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Agents of Influence: The Organization and Routine Activities of A Government News Source.

R. J. Daniel Maher

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Media Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 1992

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ABSTRACT

Agents of Influence: The Organization and Routine Activities of a Government News Source.

R.J. Daniel Maher

This thesis attempts to expand the symbiotic theory of news and politics on the crucial question of how sources participate in international news production.

The thesis begins with remarks on related research that tie this discussion in with the major body of work already available on news. The symbiotic theory of news is explained and reconciled with the observation that the role that sources play in international news production has yet to receive adequate attention. A brief history of the development and changing philosophical foundations of government information agencies in Canada follows, and then an extended discussion of the routine activities and organization of the Media Relations Division of Canada's Department of External Affairs and International Trade. It is argued, contrary to some of the research that has already been done in this area, that government media relations operations are a major source of international news for Canadian journalists and wield a significant influence over the form and content of international news coverage concerning the federal government's involvement in foreign affairs.

The thesis ends by pointing out that any assumption of a mutual dependence

of participants in the relationship described would be misleading. It is argued that the government maintains more control over international news concerning its involvement in foreign affairs than do journalists. Then, in the final paragraphs, several suggestions are made for the improvement of the media/government connection.

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Of course, this atmosphere was created and sustained by others in the faculty of Communication Studies as well: more specifically, Drs. William Buxton, Jody Berland, Dennis Murphy and Dov Shinar. I thank you all for kind encouragement and sharp insight.

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Finally, a study of this kind would hardly be complete if it had not been for the cooperation of the participants. In this regard I must thank DEA historian Mr. Ted Kelly, government archive specialist Ms. Paulette Dozois, External Affairs Media Relations Officer Mr. Denis Laliberte and all others interviewed. I hope that we can continue our discussions very soon.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Margaret, and my father, Edward. Independently, they have given a push when I needed it the most. Together, they have made pulling me along seem easy.

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**CHAPTER ONE: A Hole in the Study of Canadian
International News**

Where there is little or no public opinion,
there is likely to be bad government, which
sooner or later becomes autocratic government...
in a democracy, foreign policy cannot be the sole
prerogative of government. The public has an
integral part to play.

Paul Martin

Former Canadian Secretary of State
for External Affairs

A significant characteristic of the information often provided by mass media is the fact that elite sources, not the general public, are frequently allowed to define the frames within which issues are discussed and interpreted and the mass media thereby "significantly narrows the selection and politicizes the representation of news events."¹ This paper examines whether or not this power is exercised by the Canadian federal government. More specifically, this research seeks to expand the symbiotic theory of news and politics on the crucial question of how sources participate in international news production by examining the organization and routine activities of the Media Relations Division (MRD) of Canada's Department of External Affairs and International Trade (DEA). It is hypothesized that the federal government has developed sophisticated methods of supplying information to the media to: insure that "the information supplied is used in the way that is intended";² control government information in efforts to shape how political issues will be discussed in the mass media; and, by exercising such "information management" techniques, use the mass media to keep certain issues

on the political agenda and to keep others off. In short, this paper examines the possibility that, contrary to the conclusions reached in a similar American report,³ government media relations divisions are staffed with personnel skilful enough and powerful enough to manipulate news, often distribute information that is arguably controversial and self-serving, fail to follow government guidelines for the operation of media relations divisions, and allow personnel to spend enough of their time engaged in such activities that these operations could constitute a practical threat to Canadian democracy.

No other studies of the Canadian mass media and/or government that deal directly with the possibility of state influence on the news coverage of the Canadian government's foreign affairs. Far more general studies of international journalism that address the Canadian situation⁴ focus the discussion on the cause and effects of our dependence on international news sources (mostly large news agencies like AP, AFP, Reuters, etc.). Other works study domestic news sources but only deal with the government's influence on domestic matters.⁵ Consequently, we have very little real knowledge of the influence government news sources may or may not have on defining the frame within which we come to understand the meaning of Canada's foreign affairs activities. The research findings presented herein emphasizes the importance of this hole in our study of Canadian international news. Indeed, it may be that as government officials within departments such as the DEA become more effective information managers they

more easily assume a disproportionate amount of control over the government/media relationship; a control which is already inherently strong given the imbalance in the government's favour of resources, expertise, and powers of concealment.

A significant body of work embellishes this study. Much of such previous research criticizes journalism and news organizations for maintaining an implicit "news logic" that narrows the selection and biases the representation of news events.⁶ In short, many researchers have claimed that "news logic" is not based on the practice of the professional ideals of competitive investigative journalism, political independence, and objective analysis that the news media preach, but instead on a practice of "standardized news based on pack journalism in the field and organizational imitation in the office".⁷ In addition, some of the most recent works suggest that news organizations function most efficiently when governments and their "support systems of social institutions (corporations, pressure groups and political party)" supply a high volume of professionally produced, "ready-to-report" news.⁸ In other words, news organizations already stand accused of being intimately involved with supposedly dissimilar organizations because such relationships are mutually beneficial; what is commonly referred to as the symbiotic theory of news.

Further, according to the symbiotic theory of news, news organizations and

journalists gain more than efficiency from their working relationships with officials:

Establishing an official reference point for news events solves the major practical problem of "objective" journalism: how to validate the selection and representation of the subset of news events that is drawn from the larger universe of actual world events and their possible representations. In place of an operational definition of objectivity, mass media journalism has substituted the popular myth that the pronouncements of government officials and institutional elites somehow represent the reality in which the majority of people live.⁹

And governments solve the problem of how to maintain control without losing legitimacy:

Since the press frames virtually all important stories around the actions and reactions of institutional officials, the key institutions of polity, economy, and society appear to be responsive to all legitimate issues and interests.¹⁰

Thus, it is argued, the "construction of legitimacy", like the creation of objectivity, becomes, "a circular process based on unquestioned assumptions about authority rather than critical analysis of the cause and consequences of world affairs" and "the presumption that authority is objective makes news as much a propaganda instrument as a critical analytical tool".¹¹

Such works highlight several of the hypotheses that should be tested in research dealing with government news sources. For example, "Do government press

relations officials cast their work in familiar or normalized story themes before presenting it to the media?"; "Are reporters' fears that 'deviant story lines' will compromise their working relations with official sources well founded?"; and, "Must journalists consciously accept a symbiotic relationship with sources in order for it to work as intended?"

These works are also helpful because they provide insight into journalistic routines, values, constraints, and the relationship between reporters and sources in more general terms. Government press officers interact with journalists on a day-to-day basis and gear their work toward the needs and vulnerabilities of reporters and news organizations. Therefore, an understanding of the work habits, values, and routines of news organizations is instrumental in comprehending the work habits, values, and routines of government press relations personnel and will embellish our understanding of how news sources may influence the media.

They also provide a grasp of the significance of the increasing use of technology in government and news organizations. Technology has changed the relationship between press offices and journalists over the years as well as the amount of control that interest groups can now influence over foreign correspondents.

Traditionally, "the further a reporter gets from access to technology the more independence he/she has had over what to cover".¹² This is primarily because modern communications technology opens up new ways for participant (i.e.,

government) groups to:

- 1) quickly survey what each foreign correspondent has or is about to produce
- 2) more easily manipulate correspondents or their news organization by either making facilities, services and information available or threatening to take them away, and
- 3) at times concretely affecting the news product.

Thus, the advantages that correspondents stand to gain from technological expansionism (i.e., speed of transmission, wider geographical focus) is balanced, if not negated, by the fact that their independence from those in control of this technology is becoming increasingly threatened.

Gans¹³ extensive fieldwork, for example, gives us a view of the newsroom, the beats, the professional routines, the news values, and the range of topics that may be covered by the news media, the overall organization of news organizations in terms of public or corporate control structure, management, the hierarchy of editors and other journalists involved, but also how technology has affected the daily routines of newsgathering. In addition, Gans was able to observe the relationship between journalists and sources and noted that "it resembles a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources...but more often than not, sources do the leading",¹⁴ and that a source's success in gaining access to journalists depends on, "four interrelated factors: (1) incentives; (2) power; (3) the ability to supply suitable information; and (4) geographic and social proximity to the journalists"¹⁵ - all of which the government news sources

examined in this study demonstrate in abundance.

As another example of how this type of research is instrumental here, Tuchman's¹⁶ ethnomethodological approach suggests that reporters operate within a net, which is a strategic organizational device to draw upon news sources as effectively as possible. They are placed with bureaucratic institutions, which guarantee a steady flow of reliable news. At the same time, newsworthiness of events may be negotiated between members of media institutions and the organizations they cover. Thus, Tuchman says, newsmakers spin a "web of facticity" that creates an illusion of credibility, but which ultimately legitimizes the status quo.

Fishman¹⁷ also described and contextualized how the methods of participants in the interpretation and construction of news events predefined a great deal of news content. The author noted how public authorities, like the police, are often allowed to define the news situation. Fishman concluded that the methods of making news and the dependence on external sources and documents leads to a uniform, ideological picture of the world; an ideology largely defined in terms of the constraints of the practicalities of newsmaking.

Ericson, et. al..¹⁸, further demonstrated how interwoven the lives of journalists and their sources really are, and how such relationships play a role in the formation and maintenance of power structures and the status quo. And Connell's study¹⁹

showed how news, when it is based on the event and situation definitions of the accredited sources of journalists - such as the government or other "official" sources - merely reproduces preformulated ideologies. This position is elaborated upon in the Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts²⁰ study of mugging in the British press, and again in an American study by Chomsky and Herman.²¹ In the latter, the authors suggested that public consent for the values of private business, the market, and free enterprise is "manufactured" by elites who ensure that information appearing in the media must first pass through a series of filters that get rid of contending ideas and discordant influences. "Some of these are institutional; the ownership and profit-orientation of the mass media, the advertising licence to do business, the influence of private and public bureaucracies as sources of news, the easy availability of official news, anti-communism as a control mechanism" to name just a few of the more obvious ones.²² These authors argued that reporters "who do not display the requisite values and perspectives" are regarded as ideological, irresponsible or aberrant, and are marginalized or ignored while, "Those who remain (with some exceptions) adapt themselves to the 'recognized societal purposes' of the media, and thereafter believe quite honestly that they are under no pressures to conform".²³

In the few studies available that deal directly with the role of sources in the shaping of news, there is a definite sense that press offices do manage, manipulate, and/or control the news. Indeed, one of the notions that emerges

from this body of work is that media offices should be feared because they are "conduits of a carefully prepared position" and that they are tools of "a tightly knit bureaucracy".²⁴

In addition, Entman's²⁵ study of the media's coverage of the Korean Air Lines and Iran Air incidents concluded that "journalists' cognitive habits and constraints (and those of their organizations), combined with heavy dependence on elite sources, would predictably lead them to make frame-confirming data more salient in the news text - and to de-emphasize contradictory data. According to Entman, "for entirely new breaking events, it is the initial interactions of sources and journalists that set the framing process in motion."

In another, Jan Servaes²⁶ noted that during the Grenada crisis, "Even those papers that criticized the invasion and questioned the correctness of the official information continued to concentrate on the same issues and items".²⁷ Servaes suggested that, "It may be that the professional codes of Western journalists, in the reliance on experts and balancing official views, implicitly guide coverage, especially in light of the limited availability of on-the-spot reporting".²⁸

In yet another study, this one by Fair and Astroff²⁹ on U.S. news coverage of apartheid in South Africa, it was suggested that, "despite the news media's critiques of apartheid, existing news practices give weight to governmental,

institutional (white) sources over those of insurgent (black) movements for social change".³⁰ These researchers describe how explanations originating with the government's "Bureau of Information" are "gradually accepted, stripped of their attributions, and repackaged as fact" and how the answers to journalism's "canon of questions" - who, what, where, why, and how - not only form the story but are themselves formed by being "constantly structured and restructured by the emerging definitions of the story and by the competing (and especially by the more powerful) explanations and definitions of the situation".³¹

This said, the following work tries to answer some of the many questions such research has raised about the nature of the information we receive concerning our government's foreign activities. However, as already mentioned above, because no work is yet available on this specific area, a more descriptive analysis is also needed. Thus, this research starts by seeking an answer to the basic question, "What methods do government sources employ in an effort to contribute to the public discussion of international issues and events and how are these efforts received and made use of by the media?" Then we move to the more theoretical discussion in an effort to answer questions such as: "Could the state ultimately exercise an influence over the form and content of some international news in Canada?"; "Do journalistic routines, values, constraints of production, and relationships with elite sources assist the government's efforts to control the flow of information concerning its foreign activities to the public?"; "Could journalists

be forced in some ways to rely on the foreign event interpretations of elite sources because of economic and organizational constraints and practices?"; and "Are the media made more vulnerable to the agendas of elite sources in situations where the media have limited access to on-the-spot observations?"

Such a study as this may then be appreciated on a number of levels: as a public administration study of a government function that has received scant attention from scholars; as a series of insights into common occurrences and practices that we tend to take for granted, including government handouts, contact with journalists and even the press clippings that circulate in a government agency; and as a perspective on journalists who cover the international affairs of the Canadian government for major Canadian news organizations. However, readers will probably be most interested in the description and subsequent evaluation of the government press operations' routine activities and attempts to influence news coverage. This is my interest as well. I am primarily concerned with determining whether or not government officials may unduly influence a process vital to the health of modern democracy - the flow of information about our governments foreign affairs to the public.

METHODOLOGY

Most analyses of the relationships between the public, the press, and governments are organized around efforts to trace the flow of influence. As the authors of a benchmark work on the study of public opinion put it, "Our central problem was to locate key points in the transmission of personal influence".³² Likewise, seminal works that study elite groups also focus primarily, if not exclusively, on the investigation of who possesses influence and how it is wielded.³³ Yet, if I may quote James Rosenau's excellent inquiry into this method at length, efforts that have tried to define influence in this manner are problematic because,

...influence cannot be easily rendered operational, that is, identified and measured in terms of concrete behaviour undertaken by specific individuals or groups. Let us briefly consider what is involved in the developing of an operational definition of influence. If it means anything, influence denotes the **process** by which the behaviour of one individual **modifies** the behaviour of another individual or group. For influence to be operative, some form of interaction must occur between the influencer and the influencee. Thus, in order to identify influence and assess its potency, the researcher must examine both the behaviour which precipitated the influence and the behaviour to which that influence may have contributed, and then he must estimate what the latter behaviour might have been if it had not been modified by the influence.³⁴

Since the measurement of "might-have-beens," is impossible outside of controlled experiments in which variables may be manipulated to isolate influence, such a method is not feasible for the study of the relationships that may or may not exist

between the public, the press and government. In the latter case, one cannot expect to be able to manipulate the variables that would reveal which groups or persons in society exercise influence over the other. As this is the case, "the most one can do is to examine the behaviour which appears to be a function of the relationship, and then to deduce from that behaviour those factors which seem to have been responsible for the influence in question".³⁵ Unfortunately, utilizing such a method here encourages the study to become considerably dependent on inferences based primarily on the researcher's personal observations and, although the data presented may provide some insight, any conclusions reached remain contentious. This is undoubtedly one of the limitations of this work. Another is the short amount of time spent observing the operations of this particular administration's press office operations; I have not yet had the opportunity to compare it to the styles of successive administrations. Thus, all that can be offered at this stage is a "descriptive conceptual framework" for understanding the operations, routine activities and media relationship of Canada's Department of External Affairs and International Trade Media Relations Division as it is today, rather than a "predictive theoretical one".³⁶

As will be expanded upon below, data was amassed from observational field studies, interviews with key participants in the activities and operations discussed, content analyses of internal and external communications within the organizations visited, content analyses of the media's coverage of some key events dealt with

within this study, interactions with government historians and archive specialists, and secondary sources.

The Observational Studies

Field studies took place at a major Canadian daily newspaper based in Montreal (**The Gazette**), a national television broadcasting system (**The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation**), and the Media Relations Division of the Canadian federal government's Department of External Affairs and International Trade.

At each location I paid particular attention to the routine activities, flow of communications, and personnel's interactions with members of other organizations of interest as well as internal relationships within the sites chosen. Basically, when I was not interviewing personnel, my field time was devoted to following personnel as they went about their business. I listened to them talk on the phone, asked them to explain the calls they were making or receiving, and in some cases accompanied them to lunch. I interviewed Canadian foreign affairs reporters, Canadian diplomats/media relations officers, a former Canadian diplomat, and a former Canadian foreign correspondent, and tried to see each through the eyes of the other. I also frequently compared my interpretation of events with the interpretations of others present and noted any similarities and differences. Whenever possible, interactions were tape-recorded and later transcribed to long-hand at the end of the day. When this was not possible or if I felt it would

interfere with the quality of the data received, I made entries into the log maintained at the soonest possible opportunity.

To arrive at generalizations I tested my observations within the context of interviews with reporters and civil servants whose experience spanned more than one administration and interviews with press officers and correspondents who have served under past administrations. The result of this mix of past experiences and present observations has provided a base of impressions that I, and perhaps other researchers, will be able to test by more systematic means at a later date.

Nonetheless, the technique of site observation has an honourable tradition in the social sciences, and has been successfully used by more than a few students of news processing.³⁷ Yet, when I began this project I, like others who have done similar work, wondered whether the work of media relations offices would be considered too sensitive in political terms to be studied effectively in this way.

Indeed, during the initial fieldwork for this paper, conducted at Canada's Department of External Affairs Headquarters in Ottawa, I expected to be restricted to "front regions" of public disclosure and was not surprised. I was not authorized to enter the high-security "back regions" of secret activity and information in any way, and it appeared that any attempt to do so would have been physically threatening (as security guards seemed always close-by). Indeed,

I was only permitted to talk to the official spokespersons of the department. I, like Ericson's "reporter", was confronted with a "bureaucratically constructed universe" and was only able to base findings which were not "bureaucratic constructs for public consumption" on what I suspected were candid comments made by those interviewed, personal inferences from my observations of the Media Relations Division at work, empirical evidence of how they accomplish part of their "official" mandate, and secondary sources of information.

However, as my research continued, I found that workers seemed to go about their business and to speak more freely. This would normally be attributed to the normal process of subjects becoming accustomed to the researcher's presence. But, in the government's case, I was put through security clearances, which may have contributed to my bona fide. Suffice it to say, however, that this work does include some discussion of how governments strive to maintain an image of public accountability while they often use only the mass media to display it.

