**Global News and Information Networks**

In the realm of international news, US/UK-based media organizations produce and distribute much of the world's news and current affairs output. From international news agencies to global newspapers and radio stations, from providers of television news footage to 24-hour news and documentary channels, the US/UK presence seems to be overwhelming.

**News agencies**

As collectors and distributors of news to newspapers, magazines and broadcasters globally, news agencies play a central role in setting the international news agenda. It has been argued that news agencies contributed significantly to the globalization and commodification of international information. Though traditionally the news agencies sold news reports and still photographs, today they have diversified their operations, for example, by offering video news feeds for broadcasters and information and financial databases. Most countries in the world have a national news agency - in many cases state-owned or a government monopoly. However, there are only a few transnational news agencies and these continue to be owned by US and British companies. Two of the world's three biggest news agencies are British or American, with AP leading the trio.

**Associated Press**

In terms of overall news output, the Associated Press is the world's largest news-gathering organization, serving more than 15 000 news organizations worldwide with news, photos, graphics, audio and video, claiming that 'more than a billion people every day read, hear or see AP news'. AP operates as a not-for-profit co-operative with its subscribing member organizations, supplying news, photographs, graphics, audio and video to an international audience. It also has a digital photo network - supplying 1 000 photos a day worldwide to 8 500 international subscribers, a 24-hour continuously updated on-line news service, a television news service (APTN) and AP Network News (largest single radio network in the USA). Apart from English, AP's service is available in German, Swedish, Dutch, French and Spanish, while subscribers translate its stories into many more languages. As newspapers, radio and television stations have cut back or folded, AP has endeavoured to sell selected, packaged news to nonmembers, such as governments and corporations, for example, by AP Online, a group of subject-specific news wires, tailored to each client's industry and news needs. Since 1995, AP has operated an on-line service called The WIRE.

**Reuters**

In the world of news Reuters remains a major actor, supplying news, graphics, news video and news pictures to a global audience. However, Reuters Holding, the company which owns the news agency, deals in 'the business of information", making its main profit in transmitting realtime financial data and collective investment data to global financial markets. Over 519 000 users in 57 720 locations access Reuters information and news worldwide. In 1999, Reuters provided news and information to over 225 Internet sites reaching an estimated 12 million viewers per month and generating approximately 130 million pageviews. With regional headquarters in London, New York, Geneva and Hong Kong, and offices in 217 cities, Reuters employs more than 16000 people of 40 nationalities

**Agence France Presse (AFP)**

The third global news agency is the Paris-based Agence France-Presse, with subscribers including businesses, banks and governments, apart from newspapers, radio and TV stations across the world. Though subsidized by the French government, AFP claims to provide 'accurate, speedy, quality reporting' of world events. Every day it distributes two million words, 250 news photos and 80 graphics in English, Spanish, French, German, Arabic and Portuguese. AFP is particularly strong on coverage of the Middle East and Africa, perhaps reflecting French geo-economic interests. It has regional centres in Washington, Hong Kong, Nicosia and Montevideo. Apart from news, AFP produces on average 20 graphics each every day in English, French, Spanish and German. Its ImageForum offers Internet or ISDN access to AFP's international Photo Service - 150000 digital images are available. It has also launched an email service la carte news, tailored to client specifications. According to UNESCO, the three main news agencies are the source of about 80 per cent of the public's information worldwide and they operate in a commercial environment: though it is a not-for-profit organization, AP's mission states unambiguously that the agency 'is in the information business'. The dominant position of Western news agencies is based on professional output - a reputation for speed and accuracy in the coverage of international events, though their interpretation may often reflect Western, or more specifically, US editorial priorities.

