HOT NEWS, COLD WAR

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Few readers of this journal need persuading that the question of war and peace, of survival and extinction in the nuclear age, involves not just soldiers and politicians, diplomacy and treaties, profits and armaments. It is also a matter of culture and communication, of mindsets and ideologies, perceptions and evaluations, conceptions of threat and security, of group identity and otherness. Of all the technologies which humankind has developed exponentially in the past century, the destructive and exterminist capacity of armaments has perhaps been exceeded only by the ability to collect, process and transmit information. Is that capacity to diffuse information, as embodied by the so-called media of mass communication, exercised in the promotion of peace? Can it ever be?

Such concerns inform the manuscript which I am currently writing, based on several discrete but related studies undertaken since 1986 which hinge on two questions. First, is news reportage and commentary in the Canadian media influenced by a "Cold War" view of the world, one which would promote a garrison mentality, a desperate search for security through military alliances and armaments? Conversely, what openings are available in or through the media for the expression of anti-militarist dissent? These two questions frame my discussion of the ways in which media structure public discourse on peace and security in Canada.

Starting Points

Several assumptions constitute springboards for this study.

First, notwithstanding recent and welcome thaws in the Cold War, the threat of nuclear extinction continues to hang over everything. Even if the ultimate holocaust is avoided, massive ongoing military spending, the "conventional" wars fought since 1945 (many of them inflamed by the geopolitical designs of the superpowers), the militarization of governments, and the increased repression and poverty associated with the above, have all exacted staggering human costs on a global scale.

E.P. Thompson (1982) suggests that the US and USSR have virtually become "exterminist" social systems, in which culture, ideology, politics and economics are dominated by a logic tending towards eventual mutual annihilation. That logic, of Cold War and the nuclear arms race, cannot be reduced to the policies or interests of a particular party, economic sector or social class; rather, it has acquired an autonomous, self-generating and irrational dynamism of its own. In Thompson's view, the Cold War bipolarity is the central force-field of world politics, and effectively to challenge it would require a largescale movement of citizens from both East and West.
a popular alliance infused with both the spirit of internationalism and the objective ultimately of breaking up the opposing military blocs.

One need not accept the full thrust of Thompson's argument to conclude that governments (of East and West alike) cannot be trusted to achieve disarmament of their own accord. Not only are the "vested interests" which benefit most directly from the arms race closely linked to State power. Most modern States themselves seem virtually locked into the "Machiavellian" pursuit of national power in a world whose division into antagonistic camps is taken for granted as an intractable reality. With its "acceptance of war, of unconditional state power, and of the finality of partial human identities", as Richard Falk puts it, the Machiavellian world picture "confines rigidly the political imagination and dooms any project of social and political reconstruction" (Lifton and Falk 1982, 241). Consequently, the citizen's mass movement for disarmament which has emerged with particular momentum in Canada and elsewhere during the 1980s must be regarded, whatever its faults, as a creative element. It is potentially capable of loosening the constraints imposed on the political imagination by the Machiavellian worldview in general, and its Cold War version in particular. The concept of peace is amorphous, polysemic; but the movement is raising collective awareness that an enduring peace must be more than the absence of organized inter-State conflict: it is not just the opposite of war, but of injustice, oppression and poverty. Moreover, the peace movement constitutes a political counterweight, of uncertain and uneven potential to be sure, to the forces of "exterminism". Perhaps even more importantly, as R.B.J. Walker (1988) has insisted in much of his work, anti-war protest is one of a number of "critical social movements" around the world which are searching for new forms of human solidarity and challenging (in however inchoate a way) conventional State-centred and power-oriented ways of thinking about and doing politics.

For such reasons, the peace movement offers hope even to those who are currently its political opponents. This study can in one sense be read as an extended letter of analysis and implicit advice to the Canadian peace movement regarding the mass media which are unavoidably part of its terrain of struggle. It can also be read as a contribution to media scholarship, and in particular to the debate (only incompletely joined in North America) between liberal/"pluralist" and critical or neo-Marxist understandings of the political and ideological functions and practices of mass media.

One final assumption must be noted: even though Canada is not itself a nuclear or major military power, it is nevertheless valuable to study the peace/media relationship in Canada. The conclusions of English-language media scholars in this area, derived from studies undertaken in Britain or the US, may need to be modified or qualified in the context of a Western "middle power". The Canadian case is especially interesting: it is both a significant participant in the nuclear arms race, but also has a reputation as a diplomatic bridge-builder and international peacekeeper. These two political realities alone portend the availability of different discursive resources for
journalists in their work of making sense of the world. How journalism negotiates between contending interpretative frameworks can shed light on the political and ideological nature of mass media and peace movement alike.

The Scope of the Research

The first chapter addresses the skeptical question: What difference do the media make? Why are they relevant to the question of international peace? I summarize arguments regarding their effectivity at five different levels: State policy-making; public opinion; the peace movement as a particularly active and motivated section of the public; political culture in a broader sense; and inter-State relations. On the basis of this overview, I suggest several potential "peace keeping assignments" (Davison 1974) for the media which constitute criteria for later evaluating their structure and performance.