The Interviews

In the series of interviews conducted with the spokespersons for the DEA's Media Relations Division (all of whom are Canadian diplomats on assignment to the division), a former diplomat, international news editors, a former foreign correspondent, a newspaper Editor-in-Chief, and a national television-station Bureau Chief, considerable knowledge and understanding of the organizational

structure and culture of the DEA's Media Relations Division and the media's relationship to it was accumulated. The average length of an interview was approximately one hour in both the government and media cases.

Interviews held with Canadian Department of External Affairs' media relations officers stationed in Ottawa were conducted in the department's offices at External Affairs Headquarters in Ottawa between May 21, 1991 and March 10, 1992. Interviews with members of news organization took place between October 21, 1991 and March 11, 1992 and were held at their respective corporate locations (**The Gazette: Montreal, La Presse: Montreal, and CBC Television: Ottawa**).

Questions were designed to highlight the practices, experience and evaluation of the External Affairs Media Relations Division and the media's relationship with it. In general, questions focused on each organization's assessment of it's own role, function, and effectiveness as news communicators, organizational values, institutionalized mandates, adequacy of coverage, the nature of newsworthiness and, most importantly, it's evaluation of the locus of news interpretation and/or direction of the flow of opinion. In addition, in the DEA's case, requests were made for descriptions of the strategies and tactics used by the DEA to communicate information to the media, and how the DEA prepare both information and personnel to "meet the press." In all cases, a number of short statements - all of which were conclusions reached by other researchers in this

general area - were read to the participants who were then asked to comment on them. This concluded the questionnaire and served to test a number of hypotheses about government/media connections in a very direct way as well as pinpoint some areas of potential trends and change.

Fortunately, respondents were quite interested in my work and cooperated fully. Therefore, none of the questions had to be modified to meet special circumstances of the interview. However, special circumstances did arise during an interview at the DEA which prompted a whole series of further probes which added greatly to my conclusions (important international news was released during the interview with a spokesperson for the DEA and I was able to witness first-hand the DEA Media Relations Division go to work). Overall, however, since preliminary research served to test the overall format and effectiveness of the questionnaire used, the questions asked to all respondents were the same or "scheduled" and "standardized."

Material from these interviews is used in the body of the thesis (although in the final draft it will appear without attribution, reflecting the confidentiality promised the interviewees). Direct quotations are taken from the text of the interviews that were immediately transcribed to type from the short-hand notes taken during and after each session. Of course, because I was unable to obtain an exhaustive sample and due to the limitations attributed to this kind of study (discussed above), the

extracts from the interviews are used to illustrate the analytical points being made and to enlarge their possible meanings, and not as conclusive proof of their validity.

Secondary Sources

Of the work that relates to this area in general ways, those concerning the relationship between news sources and the media have been most helpful. More specifically, I acknowledge a large intellectual debt to the studies done by Richard V. Ericson, et. al. (1989), Luc Reyckler (1979), Gaye Tuchman (1978), Bernard C. Cohen (1963), and Stephen Hess (1984) which served as an organizational model for this paper.

Other Sources

The primary newspapers used for content analyses are the **Globe and Mail**, the **Toronto Star**, and the **Montreal Gazette**. This rather ordinary task proved invaluable as it familiarized me with the written work of leading foreign affairs correspondents who frequently deal with the DEA's Media Relations Division; enabling me to ask specific questions about their work during interviews. Moreover, I obtained copies of "official" DEA press releases (for sample see Appendix A) that were sent to each of these papers and subsequently compared

them, in content and form, with each newspaper's treatment of the story (see Appendix A1, B and C). I was also given copies of the in-house "newspaper" prepared on a daily basis by the press officers of the DEA which they narrowly circulate throughout the government. These condensed news packages turned out to most interesting and I discuss their meaning in much greater detail in Chapter III. Also included is a graphic illustration of the physical layout of the Media Relations Division (see Appendix D).

Organization of the paper

The remaining body of work is organized as follows: Chapter II provides a brief history of government press relations activities. Unfortunately, because no historical study is available that deals directly with the Division of Media Relations of the DEA, I was unable to concentrate this brief exploration on it alone. Thus, this chapter contains the discussion of the growth of public relations as a function of government in Canada since the late nineteenth century until today in general, but focuses more specifically on the emergence of federal government press offices. A brief explanation of the changing rationales that subsequently guided the evolution of these special government offices is provided as well as a description of the most recent formal guidelines for their operation and responsibilities.

Chapter III then describes and examines the organization and routine activities of the Media Relations Division of Canada's Department of External Affairs and International Trade. Thorough descriptions of the physical, philosophical, and personnel organization of this government media relations division are provided. We also look closely at routine activities and formal government communication strategies used by the DEA; reactions to crisis; government secrecy and disclosure guidelines; information leaks; and several so-called "informal communication procedures".

In Chapter IV we analyze the DEA/media connection. Based on both primary and secondary research, most of the attention here is placed on the relationships that appear to exist between selected news organizations and this government news source. Thus, we discuss the possibilities of shared values, beliefs and attitudes; similarities in the approaches to gathering and disseminating information; structural overlaps; and the DEA's use of the mass media. The division's media strategies are examined as is the media's tactics for dealing with such news sources.

The conclusion then draws the research together in an analysis of the links that exist between the DEA's Press Relations Division and Canadian mass media used in this study and represents an attempt to generalize some of the findings. Based on the case study presented as well as my previous work and the work of others

on international journalism, news organizations, and sources, this chapter reiterates the results of the test of the hypothesis that the government exercises significant influence in framing the discussion of its international activities. More specifically, in the final analysis I discuss whether or not it is possible that 1) elite sources could influence the frame within which the discussion and interpretation of the federal government's foreign affairs takes place; 2) the government may control the flow of information in these discussions; and 3) the media are highly dependent on this official source for news of Canada's foreign affairs. This chapter then concludes with a discussion of the works' general significance to the larger body of news research and recommendations for change.

Notes for Chapter One

1. Lance W. Bennett, "Repairing the News: A Case Study of the News Paradigm," **Journal of Communication**, 35 (1985), pp.50-68. p.50.
2. A comment made by Mr. Denis Laliberte, Media Relations Officer for the **Canadian Department of External Affairs and International Trade**, in an interview with the researcher. May 21, 1991.
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17. Fishman, Op. cit.
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CHAPTER II: A Brief History of Government Media Relations Activities

To best understand news concerning the Canadian government's foreign activities it is helpful to look briefly at the history of the government's media relations activities.

It has already been well documented that from confederation in 1867 to about the end of the MacKenzie King era in 1948, "Prime Ministers generally dealt with a few chosen newsmen who were not only journalists but often influential advisors to the Government."¹ Indeed, these reporter-politicians are said to have functioned so well as ambassadors from their editors to the government that, "In a real sense, the trusted reporters served as spokesmen for the Government."² But, as the Canadian political and press organizations matured and grew, by the end of World War Two this tradition of press relations had already been replaced with more formal communication structures.

When Louis St. Laurent stepped into office as Prime Minister (1948-57) Lester Pearson, his External Affairs Minister, developed the practice of inviting trusted reporters into his offices for weekly background briefings.³ But it would not be until John Diefenbaker became Prime Minister in 1957 that a Canadian government official would have a designated press secretary. However, "The Chief," as many journalists liked to call him, seldom saw the need for assistance

when dealing with the press. In fact, his many friends and admirers in the press gallery are credited with helping him win his seat in the Prime Minister's office.⁴ Consequently, Canada's first media relations officer made little impression on the media.

As Diefenbaker's appeal to reporters withered to the point where the former Prime Minister could be heard giving contemptuous speeches about the "servile press", the media were forced to take a second look at the newly emerged source-close-to-the-Prime-Minister, the press secretary. Thus, the first cog in the newest machinery of state was given a niche within which to work out a new relationship between the government and the media.

Such developments boded well for the many ex-wartime information officers who had left journalism to help the government fight enemy propaganda efforts and who did not return to news work. By the early 1960s, they were already well meshed with business, government, labour associations and other institutions as public relations officers and had built the public relations business as it is known today in Canada.⁵ As the media and public interest became representative of new factors for government officials to reckon with, the government increasingly recruited such public relations professionals. With the aid of the close contacts they maintained in the mass media, these men and women were able to begin to focus a significant amount of positive media interest on the activities of their

employers.⁶

The "professionalism" of the government's public relations personnel had increased so much by the time Lester Pearson became Prime Minister in 1963 that the term "Public Relations" disappeared from Canada's governmental structures and was replaced with the terms "Information Service," "Public Affairs," or "Communications". From that point onward, government ministers were hardly ever seen without their so-called Executive Assistants, combined speech writers-advisors and public relations men who were very often former newsmen. And the Prime Minister himself is said to have made far more sophisticated use of the media than had any of his predecessors as,

Pearson established the first effective press department in the Prime Minister's office and designated as his spokesman a professional 'PR man' who had assistants and a small support staff. Informal question-and-answer sessions outside the Cabinet room after a meeting gradually gave way to more structured press conferences. The spokesman rather than the Prime Minister became the most important source of daily information and background briefing - if only because he was always available.⁷

and the following was (is) accepted as an official definition of the function of public relations in federal government:

...an individual who evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and programmes of his or her government (party) with the public interest, and plans and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.⁸

And it was under the Pearson government that the Division of Media Relations

attached to the Department of External Affairs was brought to fruition. Then Minister of External Affairs Paul Martin approved the appointment of a Foreign Service officer to act as media liaison. This officer "immediately set about opening channels between the department and the press".⁹

In 1968, Pierre Trudeau became Prime Minister and made further changes to the federal government's media-relations organizations. Trudeau expanded the Prime Minister's press office in an effort to better control the handling of information to the media. In addition, Trudeau provided fresh impetus for all departments to tighten the government's grip on information by sternly warning his Ministers that he would fire, perhaps even prosecute, any person caught in breach of the Privy Council oath of secrecy.¹⁰ Yet at the same time, Trudeau ostensibly invited public participation in the government of Canada and appointed a Task Force on Information with one of its goals to help determine how best to foster it.

The Task Force on Information documented what it called "the mess in government information" and while recommending a new agency be established to improve the flow of information between government departments and the public (subsequently called Information Canada), recognized that "any strengthening of the government's information apparatus involves the possibility of a government manipulating public opinion."¹¹

Yet, it would not be until July 16, 1981, that the federal Cabinet would provide a series of principles "to guide future development of government policies, and also to guide the public service in their communications activities".¹² This first set of guidelines presently applies to all departments and are:

1. Canadians have the right to full, accurate and timely information, in compliance with the Official Languages Act, about their government so that they can exercise their rights of citizenship and take part in the democratic process fully, responsibly and in an informed manner.
2. Canadians have a right to access to government records, with exceptions, to be legally defined and ultimately interpreted by the courts, designed to protect essential public and private interests.
3. Government has the responsibility to provide the public with full, accurate and timely information about the policies, programmes and legislation approved by Parliament; it also has the responsibility to inform the public of factual content of its policy proposals and of facts as it is aware of them regarding the public issues addressed to its policies.
4. Government has a corresponding responsibility to make every reasonable effort to learn of the concerns and views of Canadians, with particular attention to differences of views in different regions of the country, so as better to inform itself in establishing priorities, in developing policies and in implementing programmes which serve the interests of Canada.
5. Effective communications between citizens and government imply a reasonable effort on the

part of the citizens to seek the information they require to exercise their rights of citizenship, and an obligation on the part of government to make every reasonable effort to provide access to information on an equal basis in all regions of Canada.¹³

The Cabinet guidelines also described the relationship that should exist between certain key departments and agencies (ie. the DEA). In short, these comments are:

Line departments and agencies have the primary and paramount role in obtaining, using and providing the information needed by the government, by Canadians and by the officials of the department and the central agencies with whom they work. In general, this role is carried out by officials in proposing alternative policies and programmes and associated communication plans. Finally, it is carried out by departmental officials providing their senior management and Minister with regular information on what clients think of government policies, programmes and services administered by the department. This information is obtained partly through ongoing media-monitoring responsive to the Ministers' public communications priorities and objectives.

More specifically, the communications responsibilities of line departments and agencies include developing, implementing and evaluating departmental and agency communications policies, programmes and systems which:

1. foster public awareness of the department or agency programmes and services, and

2. compliment and support those of the government.¹⁴

Of course, since these guidelines were formalized more than a decade ago, the communications operations and functions of government have become more complicated as communications systems have become more complex. One consequence, for example, has been that government public relations personnel officers have had to recruit increasingly specialized personnel, drawing not just on former media newspeople, but on those from other backgrounds - government, politics, law, engineering, management consulting, accounting, education, research, design, film-making, advertising and promotion, and in the DEA, the diplomatic corps.¹⁵

Such sophisticated human resource pools coupled with the falling credibility of governments, major companies, the legal profession, organized religion, and labour organizations has encouraged government executive to take a keener interest in public relations and the importance assigned by the public to news reports.¹⁶ Indeed, public relations advisors are now suggesting to their government clients that "Operating in the public interest (is) no longer satisfactory" and that government now has to "fight back the 'anti' and 'ism' groups...with direct, reasoned and blunt public relations advocacy and issue programmes".¹⁷ In addition, these same advisors have encouraged government leaders to be more aware of the fact that most public debates in the 1990s "will be scored in the news media, television in particular", and that they should be

seeking "policy-making public relations advisors who not only can formulate and carry out communications plans, but who can make a distinct contribution to senior policy by identifying issues and opportunities in advance".¹⁸

Such developments alone give ample reason to pay closer attention to the present day activities of government media relations divisions. They lead us to ask, 'What do we know about these government-sponsored activities?'; 'Are public information services still operating within the Cabinet guidelines set out above, or has their function in government changed with the changes in information technologies and government communication needs while only their image has remained the same?'; and 'Are such services effectively fulfilling their responsibilities to the general public of Canada?'

In the following chapters we will attempt to answer such questions by placing some emphasis on the evaluation of the routine activities of the DEA's Media Relations Division in the light of these, the most recent, government guidelines established for the operation of public information services.

Notes for Chapter Two

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.256.
5. Malcolm B. Erb, "Public Relations in Government", as found in Walter B Herbert and John R.G. Jenkins (eds.) **Public Relations in Canada: Some Perspectives**. Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1984. p.166.
6. Ibid., p.167.
7. Westall, Op. cit., p.259.
8. Erb, Op. cit., p.166.
9. Westall, Op. cit., p.260.
10. Ibid., p.264.
11. Ibid., p.265.
12. Erb, Op. cit., p. 166.
13. Ibid.
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15. Ibid., p.15.
16. Gerald D. Brown, "The History of Public Relations in Canada", found in Erb, Op. cit., p.8.
17. Ibid.
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**CHAPTER III: The Organization and Routine Activities of
the Canadian Department of External Affairs
and International Trade's Division of Media
Relations.**

In Ottawa's Department of External Affairs Headquarters building, just down the street from both Parliament and the Prime Minister's residence, a fifth-story space about the size of an average newspaper's city desk -- and organized quite the same (see Appendix D) -- has been set aside to accommodate the DEA's special Media Relations Division. Established in 1968 while Canada was still under the Pearson government, this is the department's "clearing house" for all government information relating to Canada's involvement and/or opinions concerning foreign affairs. It represents the central link in a vast world-wide information-gathering network. In addition to its work with the North American media, the Ottawa office communicates directly with 61 Canadian Embassies, 20 High Commissions, 18 Consulate Generals, 8 permanent missions assigned within international organizations, and one Commission. Combined, these separate divisions' information contributions make up the enormous pool of the government's external affairs knowledge from which media relations officers draw when supplying other government officials and the media with international news and background materials.

In the hub of activity - a centrally located, large open room surrounded by office cubicles, filing cabinets, reference library and secretarial desks - passing staff may

casually glance at the latest major North American news broadcasts on the dozen television monitors while a technician supervises the taping of every frame of it. Behind the monitors, sound-recording machines capture all major Canadian radio news broadcasts. And next to these sound machines, the Canadian Press, AFP, AP, and Reuters wire services quietly churn out fast-breaking hard copy reports on world events while another technician distributes all that may be of interest to Media Relations Officers. Across a small corridor stacks of the leading domestic and foreign newspapers lean against fax machines that are used for more urgent communications with news organizations, Canadian embassies, other government organizations, and different institutions around the world.

This is the DEA's "news net" and everything "captured" is kept on file to provide the Media Relations Officers with information on international events and issues and, of course, Canada's involvement in international affairs, so that media officers can fulfil the many requests for information and copies of programmes and transcripts submitted by news organizations and government officials.

Presently, the DEA maintains a full-time staff of eighteen in the Media Relations Division: seven of whom are "official spokespersons" for the Department, two Executive Assistants, three Technical Assistants; two General Secretaries; and four Media Writers (who also staff the office on a rotational basis during off-peak hours - between 6 P.M. and 6 A.M.).

While none of the official spokespersons for the department have mass media backgrounds, they are considered mass media specialists because they have acquired recipe knowledge of news organizations and journalists as well as the needs of the DEA and its officials. Significantly, however, all of the official spokespersons have many years of experience as professional diplomats, and treat their duties concerning Media Relations as they would any other diplomatic assignment. This latter point is important because the role of the diplomat is perhaps the perfect training ground for a media relations officer attached to the Department of External Affairs.

Researcher Luc Reyhler describes "diplomacy" using five principle function areas: "conflict management, problem solving, cross-cultural interaction, negotiation and bargaining, and program management",¹ and emphasizes how "adeptness at reconciliation, compromise, persuasion, bargaining and accommodation is critical for adequate role performance".² Further, when dealing with information, "A diplomat must first of all choose between various interpretations, sort out the cultural bias inherent in the information, and select the most creative way to utilize the information so as to influence both policy formulation and execution".³ As we see below, all such talents can be utilized by government officials who must deal with the media.

The diplomat is also a valuable asset to the Media Relations Division because

he/she "can be considered relatively good mirrors of their government's thinking"⁴ and therefore, when the media solicit information from diplomats, both the government and the media are satisfied that a reliable substitute for a direct interview with a policy-maker has been provided.

The two Executive Assistants on staff do not have the extensive diplomatic service records of their superiors but supplement such skills by assisting in research, writing some news releases and fact sheets, answering inquiries, setting up interviews and briefings between journalists and officials of the department and other secretarial duties. They may also speak with or otherwise contact the media, but are authorized to supply only "background materials" to reporters and "official" government statements; they are not authorized to "speak" on behalf of the government. This is made clear to them in guidelines concerning media relations that are issued to all Department personnel, including Ministers.

