage.<sup>11</sup>

Thus politics is relegated to the status of a “delivery person” for the media and can barely follow its own logic. Politics becomes theater, and legitimation through the sovereign is replaced by legitimation through populism. Now politics is more or less stuck between the media and democratic processes and institutions. Though the speed of topic cycles, competition, and conflict-orientation in the media is increasing at a rapid rate, political processes need to be rooted in precisely the opposite. Certain media place themselves more and more in the position of political actors; like parties, they force through one-sided campaigns or establish themselves as the voice of the nation. They are neither, nor should they be. “The new publicity threatens to turn our understanding of rational politics inside out,”<sup>12</sup> warns the

former Minister of Culture, Michael Naumann, in his new function as publisher and chief editor of Germany's important weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.

Political talk shows, in particular, have been targeted by critics. They consistently pose angst-filled themes of disaster and then hold verbal duels, man vs. man on the edge of the abyss, only to, in the end, reach a grand reconciliation. This type of program intolerably banalizes politics and dispossesses even Parliament, opined the President of the *Bundestag*, Wolfgang Thierse, though this view did not lead him to abstain from appearing on talk shows. "Television has always only produced forgetting," the great French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard is supposed to have said. Actually it also produces ideology. Critics level this accusation more and more at "Sabine Christiansen," the most-loved political talk show of German television. Week after week, every Sunday evening, it has its viewers believing that they are now well informed: "One of the crowning achievements of this Sunday chatter is that the political realities are completely hidden behind an orgy of babble."<sup>13</sup>

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the eternal chatter on television and the suspicion that television promotes ideology is that there is a corresponding lesson that relates to populism in politics:

Learning to live with complexity—that is perhaps the greatest responsibility of democratic political education. For non-populist politicians this in itself is a complex duty. They must avoid great simplifications and yet make complexities understandable.<sup>14</sup>

Above all the legions of media advisors and "spin doctors," along with a few self-blinded journalists and a couple of self-confident politicians, still believe in the limitless power of manipulation offered by the media. For the masses of voters, politics levels off into a mix of issues, campaigns, and public appearances of known personalities. They want to be entertained, and yet they also know that the politicians who do their jobs competently should not be poised to win beauty contests or casting shows. Clowning around is not in demand and top politicians who identify too much with the "fun society" (*Spassgesellschaft*) are punished, as was seen with Guido Westerwelle,

chairman of the FDP. The smart politician of the future will, among other things, stand out by skillfully allocating his public communication and his media presence. This "economy of attention"<sup>15</sup> is no longer just a metaphor, but a real accounting measure. The more clever advisors know that the facade can shape what is seen as political, but cannot change its essential traits.

## Newspapers

One does not need to know how to read in order to listen to the radio or watch television. This is obviously different when it comes to newspapers and the Internet. Because text comprehension is all important with these media, a general degree of literacy and, ultimately, rational thought on the part of the users can be assumed. On average, readers are better educated than mere viewers.

The so-called "Riepl Law," which the long-time chief editor of the Nuremberg paper, Wolfgang Riepl, penned in his 1913 dissertation concerning "The Nature of News in Antiquity," is briefly summarized: No new, more highly developed medium replaces an old one. As television has barely changed the meaning of the newspaper, so it is that the Internet has replaced neither, though it has shifted their importance.

The newspaper market is equally important to the construction of an "Info-Elite" as it is responsible for creating possible divisions in society along an informational divide. However, for the entire population there is a persistent narrowing in the scope of newspapers. Even at the end of the 1990s, newspapers in Germany seemed to find themselves in an unstoppable boom period: every notable trans-regional newspaper established at least a separate edition for the capital; publishers fought extensively against inroads by cartels; and "line extensions" of the large papers were daily routine. This changed abruptly. From 1980 to 2000 the time people spent reading newspapers decreased by 20 percent, while time spent listening to the radio and watching television increased by about 50 percent.<sup>16</sup> The crisis had little to do with the quality of the journalism. The root cause of the "twilight of the newspaper"<sup>17</sup> was above all the collapse of the advertising business. The value of the

market sank from €23.37 billion in 2000 to €20.38 billion in 2002.<sup>18</sup> At the same time the so-called “rubrics,” or ads that are mainly offered in the employment, apartment, and auto markets, migrated with increasing numbers to the Internet.

Nevertheless, the large trans-regional newspapers became journalistically better rather than worse. They focused on their differences from television and placed their main effort no longer on the conveyance of news but in providing more background and displaying a variety of different journalistic forms. The good daily papers became more and more comparable with the weekly papers and lived on background investigations, “explanation pieces,” and journalistic personalities who made a name for themselves as commentators.

The regional newspapers are a solid pillar of the German press landscape. As a general rule they are not bought at the newsstand but are sold by subscription. Although subscription numbers have continuously declined since the 1990s, for a long time this was due primarily to the unusually high concentration of newspapers in the communist GDR. The decline meant that East Germany simply normalized itself. Since 1997 there are no more official government press statistics. Instead, there is a so-called “end of period collection” of the German daily press. In 2004, 1,584 different issues were cited. Because it is often only the local sections that are different, the *Fachdienst Media Perspektiven* identified 138 “publishing entities” that have completely independent editorial departments.<sup>19</sup>

Although the press landscape is varied, the number of “one newspaper districts,” where there is no competition for regional information and publishing monopolies dominate, is increasing. This situation is typical in rural areas. Today’s newspaper market is a patchwork of small fiefdoms.

The main problem for the future of this genre is that above all, it is established families and older people who subscribe to this primary source of information. Already in the middle of the 1990s, only a third of all twenty-nine-year-olds subscribed to a regional daily newspaper; in the large cities only a sixth of this age group subscribed. Publishers always assumed that

personal connections to local news and the services provided to subscribers were the main reasons for subscribing. An empirical study countered this belief by finding that in actuality, trans-regional information is most important to the readers’ interest, and that, above all, the often simpler language was valued when compared to the national papers.<sup>20</sup>

Only a few newspaper publishing houses are showing signs of growth. Very characteristic of this is the development of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), certainly one of the leading newspapers in Germany. After three years of losses, there is once again an upward trend in distribution revenue and advertising. This has to do with the cyclical cause of the crisis. Little has changed with regard to the two largest structural deficits: the fact that newspapers are losing the young; and the need for them to “newly position themselves within their networked world,” as was noted at the 58th World Congress of Newspapers in June 2005 in Seoul.<sup>21</sup>

Also most German newspapers have either not succeeded or were very late in giving up their defensive mindset vis-à-vis the competitive medium of the Internet. New media forms are being rejected rather than actively promoted. Only recently has the “tabloid-format” appeared on the market as a variant of established brands.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the situation in Scandinavian countries, so far German newspaper publishers have succeeded in inhibiting the establishment of free papers through immediate anti-dumping measures in all large cities where this has been attempted.

Both may only be a temporary, conservative triumph. Studies show that already for two years, enthusiastic readers in Germany have lingered longer on the Internet than they have over a newspaper. The newspapers will go more in the direction of providing background and investigation, catering to specialists/experts and elites, and shaping the formation of opinion. But the press landscape will differentiate itself even further: into young and old, east and west, expensive and free. The old saying of Goethe—“one can confidently carry home what one possesses in black and white”—still influences people’s perception of the press; thus, the newspaper is in no danger of extinction. With content and technical flexibility—we are all excited about the development of flexible

screens—a “rebirth” of this signpost in the media jungle could be imminent, four hundred years after the appearance of the first printed newspaper.

### Online Journalism

Despite a constant increase in user numbers, Germany is no “El Dorado” in terms of online journalism. Something had to level off. At first almost all newspapers reacted defensively. In the spring of 2000 there were only about 2,000 online journalists. They were inexperienced, with only about a third of them having worked for a newspaper before, and so the number of beginners and career shifters was noticeably high. At first the large newspapers assigned on average three employees to the online edition.<sup>23</sup> There were too few journalists who were too poorly educated, and they lacked the specifics of this new medium. In most cases, existing articles were simply posted on the Internet. Multimedia, interactivity, and non-linear forms of reporting were still foreign to most online editors.