**Other major agencies**

United Press International (UPI) 'the world's largest privately owned news service' which was considered one of the 'big four' until the 1980s, is another US-based news agency with international influence. For most of the 1990s the majority of shares in UPI were owned by Saudi media interests but in 2000 it was taken over by the Rev Sun Myong Moon's Unification Church ('the Moonies'). In 1999, it had 600 correspondents in 90 bureaux worldwide, distributing on average 1 000 stories daily. Other major Western news agencies with notable international presence include Germany's DPA (Deutsche Presse-Agentur), particularly strong in eastern Europe, and EFE of Spain, with close links in Latin America. China's Xinhua news agency, founded in 1931, has expanded steadily since the country began to open its doors for business in 1978. It has four regional offices in the Pacific region, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East and branches in more than 100 countries. Its average daily output is 250 stories. TASS, the official Russian news agency renamed, in 1992, ITARTASS (Informatsionnoe telegrafnoe agentstvo Rossii-Telegrafnoe agentstvo Sovetskogo Soiuza), had 74 bureaux and offices in Russia and other former Soviet republics and 65 bureaux in 62 foreign countries, distributing on average 105 stories daily. ITAR-TASS also co-operates with more than 80 foreign news agencies and operates a photo service, the largest of its kind in Russia and has also entered into joint ventures in operating private and corporate telecommunication networks based on satellite, fibre-optic, microwave, radio and cable lines. It also produces multimedia products to clients in Russia and abroad. The English-language service of Japan's news agency Kyodo, established in 1945, produces 200 stories per day, accounting for some 100000 words.

**Financial news services**

In the globalized free-market world of the twenty-first century, speedy and regular transmission of accurate financial intelligence has become very important for news organizations. According to a UNESCO report, the global market for financial news stood at some $5 billion in 1996. The growth of televised financial news market has made this sector even more lucrative. The blurring of boundaries between financial news and financial data has contributed to news screens carrying news and financial information side by side or even on a single screen. Reuters, which changed through the 1970s and 1980s, from being merely a news agency to an international electronic data company, is the leading international player in financial news and data. In 1999, it was providing data for over 940 000 shares, bonds and other financial instruments as well as for 40 000 companies. In the past five years, financial information products revenue accounted for 64 per cent of the company's total, while media and professional products revenue accounted for just 7 per cent. Other global key players in financial journalism are AP-DJ economic news service, formed as a result of AP's teaming with Dow Jones and the recently launched AFX News, an agency providing real-time news service with a European focus, and produced by AFP and The Financial Times.

**Bloomberg**

Started in early 1980s by Mike Bloomberg, a former employee of Salomon Brothers, Bloomberg offers a 24-hour, worldwide real-time financial information network of news, data and analyses of financial markets and business. By 1999, it was providing financial information to more than 140 000 users in 91 countries. Its news service, Bloomberg News, available in five languages - English, French, Spanish, German and Japanese - is syndicated in over 250 newspapers around the world. Bloomberg Radio, syndicated through more than 100 affiliates worldwide, reports market news every hour while Bloomberg Television - a 24-hour news channel that reports market news, is broadcast throughout the world in seven languages. Apart from producing its own business programmes, it also provides syndicated reports to television stations. In addition, it produces two monthlies Bloomberg Personal Finance and Bloomberg Money for investors. Bloomberg Press publishes business books while its website draws select content from the financial service and its media products to provide up-tothe- minute information. Other major international players in financial news are Knight-Ridder Financial, an international news service that reports on business, finance and economics from around the world. Among business-related regional agencies are Asialnfo Services, a joint venture between US-based BDI Group and Wanfang Data Inc, China's largest database company, providing daily abstracts of news from China; and Sydney-based Asia Pulse, a joint venture, formed in 1996, by major news and information organisations, including Xinhua, Press Trust of India and Antara of Indonesia, to distribute business intelligence on Asia. Many financial news services make revenue from large-scale trading in shares and currencies and a fluid and insecure financial market is good news for them since they take commission from billions of dollars worth in weekly currency trading. This raises questions about whether their role is promoting and sustaining free-market liberalization of financial markets.