It is Department policy to have at least one Official Spokesperson on duty and two staff Media Writers twenty-four hours a day. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that all of these individuals will have to be in the Department's offices. In the event that a significant event should occur after regular operating hours, junior personnel on duty in the offices will contact the Official Spokesperson on duty at home, then monitor off-peak information requests and transfer these to the officer on duty as soon as possible.

At times of crisis and particularly increased demand for information from the media and government officials, such as the recent Persian Gulf War, additional DEA personnel are assigned as needed to the Media Relations division to answer telephone inquiries from the media around the clock (which exceeded 900 per week during the Gulf War; 66 per day during the recent attempted coup in Venezuela; and 70 per day during the Haitian crisis).

Finally, each media relations officer has a separate office around the perimeter of their assigned space. My observations suggest that an "open-door" policy encourages interpersonal interaction. Interviews were frequently interrupted by inter-office telephone calls, the delivery of memos, and other officers of the Department who stepped in to solicit and express opinions on both general housekeeping and important matters in short, abbreviated exchanges.

DIVISIONAL MANDATE

Media relations officers of Canada's Department of External Affairs have been given the responsibility to provide the public with "full, accurate and timely information...so that (Canadians) can exercise their rights of citizenship and take part in the democratic process fully, responsibly and in an informed manner" concerning Canada's foreign affairs. They have also been assigned the corresponding responsibility to make "every reasonable effort to learn of the

concerns and views of Canadians", while paying particular attention to differences of views in different regions of the country (see **Cabinet guidelines** above). To fulfil their duties, media relations officers have developed formal and informal methods of supplying information to the media which they believe "ensures that the information supplied is used in the way that it was intended".⁵

Among the formally recognized conduits for information from the DEA to the mass media are press releases, press briefings, official speeches, and direct contact established with the media through telephone exchanges, interviews and special meetings. Less structured media relations activities include the more personal relationships that officers try to develop with a handful of leading columnists and efforts to maintain control of information "leaks". Officials have found it necessary to develop such varied approaches to the mass media because they suspect that "the form of (information) release will in some ways shape how it will be discussed".⁶ All of these avenues of communication will be discussed in greater detail below.

As was mentioned in the introduction, most of what the DEA's media relations officers do, therefore, could be categorized under four major general headings: supplying themselves and their colleagues with information, preparing information for the mass media, organizing staged events, and responding to reporters' inquiries.⁷ Again, "Looking at these routines individually and then trying to

assess the time spent on each is one way of addressing the concern that press (relations) operations may have become more manipulative than is appropriate in a democratic society".⁸

THE INTERNAL SUPPLY OF INFORMATION:

Monitoring the Media

According to the **Cabinet Guidelines** for the operation of public information services outlined in the previous chapter, the DEA has "the primary and paramount role" of gathering, using and disseminating all of the information needed by the government, the general public, department officials and the agencies with whom they work concerning Canada's foreign affairs. As the above guidelines suggest, much of this information is obtained through "ongoing media-monitoring".

Canadian Media Relations Officers attached to the Department of External Affairs are expected to "read" the media constantly, scanning as many publications and broadcasts as possible, always on the "look-out" for items about Canada that give any indication of public and government attitudes at home and abroad. A typical day will corral stories dealing with everything from the recent status of negotiations on the proposed Canada-USA-Mexico free trade agreement and newspaper and television reports on the activities of Canadian businesses abroad to accounts of the Prime Minister's latest sojourn to foreign nations. Through this

process, media relations personnel can also "keep track of which publications are making use of the press materials provided by the Department, which publications do not seem to have the government's side of the story straight, and which publications might welcome additional information." But it should be noted that "detailed content is not as important as the general issues presented".⁹

Media relations personnel then clip, duplicate and circulate all of the news stories that directly relate to the DEA and its officials in any way. Of course, as we will discuss in more detail below, a not-so-subtle editing process takes place within the construction of each of these "news-packs". Briefly, story selection is generally based upon a newspaper's geographic location and organizational prestige rather than story content. A more thorough editing process is not necessary as "Canadian foreign policy and/or the government's activities abroad are so rarely considered 'newsworthy' that there is hardly an overwhelming amount of media coverage to sort through."¹⁰

The compilation of news stories is then made into the form of an "internal newspaper" and circulated throughout the Department of External Affairs and to other related Ministers of government under the banner, **Highlights**.

Preparing Internal "Newspapers"

Presently 44 copies of **Highlights** are prepared and sent to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Media Attache, the three Ministers attached to the Department of External Affairs (Finance, Trade, and External Affairs), nine others in the Minister of External Affairs Office, twelve to the Assistant Deputy Minister's Office, nine to the Director General's office, one to each of the Commissions on the Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement, and seven for Media Relations Officers. Generally one of the official spokesperson and the staff secretaries will arrive at headquarters every week day at 5:30 A.M. to begin preparation of these "news-packs." Thus, **Highlights** is made ready and distributed in time for recipients to peruse over breakfast or their morning coffees after arriving at their respective offices - usually around 7:30 A.M. In this sense, reading the DEA's internal newspapers has become an integral part of senior government officials' preparation for the coming day's activities.

Significantly, the appearance of internal newspapers in government suggests that the closer government officials are to the top, the less likely they are to be dependent on the normal forms of mass media and the more likely to have their news prepared especially for them. This is not without consequences. For example, internal newspapers like **Highlights** may cause high-level government officials to experience "the news" in a far more intensive form than the rest of us. Whereas most people peruse the media in a very cursory fashion¹¹ -- reading headlines and

perhaps one or two paragraphs of stories in general in newspaper, sections of weekly newsmagazines, watch the nightly news on television -- busy high-level government officials may often see only the narrowly focused, prepackaged, daily dosages of news supplied to them by their departments. As Stephen Hess was right to point out, such a concentrated diet of news clips can lead governments toward developing interdepartmental relationships based on a "sort of pluralistic ignorance".¹² In other words, such practices may manifest situations in which high-level officials debate public policy with entirely different conceptions of which aspects of the issues are most important to the public due to the narrow focus of the media to which they have been exposed.

In addition, while numerous studies have demonstrated that most Canadians get their news from television, the daily clips of newspaper and magazine articles prepared by the DEA's Division of Media Relations appear to be the news staple of government officials. This, too, has consequences.

While it would be possible to include a daily transcript of TV and radio newscasts, transcripts are expensive to produce and not included in the DEA's daily news packs. However, a composite tape of television's news programs is prepared by private companies in the Ottawa area and is readily available. But it is important to note that because of the videotape's length and the fact that it is not available until later in the morning, the audience is not as large as it is for **Highlights** --

most officials have more pressing obligations by this time. Thus, for officials concerned with Canada's external affairs and international trade at least, the daily newspaper clipping services provide evidence that the news rhythm of high-level government in Ottawa is determined by newsprint organizations, and notably, only a very select few of these.

Surprisingly, although only 32 news stories appeared in **Highlights** news packs between May 18 and May 21, 1991, 34 percent (11) of the stories came from the **Globe and Mail**, 19 percent (6) from the **Toronto Star**, 19 percent (6) from the **Financial Post**, 16 percent (5) from varied news agencies (such as **Reuters**, **AP**, **Mediascan**, etc.), and the remaining 14 percent (4) represented all other Canadian newspapers used (three of which were Quebec based papers ((**La Presse**, **Le Devoir**, and **The Gazette**)) and the other story came from the **Ottawa Sun**). Thus, the daily clips not only condense the scope of the news for government officials, but the service also magnifies the influence of geographically centralist, ideologically conservative, large, urban newspapers. This, in turn, spawns another set of consequences; especially for the development of reporter/source relationships. We will turn to a more detailed discussion of this relationship in Chapter IV. Briefly, however, it begins to become clear that, as Stephen Hess noted in a similar study on the American mass media and their sources,¹¹ certain journalists in the Canadian mass media also hold privileged positions in relation to government sources simply because of the news organizations they work for

and/or their geographical proximity to Ottawa.

PREPARING INFORMATION FOR THE MEDIA

Press Releases

Another major activity of press offices is to prepare information for dissemination to the Canadian mass media - most often made manifest in the press release. That government press offices produce an overwhelming amount of press releases is hardly in dispute. As to what function they serve for the DEA, if and when they are used by the media, that is another matter.

Several studies have demonstrated that press releases are widely used by the media -- often as the only account of an event or issue -- and that such prepackaged information has become fully integrated into the fabric of what we perceive as "news".¹⁴ The press, on the other hand, would like us to believe that they do not consider the press release as anything more than public relations propaganda; immediately recognized as an offering by interest groups who willingly supply only the facts they want publicized and therefore only part of the story.¹⁵ But a comparison of the contents of the DEA's press releases with the subsequent stories that appear concerning the same issues (see Appendix A and A1 for example), and studies done by W. Lance Bennett¹⁶ -- that reveal that even the prestige press rely on press releases for over 17 percent of their news -- sheds a little doubt on the media's claims.

However, it has been demonstrated that most press releases certainly do not influence the news in anyway and are utilized by journalists only when they are in need of scrap paper.¹⁷ However, these rejects tend to be the more ill-conceived and poorly written of the lot and they generally do not come from elite sources. The "better" press releases -- those "dressed-up" in proper format for the media, those making difficult issues and events more accessible to the nonspecialist, those that are clearly written and from an important source -- stand a much better chance of ending up on our breakfast tables and in our living rooms as "news."¹⁸

As one researcher describes it,

Initial decisions (on whether or not to use the information in a press release) may be based on factors such as subject matter, length, the number of releases available...and the newsworthiness of the release...but how a press release is used depends on very practical criterion (sic): whether the information appears 'balanced'; is stylishly written; and well formatted.¹⁹

The DEA's media relations officers pay a significant amount of attention to the content and appearance of their press releases; the objective being that their information be used in the way they intended: uncut and uncontested. For example, on one of my visits to the DEA, two separate high-level meetings (involving at least three spokespersons, a media writer and a secretary) were called for the announced purpose of discussing up-coming press releases.

Since, as one DEA spokesperson told me, "successful media relations involves

understanding the media, how they work and what their requirements are",²⁰ the DEA's government media-relations specialists now tailor press releases so that headlines, content, timing, styles, angles, and layouts conform to the different needs of different media and, ultimately, are used. The "news" contained in the carefully engineered press release looks quite ordinary to the journalist if the information has been "packaged" properly and is released by a "friendly" and important source. In this sense, we come closer to understanding why, "the newsworthy is not that which is new, but that which fits into a familiar frame or into the existing knowledge of news discourse".²¹

Media relations officers attached to the DEA, like most news sources, have discovered that the press release catering closest to the selection criteria of the news organizations will enjoy the most success. Of course, the chances of a source's press release being used by the media also benefit by the basic constraints and pressures affecting everyday news production of the modern media: inadequate time, space, public interest, alternative information sources, understanding of the issues, and sufficient amounts of everyday laziness. When a source is aware of these constraints, the media become vulnerable to manipulation. As one author put it, it is just a matter of "learning how to play the game".²²

With this in mind, we also understand how government information releases can

be useful and accurate and still be incomplete and even deceptive because they order information in a manner that the government officials consider most advantageous to the government. This issue is dealt with in considerable detail in the following chapter. Suffice it to say here that the press release is just one of the ways in which the DEA may "initiate the news-making process, and set ideal boundaries around what is to be known by emphasizing some information and leaving out other information".²³ As can be seen in the sample press release (Appendix A), a typical DEA press release usually arrives via fax-machine at news organizations across Canada on official government letterhead, complete with a suggested headline for the story, important names, dates and meetings clearly laid out and several key quotes attributable to the individuals involved in the issue or event. And when we compare the above sample press release to the subsequent mass media treatment of the information provided (Appendix A1), the content and style of the media articles very clearly mirror that of the press release.

Despite its effectiveness, however, I was told that the press release is "not generally used for disseminating extremely sensitive or controversial government information to the media."²⁴ Its content is generally the type of information that reporters could easily discover on their own with minimal research - who, what, where and when but not necessarily why. This seemingly benign characteristic is why, according to one Media Relations Officer, the government can count on "seeing the material released in this form in the news...practically unaltered in

form or style".²⁵

The real job of the press release is said to be far more manipulative. As "a tool for establishing initial and ongoing contact and trust between the department and the media",²⁶ the press release is an important first step toward controlling the news. As Richard Ericson noted, "Trust is crucial for news access".²⁷ When trust is in place, collaboration and reciprocity are routinized, and assimilation results.²⁸ Trustworthiness, along with "past suitability", productivity, reliability, authoritiveness and articulateness are the key criteria for what news organizations will consider a "suitable" source.²⁹ As one spokesperson put it, "We (DEA media relations officers) are extremely aware of the importance of establishing trust with the media".³⁰ Thus, the press release acts as "a credibility link" for the government; it establishes trust and accustoms the reporter to receiving useful information from the DEA. As "regular feeds" to the media establishes a journalist's initial trust in the DEA as a sources for information, the DEA begins the process of "nurturing" certain reporters for future, shall we say, more exclusive use.

Of course, we can only touch on this area of analysis here as we are primarily concerned with discussing the DEA's routine activities and information tools for now. A more detailed examination of the implications of such communicative practices and instruments is reserved for Chapter IV. Suffice it to say here that,

"Every precaution is taken to ensure that the credibility of the government and the individual media liaison as a source is not damaged" by information contained in press releases.³¹ Media relations officers expurgate press releases before they are sent out, checking and double-checking content for precision and clarity. Then, when the information is finally released, the media officer will rest assured that the information given to the media in this form is indeed factual and concise, "although perhaps not the whole story".³²

Not getting the whole story from official DEA information appears to be a rather common occurrence. For example, in a case study in which I pitted official DEA statements of Canada's involvement in the Vietnam War against the Canadian government's actual involvement in that conflict, I found that the image presented was in sharp contrast to the reality made manifest. Canadian officials were, quite rightly, quoted in DEA press releases as saying such things as "Canada has a strong sense of responsibility to world peace" and subsequent newspaper headlines reiterated the Canadian government's keen interest in establishing a truce between the warring North and South Vietnamese armies.³³ However, what the press releases never mentioned at any time between the start of the Canadian government's official involvement in the conflict (July 20, 1954) and the war's frazzled "end" in the mid-seventies, was that, as researcher Charles Taylor later documented,

Canada was effectively allied with the U.S. in its war against North Vietnam. Canadian officials were

carrying American ultimatums to Hanoi, arguing America's case on the ICC (the United Nations peacekeeping Task Force), (and) furnishing America with political and military intelligence. Canada was also selling about \$300-million worth of arms and ammunition to the Americans each year: a large if undisclosed portion of this military hardware was being used in Vietnam.³⁴

And, in another case involving the Canadian government's stance and activities concerning Apartheid in South Africa in the mid-seventies, I found that DEA press releases and official statements expressed the Canadian government's "broad revulsion" at the "cancer of Apartheid" in South Africa³⁵ and, again, subsequent mass media coverage of the issue generally followed suit.³⁶ But, no longer so surprisingly, significant aspects of the Canadian government's involvement in the issue went largely unreported. This time what the DEA did not mention in its official statements was the sizable economic stake the Canadian government had in South Africa's Apartheid system, the Canadian government's NATO obligations to defend the South African regime in the event that it was threatened by an outside force, that NATO countries, including Canada, had helped design and construct a highly sophisticated communications and surveillance centre located at Silvermine, South Africa, and that, in the years prior to the Soweto Massacres, Canada's Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) force were implicated in the training of South African police forces (which, during the Soweto massacre in 1976, were entirely armed with NATO FN rifles).³⁷

Thus, it becomes clear that while the DEA's press releases do contain "factual and

concise" information concerning the Canadian government's foreign activities, the government's official stance in world events and issues can be far removed from its complete involvement in them. Unfortunately, because of the mass media's apparent dependence on official statements and lack of investigative reporting, Canadian citizens often are not exposed to all the facts of their government's involvement in foreign affairs until such activities are a matter of historical record.

STAGING EVENTS

The staging of media events is another of the responsibilities of the media-relations office attached to the DEA. Of course, engaging in such activities is not at all a novelty for the DEA. Under the Pearson government the DEA regularly held background briefing sessions to which the spokesman might invite a senior government official whose area of specialization happened to be in the news.¹⁸

Presently, the DEA initiates relatively few such events in comparison to say, the media relations personnel attached to the Prime Minister's Office. However, when it is deemed necessary that the DEA "put on a show" for the media, the organization of the events has changed little since its inception.

Before any staged event takes place (i.e., a special media briefing, an interview, or an official visit to the site of a crisis), reporters (sometimes only a select few) are alerted through news releases, wire-service releases, and phone calls. Arrangements are made to handle the special logistical needs of various electronic

media. Fact sheets are prepared to highlight, summarize, or simplify the issues from the government's standpoint. Press kits are assembled and sometimes even transcripts and videotapes are made available. Presenters are carefully selected and the format of presentation decided. In most cases speeches are prepared for the speakers through arrangements made by the media relations division and participants may even be rehearsed.³⁹

However, aside from being a totally controlled news environment, the main benefit the staged event offers the government's efforts to actually influence the media is, like the press release, "a way of further establishing the media's trust in government information."⁴⁰ Delicate materials are very seldom disseminated to the mass media using such devices. If there is any other benefit derived from the utilization of staged events, it is "perhaps to maintain accessibility in times when officials are either unavailable or unprepared to be interviewed by the media."⁴¹

ANSWERING MEDIA INQUIRIES

The final major formal routine responsibility of media officers is to respond to reporters' inquiries. This task is done mainly over the telephone and this fact helps us understand why so little information is accessible to most reporters this way. Most of the telephone interactions between the government and the media are conducted very cautiously.

Before a reporter can even talk to a Media Relations Officer, he or she must deal with the "gate-keeper"; the DEA's Media Relations Division receptionist acts as a safe-guard against a media relations officer being caught off-guard by reporters' questions. He or she will take down the reporter's name, organizational affiliation and general area of inquiry, tell the reporter that an officer will return the call, and pass the information along to the officer in charge of the area that information has been requested on. This gives the officer time to check the "official press-line" on the issue, and in some cases, check the reporter's credentials and reputation by either referring to one of several journalist-listing guides or by asking colleagues.

In some cases, for example when a well-known reporter calls with a request for information and such requests have been anticipated by the DEA due to recent events, an "official reply" is usually made readily available to the receptionist and this routine can move along considerably faster.⁴²

In all cases, the information given to reporters over the phone is "factual and concise."⁴³ Telephone inquiries, like the press release and all other formal dealings with the media, never supply journalists with controversial or otherwise sensitive information. In this sense, the DEA perceives the task of answering telephone inquiries from the mass media as both an easy way to display the government's accessibility and yet another effective means of establishing the media's trust and

dependence on the government-sponsored information.