The leading American sites, such as those of *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*, are still superior to the German online products. They have more editors, deeper investigative reporting, and more interactive elements. This is also true for British (for example, *Guardian Unlimited*) and a few Spanish sites.<sup>24</sup>

In the meantime media brands from the offline world have also established a leading position on the web. This is true in Germany for the Internet debut of the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, whose online staff now even edits an English-language version. *Spiegel online* receives 37 million hits per month. Altogether, around 25 million Germans regularly seek to inform themselves by accessing the Internet.<sup>25</sup> In addition, leading television news programs like *tagesschau.de* or *heute.de* have established themselves online. These quality products appear a bit more lurid and tabloid-like on the Internet. Also noteworthy is the fact that many users utilize this worldwide medium to get local information and use corresponding services.

At the same time there has been disillusionment concerning the original idea of an “Internet utopia.”<sup>26</sup> Here, finally, was the dream of an “interactive democ-

racy” to quote Claus Leggewie, an all-encompassing, unruly system of communication, a new realm of interactivity for civilization in which casual visitors and reporters, activists, and experts permanently exchange ideas. However, the opportunities for access to this new medium are proving unequal. There is a real danger of a “digital divide” within societies, and especially among different global cultures. The Internet offers new modes of participation but requires a high level of engagement. It is not self-activating.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, completely new problems have appeared: commercialization, resulting in a new problem of separating advertising and journalistic content; political extremism of all varieties; and an “information flood,” rather than an “information deficit,” that threatens to overwhelm users. Therefore, the Internet requires certain abilities of its users. The user is responsible for the procurement and selection of information. The problem of bottlenecks, which earlier was determined by frequencies, market possibilities, etc., has migrated from the side of providers to users. About half of all users feel that finding information involves too much time and effort.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence, search engines have become the most used websites.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, more and more users restrict themselves to browsing only their previously bookmarked sites.

Online media is not yet shaping the political public. Regular users may still feel part of an avant-garde. However, those who already belong to the group of permanent Internet users find it a meaningful source of information. Thirty-six percent of users declared that for them, the Internet is the “most used” medium for information, followed by daily newspapers (29 percent), television (22 percent), and radio (13 percent).<sup>30</sup>

The quality of what is offered is one of the greatest problems in procuring information on the Internet. For traditional media, it is characteristic to appear before the customer as a finished product, quality controls having been carried out professionally through editing, proofreading, etc. Many Internet sites shift quality control to the public itself, almost requiring a test or some critical dialogue. Naturally this is especially true for web logs (blogs) and peer-to-peer sites.

About 2 percent of all users worldwide are said to keep their own blogs. Such blogs play increasingly important roles in the context of prominent or dramatic political events—the terrorist attacks of September 11, party conventions, or the Iraq war. International “warblogs” such as “Salem Pax” were also read in Germany. Many readers were unaccustomed to the blogs’ subjective portrayals, which limits their effect. On the occasion of the Iraq war, priorities once again became clear; 89 percent of surveyed adults stated that they used television as their most important source of information.<sup>31</sup> Recently, on the occasion of the tsunami, to which German vacationers also fell victim, there was again a vital exchange in the Internet. Finally, *Bildblog.de*, a site in which critical German journalists day after day deal with the most opinionated, leading, and sole trans-regional tabloid newspaper in Germany—*Bild*—is also lovingly maintained.

The use of blogs by a select group of specialists does not yet have the reach of other forms of mass media, such as television or daily newspapers. This holds true for the spread of information but even more so for the significance of the medium in political discourse.

But a ranking of importance in the media landscape has not yet been firmly established. If anything, skepticism about the trustworthiness of the media has become universal. A paper written at the University of Münster surveyed the “believability” of media and compiled the following list:

1. Daily Newspapers: 42 percent
2. Public Television: 31 percent
3. Public Radio: 11 percent
4. Private Television: 7 percent
5. Private Radio: 2 percent
6. Internet/Online Services: 1 percent<sup>32</sup>

One sees how little people “believe” and how much they are left to to their own devices. For developing self-confidence in order for individuals to make their own judgements in a democratic system, this may not necessarily be a bad starting point.

## NOTES

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# IN SEARCH OF ANTI-AMERICANISM IN EUROPEAN PUBLICS

CLAY RAMSAY

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The question of European anti-Americanism is always troubled by problems of definition, in part because the notion “anti-Americanism” is both a standard element in American ideology and a charged term in intra-European elite discourse. Highly elastic, it is often applied as a label to disagreements between Europeans and Americans over policy (tending to subordinate the disagreement’s content), or deployed as a causal explanation for how such disagreements came to be. Thus, while no definition of anti-Americanism is conclusive, it is crucial for clear discussion to select a definition at the outset and hold to it throughout.

Happily, for this we can follow the recent work of Pierangelo Isernia, which provides a three-tiered division of what is called “anti-Americanism” that permits a much richer analysis of various measures of European public opinion on the subject. He writes:

In an attempt to give an order to the different meanings of anti-Americanism in what is an admittedly murky terrain, I will distinguish between three fundamentally different sets of attitudes one can entertain toward the United States: feelings, beliefs and policy attitudes. People can hold affective or emotional feelings toward the United States; beliefs about what America is, and evaluations of what America does; and all of these can vary quite independently among themselves. Here, I interpret anti-Americanism as a general feeling toward America rather than more specific beliefs toward this or that attribute of the American political, cultural and socio-economic system. I will therefore define anti-Americanism as the psychological tendency to evaluate negatively the United States.<sup>1</sup>

In this essay, the term “anti-Americanism” means broad, affective negative feelings toward the United States. Negative *beliefs* about the nature of the United States and negative evaluations of U.S. policies and actions are also explored as distinct levels of attitudes, but they are distinguished from anti-Americanism. This approach offers us a much more robust understanding of current European public attitudes toward the United States, since each of the three levels has been amply measured in multi-country European polling over 2004 and early 2005.<sup>2</sup>

## Measures of Anti-Americanism in European Publics

Probably the most fundamental measure of anti-Americanism is the one that tells us whether anti-American feeling colors the interactions a person may have with U.S. nationals. Pew asked in Britain, France, and Germany: “Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of Americans?”

### 1. Views of Americans, May 2005 (Pew)

	Germany	France	Britain
<b>Favorable total</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>70%</b>
Very	8	5	18
Somewhat	57	59	52
<b>Unfavorable total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>22</b>
Somewhat	20	29	18
Very	4	7	4

Past findings bring some confirmation to a piece of very conventional wisdom: the French *are* different about this. In summer 2002 only 26 percent of the French said they had an unfavorable opinion of Americans, but by February 2004 this had risen to 43 percent (now back down to 24 percent). Among Germans, nothing changed on this dimension over the same period (23 percent to 25 percent, statistically meaningless); among Britons, the minority with anti-American feelings did increase, but remained small (11 percent to 19 percent). In Britain, though, the slow growth of this minority feeling seems to be continuing.

Pew also asked for favorable or unfavorable opinions of the United States.

### 2. Views of the United States, May 2005 (Pew)

	Germany	France	Britain
<b>Favorable total</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>55%</b>
Very	4	3	13
Somewhat	37	40	42
<b>Unfavorable total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>38</b>
Somewhat	44	42	27
Very	10	15	11

This is the question *par excellence* through which European publics have expressed a broad falling-off in their positive sense of the United States. It is useful here to compare how Europeans felt at earlier

points—before the attacks of September 11; eight months afterward, in summer 2002; and in February 2004.<sup>3</sup> Among Germans, favorable opinions of the United States were at 78 percent then; were stable at 75 percent in summer 2002 (Pew); and then fell to 38 percent by February 2004. Among the French, the progression was from 62 percent to 63 percent to 37 percent; and among the British, from 83 percent to 75 percent to 58 percent. Clearly, the simple advent of the Bush administration, including irritants like the U.S. rejection of the Kyoto treaty on climate change, did not by themselves significantly hurt European publics' overall opinions of the United States—though they may have been part of a cumulative effect visible after the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Interestingly, when Europeans are invited to nuance their views, they do. For three years running, The German Marshall Fund's poll has offered respondents a 0-to-100 "thermometer" to express their feelings toward the United States.