Establishing the effectivity of media, though, still leaves unanswered the question of the direction of their influence. Much of the scholarly work on media as agents of political communication tends to fall into one of two broad schools of thought: a mainstream liberal "pluralist" and an alternative "critical" paradigm in media studies (Hall 1982). To be sure, such labels are often inadequate: the two schools are internally heterogeneous, they imbue much but not the whole of communications theory, and they often use different concepts and address different questions (Curran, Gurevitch and Woolacott, 1982). Nevertheless, while many points are at issue within and between these two schools, the following questions go to the heart of what divides them: Are the media tied to the existing power structure which they legitimize by amplifying and circulating dominant "definitions of reality"? Or are the media autonomous (even adversarial) institutions, open to diverse interests and viewpoints, centres of power in their own right, whose political impact is contingent and unpredictable? Chapter One overviews the two competing perspectives on media, as well as their implicit consequences for our understanding of news reportage of peace and security issues. I argue that the pluralist literature is too "optimistic" because it has little sense of the limits which ideology and the conditions of media production alike impose on the media's openness to dissent and to oppositional readings. Conversely, though, critical analysis has tended to be too "pessimistic", too ready to regard protest movement successes as co-optation, too hasty to overlook diversity and cracks within the media system. The book attempts to maintain the critical sense of connection between news and power, but also to offer grounds for cautious optimism regarding the role of the media in the peace movement's political trajectory.

The rest of the book advances this argument using several different approaches and data sources. Part II, based on both interviews with journalists, and on a purposeful review of media literature, examines the structures and forces shaping news discourse, and in particular reportage on peace and security matters. Chapter Two considers the newsgathering "net" of Canadian media, the flow of news to audiences, and some characteristics of those journalists in national media who specialize in
reporting defence, foreign affairs and peace-related issues. Chapters Three and Four outline and evaluate various explanations of what determines the nature of news discourse, focusing respectively on factors within and those beyond the immediate workaday world of journalism.

Part III, based on interviews with government and military officials and with peace activists, considers what we might call the discursive context of news production. Chapter Five sketches some pertinent aspects of the dominant discourse of Canadian defence and foreign policy, one which I have labelled a "soft core" version of Cold War ideology. I then contrast it with the alternative perspectives offered by the diverse citizens' groups known collectively as the peace movement. This analysis identifies sufficient incompatibility between the two discourses to suggest that the media's reporting and interpretation of news events cannot simultaneously favour or incorporate them both to the same extent: the media are likely to be a terrain of struggle. Chapters Six and Seven consider the political communications practices and orientations to the media of pro-defence interest groups and the peace movement respectively. In summary, as a well-established interest with access to policy-makers, defence groups have until recently enjoyed the "silence of security". By contrast, as an emergent and dispersed social movement fundamentally challenging government policy, peace groups have been virtually forced to turn to the media in their efforts to mobilize support.

Part IV consists of several discrete studies of news texts/content, each of which addresses selected aspects of the way news negotiates between competing peace and security discourses. The "slices" of news content selected for analysis range in scope from individual news articles to newspaper headlines for entire years. The methodological approaches include quantitative content analysis, a qualitative analysis of media "frames" drawing from Gitlin's (1980) work on the media and the New Left of the 1960s, and an adaptation of the critical linguistics approach for the intensive analysis of particular texts.

Chapter Eight addresses the question of whether a Cold War-inspired double standard influences the patterns of attention in news to human rights violations and acts of aggression by regimes around the world. Is an atrocity more newsworthy if it is committed by an adversary rather than by an allied regime?

Chapter Nine, an invited contribution from Stuart Allan whose work appears elsewhere in this journal, closely compares the language of the Canadian government's White Paper on defence policy with newspaper articles commenting on the same. To what extent does the press amplify or inflect such official—and Cold Warlike—discourse?

Chapter Ten analyzes Toronto newspaper reportage and commentary on the 1986 US bombing of Libya. It finds considerable diversity of viewpoint on the affair, and ample space for the expression of dissent. But it also finds that the various arguments
or paradigms opposing the raid were decidedly structured in dominance: those which argue in terms of means/end rationality, or which define the raid as a temporary aberration from "our" values, were treated more seriously than, in particular, more radical or systemic critiques.

Chapter Eleven concerns the evolution of the "framing" by the local press of the annual Walk for Peace in Vancouver, Canada. From modest beginnings in 1980, the Walk has become quite probably North America's largest regular protest-cum-celebration in favour of disarmament. Organized by the broadly-based End the Arms Race coalition, it can no longer be dismissed as the expression of socially or politically marginal protest. How does the press adjust to that unaccustomed situation, and does the peace movement pay a price for such success?

The final section of the book concerns the lessons to be learned, and the possibilities for change. Chapter Twelve adds another dimension to the analysis of the peace movement-media relationship. It discusses a protest campaign, organized by peace groups and their allies throughout Canada and the US in 1987, against a phenomenon which was itself a media event: the production and broadcasting of the television mini-series *Amerika*. While some observers regard it in retrospect as a bizarre and ephemeral episode, I suggest that it has some enduring relevance, including the lesson that the peace movement shares an agenda with those who seek to democratize and decommercialize the media.

Several themes are extracted from the book in the conclusion. I evaluate the media in relation to the "peacekeeping tasks" which it could potentially assume. I compare the characteristics of the peace movement and the mass media in terms of the kinds of knowledge and action which each seeks to promote, and in light of that comparison, I search for openings as well as blockages for the expression of anti-militarist dissent via the media. Finally, I discuss some implications of this study for the pluralist and critical models of the media as institutions of political communication.

Endnotes

1. The author wishes to acknowledge funding for this study from the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security and from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, as well as the invaluable advice from colleagues and research assistance from students at Simon Fraser University.

2. The term "peace movement" is not altogether a precise one. The military establishment of course finds it discomfiting because it implies that the military favours war. More problematically, "peace groups" are so diverse that some activists wonder whether they can be characterized as a single movement. Moreover, some groups support the right of peoples in certain circumstances to wage "just wars", such as the popular liberation struggles in Central America. Angus and Cook (1984) prefer the term "disarmament movement". While these
qualifications must be granted their due weight, my analysis in Chapter Seven nevertheless persuades me, at least, that the abbreviation "peace movement" can be used without excessive distortion or imprecision.

REFERENCES