Obviously, then, it would be misleading to suggest that the government's responses to reporters' inquiries are primarily reactive. The fact is, media relations officers leave very little to mere chance and circumstance. Indeed, the primary reason for the DEA's policy of having at least one official spokesperson and two media writers on duty at all times (see above) is so that personnel and the media are effectively supplied with an "official line" on every issue of importance concerning the DEA before journalists call. This allows junior staff to spend the time needed to answer requests for more routine information that may require additional research and it maintains consistency in the information being given out on sensitive issues.

OTHER ROUTINES

Proactive Crisis Management

"Routine crises" -- revolutions, for example -- which often affect the international alignments of power and/or the safety of Canadian nationals, occur regularly enough that they can be and are planned for. In short, the crisis gets assigned from the bureau of the region in which the event has taken place to a specially constructed -- although not always formally labelled -- task force. Information then emanates solely from this group. This organizational format may ultimately disseminate less information than the DEA's regular operations but it maintains

more control over unwanted information leaks.

Late into the morning of one of my visits to the DEA's Media Relations Division I witnessed Media Officers go into action during an internationally significant crisis. As I sat chatting with Mr. Laliberte in his office, one of his colleagues burst into the room. "This just in over the wire" he said as he dropped a wire-service message onto the desk, "We're meeting down the hall." Laliberte scanned the loose sheet of paper on his desk and then quickly rose to his feet. "You'll have to excuse me for a moment," he said handing me the wire message, "read this." India's former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi had just been assassinated. The wire service could not confirm the cause of death but eyewitnesses reported it was a bomb blast from very close range. Still somewhat stunned by the news, I followed Mr. Laliberte out of the office to watch what would happen next.

From my position in the hallway, next to the security guard (who prevented me from roaming any further), I could see several media relations officers emerging from their offices, one of whom was the officer responsible for the Indian region, and entering another office down the hall directly in front of me. Laliberte came back to his own office again for a moment and I managed to ask him what would be taking place in the meeting. Hurried, he said, "We have to prepare statements for the Prime Minister (Brian Mulroney), Minister for External (Barbara McDougall), the Deputy (as Mulroney was in transit to Hong Kong at the

moment of the announcement, Deputy Prime Minister Donald Manonkowski was filling the executive position), and the official line for the phones."

Others in the office stood monitoring the bank of television sets, the wire services and the fax machines in the centre of the room. Apart from the group enclosed in the office down the hall, all other personnel were on the phones. I overheard several officers attempting to get more information on what had happened in India but could not determine who was on the other end of the lines. It was not until later that I was told that, in situations like this, calls would have been immediately placed to the Canadian embassy in the area, the Prime Minister's Press Office, the Minister of External Affairs and International Trade's office, and all other high-level government officials and/or offices that may be directly or indirectly involved in the news. The media would not be called until a statement had been prepared and if they called would be put off until that time.

Thus, the DEA, much like a news organization, has a very definite plan for dealing with crisis situations. In this case, an event occurred that, although the result of nongovernmental actions, had to be responded to by the Department of External Affairs and International Trade for diplomatic reasons. Of course, such an event could easily have consequences that would affect the delicate balance of world power and trade, and such factors, I was told by the Laliberte, are investigated before the release of an official statement. Also of significant interest,

however, was the direction of the flow of opinion and information during the initial stages of the event: Media Relations first received very sketchy information of the incident from a wire service. They immediately phoned their own agency in the area - in this case a Canadian embassy - and all other internal sources in an effort to be get the latest news on the matter while closeting themselves off from the media to prepare an official statement. They did monitor the news simultaneously, but there was no indication that they depended on it to assist them in defining the meaning of the event any further. The media, on the other hand, were immediately calling for information from the government but were put off until after the DEA had completed a brief meeting -- of about 30 minutes -- in which they had prepared an official "press line" concerning the event. The telephone inquiries in regards to the government's statement were then answered with the prepared statement. Just an hour later, as I started my return trip to Montreal, a **Broadcast News** radio news spot announced the Indian leader's death on a local Ottawa station, including in the story the government's official statement. A day later, in the newspapers that closely followed the event, government officials were frequently used to clarify the significance of the event and demonstrated an ability to establish the interpretation of its meaning (see Appendix B).

Developing and Maintaining Informal Information Channels: Secrets, Leaks and Plants

In times of crisis journalists may find that the flow of information has become

"dammed-up" at the government press office, and they are then forced to turn elsewhere to get the information they need to do their jobs. Alternative sources may include foreign newspapers, amateur radio operators, rumour mills, and political opponents of the administration.⁴⁴ For example, Kevin Newman, **CBC Television's External Affairs reporter**, related the story of when, during the Iran hostage crisis, the Canadian government opened a \$1 billion line of credit to Iran - the largest Canada has ever opened to another country -- but did not release the news to the media. **CBC Television** only later found out about the affair through Teheran radio.

Subsequently, the price paid by the administration for forcing journalists to look for other sources can be less flattering coverage of the government's activities and, perhaps, less accurate news. Therefore, it is often in the administration's interest to keep certain "friendly" news organizations and/or journalists at least partially aware of the government's interpretation of even its more secretive activities in order to stunt the growth of a negative public outcry. Controlled "leaks," then, may sometimes appear in the government's information dike and media relations officers are made responsible for ensuring that at least a government "thumb" stays in the hole.

However, I was assured by DEA spokespeople that the release of extremely important information through a leak in the Media Relations Division of the DEA

has never happened. "Such an obvious display of favouritism to a certain member of the media would create a great deal of antagonism among the others; enough that it might damage the credibility of the Division in the eyes of the media."⁴⁵ Therefore, Media Relations Officers avoid employing such methods in getting their information out. When such leaks occur "they usually originate outside of press relations".⁴⁶ Indeed, beginning with the Pearson government, government Cabinets have been considered notoriously leaky and successive administrations right up to today's have harboured a certain paranoia about the possibility of information emitting from high-level officials.⁴⁷

However, more "routine secrets" are often allowed to slip through cracks maintained in the wall by the DEA's media relations spokespersons. This generally occurs within the context of the direct contacts made by the Department of External Affairs media relations officers to selected leading foreign affairs correspondents and analysts considered "trustworthy" and "friendly".⁴⁸

For these purposes, the DEA prefers cultivating newspaper journalists - especially correspondents in the "prestige press", such as the *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* and Montreal's *Le Devoir*. Newspapers are favoured because it is believed that "Television and radio are ephemeral (and) are not really listened to by the Department, but press is permanent. Bad news is worse when printed." Thus, certain individuals, "like John Cruickshank, Associate Editor of the *Globe* and

Mail, John Hegal of the **Globe and Mail**, and Joe Souton in **Le Devoir**, are considered very influential in determining how other journalists and media will report certain events and issues and receive preferential treatment by government employees. As I was told, "We treat them well...we reply to their requests for information and research quickly because they have proven to be professional".⁴⁹ When pressed for a definition of "Professional", Laliberte offered, "those reporters that "get the story straight...aren't (sic) adversarial". But, taking the reporters mentioned above as representative of those preferred by the DEA's media relations officials, we can see that they also share other qualities not found in all Canadian journalists.

It appears that the characteristics that mark a journalist for preferred treatment by media relations officers are similar to those Gans observed (above) that mark sources as "suitable" for news organizations. For example, in addition to trustworthiness, a reporter's location, assignment, seniority, ability, and employer may also figure in the mix. Of these qualities, geographic location and the prestige of the reporter's place of employ are the most effective in ensuring that some reporters get more than routine information. This helps us to understand why, as was mentioned in the discussion of the government's "News-Pack" - **Highlights** - geographically central, ideologically conservative, urban journalists appear to receive a disproportionate amount of the government's special attentions. Perhaps coincidentally, these are also the reporters whose columns usually get

clipped for inclusion in **Highlights** and are subsequently read by high-level government officials.

With minimal imagination, one can see that a definite cycle emerges: If a reporter who works for one of the prestigious newspapers begins to receive preferential treatment from the Media Relations Division, it is likely that he or she will enter upon a quickly ascending spiral of influence inside and outside of the government; his or her reports will be among those most often read by government insiders and other Canadian news organizations; government insiders may then begin to supply even more confidential information to these reporters; more confidential information translates into more prestige for the reporter; and so on. In this sense, just as reporters become highly protective and nurturing of their sources,⁵⁰ sources often guard and nurture "their" reporters. Once "captured", the DEA can then depend on certain key journalists to handle necessary leaks in a way that fits the DEA's definition of "professionally".

Of course, there are a host of other reasonable explanations for the existence of leaks in government press offices beyond the possibility that the government may want to control the flow of information concerning its activities to the public. A department official may just want to create a little goodwill with a reporter he/she might need for a future favour; or he/she may be trying to shroud a certain policy in mystery so that it receives more attention than it really deserves; a leak may be

used as a sort of "trial-balloon" to test a proposal that is under consideration; or it may be motivated by purely personal factors such as when a disgruntled civil servant wants to settle a grudge by embarrassing another person, or blow-the-whistle to the press as a last resort after internal channels of problem-solving have proven unsatisfactory, or even just as a way for an individual to boost his/her own ego when caught in a system which allows few outlets for ego-tripping. But these frequently petty considerations are easily merged with the more important official objectives.

Nevertheless, for whatever reason, cultivating the press corps has become "one of the musts of a (DEA) media-relations officer"⁵¹ and a rather routine activity. Such practices have proven to be "practical, effective, and mutually beneficial".⁴⁵ However, because of the secrecy that surrounds such activities, it is impossible to know how often, if ever, such information exchanges represent a deliberate attempt by the government to use the media in efforts to further foreign policy objectives, or their importance to the government's overall voluntary information contributions to the media. A much more detailed analysis of these activities would be required before I could comfortably draw any conclusions concerning the DEA.

Conclusion

As it is, Canada's diplomatic media relations officers occupy a position of needing to know virtually all of the information dealing with Canada's foreign affairs so that they can effectively communicate with department officials and best assist in the decision-making process concerning what information should be released to the public. It is also the responsibility of the DEA's media relations officers to effectively communicate desired information to the public, via the mass media, concerning the federal government's stance on international issues and events. Thus, as we have seen, the Canadian Department of External Affairs has developed several official and unofficial mechanisms for dispensing 'news' to the mass media. However, contrary to the **Cabinet Guidelines** outlined in Chapter II, case studies have shown that the DEA has often failed to provide full information to the Canadian public concerning the federal government's involvement in international issues and events, via the mass media, "so that (Canadians) can exercise their rights of citizenship and take part in the democratic process fully, responsibly and in an informed manner."⁵² What does such practices say about the function of the DEA's Media Relations Division? As one Canadian foreign correspondent has put it,

When we (reporters) are denied answers to questions or access to documents, we say that news is being suppressed; but when the Government releases less than the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about its activities and decisions, we say that news is being manipulated.⁵³

While, conversely, a DEA spokesperson believes such practices merely display the

government's willingness to supply the public with information that is "accurate, timely and necessary so that Canadians can effectively participate in the democracy," while maintaining a "sensitivity to the agenda of the Prime Minister's Office and Privy Council"⁵⁴ that a majority of the electorate has arguably already consented to -- hardly as sinister a practice as words like 'manipulation' imply.

It is, ultimately, a matter for more extensive research to decide. What is of interest is that even though representatives of the mass media believe that such government media relations activities can be 'manipulative', several case studies presented herein suggest that Canadian news organizations depend on the DEA as a major news source. Why? As will be discussed in Chapter IV, there are several significant factors that may contribute to the Canadian mass media's apparent dependence on the DEA for 'news' concerning the federal government's involvement in foreign affairs.

Notes for Chapter Three

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3. Leon B. Poullanda. "Diplomacy: The Missing Link in the Study of International Politics," in **The Theory and Practice of International Relations**, David S. McLellan et al., (eds.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Princeton Hall. 1974. p.196.
4. Reychler, Op.cit.,p.6.
5. A comment made by Mr. Denis Laliberte, Media Relations Officer, **Canadian Department of External Affairs and International Trade**, during an interview with the researcher on May 21, 1991.
6. A comment made by Ms. Nicole Martel, Media Relations Officer, **Canadian Department of External Affairs and International Trade**, during an interview with the researcher on March 3, 1992.
7. Stephen Hess. **The Government/Press Connection**. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute. 1984. p.38.
8. Ibid.
9. Martel, Op.cit.
10. Anthony Westell, "Access to News in a Small Capital: Ottawa," as found in, Thomas M. Franck and Edmund Weisband (eds.). **Secrecy and Foreign Policy**. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974. p.260.
11. Jacques Ellul. **Propaganda**. New York: Vintage Books Edition. 1973.
12. Leon Sigal, as quoted in Hess, Op. cit., p.42.
13. Hess, Op.cit., p.45.
14. Ellul, Op.cit.; also Richard Ericson, et al. **Negotiating Control: A study of news sources**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989; Hess, Op.cit.; et. al.
15. Leo Calvin Rosten. **The Washington Correspondents**. New York: Harcourt, 1937. p.73; and confirmed in interviews with DEA's media relations officers

conducted by the researcher.

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20. A comment made by Ms. Kathryn Aleong, Media Relations Officer, **Canadian Department of External Affairs**, during an interview with the research on March 3, 1992.

21. Richard Ericson, et.al. **Visualizing Deviance: A Study of News Organizations**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1987. p.143-144.

22. Hunter Davis. **The Beatles**. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978.p.20.

23. Joyce Nelson. **Sultans of Sleaze: Public Relations and the Media**. Toronto: Between the Lines Press. 1989. p.50.

24. Laliberte, *Op.cit.*

25. Martel, *Op.cit.*

26. Laliberte, *Op.cit.*

27. Ericson, et.al. *Op.cit.* (1989) p.199.

28. *Ibid.*; see also Herbert Gans. **Deciding What's News**. New York: Pantheon. 1979; Hess, *Op.cit.*; and Leon Sigal. **Reporters and Officials**. Lexington, Mass: D.C., Heath.1973.

29. Gans, *Op.cit.*

30. Aleong, *Op.cit.*

31. *Ibid.*; but also confirmed by Laliberte, *Op.cit.* and Martel, *Op.cit.*

32. Laliberte, *Op.cit.*

33. **Globe and Mail**, July 20, 1954, p.1; et.al.
34. Charles Taylor. **Snow Job: Canada, the United States and Vietnam (1954 - 1973)**. Toronto: Anansi, 1974. p.85.
35. Dick Fidler. **Canada: Accomplice in Apartheid: Canadian Government and Corporate Involvement in South Africa**. Toronto: Vanguard Publications. 1977.
36. See coverage in **The Globe and Mail** and **The Montreal Gazette** on June 19, 1976.
37. Fidler, Op. cit., pp.3-8.
38. Westall, Op. cit., p.260.
39. Aleong, Op. cit.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Martel, Op. cit.
44. A comment made by Mr. Kevin Newman, Parliamentary reporter-External Affairs beat, **CBC Television Ottawa**, in an interview with the researcher on March 3, 1992.
45. Laliberte, Op.cit.
46. A comment made by Mr. Elly Alboim, Bureau-Chief, **CBC Television Ottawa**, during an interview with the researcher on March 3, 1992.
Ibid.
47. Westall, Op. cit., pp.261-265.
48. Laliberte, Op. cit.
49. Ibid.
50. Allen Fotheringham. **Birds of a Feather: The Press and the Politicians**. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1989.

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54. Laliberte, OP. cit.

CHAPTER IV: Necessary Collusions: The Government/Media Connection.

Media relations officers of Canada's Department of External Affairs work hard to maintain their status as a major source of foreign affairs "news" for Canadian mass media. They believe that they have this status now because, as one media officer interviewed said,

...the media generally do not have the time to do the necessary research on most things the Canadian government is involved in internationally, they come to us. We provide them with what they need to know to get the story out, and they generally report whatever we say.¹

It is perhaps true then that, as Ericson pointed out, "journalists rely upon sources to function as 'reporters'. And it may be reasonable to argue that the real reporters are the source spokespersons, who do all the essential 'signwork'".² It may also be true that reportage is made easier by having source organizations "who are only too willing to do the basic signwork"³ and that "Rarely will the media change the angle of the story (the government) supplied".⁴ Surely then we could say that government media relations divisions are at least somewhat influential in determining the scope and direction of news. Indeed, perhaps Ericson's point, that governments are "in a hegemonic position as a primary definer" of accounts of events in the news because opposition parties, news organizations and other interests "lack the resources to match the knowledge resources of the government",⁵ can be validated with a closer examination of the

government\media connection.

The Mass Media as the "Voice of the People"

Perhaps the most obvious service the media might appear to provide to democratic governments is the monitoring of the one thing government officials need to maintain their legitimacy to control: public support. Information concerning the public's opinion of the government's policies and activities is, arguably, the only data the government does not already provide to itself. Except for the very top-level foreign affairs personnel and official offices, "most of the information that people in this department get comes from very specialized internal systems of communication".⁶ The media, then, ostensibly provide government officials with a direct connection to the citizens they have been hired to serve.

But, as will be demonstrated, opinions expressed in the media - editorial opinions; views expressed by columnists, commentators, and the ideas of "newsworthy individuals" - should only be considered as a way for government to "tap an informed and articulate segment of public opinion" (emphasis mine), not the attitudes of a more general populace.⁷ Indeed, some researchers believe that even letters to the editor should be considered suspect when looking for the "public voice" in newspapers.⁸ Therefore, government officials are stretching matters to extreme distortion when, as the **Cabinet** guidelines for the government's public

communication services (Chapter II) suggests, government departments rely on the mass media to regularly and continuously tap wide-spread public opinion concerning their activities.