### 3. Average feeling toward the United States on a 0-100 scale: 0 = "very cold," 100 = "very warm," 50 = neutral. (GMF)

	Germany	France	Britain	Italy	Netherlands	Poland
Average, June 2004	55	51	62	61	55	56
Summer 2002	63	60	68	68	59	65

When asked to give a very fine-grained description of their feelings, the average respondent's positive feeling toward the United States dropped no more than nine points in any of the countries polled over the 2002-04 period. This suggests that when respondents are simply asked whether their opinion of the United States is favorable or unfavorable (strongly or somewhat), they answer by describing the *direction* in which their attitude is moving.

Shortly after President Bush's reelection, a BBC World Service question explicitly asked Europeans to convert their view of the reelection into their feel-

ings toward the American people—something unusual in the polling literature:

**4. “How does the fact that George W. Bush has been reelected make you feel toward the American people? Much better, a little better, a little worse, or much worse?” (BBC)**

	Germany	France	Britain	Italy	Poland
Better	12%	12%	26%	22%	22%
Worse	56	65	48	39	11
Opt-out of question: Volunteer “depends” or “no effect,” or decline to answer	32	23	27	39	67

In Germany and France, there was majority willingness to express generalized negative feelings toward the American people over the election result; in Britain and Italy this was not the case, while in Poland a full two-thirds of respondents essentially rejected the premise of the question. That 23-39 percent of western Europeans avoided both response options suggests a good deal of reluctance to make the link the question demanded.

A comparable question—also relating an event to generalized feeling toward the United States—was asked by Pew in February 2004 about America’s “trustworthiness.”

**5. “As a consequence of the war, do you have more confidence or less confidence that the United States is trustworthy?” (Pew, February 2004)**

	Germany	France	Britain
More confidence	10%	14%	24%
Less confidence	82	78	58

Here respondents are asked about the direction their feelings are taking, but not asked to gauge their inten-

sity or make an absolute judgment. Consequently, British responses to this question are closer to those of the Germans and French than we have seen in other questions. While support for the Iraq war was and remains a good deal higher than 24 percent in Britain, only 24 percent have an accompanying sense of greater trust toward the United States.

Overall, we see a majority reluctance to view Americans as people negatively, despite the increase in negative views of the United States. There is even resistance—especially outside France and Germany—to emotionally associating Americans to American choices in the voting booth. But a new wariness of the United States, the feeling that the United States is not as trustworthy as in the past, is unquestionably present.

**Measures of European Beliefs on the Nature of the United States**

Beliefs about what the United States is—and what can be expected of it, given its nature—also are measured by specific poll questions, as we see when we closely examine question wording. One of these is a question asked regularly by GMF: “How desirable is it that the United States exert strong leadership in world affairs?” Such a question is limited by neither specific issues nor time: to answer it, one must resort to one’s sense of the qualities of the United States.

**6. “How desirable is it that the United States exert strong leadership in world affairs?” (GMF)**

	Germany	France	Britain	Italy	Netherlands	Poland
<b>Desirable: total</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>39%</b>
Very	3	1	16	9	8	6
Somewhat	34	23	38	32	51	33
<b>Undesirable: total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>47</b>
Somewhat	44	43	23	34	25	37
Very	16	30	14	22	15	10

This is another question through which Europeans express a sharp falling-off in their positive sense of the United States. In summer 2002—when the war on terrorism was already eight months old—68 percent of Germans, 48 percent of French, 72 percent of British, 63 percent of Italians, 75 percent of Dutch, and 64 percent of Poles thought it desirable for the United States to exert strong leadership. Thus a previously consensual view, on which (well into the Bush administration) only the French were evenly divided, has fallen apart so that only majorities of British and Dutch retain it.

Given that strong leadership by the United States is seen as undesirable, it would be plausible for Europeans to opt for lessening efforts to cooperate on international problems with the United States. But in fact, majorities insist on the path of cooperation in all the countries polled—the French and Germans even more so than the British.

**7. “Some people say that the U.S. and the EU have enough common values to be able to cooperate on international problems. Other people say that the U.S. and the EU have such different values that cooperating on international problems is impossible. Which view is closer to your own?” (GMF)**

	Germany	France	Britain	Italy	Netherlands	Poland
Can cooperate	62%	58%	54%	74%	63%	59%
Cannot cooperate	34	39	40	23	34	27

This shows a definite majority preference for what might be called “arms-length cooperation”; perhaps felt as a necessity that tempers the vagaries of U.S. leadership, but cooperation all the same.

In the Bush administration’s second term, there has been a heightened emphasis on an American vocation to spread democracy, and on a connection between democracy’s spread and long-term U.S. security. However, Europeans do not read U.S. actions in these terms. When Pew asked “As a consequence of the war, do you have more confidence or less confidence that the U.S. wants to promote democracy all around the world?” majorities and pluralities expressed lowered confidence.

**8. “As a consequence of the war, do you have more confidence or less confidence that the U.S. wants to promote democracy all around the world?” (Pew, February 2004)**

	Germany	France	Britain
More confidence	24%	16%	41%
Less confidence	70	78	45

There is no sign here that selling the idea that democracy promotion is the basis for the full sweep of U.S. foreign policy has any potential to convince Europeans. This raises the problem of whether Europeans even believe the declared intentions of the United States to be its real intentions. Pew asked explicitly about the sincerity of U.S. actions:

**9. Do you think the U.S.-led war on terrorism is a sincere effort to reduce international terrorism or don’t you believe that?” (Pew, February 2004)**

	Germany	France	Britain
Sincere	29%	35%	51%
Don’t believe that	65	61	41

The depth of the U.S. public diplomacy problem is surely revealed when more French than Germans think that the United States is at least sincere in its actions, i.e., doing what it does for the reasons it puts forward.

Overall, Europeans—feeling the United States is less trustworthy—would rather not see it exert strong leadership. They very much doubt that the commitment to spread democracy is the key that explains U.S. actions. But at the same time, clear majorities think the United States and the EU should nonetheless be able to cooperate on world problems.

**Measures of European Evaluations of U.S. Policies**

Our third level, and farthest from anti-Americanism proper, is how Europeans evaluate the policies of the United States. A simple measure in this area is offered by a BBC World Service question that asks:

**10. Please tell me if you think each of the following are having a mainly positive or negative influence in the world... the United States. (BBC)**

	Germany	France	Britain	Italy	Poland
Mainly positive	27%	38%	44%	49%	52%
Mainly negative	64	54	50	40	21

It is noteworthy that (by comparison with Pew, Table 2) more Germans and British say the United States has a mostly negative influence in the world than say that they have an unfavorable opinion of the United States.

European majorities feel that the United States does not really take into account the interests of their countries when it decides on policy. Even in Britain, 66 percent make this assessment of the United States.

**11. In making international policy decisions, to what extent do you think the United States takes into account the interests of countries like [survey country]—a great deal, a fair amount, not too much or not at all? (Pew, May 2005)**

	Germany	France	Britain
<b>Takes into account: total</b>	38%	18%	32%
A great deal	3	2	8
A fair amount	35	16	24
<b>Does not take into account: total</b>	59	82	66
Not too much	44	51	44
Not much at all	15	31	22

But in the midst of these negative evaluations, it should be noted that about half still say that they favor, rather than oppose, "U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism."

**12. (Pew, May 2005)**

	Germany	France	Britain
I favor the U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism	50%	51%	51%
I oppose the U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism	45	48	40

These numbers dwindled from mid-2002 to early 2004: from 70 percent to 55 percent among Germans; from 75 percent to 50 among French; and (a far lesser drop) from 69 percent to 63 percent among British—whom, after another year, are at 51 percent. Even so, there is a form of the war on terrorism that could engender agreement from European publics.

When asked to assess whether the United States is overreacting about international terrorism, there was reluctance in February 2004 to diminish the importance of U.S. concerns. By two to one British rejected the idea that the United States is overreacting; Germans were evenly divided; a majority of French said the United States is overreacting, but 42 percent disagreed. (It must be pointed out that the question's two options are not mutually exclusive; the United States could be right to be so concerned, but still be overreacting.)