**International television news**

Two of the world's biggest wire services - AP and Reuters - are also the two top international television news services. These two companies largely control global flow of audio-visual news material, thus influencing global television journalism. In the realm of television news - both raw footage and complete news channels - the US-UK predominance is obvious, as is indicated in Table 4.20. Reuters Television (formerly Visnews) one of the world's two largest television news agencies, remains a key player in global trade in news footage, and is used by major news organizations such as CNN and BBC. Reuters also owns 20 per cent of the London-based Independent Television News (ITN). Its rival is Associated Press Television News (APTN) which was launched in 1998 following the acquisition from ABC of TV news agency Worldwide Television News (WTN) by AP, integrating it with the operations of APTV, the London-based video news agency launched by the AP in 1994. This development indicates further narrowing of international television news sources - just two organizations now supply most of the news footage to broadcasters worldwide. ABC News, part of the Disney empire, had a 80 per cent stake in WTN (formerly UPITN) since 1998, while 10 per cent was owned by the Nine Network Australia and the rest by ITN. Why it sold such a powerful resource - the second largest provider of international television news pictures - is a matter of speculation. Perhaps Disney's priorities are in the entertainment business, as news and current affairs, though very influential, can struggle for revenues. Given their access to global satellite networks, APTN and Reuters Television offer satellite newsgathering deployments around the world. Their feeds are sent, both with ready scripts to allow immediate broadcasting, or with natural sound which can be re-edited with local voice-overs. Through dedicated 24-hour uplinks in Beijing, Hong Kong, Moscow, Jerusalem, New York and Washington, APTN offers individual regional services for Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia Pacific and the Middle East.

**International news channels**

In the category of news channels, the Atlanta-based Cable News Network (CNN) is undoubtedly the world leader. CNN, 'the world's only global, 24- hour news network', best symbolizes globalization of American television journalism, influencing news agendas across the world and indeed shaping international communication.

* **Setting the Global News Agenda**

The West, led by the United States, dominates the world's entertainment and information networks. These mainly Western corporations are the major global players in most sectors of the media - book publishing, news agencies, international newspapers and magazines, radio and television channels and programmes, music, advertising and films. Apart from showing the validity of the arguments of dependency theorists and the proponents of the NWICO, the evidence presented suggests that Western control and its ability to set the agenda of international communication debates have, in fact, increased.

During the 1970s and 1980s the debates about global cultural flows were mainly concerned with news agencies, but with the expansion of television - a medium which transcends language and literacy barriers - the Western way of life is in the process of being globalized. Though there are more producers of images and information, the global entertainment and information flow between Africa, Latin American and Asian, is still mediated, to a large extent, through content provided by Anglo- American news organizations, who share information, visuals and even journalists. It is not unusual to find an ITN report on CNN or CNN visuals on the BBC news. For nearly 40 years, between 1954 and 1993, NBC had an arrangement to share news pictures with the BBC. These exchanges also include magazines and newspapers, given the linguistic, political and cultural affinity between the USA and Britain. A market-led global media system benefits TNCs on whose advertising support the media edifice is based. The TNCs have increasingly taken an active role in promoting a global privatized international network. Corporations have used their media power to placate governments, some have even used it to acquire direct political power. One prominent example was Italian media magnate Silvio Berlusconi, owner of the AC Milan football club, who used his popular appeal and his media empire, crucially satellite channels, to launch his political party Forza Italia that vaulted him, in 1992, to Rome as Prime Minister of a right-wing coalition government.

Media organizations are often part of major entertainment conglomerates. Does the corporate nature of the global media industry affect its content? Sometimes, broadcasters themselves exercise self-censorship when dealing with sensitive issues. In May 1999, NBC, which claims to reach a global audience, took a last-minute decision to redub the two-part adventure drama The Atomic Train to delete all references to nuclear waste, in what critics said was NBC acting out of deference to its parent company, General Electric, a major investor in the nuclear industry. It is tempting to wonder how people would react if the world's books, visual media and journalism were controlled, for example, by the Chinese. Would they be concerned that such concentration of media power could lead to globalization of a Chinese perspective on world events? However, unlike the media in China, the US media, despite close links with officials, are independent of government control, a fact which adds to their international credibility.

At the heart of this credibility is the ability to consistently provide accurate, fast and authoritative news and information to an international audience, something which has been earned over two centuries of journalism - indeed, it has been argued that journalism itself is an Anglo- American invention. Though the French and the Germans may dispute this assertion, there is little doubt that from its inception, the mass media has operated in a market system. In an age of privatized global communications is it possible that the Western media is becoming conduits for promoting Western consumerism and a free-market ideology? In the new media landscape, observes one commentator: 'Consumerism, the market, class inequality and individualism tend to be taken as natural and often benevolent, whereas political activity, civic values, and anti-market activities tend to be marginalised or denounced'.