Several studies have clearly demonstrated that the mass media have almost no "publicness". For example, work done by Robert Darnton concluded that the media have little contact with the general public and receive almost no feedback from it.⁹ Darnton suggested that it is misleading to think that reporters write for "the public", and more accurate to say that reporters write for very specialized subgroups of the general population. These subgroups, or "particular publics", which, according to Darnton, are often the primary sources for news for individual reporters, have far more influence on each writer's production than the wider listening-reading-viewing audiences. The implication of Darnton's work, in short, is that while the government may claim it has good access to what "the public" thinks by monitoring the mass media, in fact, monitoring the media is a good way for the government to keep track of the effectiveness of its efforts to influence what members of the media think, not necessarily the general public. Indeed, in response to the question asked by researchers, "Is the general body of citizens informed and engaged in public life in the manner democratic theory assumes?" the answer has usually been an emphatic 'no'.¹⁰

The search for a public voice in the media has been sketched in broad outline by

Carey, subjected to historical treatment by Schudson, Leonard, and McGerr, and applied to recent trends in American politics by Entmen.¹¹ Hallin also noted "the decline of a politically-committed journalism" from the 1830s on, and "its replacement by a professional journalism that claims to stand above politics".¹² And many of the conclusions reached in such work was predicted by Habermas who wrote,

"Ordinarily, the local newspaper informs discussants by providing news, adds voices to the discussion by publishing editorials and letters to the editor, and tries to provoke more candid discussion among public officials through interviews and press conferences. What all these contributions assume, however, is the prior existence of a functioning public sphere, in which common problems are being continuously recognized and discussed. The conceit of the letters column, for example, is that the letters emerge from - and address - an on-going conversation in the community".¹³

What Habermas is suggesting to his readers is that the age is long passed when the private interests of media ownership coincided with the improvement of public discussion. Indeed, the scholars mentioned above believe that public discussion through the media has broken down. They have added their research findings to the growing body of literature which suggests that discussion in the mass media consists primarily of reporters and officials talking back and forth to one another. In addition, such research findings are now motivating other researchers to ask "if forming the public is now an antecedent goal to informing the public?"¹⁴

When Gans started his research, he assumed "journalists, especially reporters, knew more about America than anyone else - or at least more than campus-bound sociologists", but this, he observed, is not the case. "Journalists obtain their information about America from their customary sources; and from what they themselves read in the paper", certainly not strangers.¹⁵ Kevin Newman of the CBC told me that he never talks to strangers and generally writes with his mother in mind.¹⁶

Similarly, Joan Didion describes how reporters create the "public narrative" in an article titled "Insider Baseball".¹⁷ Here Didion says reporters "speak of the political process as an end in itself, connected only nominally, and vestigially, to the electorate and its possible concerns".¹⁸ And this, she says, is one of the reasons modern-day politics has a certain "remoteness from the actual life of the country" as reporters "tend to speak a language common in Washington but not specifically shared by the rest of us".¹⁹ More specifically, according to Didion, journalists talk,

about the 'story,' and how it will 'play.' They speak of (a politician's) performance, by which they mean his skill at circumventing questions, not as citizens but as professional insiders, attuned to signals pitched beyond the range of normal hearing: 'I hear he did all right this afternoon,' they were saying in the press section of the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans on the evening Dan Quayle was or was not to be nominated for the vice-presidency. 'I hear he did OK with Brinkley'.²⁰

This, to Didion, is how politics sounds when it is being emptied of any public purpose. She writes:

When we talk about the process, then, we are talking, increasingly, not about "the democratic process," or the general mechanism affording the citizens of a state a voice in its affairs, but the reverse: a mechanism seen as so specialized that access to it is correctly limited to its own professionals, to those who manage policy and those who report on it...and to those who ask and those who answer the questions on the Sunday shows, to the media consultants, to the commentators, to the issue advisors, to those who give the off-the-record breakfasts and to those who attend them; to the handful of insiders who invent, year in and year out, the narrative of public life.²¹

In short, Didion emphasizes the increasingly common impression that the media occupy and relate to "worlds all their own, constantly transmitting their own images back to themselves;" those inside the process continuously directing their attention "toward the invention of a story for which they themselves are the principle audience".²² Thus, Didion's "Insider Baseball" expresses a theme that can be found repeatedly in the literature on the media's role in politics.²³

Even well known journalist Bruce Hutchinson has admitted that he does not frequently make contact with "the people". Since youth," he confessed, "I have felt a horror of crowds, of argument, of making decisions, while criticizing the men who had to make them. Instead of responsible power (assuming that I could have

gained it) I sought irresponsible privacy".²⁴ And another popular Canadian journalist, Allen Fotheringham, related similar experiences in the "closed world" of politics in Ottawa.²⁵ In this regard, the best "feedback" that we could hope the media is providing to our government would be the sort defined in *The Merriam-Webster* dictionary as: "the return to the input of a part of the output of a machine, system, or process."

Thus, we can safely assume that the government is not seriously relying on the mass media as a way of monitoring the everyday citizen's voice, but at best, only those of "influential" individuals that the government takes to represent us, but whom have no real authority to do so.

The Mass Media as an "Independent Voice"

Working for one of Canada's major dailies, says former *Globe and Mail* reporter Boyce Richardson, can "translate into a powerful form of political partisanship, far from value-free".²⁶ So much so that,

"Many of those who have quit have done so because they began to use their skills in the cause of the environment, human rights, civil liberties and the poor - values that, according to the elite consensus, are all very well, in moderation...Canada has dozens, perhaps hundreds of journalists whose experience and judgement are largely lost to Canadian political and

social discourse: they have 'fallen to the wayside', leaving the field to those who can be depended on not to rock the boat, either for the medium that employs them, or for the government".²⁷

Perhaps, however, we should still believe the claim made by DEA's media relations officers that they rely on the mass media to "provide an independent report, outside of government routes, on what is happening around the world" so that the government is better informed when making foreign-policy decisions.²⁸ Here, it is hoped, the media may be playing a legitimate role in keeping many government personnel and officials in touch with a broader range of issues and developments that they may not otherwise be aware of in their day-to-day activities; especially since top level officials "rely only on large news organizations" because "they have their own people abroad to supply angles on issues, attitudes, and events that (officials) may not be aware of as a consequence of reading only internal reports".²⁹ Let's move, then, to an examination of the soundness of this government assertion.

Such a stance treats media reports and official government reports as if they were two wholly separate, independent sources of information and as we will see, this is definitely not the case. Indeed, almost immediately after one media relations officer informed me that the government depends on the media's independence, another officer told me candidly, "We never depend on the media in that way because we are their source."

The latter statement highlights the fact that, although reporters "in the field" may have significant first-hand experience and insight into international situations, even foreign correspondents rely on "official sources" a great deal. This is primarily due to the fact that the foreign activities of the Canadian government tend to be within very close proximity to Canadian embassies,³⁰ and, as CBC's Kevin Newman noted, "When reporters are posted overseas, Canadians tend to stay with Canadians. They do everything together. When a story breaks, they go straight to the embassies".³¹ Thus, the "news" that is received through the media concerning government activities has usually already been somewhat influenced by government officials "on the scene".

When I asked Bruce Mabley, a veteran Canadian diplomat, if the government was a major source of news for foreign correspondents abroad, he replied with a laugh, "Where else are they going to look?"³² Mabley elaborated by pointing out that the government is so confident that the press will need them, that each embassy around the world immediately releases a diplomat's name, phone number and address to the media whenever issues arise. "You can expect to have your ear to a phone for the rest of the day talking to journalists" says Mabley. "But," he added, "because the Foreign Service is very afraid of the press, we have a special section that deals with what to say to the media. In fact, because (media relations officers) are mandated to be the only ones allowed to construct statements, whatever you tell the press originates in Ottawa" (emphasis mine).

Other examples of the close relationships that exist between foreign correspondents and government sources were expressed by representatives of the **Gazette**. Editor-in Chief and former foreign correspondent, Norman Webster stated,

when abroad, regular contact with government officials is normal. Foreign embassies are considered a most helpful, reliable, credible news source...by taking care of the press they provide contacts, leads, facts, figures, impressions of events and ideas on what is going on...³³

And journalists at the **Gazette** readily recognize how professional media relations practitioners are becoming more successful in influencing news producers. As **The Gazette's** World News Editor, David Walker, put it,

source control and symbiosis are very much acknowledged...and if the relationship is intimate at home, it is even more intimate abroad because of the distance, loneliness, commonalities of position, etcetera. They all go to the same parties, dinners and entertainments. External Affairs, for example, is considered politically neutral; if we don't have a reason to doubt them, we won't doubt them...they make the reporters' job as easy as possible...you have to go by the rules of such things.³⁴

According to Walker, no one seriously believes that the hundreds -- even thousands -- of persons who receive journalistic accreditation to cover international events or tours of world leaders are all qualified and competent to make the independent findings of fact and observations that are expected of superior foreign correspondents. Researchers also have known this for some time:

Whether we in an open society like it or not, there are relatively few such professionals, career men and women, who file at regular intervals for a serious publication, wire service, or electronic medium around the world. Many of the so-called foreign correspondents of our day, unhappily, either work directly for their governments or are indirectly controlled by them.³⁵

In addition, because of increasingly frequent and rigid deadlines, journalists have very little time to collect all the details before the presses roll. "In essence, on breaking stories and new controversies, a daily paper may have three hours of actual tracking-down time (i.e., telephoning) on a story".³⁶ Thus, having "credible," "reliable," and "informed" government sources that can be called at the last minute for an "authoritative" quote is becoming ever more important to the job of journalists.

The DEA has noticed the shift in the power relationship that exists between it and news organizations. Indeed, as was discussed in Chapter III, the DEA's media relations spokespeople now work very hard at increasing the journalist's dependency on them. And once journalists have become heavily dependent on institutional authorities for much of their information, they are disinclined to be too critical of them.³⁷

Studies of television coverage of foreign affairs find a general neglect of the views of foreign governments (except for an occasional crisis) and a general absence of

views that do not coincide with the ones propagated by government foreign policy elites and the government.³⁸ In fact, these researchers believe that, "Much of what is reported as news is little more than the uncritical transmission of official opinions to an unsuspecting public".³⁹

Obviously then, norms, developed within the organization, are exportable and affect the news-gathering process abroad as well. Put a little less delicately, *The Gazette's* World News Editor stated, "Most foreign correspondents are a bunch of thumb-suckers and nail-biters that function in the old-boys-school-mode".⁴⁰

And while Walker's assessment may be a bit rash, it does seem that the tougher the task, the more likely foreign journalists are to co-operate with sources.⁴¹ We can easily imagine what it might be like for Western foreign correspondents working overseas by paying a little attention to the habits of Eastern block journalists working in the West. They tend to stay within their own groups, relating closely to their embassies.⁴² Although this may be a bit of a false contrast -- considering the lack of freedom most Eastern countries have traditionally afforded their foreign reporters -- Mr. Newsman's statement above attests to the existence of some generalizable behaviour on the part of foreign correspondents.

Such collective norms and actions of newsgatherers can lead to situations where foreign correspondents create uniform expectations when presenting forthcoming events, and, in some cases, make sure that those expectations are satisfied

(irrespective of actual courses of events).⁴³ The tendency to do this is greater with foreign than with domestic news events since:

1) immediate response to inaccuracies is less common - foreign authorities trying to redress inaccuracies are less likely to have an impact, or even access to the media, than domestic authorities; and

2) collecting correct information is often harder in a foreign country than at home.⁴⁴

In addition, personal ambitions and limitations have not been lost on the DEA's press-relations personnel. Press-relations officers understand that journalism, like any occupation, has its pressures for promotion and reputation and that each foreign correspondent must also face the normal fatigue that comes with long hours and stressful working conditions.⁴⁵ Indeed, for foreign correspondents, whose work situations are often significantly more stressful and fatiguing than most, the struggle to continuously think and work on developing world problems that may be personally threatening to investigate, can quickly motivate a desire to have the "news" prepackaged and given in the form of "rapid dollops that do not require or allow too much time, energy or personal investment".⁴⁶

As Gans observed, such symbiotic relationships are particularly problematic for "beat" reporters - those assigned to cover a very narrow line of news such as External Affairs - whose stories have political implications. "Beat reporters must often practice self-censorship, keeping their most sensational stories to themselves in order to protect their beat," and, although sources may have occasionally to

"grin and bear it" when a reporter must report unflattering news, "sources may then put pressure on a news executive to restrain the reporter in the future".⁴⁷ Such scenarios, Gans stated, are equally applicable to all media, not just newspapers.

CBC Television's Ottawa Bureau-Chief, Elly Alboim, related how, "Grievances are handled very quietly. You'll get a call and things will be ironed out...If (sources) go over your head on it though, they know there is a price to be paid later".⁴⁸ That price, presumably lack of cooperation and/or distrust, is acknowledged by participants on both sides of the news-production equation. Media relations officer Kathryn Aleong said, "I've only been burned twice, by the same reporter, and now everyone in this office knows his name...He'll learn fast enough".⁴⁹

Another form of the media's self-censorship occurs at the collective level. Often, when determining what to treat as news, media organizations, like individuals in the field, take their cues from one another, moving in a kind of rough unison - a macro-version of the phenomenon called "pack journalism." Aside from the economic factors discussed above, macro-packing of news organizations seems to be caused by each corporation's tendency to adopt particular ways of seeing things based on how their competitors are seeing it. Lkening this to the "consonance" theories developed by Galtung and Ruge,⁵⁰ it is as though news organizations, and subsequently their reporters, develop definite images or ideas of events from other news organizations before they arrive on the scene, and then seek only those

images and ideas, regardless of the reality. More recent research underpins this hypothesis: "The more consonant an event is with the mental image of what journalists expect to find, the more probable journalists will consider that event to be newsworthy".⁵¹ Thus, as was discussed in Chapter III, when large, predominantly conservative, geographically central, urban media organizations in Canada are afforded more attention by DEA officials in Ottawa, smaller news organizations may have a tendency to follow their "leads" when covering the Canadian government's involvement in foreign affairs. When the former group of journalists are dependent on official sources for leads, coverage of issues and events may be significantly narrowed and sources may yield a considerable influence over how a majority of Canadian citizens view the government's involvement in foreign affairs.

Similar loops in the search for information can often bring the story right back to the source of the original information, what Gaye Tuchman describes as becoming caught in the "web of facticity" of a reporter's "news net", and a source's efforts to manage the news can then be stunningly effective.⁵² As Tuchman pointed out, by becoming tangled in their own "web", "the mass media limit the frames within which public issues are debated, and so narrow the available political alternatives".⁵³ In this way, according to Tuchman, "facts", caught in the news net by "professionally validated methods" get checked for validity by being "thrown back" into a reporter's already limited flow of information which is frequently

where the "fact" or story lead originated. Thus, even when a trusted and valued source supplies only a "likely story", a news lead that, for one reason or another is somewhat suspect, it is difficult for a reporter to effectively challenge the claims of one of his or her high-level government news sources because other sources will either merely further validate the "facts" or be unable to access information that could discredit it. To reiterate the point presented above, it is in this way that government "sponsorship" of initial news frames can significantly narrow public discussion and knowledge of Canada's involvement in international affairs.

Returning to our original concern, it seems fairly obvious that Canadian foreign correspondents should not be depended upon to supply our government with an "outside, independent" report of the government's involvement in world events. And even when based at home, foreign correspondents may not have the access or the resources to investigate Canada's foreign affairs to any significant depth. At the *Gazette*, for example, the term "World News Desk" has a very literal meaning; the *Gazette's* World News Editor, David Walker, works without assistance at a desk in the back of the news room. Since the *Gazette* does not directly employ any foreign correspondents, relying instead on the Southam chain's news service and other wire services, Mr. Walker is really a self-described "World News Wire-Editor".⁵⁴ His task is to monitor all international news that is fed into the newsroom by the national and foreign wire services, and to always be "on the look-out for the good stories". Thus, referring back to Tuchman's

"information loop", we can see how even a Montreal-based foreign news editor may be dependent on DEA sponsored leads.

In addition, as was expressed by representatives of both *The Gazette* and *La Presse*, the increasingly steady flow of material, the desire to "scoop" rivals, and the need to maintain "deadlines" now frequently comprise the most sensitive points in the selection and production process. The urge to be first can lead to less than perfect decisions as far as fact-checking is concerned and deadlines force decisions to be made based on such imperfect decisions. All forces considered, "news organizations are becoming more and more dependent on, and vulnerable to, influences from outside".⁵⁵

When we add together the economic and technological constraints that ensure that foreign correspondents stay along very definite "news corridors" in the world,⁵⁶ and the fact that collective and individual norms of international news reporters prove to be very effective in ensuring that the press goes along willingly with officialdom's view of things while at home and abroad,⁵⁷ we should be very surprised indeed to find the government dependent on mass media news for "an independent report, outside of government routes, on what is happening around the world."

Therefore, we can assume that press relations officials maintain their relationship

with the media while knowing that the opinions expressed within it are not representative of a vast majority of the public, and while not expecting the media to provide a truly "independent report on the world", and that there is something else that the mass media provide to government that motivates elected officials to mobilize such vast public resources.

The Mass Media as Most Effective and Most Efficient Means for Government to Fulfil its Duty to Inform the Public

Government officials also consider their relationship with the media necessary because they have "a duty to the public to use the best methods available to solve their information dissemination problems."⁵⁸ In addition, as was pointed out in the **Cabinet guidelines** (above), the government "has the responsibility to provide the public with full, accurate and timely information...so that (Canadians) can exercise their rights of citizenship and take part in the democratic process fully, responsibly and in an informed manner". When the government's media relations activities are examined with this definition of effectiveness in mind, one might question the DEA's success in achieving its mandate.

I, of course, will not take issue with the government's claim that its media-relations efforts are most effective. After all, I have been questioning the effectiveness of the DEA's media relations officers' methods at length throughout this paper and am satisfied that the mass media are the most effective means the

government can use to disseminate its messages. In fact, it is the predominance of government opinion in the mass media that sparked this inquiry. Therefore, in my opinion, the question is not whether or not the mass media are an effective conduit for the proclamation of government agendas, but whether or not the government's chosen methods fulfil its duty to keep the public **effectively informed** of its foreign affairs activities.

In 1969, the Task Force on Government Information presented its report entitled **To Know and Be Known** to the then Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, declaring, among other things, that a large segment of the population was "thoroughly uninformed of Canadian political life".⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the situation does not appear to have changed much in the last 23 years. I asked all of the individuals interviewed for this study if they believed the average Canadian was even reasonably informed of the government's foreign affairs activities and all, without exception, responded with a definite "no". Surprisingly, although both media-relations officers and journalists believe that the government's efforts to supply information to the media are "effective", these same people do not believe that Canadians know very much about what their government is doing outside of Canada. How can we explain this?

One possibly explanation is gleaned from Fishman's study of news organizations.⁶⁰ Fishman argues that the methods of participants in the interpretation and

construction of news events predefined so much of the news content that the information offered is little more than a repetition of more constant, uniform, ideological pictures of the world. In this sense, Canadians in search of information about their government's activities in foreign affairs in the mass media, may find very little new "news", but rather, a redundant elaboration of informational "olds". In practical terms, this helps us understand why Canadians seem to know so much about Canada's peacekeeping efforts abroad, while they may know very little about our country's direct involvement in the Vietnam War, or our government's past, and current, weapons-export trade. These latter messages, although infrequently available through the mass media, would, according to Fishman's theory (and as we saw in the historical case studies above) stay outside of the more constant cognitive framework offered by the government officials and the media.