**13. Which of the following comes closer to your point of view? The U.S. is right to be so concerned about the threat of international terrorism OR the U.S. is overreacting to the threat of international terrorism. (Pew, February 2004)**

	Germany	France	Britain
Right to be so concerned	49%	42%	64%
Overreacting	49	57	33

In April 2002—after U.S. forces had driven the Taliban from most of Afghanistan and President Bush had delivered his “axis of evil” speech—strong majorities in France and Germany refused to describe the United States as overreacting (67 percent to 30 percent in France and 63 percent to 33 percent in Germany).

Overall, western Europeans are inclined to rate U.S. influence on the world as mainly negative at present, and the sense that their own countries’ interests are not taken into account by the United States is even more widespread. Modest majority support seems to remain for some form of the war on terrorism—but not for the form they are seeing.

The negative evaluation of U.S. actions is shared by many more people than express some general anti-American sentiment—with one exception: those who say they are now less confident that the United States is trustworthy. Majorities still see shared values as a basis for cooperation, but in four countries out of six they do not see it as desirable for the United States to exert strong leadership. This is a complex set of attitudes—probably too complex to be predetermined by simple anti-American feeling.

### Postscript on the Potential for Media Bias

In this essay I hold that European public attitudes, however negative toward U.S. policy, are demonstrably not predetermined by anti-Americanism. This does not mean, though, that anti-Americanism is not present in other senses, different from that covered by the definition at the beginning of this essay. Anti-Americanism as a cultural current, as a tendency in political elites, or as a bias in the media is not ruled out by anything poll data can demonstrate.

Personal experiences discussed in this project’s workshops by German journalists, especially foreign correspondents working in the United States, were very suggestive about what future anti-Americanism may have in Europe. In a world of media globalization, when one can read a current online edition of practically anything, the new potential for organizing world misunderstanding is immense. The web can create

the delusion of having “all the information” more potently than anything since the classified information of the Vietnam era—that is, the experience (familiar to the upper levels of governments) of possessing highly secret information that makes the great mass of other information invalid.

In the workshops, a cycle was described that begins early in the morning in Germany, as German editors glance at U.S. news websites and read *Spiegel-online.com*—itself written, apparently, with one eye cocked at *nytimes.com*. Soon it is 11:30—time to decide what news stories to run that day. In Washington it is 5:30 am; the German correspondents’ feet have hit the floor and they are reading *Spiegel-online.com* with their first cup of coffee, because they need to know what their editors are going to ask them as—the phone rings. This conversation with editors is the correspondent’s best chance to influence his organization’s coverage of the United States. Whatever else the correspondent does that day will be fenced in by the widely informed, and hence largely unanswerable, predispositions of the home office about American events.

As the globalization of information proceeds, it becomes ever harder to make the case that there is a kind of knowledge that can be gathered only on the ground—partly sensory, partly derived from immediate human contacts and the obscure sources of information they suggest.<sup>4</sup> Here is the nucleus around which a media bias feeding anti-Americanism can develop. Anecdotes of editors’ pressure to come up with a story, for instance, about how Berlusconi’s coming withdrawal of Italian troops from Iraq would lead to the collapse of support for the Iraq war in the United States, may seem improbable, especially to Americans. But information environments in Europe and America could well become increasingly different, while appearing to be in constant communication. By selectively culling each other, they could both become sterile. And in such environments, anti-Americanism and anti-Europeanism would have their chance to flourish.

## NOTES

1 Pierangelo Isernia, "Anti-Americanism and European Public Opinion," in *America Contested: The Limits and Future of American Unilateralism*, edited by Sergio Fabbrini and Mark Gilbert, Routledge, 2005 (in press).

2 This brief essay will rely primarily on three major international surveys, all from 2004: the wave of the Pew Global Attitudes survey that was conducted in February; The German Marshall Fund's Transatlantic Trends poll, conducted in June; and the BBC World Service Poll, conducted in December 2004 in most countries by Globescan and the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA). As this essay was going to press, Pew released a May 2005 wave that included some of the questions discussed; these findings have been included. No claim is made here to be completely comprehensive; that would require many national measures and a longer essay.

3 U.S. Department of State Department polling asked this question worldwide over 1999 and 2000. Pew asked the same question in summer 2002 and February 2004.

4 This type of knowledge and how it differs from the more abstract, plan-based intelligence that often characterizes major state projects is the subject of James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

# RE-CREATING THE WORLD: AN EXAMINATION OF PUBLIC OPINION, THE MEDIA, AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES AND GERMANY

MARY N. HAMPTON

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With U.S.-German relations at a low point, analysts and observers of U.S. and German foreign policy are engaged in a debate regarding the future of the transatlantic relationship. A critical component is the role played by public opinion and the media in the U.S. and German foreign policy arena. Many, including myself, have averred that a liberal democratic transatlantic community has been emerging since the end of the Second World War, thereby raising the expectation that Americans and Germans would view foreign policy issues in similar and complementary ways.<sup>1</sup>

In this schema, public opinion and the media are critical components of the foreign policy process and even though the structure and relevance of public opinion within each state differ, they should reflect shared community values and interests concerning vital foreign policy issues. Thus, values relating to peace, war, and justice should look roughly similar whether one sees them from New York, Berlin, or Amsterdam. Indeed, Germans and Americans do share many values when it comes to foreign policy. Yet, expectations concerning transatlantic unity of purpose appear less persuasive in light of recent trends, which portend diverging foreign policy goals and discord over the proper norms and principles relevant to creating and maintaining a proper world order.

The purpose of this essay is twofold. First, I examine the influence on the foreign policy process wielded by public opinion and the media in the United States and Germany. The constant in both is that media and public opinion matter greatly, and while the roles vary, there are more similarities than many acknowledge. In both contexts, public opinion and the media push on the foreign policy process, but also are pulled by political elites to follow. The impact of globalization and

monopolization of the media is affecting both countries in similar ways.

Second, I examine the influence that cultural identity has on establishing constancy of public opinion and national self image in the two cases. This approach reveals that there is much that separates U.S. and German public opinion on critical foreign policy issues and that these dissimilarities are reinforced through media. Insights gleaned from examining American and German identity clusters also reveal the limits of liberal expectations regarding the emergence of unity of purpose among democracies in foreign policy endeavors.

## Leaning Toward Each Other: The Evolution of Media in the United States and Germany

The role of media and public opinion have evolved differently in the United States and Germany, each developing according to their respective domestic state-societal structures. For example, the media in the United States long cherished their role as the fourth estate, the institution that stood apart from the executive, legislative, and judicial branches and held



its independence vis-à-vis all. In Germany, the media were long associated with the state. Media were largely governed and controlled by the government, and media coverage reflected the major party debates of the German political system. In short, the U.S. media claimed to be set apart from the state while German media were creatures of the government and party system. Obviously, these are heuristic short-cuts: the U.S. media were never as independent as they claimed, and the German media often achieved more objectivity than the model suggests.

That said, the traditional roles of the U.S. and German media have changed significantly, and both are evolving in some parallel ways. For example, the ongoing process of globalization affects western media in similar ways. One result of this process is the monopolization of media. Statistics on the concentration of U.S. media are staggering—the great bulk of American media are owned and operated by less than fifty corporations. Where German media were once government affiliated, there has been a privatization revolution in the German market. Privatizing German media has changed the way the media operates and transformed the government approach to public media, since it now has to compete with the privatized sector. Since privatization, monopolization is progressing in German media, and unification fired up the process as West German media moguls soaked up the former East German markets.<sup>2</sup>

The U.S. media has been bound by commercial imperatives ever since readership of newspapers became based on advertising revenues in the early twentieth century. As media have multiplied, the fierce competition in the deregulated and privatized context has led in the electronic media, where most Americans get their news, to an over-emphasis on sensationalism, personal interest stories, sound bite politics, limited foreign policy coverage, and an increased temptation to run with stories before they are fully researched and verified. American public opinion generally never had much interest in foreign policy, which I will discuss below. Now the media are more willing than ever to accommodate that cultural trait. Most American electronic media coverage of foreign policy revolves around natural and political disasters, the death of famous people, and war, which become more dramatic because of media's ability to deliver news in real time. Even during the coverage of

war, such as the 1991 Gulf War, a sizable slice of American electronic news coverage was of personal interest stories from the troops or about American technology wizardry. As many critics pointed out, Americans rarely, if ever, saw real war, even though it was coverage in real time.