There is a danger that rather than being used by governments for propaganda purposes, as was the case during the Cold War years when anti-communism defined the Western media's ideological orientation, in the era of globalization and increasing corporate control of the channels of international communication, the media may become the mouthpiece of global corporations and their supporters in governments. It has been argued that in Western democracies a symbiotic relationship exists between the media and governments. 'Information is power in the foreign policy sense ... and one may grant the necessity for governments to manipulate it on occasion as they would other instruments of national power,' wrote Bernard Cohen in his famous book, The Press and Foreign Policy (1963). If during the heydays of radio, governments could use the airwaves to promote their viewpoint, in the era of round-the-clock global news, they have refined their public diplomacy to the extent that it can be marketed successfully to international publics. This is true as much for the Bush Administration's attempts to 'sell the war' during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis as for the subsequent 'humanitarian interventions' which have defined US foreign policy in the 1990s. The world's view of US military interventions were, to a very large extent, moulded by the US-supplied images of Operation Just Cause in 1989 in Panama; Operation Provide Comfort (in Northern Iraq, following the Gulf War in 1991); Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1992 and Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti in 1994.

A recent study of how television news can influence foreign policy, based on US 'peacekeeping' operations in Iraqi Kurdistan, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda and Bosnia, argues that the relationship between the government and media is more complex than is sometimes believed. The CNN effect is highly conditional. Images and written accounts of the horrors of the post-Cold War world that stream into the offices of government officials do not dictate policy outcomes. Sometimes they suggest policy choices ... at other times media reports become an ally for an entire administration, or individual member of it, seeking to pursue new policies. Others have maintained that US media have let the government set the terms of military policy debate in the news and American journalists rarely criticize US military interventions. In the marketdriven media environment there is also a discernible tendency to simplify complex international issues into what may be called easily digestible 'sightbytes', given the proliferation of 24-hour TV and on-line news culture.

In such an environment, the coverage of the South, already 'deplorably infrequent and misleading' may be further reduced. Already, US networks have cut back on their foreign coverage. Partly as a result of this and partly as a consequence of depoliticization in many postmodern Western societies, only certain parts of the world - where the West might have geopolitical and economic interests - and particular types of stories, which have wide appeal, are given prominence. So for example, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka barely gets a mention in mainstream media while when the West decides to bomb Yugoslavia - Operation Allied Force - to defend Albanian communities in Kosovo, the coverage is almost wall-to-wall. It is not just a question of the quantity, also crucially important is how issues impinging on Western geo-political interests are covered by mainstream Western, and by extension, global media, especially television.

The 1999 bombing of Yugoslavia by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was presented by the media as the only course of action to stop 'ethnic cleansing' in its Kosovo province. The media generally omitted to comment on the fact that it was the first incidence of NATO actively interfering in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation, thus rewriting the rules of international law. However, the bombing may have more to do with changing the character of the Western military alliance from a relic of Cold War into a 'humanitarian force' which with its rapid reaction units can be deployed anywhere in the world. Already, NATO's remit has been extended to allow it to operate out of area. However, this crucial aspect was rarely discussed in the mainstream media, which focused on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis and how a benevolent West was resolving it. Despite protestations from Western media organizations, such double standards in reporting are not uncommon and have been well documented in the context of Vietnam, East Timor and Central America and Iraq.

In the post-Cold War era communism seems to have been replaced in the media by 'Third World threats', especially emanating from Islamic fundamentalism, which often receives more negative coverage than other forms of fundamentalism, namely Christian, Hindu or Jewish. The news discourse is also biased in terms of nuclear issues - if a developing country aspires to join the exclusive nuclear club, as India has tried to do, the US media, reflecting the US Government's position, tend to argue that such moves would threaten world peace. Exhortations of moral rectitude from the only country which has used nuclear weapons - in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 - and not balked at dropping chemical weapons in Vietnam, air-fuel explosives in Iraq and bombs tipped with depleted uranium on civilian populations - most recently in Yugoslavia, may not be universally acceptable. Yet, in the absence of a credible alternative media system, the US position - given the reach and influence of the Western media - often becomes the dominant position, whether on nuclear issues, trade policy, human rights or international law.