We get an even better understanding of how this phenomena may work by utilizing Cohen's news "amplification" theory in a slightly different way than was intended. Cohen demonstrated how the media, along with the authorities (the control structure), "amplify" the news audiences' perception of deviance in society.⁶¹ That is, Cohen described how the media's practice of misrepresenting, sensitizing, dramatizing and escalating accounts of deviance contribute to the formation of the audiences' belief of increased deviance in society and to the confirmation of stereotypes. Ericson, et.al. demonstrated that similar phenomena

occur in the Canadian society.⁶² But, of course, negative stereotypes are not the only societal characteristics that can be reinforced by the media's practice of "amplifying" minor accounts of their existence. Why should we think that positive stereotypes cannot also be amplified until they are so solidly entrenched in the minds of the general populace that even blatant contradictions will not weaken their hold? In this regard, it is possible that Canada's "peacemonger" image, for example, is as fiercely protected, and thus "amplified", from contending ideas and discordant influences in Canada as Chomsky and Herman suggested the values of private business, the market, and free enterprise are in the United States.⁶³ Our image as a peacekeeping nation has, after all, been very beneficial for our country's international businesses.

Granted, there are worse things that could happen in a modern democratic society than realizing your government is desperately trying to protect its peaceful image. That is, if it is not just the image that your government is worried about. Unfortunately, in Canada, at least according to those interviewed for this study, not many citizens know enough about their government's foreign activities to know the difference.

There is, of course, another possible reason that the average Canadian knows little about the government's foreign activities. Average citizens may not be accepting their share of the responsibility to get such information. As the **Cabinet guidelines**

summarized above quite rightly pointed out, "Effective communications between citizens and government imply a reasonable effort on the part of the citizens to seek the information they require" (emphasis mine).

However, presently the average citizen has to dedicate a considerable amount of time and effort to investigate government activities. If, for example, a citizen is not satisfied with the information supplied by the DEA's Media Relations Division, the only recourse available is to make a formal request for more information to the government. The average waiting time for a reply to a request for information under Canada's Access to Information Act is approximately four weeks. But even then, nothing in the Act guarantees the information requested will be made available. If the average Canadian is willing to go through such a process without even knowing that the information sought will actually be made available, I think we can safely say that Canadians are expected to be more than reasonable in regards to their efforts to find the information they need. Such slow-moving and cumbersome information conduits severely hamper not only the general public's efforts and willingness to study the government's activities abroad, but make it almost impossible for journalists to provide fuller accounts of Canada's involvement in emerging international issues.

Media Relations Use of the Mass Media as Harbinger of the Government's Agenda

We come now to the possibility that the government attempts to use the mass media and control news to get its issues on the political agenda, and to keep others off, and then define those issues in ways likely to influence their resolution. It at least seems obvious that the DEA's media relations officers do not function to protect, axiomatically, both the government's privilege to conceal information from the public and the public's right to know about the activities of elected officials. Such a claim is misleading as it gives equal weight to both sides of the equation while, despite the Cabinet guidelines, there exists government regulations that prohibit such equality. As we shall see below, media-relations officers are forbidden, by law, to pass out information the government does not want released but that may nevertheless be in "the public interest".

Although there exists two important governmental studies that indicate the government's concern for such ambivalent principles and contradictory practices, the **1969 Royal Commission on Security** and the **1969 Task Force on Governmental Information** (subtitled **To Know and Be Known**),⁶⁴ the existence of these reports should not mislead the reader to think that government-information officers are left to agonize over each information disclosure decision as though the choice of which side to come down on were really left up to them. This, of course, is not the case. In fact, as Gordon Robertson, clerk of the privy council and secretary to the Cabinet in the Trudeau government of the early

1970's made clear, the choice is already predetermined by government policy:

If we believe that representative and responsible government is the best way we have so far been able to work out to provide a degree of participation that is consistent with effective action and to give expression and reality to the general will in determination of the interests and wishes of the people as a whole, we cannot accept as permissible a liberty by those in the service of the state to place their convictions about policy, or about the public right to know, ahead of their official responsibility.⁶⁵

Thus, "the concepts of ministerial responsibility and civil service anonymity have, in part, contributed to the general assumption that all documents are secret unless they are specifically declared to be public"⁶⁶ In addition, these concepts are now entrenched by more specific statutory influences such as the Canadian Official Secrets Act and the Criminal Code of Canada. But, as Stanley Cohen pointed out, such acts "do not enhance national security significantly more than would other less Draconian alternatives, but pose substantial impediments to greater openness in government."⁶⁷ For example, although the Canadian Official Secrets Act is designed to primarily combat international espionage, section 4 of the Act

embraces in intent almost any form of information obtained in the course of service or contract of employment, or otherwise, and then passed on without authority to any other person whatever his status and whatever the purposes of the transfer of information may be, however unclassified the information may be, if obtained from sources available because of holding a government position or having a government contract.⁶⁸

We can better understand why it has been said that "[I]n Canada, there is no legal right to know...[n]or is there a legal duty on the government to inform. On the contrary, secrecy is sanctified by the Official Secrets Act and the civil servant's Oath of Office and Secrecy."⁶⁹ Indeed, s.4 of the Act embraces far more than *mere communication of secret information*. As one researcher summarized, "It makes **recipients** of official information (most notably the press, but potentially **any** civil servant) guilty of an offence under the Act."⁷⁰ Thus, as the Franks Committee noted,

[The section] catches all official documents and information. It makes no distinctions of kind, and no distinctions of degree. All information which the Crown servant learns in the course of his duty is "official"...whatever its nature, whatever its importance, whatever its original source. A blanket is thrown over everything; nothing escapes. The section catches all Crown servants as well as all official information.⁷¹

If, then, media relations officers release information that is not included in the authorized, "official" agenda, they not only risk falling outside of the boundaries of traditional government-service responsibilities, but may also face criminal prosecution. And, as s.4 of the Act makes clear, the same rules can then also apply to any journalist who becomes privy to such official information. Undoubtably, such restrictions can act as strong motivation for both media relations officers and journalists to use the mass media "as they are told" by the government, and may make activities designed to offer the public kinds of information that are in "the public interest" (but unofficial) very unattractive

alternatives. Indeed, in regards to the media relations officers attached to the DEA, they are not authorized by the terms of the Act to fulfil their mandate of communicating "full, accurate and timely information...so that (Canadians) can exercise their rights of citizenship and take part in the democratic process fully, responsibly and in an informed manner" (see **Guidelines** above) unless the government in power deems such information public property. This said, one should be forgiven for suspecting that the only type of information a government in power really wants the public, and the opposition, to have, and the only type of information the government's DEA media relations division would be allowed to hand over to the media, would be in accordance with that government's official agenda for each particular issue and event.

This said, however, even if we assume, for the sake of discussion, that the government is successful in influencing the media so that it can be used as a harbinger of the government's foreign affairs agenda in the ways posited, if such an influence has no significant effect on public opinion we should still perhaps consider these activities a threat to democratic theory, but hardly a practical threat to democracy in Canada. We must, then, at least briefly examine the mass media's effect on public opinions as the final link in the government-media connection.

A Brief Examination of the Possibility That Mass Media Influence Public Opinion

As a version of the minimal effects theory of the media, there is an argument that goes along the following lines: people do not necessarily believe that what the mass media reports represents the reality of world relations, issues and events. In addition, people are provided with the ways and means of seeing through the propaganda via the availability of alternative sources of information. The assumption is, then, that because our society ostensibly encourages each individual to bring his/her unique, and perhaps unalterable, interpretation of reality to the discussion of public issues, a social pluralism protects the general populace from failing to question the dominant interpretations offered in the mass media. In other words, although news may be manipulated, the public is not necessarily manipulated by the news. Concerns over media bias, then, can be dismissed as unduly alarmist because the mass media do not have enough influence over the public to maintain any sort of "biased reality".

Indeed, early studies of the media's impact on voting choices found that people seemed surprisingly immune from media manipulation. Campaign propaganda usually reinforced the public's preferences rather than altered them. People, this research showed, exposed themselves to media appeals in a selective way, giving more credence and attention to messages that bolstered their own views. If anything, this research claimed, opinions and information intakes were influenced by peers, social groups, and community. It followed that since the individual did not stand without a buffer against the impact of the media, the media had only

a "minimal effect".⁷²

Initially, many researchers were calmed by these findings: people seemed fairly self-directed in their responses to the media and did not allow themselves to be mindlessly directed.⁷³ Democracy was safe. But troublesome questions remained. If through "selective exposure" and "selective attention" the media only reinforced our established predispositions, where did the predispositions themselves come from? Thus, various studies were conducted on other "socializing" agencies: family, school, peer groups, work place - and more on the media themselves. Evidence began to emerge that suggested our political predispositions come from the dominant political culture in general.⁷⁴

The concept that our "selectivity" is not an autonomous antidote to propaganda but may feed right into it, drew attention to the "realities" that the mass media implicitly embrace as representative of "the nature of things." Subsequently, more research revealed that, contrary to the earlier "minimal effects" theory, the news media are able to direct our attention to certain issues and shape our opinions about them.⁷⁵

Indeed, it was argued that especially in the event that something happens in the world with which we have had little or no experience, and about which we have no predetermined opinion, the media may not only reinforce previously held

opinions, but actually implant new ones;

The press can effectively direct our perceptions when we have no information to the contrary and when the message seems congruent with earlier notions about these events (which themselves may be in part media created). In this way the original implant is also a reinforcement of earlier perceptions. Seemingly distinct reports about diverse events have a hidden continuity and a cumulative impact that again support previous views...⁷⁶

For example, I think we can safely say that at least a few Canadians had a favourable view of our country's involvement in the recent Persian Gulf War, without really knowing anything about the issues beyond what media reports provided them. Certainly few had any direct experience of the conflict and most probably did not make Middle-East Studies a priority before, during, or after the conflict began. Here, then, is an original implant; people feared the actions of a foreign government on the basis of the information they receive from the media. Why?

Some explanation can be derived by looking at **The Gazette's** news coverage of the conflict (see appendix C for study). The case study validates Corcoran's hypothesis that the mass media, in general, project a reality that is uniquely crafted and accepted by the public as meaningful. As Corcoran put it:

The key concept here is the power of the media to define, not merely reproduce, reality through their narrative devices which actively make things mean (sic). Reality is no longer

viewed as a given set of facts,...Instead, it is the result of a particular way of constructing, through preferred meanings, a "reality" which would have credibility, legitimacy and a taken-for-grantedness.⁷⁷

Briefly, the manner in which *The Gazette's* coverage of the Canadian government's involvement in the Persian Gulf conflict relied upon official sources, some of which spoke through the DEA's Media Relations Division, among other questionable journalistic practices, (see Appendix C), lent the government's position in the issue a certain credibility and legitimacy that opposition voices were not afforded. Hence, the way in which the press reports the news is extremely important if readers are to have informed opinions.⁷⁸ Our knowledge of what is occurring in the world comes to us directly in only a very small proportion of cases. Most "events" are mediated by the press which provide information extending far beyond our immediate experience.

Granted, for coverage of local events, the reader has access to several sources of information, such as personal knowledge and direct interpersonal communications, which can substantiate or call into question the accuracy, balance and objectivity of the news received. However, when events occur beyond the local environment, such as the Gulf War, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, or any of the Canadian government's foreign activities, such alternative sources are frequently limited or non-existent for a great many Canadians and international news reporting then becomes critical to the public's understanding of these events.

For most people, "good journalism" is based on "fact" - that is, we accept 'facts' as "the ultimate reality (and) are convinced that what is, is good".⁷⁹ In this sense, the hard, "factual" reporting style of international journalism can go a long way in convincing its readers that what is said, 'is.' Ellul explains further,

The news event may be a real fact, existing objectively, or it may be only an item of information, the dissemination of the supposed fact. What makes it news is its dissemination, not its objective reality".⁸⁰

And turning our attention to international affairs, Ellul claims that,

With regard to larger or more remote facts that cannot be the object of direct experience, one can say that accuracy is now generally respected in propaganda...(however) most of the time the fact is presented in such a fashion that the listener or reader cannot really understand it or draw any conclusion from it...The lack of coherence and cohesion of such data is entirely deliberate...The public is left to draw obvious conclusions from a cleverly presented truth, and the great majority come to the same conclusions...(thus) information prepares the ground for propaganda.⁸¹

Likewise, perception, according to agenda-setting research, is more malleable and open to media influences in situations where the audience lacks direct and personal experience.⁸² "Such is precisely the case in acquiring a picture of world events".⁸³ The propaganda truism that the report of the event is as important as the event itself has greater impact than ever in the age of instantaneous, international media coverage of events. Indeed, some researchers have demonstrated that international coverage of a news event can affect the political

impact of the event itself.⁸⁴ Therefore, we can now assume that if the government does influence the international reporting of its activities in foreign affairs, this influence affects the public's perception of them. Hence, it can now be argued that the only notions that are truly "unduly alarmist" about the government's use of mass media to define the limits of public discussion of their international activities are fears of appearing "unduly alarmist" about such activities.

Notes on Chapter Four

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2. Richard Ericson, et al. **Negotiating Control: A study of news sources**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.p.6.
3. Ibid.
4. Martel, Op.cit.
5. Ericson, Op.cit.,p.185.
6. A comment made by Mr. Denis Laliberte, Media Relations Officer, **Canadian Department of External Affairs and International Trade**, during an interview with the researcher on May 21, 1991.
7. Bernard Cohen. **The Press and Foreign Policy**. Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1963. p.233.
8. Stuart Hall. "Culture, the Media and Ideological Effect." P.315-45 in: J Curran, et.al. (eds.) **Mass Communication and Society**, Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage. 1979. pp.120-138.
9. Robert Darnton. "Writing News and Telling Stories," **Daedalus**, (Spring). 1975.
10. See James W. Carey, "Communication as culture: Essays on Media and Society. Boston: Unwin Hyman,1989; Christopher Lasch, "Journalism, Publicity, and the Lost Art of Argument." **Gannet Centre Journal** 4:2, 1990. pp.1-11; Michael Schudson. **The News Media and the Democratic Process**. New York: Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1983; et.al.
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12. Daniel C. Hallin, "The American news media: a critical theory perspective," in John Forester (ed.) **Critical Theory and Public Life**. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1985.p.140
13. Jurgen Habermas.**The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An**

Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1989 (First Published 1962).p.42.

14. Jay Rosen, "Making Journalism More Public," **Communication**, Vol.12, (1991), p.272.

15. Herbert J. Gans. **Deciding What's News**. New York: Pantheon, 1979. p.126.

16. A comment made by Mr. Kevin Newman, Parliamentary Reporter-External Affairs Beat, **CBC Television**, Ottawa, during an interview with the researcher on Mach 3, 1992.

17. Joan Didion, "Insider Baseball", in **New York Review of Books**. 35:16, October 1988, pp. 19-21, 24-26, 28-30.

18. Ibid., p.18.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p.19.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p.26.

23. I am referring again to Hallin (Op.cit.) and Entmen (Op.cit.), but also, Todd Gitlin. **The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980; Peter Golding, Graham Murdock and Phillip Schlesinger (eds.) **Communicating Politics: Mass Communications and the Political Process**. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986;and Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson (eds.) **Reading the News**. New York: Pantheon, 1986.

24. Bruce Hutchinson, as quoted in Allen Fotheringham. **Birds of a Feather: The Press and the Politicians**. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1989. p.117.

25. Ibid., p.146.

26. Boyce Richardson, "The Media: Manufacturing Our Consent," **Canadian Forum**, (September, 1989). pp. 5-6.

27. Ibid.

28. Laliberte, Op.cit. March 3, 1992.

29. Ibid.
30. A comment made by Mr. Norman Webster, Editor-in-Chief, **The Montreal Gazette**, during an interview with the researcher on Oct. 15, 1991.
31. Newman, Op.cit.
32. Dr. Bruce Mabley was responding to questions posed to him by the researcher after a lecture he gave entitled, "The Foreign Service: A Diplomat's Experience" at **Loneragan College**, Loyola Campus, Montreal, November 21, 1991.
33. Webster, Op.cit.
34. A comment made by Mr. David Walker, World News Editor, **The Montreal Gazette**, Oct. 14, 1991.
35. John Hohenberg. **Foreign Correspondents: The Great Reporters and Their Times**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965. p.xviii.
36. Fotheringham, Op.cit., p.13.
37. Robert Entman and David Paletz, "The War in Southeast Asia: Tunnel Vision on Television," in William C. Adams, (ed.) **Television Coverage of International Affairs**. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982.
38. Ibid. and Mallinckrodt, 1983.
39. Entman and Paletz, Op.cit., p.143.
40. Walker, Op.cit.
41. M. Buerk, et al. **BBC, Apartheid, and South Africa**. London: report from BBC World Service Seminar, 1988.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Laliberte, Op.cit. May 21, 1991.
46. Waters, Op.cit., p.3.

47. Gans, Op.cit., p.133.
48. A comment made by Mr. Elly Alboim, Ottawa Bureau Chief, CBC Television, during an interview with the researcher on March 3, 1992.
49. A comment made by Ms. Kathryn Aleong, Media Relations Officer, **Canadian Department of External Affairs and International Trade**, during an interview with the researcher on March 3, 1992.
50. Galtung and Ruge, 1965.
51. Jan Kleinnijenhuis, "News As Olds," *Gazette*, 43: 205-228, 1989.p.205.
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53. Ibid., p.83.
54. Walker, Op.cit.
55. A comment made by Mr. Andre Pratt, World News Editor, **La Presse, Montreal**, during an interview with the researcher on Oct. 22, 1991.
56. Oliver Boyd-Barrett. **The international News Agencies**. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980. pp.192-93; Debra Clarke, "Constraint of Television News Production: The Example of Story Geography," **Canadian Journal of Communication**, 15:1, (February 1990), p.67-114 and "Second-hand News: Production and Reproduction at a Major Ontario Television Station," a paper presented at the founding conference of the **Canadian Communication Association**, Montreal, June 1980; Gertrude J. Robinson, "Foreign News Values in the Quebec, English Canadian and US Press: A Comparison Study," **Canadian Journal of Communication**, 9 (3), (Autumn 1983), p.1-32; et. al.
57. Tuchman, Op.cit.; Gans, Op.cit.; and Lance W. Bennett, "Repairing the News: A case study of the News Paradigm," **Journal of Communication**, 35 (1985),pp.50-68; et.al.
59. See Ottawa. **To Know and Be Known: Report of the Task Force on Government Information**. Vol.1. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969. p.3.
60. Mark Fishman. **Manufacturing the News**. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. 1980.
61. Cohen, Op.cit. 1980.