While in its early stages, there are clearly signs that with concentration, the increasing dependence on advertising revenue for privatized media, and the mimicking behavior of public media to keep up, German media are also moving toward what I call glam news. Starting with the unification election of 1990, German political campaigns began to resemble American campaigns with the focus on the personalities of the candidates. That tendency took off in the last national campaign, where sound bite politics came of age and in which Chancellor Schröder used the media in much the same way successful American politicians do—he appeared often on television, and allowed his life story to become part of the campaign. Further, the calming image of German newscasters reading the news from their script that I remember from the 1980s is being replaced by the push to deliver news in real time.

In short, having started in very different places, media trends in the United States and Germany are on a similar trajectory. In both cases, elites are forced to attempt to use media, especially the electronic variant, to their advantage. The 1978 hostage crisis in Iran would likely not been as devastating for President Carter's political fate had Ted Koppel not reported on the ongoing crisis every night on the newly born "Nightline." The Germans would likely not have been mobilized to intervene militarily for the first time in their history without the constant incoming electronic narrative of Kosovars being ethnically cleansed by the Serbs. The two examples reveal the ability of media to place constraints on and present opportunities to political leaders in persuading public opinion to follow their lead.

### The Push and Pull Factors of Public Opinion in the United States and Germany

Much of the public opinion and media literature concerns itself with the ability of national elites to set the foreign policy agenda and to push the media and public opinion into following, or in some cases into

simply disregarding public opinion. There are many examples in the U.S. and German cases that accommodate the elite-driven argument, or top-down model. While the German case is most often thought of as one in which the executive dominates foreign policy-making more than is true for the American case, such thinking is somewhat dated and over simplified. There is evidence in the German case that elites have become much more captive to public, societal, and media interests. On the other hand, the U.S. example reveals that the foreign policy process is often dominated by the decision-making elites, especially the executive branch. In the U.S. case, many analysts, such as Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, have found evidence to support the proposition that the U.S. government can and does often dominate the foreign policy process, even though in many other instances: "The public can be remarkably resistant to persuasive attempts by elites and governments, especially when alternative information is available and when some elite faction or factions voice disagreement with the dominant view."<sup>3</sup>

What is striking about American public opinion and the role of the media since the onset of the Cold War and the emergence of the national security state is how captive both can be to the executive branch, especially in a foreign policy crisis. The power to classify and manage information wielded by the executive branch, especially the White House, has directly influenced the relationship between the executive branch and the public. In many cases, the public and media are led onto a policy trajectory because of its reliance on the president or executive branch for information and guidance.

The power of privileged information has been a tool used by U.S. administrations since the Cold War to shape the media message and produce the public opinion sought in advancing foreign policy interests. The telegenic and media savvy President John F. Kennedy warned the press in the days preceding the Bay of Pigs: "In times of clear and present danger, the courts have held that even the privileged rights of the First Amendment must yield to the public's need for national security." He observed further that the members of the media must reflect on every sensitive story: "is it in the interest of national security?"<sup>4</sup> This was both justification for his withholding information and admonition of the media for publishing stories

that might infringe on the national interest, as most succinctly defined by the executive branch. An obvious recent example was the Bush administration's long-standing claims about the WMD threat in Iraq as a justification for military intervention. Both the media and public opinion long accepted the executive branch's interpretation of the WMD threat, the evidence for which was not discussed publicly by the president or anyone else because it was based on classified intelligence. Obviously, the recent revelation of Deep Throat's identity and the subsequent rebirth of interest in the Watergate scandal reveal that the media and public have a number of ways to obtain information that will allow them to reassess an administration's policy statements.

Besides pushing the media and public opinion through persuasion, or even manipulation, the proposition that national leaders will act against prevailing public opinion when national interests are deemed at stake can also be verified in the U.S. case. President Richard Nixon's opening of relations with "Red" China, deemed by most Americans to be the most menacing communist threat by the late 1960s, reveals a president swimming against a strong counter current in the media and in public opinion. Despite such examples, it is more unusual in the U.S. context for the executive to conduct foreign policy against the tide of public opinion; it is much more common for the president first to persuade or manipulate public opinion before pursuing a foreign policy direction.

While national elites are therefore able to push public opinion in foreign policy matters, their ability to do so is limited. Because of the decentralized and porous nature of the American political system, and a weakened party system, public opinion can be expressed in a plethora of venues and contexts. The nature of the American state-society construct therefore favors a society-dominated model of public opinion, where "the openness of the political system provides the society with comparatively easy access to the decision-making process."<sup>5</sup> Thus, public opinion percolates up through multiple venues to constrain foreign policy: Congress, interest groups, churches, and so on. Two examples of presidents being hamstrung in their ability to pursue a desired foreign policy are all the more telling since these two presidents are often considered among the most astute public opinion

leaders of the twentieth century. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was persuaded of the need for the United States to respond to Nazi Germany after the Kristallnacht of 1938, when the destruction of Jewish businesses and employment of intimidation tactics were unleashed on Germany's Jewish population by Hitler's government. Yet, Roosevelt, the consummate politician with unending public appeal, was unable to mobilize the isolationist public until 1941, and then not until Pearl Harbor was attacked and Hitler had declared war on the United States. Again, another publicly venerated president, Ronald Reagan, was never able to mobilize the American public to directly aid the Contras in Nicaragua, whom he labeled as analogous to America's founding fathers and a situation he thought was critical in the war against communist influence. The inability to rouse public opinion on an issue he felt so strongly about was largely responsible for the subsequent Iran-Contra chapter in U.S. history.

Thus, the American political system reflects both the push and pull models of public opinion. While it is traditionally thought of as a society dominated system, the foreign policy arena significantly empowers the executive branch, especially the president. As I will discuss below, the most important role played by public opinion is in setting the cultural and political foundation blocks away from which leaders can only rarely successfully venture.

For many years, the common wisdom was that Germany represented a top-down model of public opinion, where executive control of foreign policy was constrained more by consensus building within the party system than by the direct influence of public opinion. This model clearly reflected German politics in the 1950s and 1960s, where the governing coalitions forged consensus among the governing parties on major foreign policy issues, like West German rearmament. The fact that West German public opinion was significantly against rearmament did not preclude the Adenauer government from executing rearmament, nor did public opinion weigh as heavily on decision-makers' calculations as did party and coalition politics. Likewise, the hot public debate that played out daily and feverishly in the West German media in the early 1980s regarding the stationing of U.S. Pershing missiles—and the possible Soviet response that it might trigger—led many to assume

that newly elected Chancellor Helmut Kohl would refuse the missiles. One public opinion poll from the period showed support for Reagan's hard line approach to the Soviet Union at 38 percent, with 60 percent wishing to distance West German foreign policy from it. Instead Kohl proceeded with the deployment, making certain that he had full control on the issue within the governing coalition. The debate in the public was organized in the media roughly along party lines, since West German media was state governed and financed at the time.

The elite-driven model of public opinion has not vanished from the German landscape. The singularity of purpose with which Chancellor Helmut Kohl drove German foreign policy toward closer EU integration in the 1980s and 1990s, especially the introduction of the euro, was often carried out in the face of strong public resistance. Public opinion polls showed that Germans were mostly against the introduction of the euro as a replacement for the *Deutschmark* right up until the actual changeover date. What Kohl did make certain of was that the governing coalition was of one mind on the issue.

That said, there is much evidence that the role of German public opinion, like that of the media, has been undergoing change. Since the 1970s, and especially with the birth of the Greens (the "anti-party" at the time) in the early 1980s, the German model began changing significantly, with the rise of extra-parliamentary politics. Since then, privatization, unification, and the rising importance of interest group politics have combined with the relative weakening of the traditional German party system to strengthen the role of societal inputs into the foreign policymaking process. For example, it is clear that the mobilization of public opinion in favor of environmentalism by the Greens in the early 1980s directly influenced the greening of the left-of-center and then the right-of-center parties. By the 1990s, public support for international environmental policies was actively pursued by right-of-center and left-of-center coalition governments alike. It is also clear that the Schröder government has responded to public attitudes about foreign policy more so than his predecessors. His public rejection of Bush's military intervention policy in Iraq revealed at once a more assertive Germany and a more influential society.

In sum, German public opinion has become increasingly empowered in its ability to affect the foreign policy process. In the end, both the American and German examples reflect political systems where the push and pull effects of public opinion hold. One final enduring strength of public opinion or societal influence in both cases is the fact that national and cultural identity is reflected in bedrock values and principles that must not be undermined or circumscribed by political leadership. This enduring push effect of public opinion sets the broad parameters within which foreign policy is made. As I argue, these cultural artifacts of the United States, Germany, and all other states make another contribution that is detrimental to the unity of purpose foreign policy expectations raised by liberal theory advocates.

### Cultural Identity and its Effect on Public Opinion and Media

The cocoon of cultural and national identity not only sets the parameters within which national leaders can act, it is also here that *we-ness* vs. *the other* is defined. National bias emerges from the act of defining one's own group relative to other groups.

Accordingly, oppositional cultural cues in American and German society potentially challenge liberal assumptions that two liberal democracies should view the world in roughly the same way. Despite the emergence of a positive identity complex I identified in the past between Germany and the United States, I would argue that much of the growing sense of discomfort in transatlantic relations emerges from stereotypes forged through cultural and national identity. Roger Cohen opines, "views of Europe and America have hardened as the continents, no longer bound by the conviction of a shared threat, have drifted apart. The result is often an exchange of caricatures, with neither side ready to concede any virtue to the other."<sup>6</sup>

Examining the cultural cues that emerge from these webs of national identity is critical to understanding the role of public opinion and media in the United States and Germany. First, the evolution of cultural and national identity produces the stereotyping of others. Social, political, and cultural stereotyping helps define one's own membership in the *we-group* and reveal what is different about the other. The

media, especially the modern mass based electronic media, is a major societal vehicle for stereotyping. It is a constant conduit for reminding members of a community how they are different from others. Second, an embedded identity complex also produces constancy in public opinion values and perceptions of self-interest. The existence of the bedrock of values partially accounts for the widely accepted proposition that elites are limited in their ability to manipulate or push public opinion; any policy change or projection must appeal to the cluster of continuously held values, principles, and interests that make up the national self image. Only with the introduction of genuine shocks to the national identity does the cluster of cultural values change, or present a real shock to that set of beliefs that shape them. I call this the constancy effect of public opinion on media and policy. Thus, an examination of public opinion and the media in the United States and Germany via cultural identity effects reveals stereotyping and constancy.

In the U.S. and German cases, the role of the media is critical to the construction and reproduction of American and German identity and perception of each other and others. Here I am most interested in how national and cultural identity influences both expectations the public has about the world and how it sees its own role in the world. Likewise, the media in both cases are captive to their national bias and local culture. The most important roles played by the media in this regard include the framing effects they have on public opinion and the constraints and opportunities this presents to political leaders. In the United States, for example, the national media constantly frame the U.S. role in the world: they reinforce the uniqueness of the country, while stereotyping others. The belief that the United States is exceptional and therefore called on to play a unique and superior role in the world is a canon that reverberates through the ages right down to the current administration. This American exceptionalism is embedded in the U.S. media's portrayal of Americans, as well as being reflected over and over again in public opinion.

A revealing example for the U.S. context is particularly striking regarding both the role of public opinion and the role of the media. In order to mobilize Americans to fight the Gulf War of 1991, President George H. W. Bush went through a number of justifications

before striking gold. He presented several arguments publicly as to why the United States might be obligated to act against Saddam Hussein after he invaded Kuwait. Interestingly, the hard core national security arguments did not sell: Americans were not willing to be mobilized to save the Kuwaiti government, to protect oil, or to stabilize the Gulf region. Two arguments worked: the threat of WMD, which of course is all the more interesting given the current Bush administration's laser-like focus on that issue prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The second constantly used pitch that worked particularly well with the public, and Bush would therefore use it constantly, was that Saddam Hussein was an evil dictator, comparable to Adolf Hitler. William Dorman and Steven Livingston observe: "Bush's use of the Hitler analogy became so common at one point, his failure to use it was considered newsworthy by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*."<sup>7</sup> Here was the message that moved Americans—it was a moral message about an undemocratic, unscrupulous dictator that the United States was obliged to counteract. The president then became trapped by the message: once Americans were persuaded by Hussein's likeness to Hitler, they were dissatisfied in the end with the Bush administration's limited objectives of expelling Hussein from Kuwait while leaving him in office.

The theme of America as the unique moral arbiter in a corrupt world has a long history and resonates with the embedded American belief that the United States is the shining city on the hill, and morally superior to others, including (sometimes especially) the Europeans. One need only recall Woodrow Wilson's summons to Americans to make the world safe for democracy by ridding it of the corrupt European balance of power system and German autocracy; Ronald Reagan's call to combat the evil empire; the pronouncements on America's mission by President George W. Bush: "Ours is the cause of human dignity; freedom guided by conscience and guarded by peace. This ideal of America is the hope of all mankind."<sup>8</sup> These self images resonate with Americans and often contradict the liberal impulse that also is part of the national culture, where team playing and multilateralist inclinations emerge. Americans, for example, consistently support multilateral responses to foreign policy crises. Thus, when Germans and others react negatively to the United

States, it is often against the exceptionalist image, which can be perceived as an arrogant unilateralism, characterized often in the German press as a cowboy, bully, or Rambo figure."

Germans have their own national and cultural identity cues that often conflict with those of the United States and others. In the long shadow of the National Socialist experience, West German society developed a core identity that many have come to define as the culture of reticence. The cues from this identity complex are many. First and most important is the German rejection of militarism. The lessons of the Second World War have translated into an anti-militarism that rejects the blatant and egoistic use of military power to meet the national interest. Many observers have called the German national culture pacifist, and it is to a large extent. To critics in the United States, it appears as the "Euro-wimp" stereotype.

That said, Germans have been moved to military intervention. Why, for example, did Germans support stopping Milosevic, even by force, but not Saddam Hussein in 2003? According to some polls, the Germans favored the NATO war in Kosovo by slim majorities. Here is where two cultural cues collided in an interesting way. While "never again war" committed by Germany is a rock solid cultural value, so too is "never again Hitler." Germans now feel obligated to fight human rights abuses wherever and whenever possible. Thus, while cartoon images of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright riding through the air on a guided missile were reminiscent of Dr. Strangelove and framed once again the German resistance to perceived American adventurism, the media images of Serb ethnic cleansing pulled German public opinion toward action. Thus, "never again war" from German soil gave way to "never again Hitler." As the media enabled images of ethnic cleansing to pour into Germany, the public came to accept that such aggression must be stopped. The decision to help thwart Serb aggression militarily brings up the third bedrock principle that emerges from German cultural identity—that national interests must be pursued in a multilateral context. Although the lack of a UN mandate bothered many Germans during Operation Allied Force, the fact that it was a NATO intervention undertaken in solidarity with other western democracies was critical to

winning over German public opinion. Thus, the self image of a just and non-militaristic Germany was preserved, and German elites worked throughout the intervention to keep Germany's role in line with this self image.