62. Richard Ericson, et al. **Negotiating Control: A study of news sources**. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

63. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman. **Manufacturing Consent: Mass Media at the Service of the Powerful**. New York: Panther Books, 1989.

64. The two reports are summarized by Bruce Doern in "Canada", found in Itzhak Galnoor (ed.). **Government Secrecy in Democracies**. New York: New York University Press, 1977. p.143.

65. Gordon Robertson, Clerk of the Privy Council (mimeographed paper presented to the Royal Society of Canada, June 6, 1972. p.25.

66. Bruce Doern, Op.cit., p.146.

67. Stanley A. Cohen, "Freedom of Information and National Security," as found in Thomas M. Franck and Edmund Weisband (eds.) **Secrecy and Foreign Policy**. Toronto: Oxford University Press. 1974. p.153.

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75. See S. Iyengar, M. Peters, and D. Kinder, "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs," **American Political Science Review**, 76, December 1982, p.852; G.R. Funkhouser, "The Issues of the Sixties," **Public Opinion Quarterly**, 37, pp.62-75; Michael MacKuen and Steven Coombs. **More than News**. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1981; et. al.

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80. Ibid., p.47.

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CONCLUSION: Engineering Restraint

As has been discussed, a symbiotic relationship was believed to exist between Canadian journalists dealing with the government's foreign affairs and Canada's Department of External Affairs and International Trade media-relations practitioners. But, contrary to the general symbiotic theory of news, in this case study the symbiosis was not expected to be characterized by equal measures of cooperation and conflict: the element of cooperation resulting from the functional/economic nature of the relationship (the exchange of resources) between the two groups; while journalistic distrust of "interested" sources adds the more conflictual "political" dimension (struggle for control over news-making). Instead, in the above symbiotic relationship between government news sources and journalists it was hypothesized that the divergent interests would find themselves mutually, but not equally, dependent on one another. Indeed, believing that power and influence in a symbiosis is in a constant state of flux would be a slightly misleading way of approaching the relationship that exists between the Department of External Affairs Media Relation Officers and journalists, whether foreign correspondents or special beat reporters.

Because the Canadian public is interested in how its elected representatives respond to major international issues and events (ie. wars) the federal government does not have to encourage the mass media to cover its foreign activities. Such government opinions and actions are considered "newsworthy" enough to

Canadian news organizations that they will receive publicity. On the other hand, as was demonstrated in this case study and the review of the work of other researchers used within it, Canadian journalists do not appear to have the necessary access, training, resources or time to supply themselves with enough detailed information on even the government's most "newsworthy" foreign activities to report them with any real authority or objectivity, do not make contact with domestic or foreign publics as much as they say they do, and accept handouts too uncritically. In addition, neither an average Canadian urban newspaper nor our national television network have a sufficient corps of experienced foreign correspondents that specialize in international relations or even an adequate number of foreign bureaus to proclaim "world coverage" in any real sense. Yet, if these news organizations were to admit this to the general public, the public may no longer consider such mass media a reliable source for information on these events, audience shares might drop, and news organizations could lose money. Thus, it would appear that the Canadian mass media have been forced to construct their own legitimacy on the authority of its sources and have confused the issue of objectivity in the bargain.

However, although the government does not have to worry about most of its activities receiving too little attention from the mass media, officials do worry that some of their activities will receive too much attention and/or not the right sort. Thus, the government uses public funds to support its efforts to control what

information is made available to the public about its foreign activities. The basic objective of this government media relation office is then, like that of public relations offices in private businesses, to project a positive image of its employers' activities to Canadian citizens and to the citizens and leaders of other countries as well.

All told, the government's media-relations activities and the economic and organizational norms of news organizations ensure that media relations experts now occupy important and influential positions in defining what the Canadian public will learn about the federal government's foreign activities. As I believe this study demonstrates, the government is a significant source of foreign affairs "news" for Canadian mass media organizations and, thus, wields a tremendous influence over the way Canada's involvement in foreign affairs is reported to Canadian citizens. The government willingly acts as this source because it seems to understand that the less it says about its actions, the more the flow of information about them will be shaped solely by the interests and standards of the media. Because the interests and standards of the media are not always in the best interests of the government in power, the government does all it can to "influence" what is reported about its actions in the media. Such efforts to influence the flow of information contributes to the creation of a shared environment that is increasingly taken for granted and may "sustain and legitimate organizational and institutional ideology and interests."¹

The situation described is quite frightening as it represents a very real threat to Canadian democratic theory and practice. If the mass media are indeed the main instruments by which the Canadian public measures the international significance of events in our country, the news we receive is favourably biased toward the interests of its sources, and the sources of such news are arguably the elite, we have no guarantee that such a system can ensure that "the public interest" is being served by the federal government's involvement in foreign affairs.

This is not to say that such unbalanced symbiotic relationships between sources and journalists should be taken as representative of a government conspiracy to push Conservative ideology down the throats of Canadians - or at least I have seen no evidence that would suggest this. It is, rather, a simple characteristic of the fact that politicians and the media are in an industry together. They live off one another. They have conflicts, but in the long run these conflicts seem forgotten. The situation is rather like Gans suggested it would be:

"Sources alone do not determine the news, but they go a long way in focusing the journalists' attention on the social order described earlier. Neither do sources alone determine the values in the news, but their values are implicit in the information they provide. Journalists do not, by any means, parrot these values, but being objective and detached, they don't rebut them either".²

The great public need, in my opinion, is for well-trained, ethical journalists and media relations officers who are not afraid to resign if what they are asked to do is contrary to their responsibilities to and as Canadian citizens. Relative to this,

there seems to be a genuine need for journalists well trained not only in international affairs and journalism, but also in public opinion, sociology, communications law, and ethics.

As far as the government is concerned, a more efficient method of providing public opinion feedback and input is needed in place of the government's posited reliance on the mass media. Government media-relations officers, although skilled in the art of persuasion and adept in performing their related duties, are seldom trained in ways of surveying public opinion. The DEA's rather cursory content analysis of print and broadcast media should not be considered sufficient for acquiring a feel for the day-to-day attitude of the Canadian public. Studies of media have revealed that such methods will not provide a reliable barometer of public opinion.

There is, of course, a perfectly legitimate role that the Media Relations Division of the Canadian Department of External Affairs can fulfil in attempting to purvey information and ensure that it is channelled through the media to the public in a positive way. Sound government public relations should release information that explains without self-serving propaganda. Media-relations officers should respect the right of the media to ask difficult questions and to expect direct and honest answers. Many practices of government agencies, for example, stalling reporters on telephone lines and withholding information from the public and the media,

are counter-productive to the maintenance of an effective, informed public debate.

Thus, perhaps the most pressing need in government media relations is for trained communications specialists who can convince their own bureaucracy that a government information executive is just that - not a propagandist for a point of view, not a media relations officer for an agency head and not an apologist for policy, but a catalyst who functions to convey information that the public should have by means of honest and effective liaison with the journalists who now act as the public's surrogates through the media of mass communications.

Public funds should not be used to hire media relations officers so that they can aggrandize the activities of a government agency or department. And these officials should not be depended on for information by a mass media claiming to have the best interests of the public at heart. However, there is no indication that government media relations officers will ever cease to work hard at maintaining their "suitable source" status in the eyes of the media. In fact, the evidence suggests that such sources of news will only be increasingly encouraged to supply "newsworthy" information to the mass media as long as they continue to satisfy "source considerations", such as trustworthiness and authoritiveness. Thus, it can only be hoped that the existence of government media relations divisions as they now operate will stand as a constant reminder of the government's desire to have

some control over news production, and that its desire is so strong that it is prepared to invest a great deal of public money to achieve its goals.

And finally, it must be recognized that if a "credibility gap" exists between the people and the government, neither the mass media nor government's media relations officers have enough substance to fill it; a hole as large as the one that has been created by the absence of the public can only be filled by the public.

Notes for Conclusion

1. James R. Beniger, "Does television Enhance the Shared Symbolic Environment? Trends in Labelling of Editorial Cartoons, 1948-1980", *American Sociological Review* 48: 103-11, 1983. See also Karen A. Cerulo, "Television, Magazine Covers, and the Shared Symbolic Environment," *American Sociological Review* 49: 1984, pp.566-70; and Anthony Giddens. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press. 1984.
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INTERVIEWS:

Journalists:

MR. NORMAN WEBSTER: EDITOR-IN-CHIEF **THE MONTREAL GAZETTE**
OCT.15, 1991. DURATION 60 min.

MR. DAVID WALKER: WORLD NEWS EDITOR **THE MONTREAL GAZETTE**
OCT.14, 1991. DURATION 45 min.

MR. ANDRE PRATT: WORLD NEW EDITOR **MONTREAL LA PRESS**
OCT.22, 1991. DURATION: 85 min.

MR. KEVIN NEWMAN PARLIAMENTARY REPORTER-EXTERNAL
AFFAIRS "BEAT", CBC TELEVISION OTTAWA MARCH 3, 1992.
DURATION: 60 min.

MR. ELLY ALBOIM BUREAU CHIEF CBC TELEVISION OTTAWA
MARCH 3, 1992. DURATION: 30 MIN.

Government Officials:

MR. DENIS LALIBERTE MEDIA RELATIONS OFFICER, CANADIAN
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE.
MAY 21, 1991. DURATION 90 min.

- second session: March 3, 1992.
DURATION: 60 min.

MS. NICOLE MARTEL MEDIA RELATIONS OFFICER, CANADIAN
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE.
MARCH 3, 1992.
DURATION: 40 MIN.

MS. KATHRYN ALEONG MEDIA RELATIONS OFFICER, CANADIAN
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE.
MARCH 3, 1992.
DURATION 45 MIN.

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News Release

APPENDIX A: Sample Press Release

Communiqué

Secretary of State
for External Affairs

Minister
des Affaires
étrangères

No. 117

May 16, 1991

MCDOUGALL MEETS WITH UN SECRETARY-GENERAL IN NEW YORK ON MAY 17, 1991

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, will hold a series of meetings at the United Nations in New York, on Friday, May 17, 1991.

"Canada is one of the UN's most loyal supporters," stated the Minister. "As the new Secretary of State for External Affairs, my first trip abroad is to the United Nations precisely to emphasize that our commitment to the UN is a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy."

During her visit, the Minister will hold discussions with Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, UN Development Program (UNDP) Administrator William Draper and the Executive Director of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), James Grant. She will also meet with the ambassadors of the five permanent members of the Security Council to exchange views.

"The UN's agenda is broader than ever before," said Mrs. McDougall. "The aftermath of the Gulf War, the plight of the Kurds, co-ordination of relief effort to the people in the Horn of Africa and Bangladesh -- these are only some of the major challenges facing the international community."

In recent months, Canada has pledged \$77.5 million in humanitarian assistance to countries affected by the Gulf War, \$16.6 million in relief for Kurdish refugees, \$3 million in emergency relief to help Bangladesh recover from its recent disaster, and \$56.4 million to help famine victims in the Horn of Africa.

Affaires extérieures et
Commerce extérieur Canada

External Affairs and
International Trade Canada

Canada

ST. JOHN'S

THE EVENING STAR

MAY 18

External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall, with UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar

McDougall reaffirms support of UN

UNITED NATIONS (CP) — Barbara McDougall used her first foreign trip since becoming external affairs minister to reaffirm Canada's support for the United Nations and the wish to continue the Canadian peacekeeping legacy.

McDougall visited Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar for about 40 minutes Friday before going on to meet representatives of the five permanent members of the Security Council at UN headquarters in New York City.

"I have said here of our ongoing in-

terest in peacekeeping," she told reporters. "That's one of our traditions. I think the United Nations counts on and that we're quite happy to be involved with."

Ottawa has been especially happy about that since the Persian Gulf War, when domestic critics charged Canada was tarnishing its peacekeeping reputation by joining the allies in the fight against Iraq.

Since then, Canadian Forces have been sent under UN authority to the Iraq Kuwait border and UN has

been asked to consider sending a large contingent to the western Sahara when a UN sponsored truce between Morocco and Polisario guerrillas is ready to start.

"We've been fortunate," McDougall said. "We've always been able to respond positively when we have been asked."

But she said she did not make any specific peacekeeping commitments at the meeting.

McDougall moved to External Affairs from the Privy Council after a cabinet shuffle last month.

MAY 18 1991

UNITED NATIONS

McDougall stresses peacekeeping role

UNITED NATIONS (CP) — Barbara McDougall used her first foreign trip since becoming external affairs minister to reaffirm Canada's support for the United Nations and the wish to continue the Canadian peacekeeping legacy.

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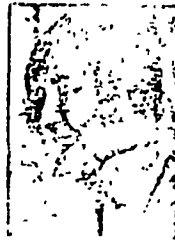
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McDougall moved to External Affairs from the Privy Council after a cabinet shuffle last month.



McDougall (left) and Cuellar (right) after their meeting at the UN.

Appendix B:
A Brief Look at Newspaper Coverage of the Assassination of Rajiv Gandhi

In the coverage provided by both the **Globe and Mail** and the **Gazette** in the earliest editions after the incident (May 22, 1991), stories concerning the former Indian prime minister's assassination made front page, above the fold. In both the **Globe** and the **Gazette**, stories led with the description of the event that I had read in the VIS wire report, laid out the facts of who the victim was, and then immediately after quoted the statements of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, Deputy Prime Minister Donald Mazankowski, External Affairs Minister Barbara McDougall (as they were quoted in the DEA's press releases), and American President George Bush. In all of these statements, those quoted expressed "personal sadness" and then mentioned how Gandhi's death should be considered a difficult blow to the stability of the region and India's fight for democracy. Opposition to this view was then presented from "militant Sikh separatist" spokespeople, who remained unnamed until the second or third paragraph after their mention. The latter sources claimed that Gandhi's death should be "celebrated," as he was "responsible for the slaughter of thousands of innocent Sikhs after the assassination of his mother" and "never brought to trail those murderers responsible for the massacre."

Stories regarding the Gandhi assassination continued to make the first page of the **Globe and Mail** until May 27, 1991, when it slipped to page A10, and until May

25, 1991, in the **Gazette**, before slipping to page B6. Most of the subsequent editorials and follow-up stories explored only the concepts of Gandhi's contribution to stability in the area and how his death would cause unrest, themes established by the elite sources when the event first occurred. Several of the articles included photographs of Indian citizens stricken with grief and gave the impression of a whole country in mourning.

The claims made by "opposition voices" in the first day of coverage eventually fell from the discussion despite the fact that one article, by the **Globe's** Zuhair Kashmeri, detailed the corruption of Gandhi's brief reign as prime minister by citing Amnesty International reports of human rights abuses he was responsible for and the wide spread belief that Gandhi was a villain and had many enemies among the Indian people. Kashmeri's article appeared in the "Commentary" section, a newspaper 'address' that is arguably used to marginalize opposition voices by setting them up as personal opinions.

Initially, it was thought that the media may have had to privilege the government sources because the suddenness of the event and its remoteness from the "international news corridor" would have made it difficult for news organizations to have their own sources on the scene in time. However, violent clashes in the area assured that all of the major wire services and even foreign correspondents from both the **Globe and Mail** and the **Southam** news chain (to which the **Gazette**

belongs) were in the area at the time, closely following the activities of Rajiv Gandhi, and regularly filing reports prior to the assassination (stories appeared in both newspapers from these sources a full week before news of the assassination). These facts suggest that the newspapers in question willingly prioritized the information supplied by the government press offices over that supplied by their own reporters. This practice on the part of the media gives the government an excellent opportunity to frame the meaning of events in terms that best suit their needs and interpretations.

APPENDIX C:**Smoke and Mirrors: A Case Study of the Montreal Gazette's Coverage of Persian Gulf War Tensions.**

During the events leading up to the Persian Gulf War and after the outbreak of hostilities between the predominantly American United Nations forces and Iraq, the media focused on an area of the world, the Middle-East, with an unprecedented intensity. As a result, so many sources of information were made available to the press that it seemed reasonable to assume that news coverage would provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues. However, Canadian newspaper coverage of these events and issues seemed to neglect many of the sources available and instead demonstrated a particularly pro-elite bias, at times to such an extent that many facts were lost to the general audience.

Code-named **Desert Storm**, the American-led offensive on Iraq began January 16, 1991; less than 24 hours after the expiration of the United Nations-imposed deadline on Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, to withdraw his troops from neighbouring Kuwait. Iraqi troops had occupied the small, oil-rich Arab monarchy since an August 2, 1990 invasion. An U.N.-imposed economic embargo of Iraq began shortly after on August 12, 1990.

The official reason used for the necessity of American intervention was to liberate Kuwait and to demonstrate that in a "new world order" - the term coined by

American officials to mark the end of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union - no country would be allowed to forcibly occupy another. So-called "alternative news sources" - such as **Mother Jones** magazine and **The Nation**, however, suggested other motives for the stance taken by the U.S.. These motives included the American government's need to protect its petroleum interests in the richest oil-producing area of the world, and the government's willingness to make use of an opportunity to showcase the latest in armament technology.

The war introduced 'scud missile', 'cluster bombs' and laser-guided bombs' to the vocabulary of many people who witnessed the events of the war through the mass media. The war itself lasted only approximately six weeks and media coverage was subject to censorship by the Iraqi and American governments only during this short, although crucial, time. However, even before the commencement of full-scale hostilities, relatively little data circulated in the mass media that would help the average Canadian understand why such a massive operation, involving over 500 000 troops and \$450 billion from the Americans alone, had been mobilized, or why it was necessary for Canada to contribute over \$700 million and 800 troops to the conflict.

Granted, research relating to crisis reporting has determined that the media do tend to carry a higher proportion of inaccuracies and rumour during periods of crisis and disaster because the very nature of such events make it difficult to

provide accurate information.¹ Indeed, findings suggest that the media may not even try to be accurate, but give reports without attribution of information about the source of their data, seeming to produce figures "out of thin air".² Given that the situation that developed in the Persian Gulf in the months leading up to the full-scale war in January, 1992, can definitely be described as a crisis situation, the Canadian international news coverage of these events were perhaps produced under worst-case circumstances (although the media had ample time and opportunity for in-depth analysis of the scenario). With this in mind, the analysis of this coverage that follows is not suggesting that all Canadian international news will necessarily adhere to all the points raised in this case study. Rather, this brief case study of the Persian Gulf coverage in a major Canadian daily newspaper is merely meant to demonstrate some of the practical implications of the theoretical discussion presented in the main text of the thesis.