If Germans accepted the need to intervene against Serb aggression, why were they overwhelmingly opposed to U.S.-led military intervention against Saddam Hussein? Germans never accepted the U.S.-led military intervention as one based on the community wide held values of preserving human rights and agreed upon rules, and German elites never attempted to mediate or raise support for intervention as they did in 1999. Indeed, for the first time in U.S.-German postwar relations, the German governing class played to embedded negative images of the United States prior to the Iraqi intervention, where the intervention was seen more as U.S. unilateralism at work. That negative reaction vis-à-vis Iraq holds true today: Germans are more opposed to the initial U.S. decision to intervene in Iraq today (87 percent) than they were in 2003 (80 percent).<sup>9</sup>

The brief foray into the examination of U.S. and German cultural and national identities helps explain the current tension in U.S.-German relations. While both are liberal democracies and often have unity of purpose in foreign policy, which was reflected during the Kosovo intervention, they also often clash in their weighting of values. The identity complexes establish a national bias that can cast the actions of one's own behavior in the best light and that of the other's in a less flattering light. Thus, while Americans often see their behavior in the world as noble and answering a calling, Germans often see it as heavy handed and aggressive; here the "cowboy" or "Rambo" cultural cue emerges. While Germans see their actions in the world as measured, civilized, and just, Americans often perceive this behavior as weakness, or conveniently self serving; here the "Euro-wimp" cultural cue emerges. In the absence of the Soviet threat or the like-mindedness among governing elites in both countries that have in the past focused public opinion on policy choices that re-enforced the positive elements of the German-American relationship, misunderstandings and impatience in the transatlantic relationship are bound to continue.

*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.*

## NOTES

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8 President Bush, *Remarks to the Nation*, Ellis Island, 11 September 2002.

9 These are among the very revealing results of the latest Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 2005.

# INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY: NOT JUST FOR GOVERNMENTS ANYMORE

JEFF ROSENBERG

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*The negative image of America is perhaps the natural result of our status as a global superpower. It also stems from disagreements in foreign nations with U.S. policy. But it is also the result of a failure to explain U.S. policy, and a failure to engage in a dialogue with foreign audiences.*

*The negative opinion in the world about the United States and U.S. policy is a national security challenge of the first order. We must deal with this simple fact: most foreign governments, even non-democratic ones, are constrained in their ability to support American policy if their own people oppose the United States and its policies. We must, therefore, greatly expand our efforts to engage foreign audiences, not in a one-way monologue, but in a dialogue. International broadcasting is just one means of conducting that dialogue. We have to explain who we are, what we stand for, and what our motives are. If we don't, we will have ceded the field to people who will misrepresent our policies or our motives.*

*-Senator Joseph Biden, September 30, 2004*

The post-9/11 environment has brought a great deal more attention to the subject of public diplomacy than has been evident at any time since the peak of the Cold War era. The hard realization that hundreds of millions of people around the world, many living in countries friendly toward the United States, are opposed to our policies and have overwhelmingly negative opinions of this country has sent shock waves through the foreign policy establishment, the administration, and even the general public.

Although the focus of discussion quite logically tends to center on the view of the United States by citizens of Muslim countries, the concern extends to almost every part of the globe, including Europe.

The gravity of the situation does not need to be discussed at any length here, as it has been the topic of countless publications, conferences, hearings, and speeches. What remains unclear after all the study and discussion is what to do about the problem.

There is nothing even approaching consensus either inside or outside of government about what role government should play in re-shaping this country's image abroad, and which of the conventional components of public diplomacy—generally defined as international broadcasting, foreign representation for cultural and informational matters, exchanges of citizens and scholars, or visitors programs and cultural exchanges—should be given preference in the campaign.

After the Cold War, policymakers believed that many of these official tools of public diplomacy could be cut back, or even eliminated, because the major threat to American security had ended. In retrospect, where our vision is always 20/20, this is now seen as a grave mistake. While the United States was eliminating the United States Information Agency (USIA) in the 1990s and absorbing that agency's resources into a backwater of the State Department, it was simultaneously trimming exchange programs, overseas visitors' programs, and international broadcasting. There followed a period up to and including 9/11 in which the U.S. government's ability to help shape public opinion abroad was greatly diminished by a lack of resources, coordination, and policy.

Simultaneously, the field of mass communications was in the process of growing and changing at a rate never before experienced. The arrival of the Internet in almost every nation of the world, and its rapid spread from elites to average citizens, was the single greatest change. Internet parlors sprang up everywhere, making the web accessible to even those that could not afford their own computer.

Readers no longer had to wait days to read out of town newspapers, but merely mouse clicked and scanned the entire publication before it had hit the doorsteps in the paper's hometown. Even in established democracies, there was a rapid growth of new voices in every medium, as well as an early grasp of the potential of the Internet. Europeans were the first to have satellite viewing and listening offerings in the hundreds, easily and inexpensively available. The shifting patterns of work and commerce in the region

were mirrored in the available mass media. A Portuguese worker living in Finland could now come home from the workplace and watch a soccer game from Lisbon, hear the news in his native tongue, or listen to *fado* music broadcast live from Coimbra.

In newly-emerging democracies, a whole new universe of broadcasters and publishers emerged. Many of them were keenly attuned to local audience needs, and they siphoned off audiences from more traditional "official" broadcasters and news sources. In the Muslim world, the explosive growth of transnational satellite television in the 1990s quickly overshadowed the stodgy state broadcasters that had long held sway over public opinion in the region. New ideas, new faces, and new experiences were all suddenly available in the homes of tens of millions whose previous access had been limited to very few options. The effects were not entirely positive from the standpoint of the United States. Official American public diplomacy voices in the region were slow to adapt to the new reality, and as a result, the more strident and anti-American voices dominated these new broadcasters from their very beginnings.

Now that the issues of public diplomacy have returned to haunt the United States, a number of studies and a great many voices in and out of government have called for a wholesale restoration of the policy tools of yesteryear as quickly as possible and at great financial cost. One group of commentators has focused on the international broadcasting done by the U.S. government, calling for the expansion and strengthening of traditional outlets, such as the Voice of America (VOA).

Although funding for the nation's international broadcasting has generally increased post-9/11, the VOA has faced cutbacks and the elimination of some of its many language services. English is no longer broadcast twenty-four hours a day, and much of what is carried in English has a regional focus, such as South Asia or Africa. The government's attention to the broadcast side of public diplomacy has shifted to the Muslim world and the newest favored project, Radio Sawa.



A very large chunk of the new money for international broadcasting has gone into this regional radio network for the Arabic-speaking world, featuring mainly American popular music, interspersed with short newscasts and feature items. Now that we are many millions of dollars into the Radio Sawa effort, reports seem to differ on its reach and effectiveness. The new service, and its Arabic language TV counterpart, Alhurra, have been the recipients of glowing praise from the Bush administration, as well as the creators of the services at the Broadcast Board of Governors (BBG), the oversight agency for the nation's official broadcast entities.

One of the biggest boosters is Norman J. Pattiz, a wealthy and powerful commercial broadcaster from Los Angeles, first appointed to the board by President Clinton. Pattiz has stressed implementing a market-driven strategy to attract audiences that will be won over with straight-forward, fact-based journalism. Pointing to studies of the effectiveness of the new Arabic voices for the United States, Pattiz has written that, "Receptivity to BBG broadcast efforts in the Middle East is strongly affected by negative Arab perceptions of U.S. policy in the region. In the face of this animosity, our role is to exemplify a free press in action. We let the facts speak for themselves. We are confident that our overseas audiences, once fully informed, will make decisions that over the long run will coincide with U.S. values and interests—with what President Bush has called a 'forward strategy of freedom.'"

Even allowing for the declaration of the new official government media as purveyors of "fact-based" reporting (a notion widely disputed), one of the biggest problems with this course of action follows from Pattiz's own analogy.

The market exists in a variety and profusion never before known, both in the Muslim world and elsewhere around the globe. The consumers of the media product are sophisticated in demanding what they need and want from the smorgasbord of outlets available in their homes. Any product that carries the burden of being the *official selling tool of the U.S. government* is subject to suspicion and distrust. It is a far tougher sell for the BBG's voices than it is for

other American voices, whether they be *The New York Times*, ABC News, or even NPR. Although we might view these outlets as purely domestic, they are easily available in most countries via the Internet or satellite broadcasts. To the elite audiences the world over, the United States does not speak with one voice in the new media environment, it speaks with many voices, and therein lies both the challenge and the potential.

One of the most thoughtful American scholars of international broadcasting, Kim Andrew Elliott, works in the research section of the VOA but publishes his own opinions and analysis outside office hours. In his survey of the primary problem for the American government broadcasters, he points to the very heart of the misunderstandings about what international broadcasting by governments can accomplish:

Many American journalists and decision makers seem to think of international broadcasting in terms of the radio propaganda pioneered by Germany and Italy in the 1930s, and continued by Radio Moscow from the 1950s. To them, the concept is send message (A), to audience (B)—with the assumption that the audience is huddled around their radios to hear message A—to bring about outcome (C), e.g. a more favorable attitude towards the United States, rejection of terrorism, etc.

But the German, Italian, and Soviet international radio efforts were not successful. This is because the actual process of international broadcasting is more complex than that described in the previous paragraph. It starts not with what message a national government wants to send, but with what content the audience wants to hear.

In my experience, and that of many other observers, there is a powerful demand by audiences everywhere in the world for information about the United States. There is no question that this nation exerts a strong influence on what happens globally, both politically and culturally. The important point, however, and one that reflects the consequences of the changes in communications technology, is that those whom we might term elite audiences, who most commonly have good English language skills, now have the means at their disposal, through broadcasts and the Internet, to

seek out *the information they want to hear*—unfiltered by governments, either their own or ours. What this says to us is that the use of archaic formats modeled on Cold War government public diplomacy projects—when the notion of winning over the hearts and minds of foreign audiences was to use pop music to grab listeners (who had far fewer choices then) and then give them some soft sell on America—cannot be effective in today’s global media landscape. The contemporary global media environment demands new and innovative solutions for getting foreign audiences to *understand* us, not to “buy” us.

At this point, I need to declare my own credentials, so that the nature and derivation of my views can be more easily understood: For more than a decade I have been associated with NPR’s broadcasts of our information and cultural programs worldwide. This export function carries the name NPR Worldwide, but contrary to what the title might convey, it is not a large-scale operation, and not at all costly. Our broadcasting efforts overseas are not a high priority at NPR, which is focused almost entirely on serving the American audience. For the past several years, the NPR Worldwide operation has been self-supporting. It does not take any resources from the primary broadcasting mission at NPR.

NPR does not produce any programming specifically for overseas listeners, and we do not change a word in the popular NPR news, information, and cultural programs heard by more than 23 million listeners weekly in this country. The efforts are modest to be sure, and part of a larger branding effort designed to make NPR a more visible entity in the jumble of information sources available.

NPR’s news programs such as “All Things Considered” and “Morning Edition” are re-broadcast on a number of terrestrial stations, including those of the American Forces Network (AFN) and the NewsRadio network of ABC Australia, and our largest audiences are most likely reached in this format. We also distribute a 24-hour channel of NPR for the “Hotbird” satellite in Europe, which reaches audiences from Iceland to Yemen. Listeners can tune in through the same low cost receivers used for popular television services, and there is (unlike similar satel-

lite services in this country) no charge for receiving the signal.

In recent years NPR has also provided the same program stream to the WorldSpace satellite system, which utilizes small, portable digital radio receivers which can receive dozens of channels of music and information direct from powerful orbiting satellites for Africa, Europe, and Asia. NPR is part of a subscription service, which helps to pay WorldSpace for the costs of their operations.

In Japan, the USEN 440 cable system brings several hundred audio channels into homes and offices for a small monthly fee. NPR has one of the channels, as does the BBC, Deutsche Welle, VOA, and several popular American commercial radio stations.

NPR was one of the first broadcasters in this country to recognize the Internet’s capabilities to carry audio. Our programs have been available for on demand listening and archival access for almost a decade. Today an Internet user anywhere in the world can go to the website and search out a feature or report from as far back as 1995 and listen to it instantly, at no cost. In fact, a recent survey by NPR’s online division suggested that as much as a third of NPR’s online visitors could be coming in from abroad. Given the very large reach of NPR’s site, that makes the number of overseas visitors quite substantial.

Like all broadcasters, we actively solicit the views of our audience. We want to know their likes and dislikes, as well as their preferences and unmet needs so that we can better serve them. The overseas listeners to NPR Worldwide have told us by the many hundreds over the past few years that what they value most in NPR programs is ingrained in their very nature. They are quite simply what they are, with no artifice, no hidden sales pitch, and no slanting to “sell” a point of view.

At the same time, many listeners tell us that they get a clearer picture of this country by being able to eavesdrop on what we are hearing ourselves than from what is put forward as conscious export. Because of NPR’s mission in gathering news and covering issues in this country and around the world,

in the process of serving American listeners, we are putting out information not easily available elsewhere.

Recently, NPR covered the problems of a small town in rural California, which had experienced an incursion of naturally occurring arsenic in its drinking water. The report covered the efforts of the citizens and their local government, and how they worked together to ameliorate the problem. They had some successes and some setbacks. The problem has not yet been completely solved.

It struck me at the time that this one small feature embodied one of the messages America should be trying to communicate to interested audiences abroad. We are, as a nation, *a work in progress*. We have had successes and failures, and although we have pride in our tremendous accomplishments as a people, we have made many mistakes along the way. We do not hide them but, rather, we attempt to learn from them, and often we do.

It is this notion that seems to touch our overseas listeners most deeply, and because of what they have told us, it is the wellspring of my conviction that we can convey a positive message abroad merely by making it possible for others to see us as we see ourselves.

One e-mail we received stands out as perhaps the best example I can offer of what the impact of what NPR and other un-mediated American sources are accomplishing for listeners abroad.

The message came from a high school student in Germany, living near Frankfurt. She hears NPR programs on the local AFN station. It has always enjoyed a very large audience among Germans in the wide coverage area, and most have an excellent grasp of English. For years, the AFN stations in Europe have carried NPR's news and information magazines as part of their daily output for the U.S. military forces and dependents in the region. In addition to the news, the audience has heard countless interviews with authors, musicians, dancers, architects, etc. They have heard a running survey of American culture as well as a running narrative of our political and international issues.

The beneficial result of this constant presence occasionally surfaces, as it does in this young girl's e-mail (reproduced exactly as received):

*hi!*

*i`m a 17 years old high school student from frankfurt germany.*

*i`ve now been listening to your program for about a year or so and i must say that i`ve been very lucky having discovered npr on the AM frequencies.*

*it gives me the opportunity to listen to interesting in-depth interviews with folks like martin scorsese, terry gilliam, peter weir. especially your news coverage and reports tell me very much about the american way of life, american culture and traditions. it`s interesting to witness the similarities and differences between our two cultures because this way i get a bigger awareness of what shapes my (german) culture and of what we could do better. but it`s also important to UNDERSTAND your culture (which doesn`t mean that everything is legitimated!) and to see the causes of (inter)national american "behaviour". especially in times like this...*

*your radio station is global!*

*thanks!!! keep up the fantastic work...:)*

*(sorry for the bad english...hope you can understand what i`m trying to say;)*

This e-mail seems to me to personify the concept posed in the opening quote from Senator Biden. We urgently need to find ways to bring the candor and transparency we demand in our own media to students, teachers, professionals, and opinion leaders abroad.

We should seriously examine the possibility of a new *America.org*, designed especially for use abroad. It would be a non-commercial, non-governmental web source of information and links to all kinds of substantive information, including, but certainly not limited to, official government positions. It can offer audio and video on demand, resources for teachers, and even translations of significant information. It would not need to generate material on its own, but more effec-

tively, it would bring in content found in our domestic media output. It should embrace the diversity and complexity of our society, and help others to reach a better understanding of who we are as a democratic nation, as a people, and as a work in progress.

For me, Senator Biden's plea to the witness at that hearing in 2004 holds the key, and resonates in my mind:

*I would be very happy if the Lord came down and stood in the area between you and I and said, "Look, you've got a choice. We'll guarantee you that over the next 10 years, 1.2 billion Muslims of the world will understand America's position thoroughly. They'll understand—not accept it, not agree with it, not embrace it, not become pro-American—just understand it, understand our motives and understand our objectives, and understand what we're saying," I would say I'll take that, I'll take that.*

*The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not represent the views of NPR.*



# AICGS

1755 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, D.C. 20036 – USA  
T: (+1-202) 332-9312  
F: (+1-202) 265-9531  
E: [info@aicgs.org](mailto:info@aicgs.org)  
[www.aicgs.org](http://www.aicgs.org)

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