In examining the possibility of media bias in the reporting of this major international story, I found it useful to explore two lines of inquiry - one relating to the sources used in presenting this story to a Canadian public and the second relating to possible errors and misrepresentations in the reporting of particular events within the larger story.

Under this dichotomy, then, this case study begins by illustrating the *Gazette's* overwhelming dependence on NATO government sources for news of events in

the Persian Gulf leading up to the Persian Gulf War. Then, in the second part of this analysis we turn more toward the content of the sample coverage that appeared in the *Gazette*. All told, we examine areas in which the media blatantly misrepresented some of the issues by: 1) over-reliance on official government sources; 2) the use of biased language in describing certain key figures and events involved in the story; and 3) failing to supply entirely accurate information, when it was supplied at all, to substantiate claims made. Then, we briefly discuss the possible consequences this type of coverage may have had on the public's perception of the conflict's main actors - the United States and Iraq - and Canada's involvement and role in the event.

Looking at a typical week of coverage of the events leading up to the war in the Persian Gulf in the *Gazette*, extracted in the period between October 22, 1990 and January 16, 1991, and an eighth day, the day of the deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, we are left with a total of 41 stories. These articles represent every story having anything to do with the Persian Gulf situation in particular, the Middle-East in general, and/or related activities of the main actors involved in the scenario, including Canada.

Of this sample, it was found that 59 percent (24) of the 41 sample articles chosen for analysis originated from American sources (AP, Knight-Ridder and various other American syndicates); another 17 percent (7) from a European agency

(Reuters); and the remaining 24 percent (10) from Canadian based sources. Of the Canadian produced stories, 15 percent (6) were produced from within the Southam news chain, and 9 percent (4) were fed in from the Canadian Press news agency.

Slightly off the topic, one cannot but be impressed by the amount of the news that originated from American news sources: accounting for at least 77 percent of all foreign produced stories on the Gulf in the **Gazette** sample; appearing nearly two and a half times more frequently than all Canadian produced stories. Such a dominant quantitative American presence in the **Gazette's** coverage may partially account for one's impression that the coverage was slightly skewed. But this is highly speculative until we more closely examine the content of the 41 stories.

Continued analysis showed that coverage was biased qualitatively as well. All of the American stories, 86 percent of the European, and 50 percent of the Canadian stories demonstrated a heavy reliance on quotes from "official" American government sources. In fact, 85 percent of the sample articles relied on American officials as the **primary** sources for information.

Primary sources are defined as "immediate participants, both for the description of facts and for the formulation of opinions".³ Thus, the majority of events leading up to the Persian Gulf War which were reported in **The Gazette** were

interpreted by elite American government officials.

Returning more toward the points of the research presented above, when attention is turned toward the few stories which originated in Canada, in the hope that at least here, in the Canadian product, the opinions and interpretations presented would provide a more objective interpretation of the events in the Gulf, over 70 percent quoted official Canadian sources, and more than half of the Canadian samples allowed Canadian federal government officials to act as the primary source of comment and interpretation.

Thus, although the Canadian pieces contained a significant proportion of "Canadian content", government officials, who had made their support of the American mandates very clear, dominated the interpretation of the events.

Such dominant "official" interpretations of events were also frequently embellished by the fact that, in many cases both in the American and Canadian stories, quotes from official government sources were presented without quotation marks, a practice that arguably makes certain controversial opinions appear as simple statements of fact.

Other characteristics of the coverage to appear in the **Gazette** sample highlight a number of the remarkable claims that were made during the months leading to the Persian Gulf War, none of which were supported by evidence or subjected to

rebuttal elsewhere in the newspaper. For example, when one considers the fact that American President George Bush repeatedly stated that he would attack "with or without UN approval" at a time when Hussein was offering terms for negotiation, it is remarkable that a January 11, 1991 editorial in the *Gazette* would claim that "Saddam Hussein seems to be leaving the world little choice" and then, the next day, January 12, 1991, repeat the claim, although paraphrased, by stating, "UN member countries are left with little choice."

Another example is the statement made by *Gazette* commentator Lance Gay, who said, without proof, that "Saddam refuses to withdraw from Kuwait because no advisor dares to tell him that the U.S. threat is real" (*Gazette*, Jan. 11). Then, in the same day's paper, an article entitled "Persian Gulf is forcing Canadians to choose at last," presented *Gazette* reporter William Johnson's astounding assertion that Canadians must find the courage to attack or "human society will have failed its best chance to head off nuclear blackmail". Really? Why was it that neither Johnson nor any other reporter explained that Hussein's tactics were essentially the same strategies superpowers have been using for the past 45 years? The overall result of such "coverage" of these issues is, again, that what should be treated and presented as a controversial issue is presented as a simple fact and given an interpretation favourable to the current American/NATO position.

Turning to the "personality" profiles of Hussein and Bush offered in the *Gazette*,

we notice the rhetoric really heats up. In a Reuters' article that appeared in the **Gazette** January 10, 1991, readers learned that Bush "cried when he learned of Iraq's aggressive move against Kuwait citizens...and his voice trembled when describing his horror in reading the Amnesty International report of Iraqi atrocities." Yet, no **Gazette** writer noted how strange it was that a former head of the CIA, who must have known of the mass torture and murder of civilians carried out year after year in Central America by U.S. trained, advised, armed and financed troops, would suddenly become so emotionally shaken by reading what was surely "old news" to him; especially in light of the fact that Bush had also helped inspire Amnesty International reports on torture and murder in Iraq by once courting and arming Hussein against the then Evil Enemy, Iran.

Continuing with a review of the "personalities" presented in the press, another article, this one by Southam's Christopher Young, used the adjectives "mad," "rabid," "incapable," and "crazy," to describe Saddam Hussein, while describing various U.S officials as "rational," "convincing," "legally-free," and "diplomatic." Precisely what the author takes to be the basis for these claims is unclear. What should be clear, however, is that the author's claims are not statements of fact, but rather personal opinions -although nowhere in the article is this stated and no rebuttal or opposing view was presented.

Of course, the perceptive reader with a long memory could possibly identify the

flaws and falsehoods of this type of international news coverage. But for the uncritical reader who turns to the newspaper for "headline" information, such an article and others like it seem to suggest a justification for alarmist and pro-militaristic responses.

But text was not the only problem area found in the **Gazette** coverage. I could not ignore the way that layout editors used photographs in the sample; especially as research has proven that many newspaper "readers" rarely read through whole articles, but rather glean a significant proportion of their information concerning international events from quick headline skimming and the impression received from photographs.⁴ The juxtaposition of photographs with supposedly related stories and headlines make up the "total impression" one receives from the newspaper's coverage of an event. This impression can easily be influenced by any one of the immediate elements, but visuals seem particularly influential in the formation of attitudes.⁵

One striking example of an attempt to influence the formation of an attitude about the conflict by the use of photographs appeared in the **Gazette** on December 28, 1990. Next to the article, "Saddam moves to hold Israel hostage," the **Gazette** ran a relatively large photo of American soldiers "waiting patiently to call home from phone booths at Saudi Arabian filling station." The article itself starts with this short paragraph:

Ottawa - In the Middle-East, the political ratchets tighten the twanging wires of tension as the supposedly fateful month of January approaches.

One might ask, 'What message is supposed to be conveyed by this bizarre grouping?' That, perhaps, while Saddam Hussein is running rampant through the impending "theatre of war," the nice American soldiers would rather just be home with their families during Christmas? And why is it that if "political ratchets" were indeed tightening "the twanging wires of tension" (despite the fact that at this time it seemed the deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait was going to be pushed back to February), the Americans soldiers are portrayed to have little to do with it? In my opinion, such a grouping of images and ideas is an example of how the **Gazette** sided with the American government's interpretation of the events in the Gulf; it reinforces the U.S.'s self-image that their largest and most expensive military build-up in 45 years was the reluctant act of a government merely interested in freeing an oppressed nation from the clutches of a madman. There were, of course, other issues at stake.

Scott Armstrong, a former reporter for the Washington Post and coauthor, with Bob Woodward, of the book **The Brethren**, published an article in **Mother Jones** magazine which revealed that three American Presidents and two Saudi Kings were involved in the creation of a covert network of military superbases in the Saudi Arabian desert. The project started in 1980, cost over \$200 billion and, since

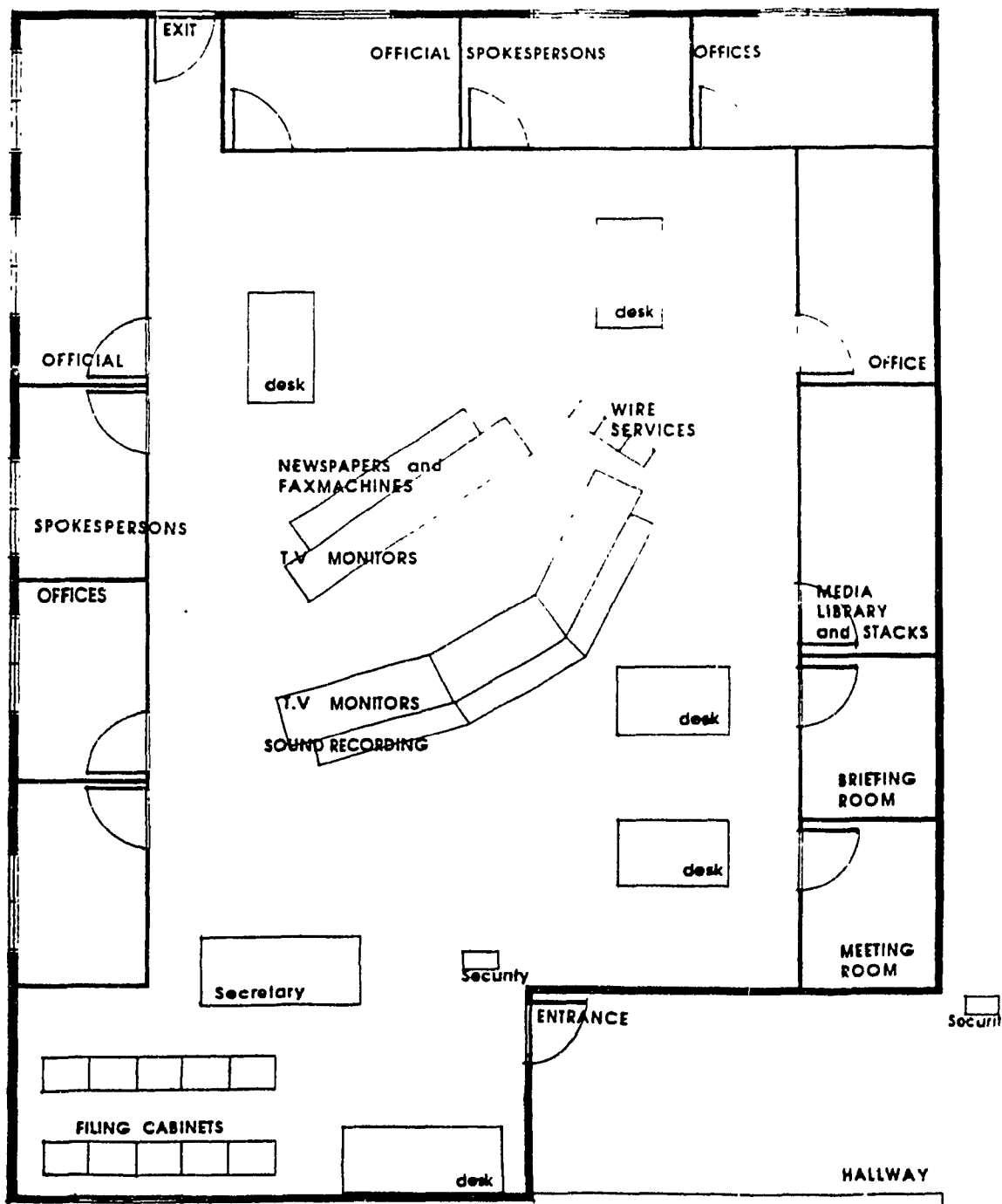
completed, is now more sophisticated than both NATO's NADGE system in Europe and the NORAD system in the United States.⁶ The Saudi system, which Armstrong described as "a pre-mixed, dehydrated war machine" - because you only needed to "add American troops and (fresh) water to create the most advanced warfare command system in the world" - was completely overlooked by the mass media. Even though many of the international reporters transmitted their stories from King Khalid Military City, a central node in the new system, Armstrong says that, "reporters were so captivated by the logistics and electronic wizardry" that they "overlooked the story of the ten years of secret preparation that had made it all possible".

In conclusion, I believe that this very brief survey of the **Gazette's** treatment of a major international story has identified very serious cases of bias both in the way events are selected for coverage and in the reporting of those specific events. The final irony of this situation appeared in an article about the Persian Gulf War tensions by **Gazette** journalist Lance Gay. In this report, Gay described how Iraqi "radio, television and newspapers are controlled and manipulated by an Orwellian Ministry of Information that 'massages' the news." While this is perhaps true, this journalist missed (or was remiss) mentioning the fact that "massaged news", such as I have demonstrated, also appears in our media. Yet it is done in Canada without any of the brutal force that exists in George Orwell's imaginary state or in Iraq.

Notes For Appendix C

1. J.T. Scanlon, Ruby Lukko, and Gerald Morton, "Media Coverage of Crisis: Better than Reported, Worse than Necessary," **Journalism Quarterly**, 1978, 55, pp.68-72.
2. Ibid.
3. Tuen A. Van Dijk. **News As Discourse**. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988. p.87.
4. Jacques Ellul. **Propaganda**. New York: Vintage Books, 1973. p.144.
5. Van Dijk. Op.cit.
6. Scott Armstrong, "The \$200 Billion Secret", **Mother Jones**, November/December, 1991. pp.30-32.

PHYSICAL LAYOUT of DEA's
Media Relations Division



FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of International Law
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario
Canada

FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction:

This research is being conducted to examine how and why diplomacy has gone from being the preserve of government insiders, to being the reserve of public discourse through the media, and the effect this shift has had on the role and image of the media in foreign policy decisions.

In accordance with the research standards and ethical code of Concordia University, Montreal, the identity of the interviewee will be treated with the strictest confidence if requested. In any case, no information will be attributed to any individual without prior consent of the individual concerned.

- How would you describe your job and its purpose?
- How many foreign correspondents are directly employed by your news organization? Where are they deployed?
- What is the basic process for news gathering abroad? (i.e., what sort of tasks and activities are expected of foreign correspondents?)
- In other words, how do Canadians find out about the foreign affairs of their government?
- What is considered a foreign news story?
- When covering international affairs, what do you report on, and what do you not?
- How has technology affected foreign correspondents?

- . Is the government considered a major news source for foreign correspondents?
- . If so, do you feel the government is a credible and reliable source for information on foreign affairs that involve Canada?
- . How do you know?
- . What key words would you use to describe the type of information you receive from government sources?
- . Has there been an increase in the amount of "prepackaged news" that reaches the foreign correspondent in the field? (i.e., information that has already been "handled" by at least one other player)
- . Does the Canadian government exercise any control on foreign affairs news?
- . What do you consider to be "newsworthy"?
- . Which media do you feel is most influential in foreign affairs reporting?

Finally, research into the relationship between official news sources and the media has come to a number of conclusions. I am going to read to you a number of these conclusions. Tell me what you think of them.

- * What is reported about Canada's foreign affairs that we experience through the media is "packaged" by government media relations officers.
- * The media is more dependent on government media relations officers than vice versa.
- * Much of what is finally reported from abroad is the product of source-journalist "negotiation".
- * Most foreign journalists do little investigative reporting and rely more on the "handouts" of official sources.

Name

Title

News Organization

Date

Duration

MEDIA RELATIONS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Graduate School of Communications
Concordia University
Montreal
1997

Introduction:

This research is being conducted to determine how the topic has gone from being the province of government officials to being the preserve of ordinary citizens. The aim is to find the reasons why and the effect this shift has had on the role and image of the media in foreign and press relations.

In accordance with the research objectives, the interview schedule will be structured to explore the role of the media in the intervention. In any case, no information will be collected that is irrelevant to the main concept of the research design.

Interview Questions

- 1. What are your general impressions of the role of the media?
- 2. What are your impressions of the role of the media?
- 3. How would you describe your role and of the press?
- 4. Do you have regular contact with members of the media?
- 5. Are you considered an expert source?
- 6. If so, do you feel the media regard you as a credible and reliable source?
- 7. How do you feel?

1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific information required.

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the asymptotic behavior of the solutions of the system (1) as $\epsilon \rightarrow 0$. It is shown that the solutions of the system (1) converge to the solutions of the system (2) in the sense of the weak convergence in the space $L^2(\Omega; \mathbb{R}^n)$.

$\frac{1}{\sqrt{\pi}} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(x) e^{-x^2} dx = \frac{1}{\sqrt{\pi}} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(x) e^{-x^2} dx$

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}_t] &= \mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}_t^{\text{train}} + \mathcal{L}_t^{\text{test}}] = \mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}_t^{\text{train}}] + \mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}_t^{\text{test}}] \\
&= \mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}_t^{\text{train}}] + \mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}_t^{\text{test}}] = \mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}_t^{\text{train}}] + \mathbb{E}[\mathcal{L}_t^{\text{test}}]
\end{aligned}$$
[illegible]

It seems how it has done.

the standard deviation of the error term is equal to the standard error of the regression

• Wavelength is the distance between two consecutive crests or troughs.

Other factors such as corruption are most influential for government structure.

1996

- The three "big" countries (U.S., France, Germany) have the most influence on the world, more influential than others.
- Are there any other countries of importance?

Finally, most researchers on the relationship between official news sources and the media have come to a conclusion that I think you will be interested in. I am going to read to you a number of these conclusions, I will mention a number of them.

- * What is reported about Canada's foreign relations is not what has been "revealed" by the government, for media's coverage is not.
- * Media's coverage can only be expected to be one of the official view of events and issues.
- * The media are more dependent on government in the reporting of news than vice versa.
- * Most of what is reported on Canada's foreign relations is not what is the actual relationship between the two nations.
- * Most foreign news is concerned with the government's involvement in foreign affairs, do little to increase understanding and rely more on the headlines of the news.

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Date _____

Duration _____