

**Veterans of Perception:  
GII Antecedents in the Literature  
On Media and Foreign Policy**

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## Introduction

“The Battle in Seattle: What Was That All About?” blared the headlines of the *Washington Post*'s Outlook Section on Sunday, December 5, 1999. Was it, as the first bylined commentary suggested, a return to the 1960s, in which case we are to understand the “two sides” presented in the struggle as rebels against the system? Or was it, as a second article asserted, a theatrical travesty, where protesters donned the clothes of the poor in order to push their own self-interest, in which case the “two sides” represented in Seattle were the developing countries and those who claimed to speak for them? Or was it, as a third commentator proposed, the example of civil society gone global, the “flowering” of an international social movement, in which case we witnessed the old order of the corporate-driven WTO against the new internationalists. How exactly are we to interpret the dramatic events in Seattle that dominated our television screens for more than a week?

Forty-five years before, Gregory Bateson had asked the same question, observing monkeys playing. It was only, he suggested, “by reference to the metamessage ‘This is play’ that a monkey could understand a hostile move from another monkey as not intended to convey the hostility that it obviously denotes. In other words, metamessages ‘framed’ the hostile moves as play.” (Tannen, 1993: 18) Similarly, in order to understand “what was that all about,” the observer had to read cues in the behavior of the monkeys that allowed him to determine what “frame” of reference they were operating within, fight or play, in order to provide an appropriate response, concerned or entertained.

The *Post*'s coverage of Seattle that Sunday in December provides stunning examples of two important concepts that emerge again and again from the literature of foreign policy and media. First, the notion of how an issue gets “framed” in order to signal its appropriate interpretation, and second, the recurring tendency to present the narrative of what happened as a fight between two opposing sides, reinforcing in this issue domain the notion of eternal conflict. As Martin Medhurst observes, “Cold War, like its ‘hot’ counterpart, is a contest.” (Medhurst et al, 1997: 19)

In an explanation of how even small word choices alter judgment by evoking different frames of reference, Joseph Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson refer to a study in which groups were asked their views on U.S. intervention after reading slightly different scenarios describing a fictitious foreign country that had been invaded by its neighbor. In one scenario, the Vietnam War was subtly evoked by mentioning “chinook helicopters” and locating briefings in “Dean Rusk Hall.” The other group read a similar scenario in which World War II was evoked through phrases like “blitzkrieg invasion” and briefings in “Winston Churchill Hall.” The result was greater support for the latter intervention, “even though supporters did not see the scenarios as similar to Vietnam or World War II.” (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997: 43) Thus, the metamessage that what we are deciding is Vietnam, not World War II, directs judgment and presumably action by inferring for the reader “what exactly is going on here.” And, far removed from the historical event that gave rise to the frame, this metamessage will

continue to apply to modern situations as long as the words “work.”

The search for a frame of reference, a framework of meaning, is played out against, and checked against, experience in a dynamic that linguists have called “structures of expectation.” As Deborah Tannen has explained, “People approach the world not as naive, blank-slate receptacles who take in stimuli as they exist in some independent and objective way, but rather as experienced and sophisticated veterans of perception who have stored their prior experiences as ‘an organized mass,’ and who see events and objects in the world in relation to each other and in relation to their prior experience. This prior experience or organized knowledge then takes the form of expectations about the world, and in the vast majority of cases, the world, being a systematic place, confirms these expectations, saving the individual the trouble of figuring things out anew all the time.” (Tannen, 1993: 21)

What is different for foreign affairs, however, is that unlike many other issues with which we contend on a daily basis, our “experience” of these issues is almost wholly mediated by media. That “systematic place” against which we check our expectations is likely to be not the corner store or the kitchen table, but yesterday’s news. Our structures of expectation reflect not a lived history, but a narrative history conveyed to us through media’s lens over time. As Simon Serfaty noted, writing in *The Media and Foreign Policy*, “the TWA pilot with a terrorist’s gun at his head at the Beirut airport...the young man standing up to a tank in Beijing...the older man standing on top of the Berlin wall and smashing at it with hammer and chisel...all these images and many more remain penetrating visions of the world that continue to be carried live in the citizen’s mind for years to come.” (Serfaty, 1991)

Thus it is that we can also begin to see dimly the origins of the two-sided phenomenon as a media construct, necessary and expected elements of any of a number of foreign policy frames, from “game” to “fight.” Indeed, the rhetoric of foreign policy is replete with these dualisms — chauvinism vs. pacifism, containment vs. liberation, savagery vs. civilization — to such an extent that one observer has labeled it “the rhetorical essentials of the logic of confrontation.” (Ivie in Medhurst et al, 1997) The problem with the rhetoric, of course, is that it reinforces a frame of expectation, in which confrontation is required. As Philip Wander put it, “prophetic dualism leaves little room for adaptation or compromise...how to explain negotiations with the forces of Evil.” (Wander in Medhurst et al, 1997) The dominance of this construct is further ensured by its roots in American journalism; the idea that “fair reporting” requires two sides to every question and that “balance” is achieved when the farthest poles of opinion are represented (Tannen, 1998; Sahr in Spitzer, 1992) provides the perfect collusion between the form and content of conflict in foreign affairs.

Long before the end of the Cold War, before the founding of the Global Interdependence Initiative, foreign policy scholars and analysts recognized the need for “a replacement metaphor” to guide the understanding and actions of policy-makers. Others probed the inherent tension between diplomacy, viewed as a secret transaction between elites, and media, viewed as the foundation for

democratic discourse and debate, asking, what does the public really need to know? Still others bemoaned the public's lack of understanding of geography, history and foreign affairs, concluding that little communication was possible between governing elites and the governed on this topic, perhaps a necessary exception to democracy. And others, viewing the demise of informed foreign policy coverage and the downsizing of news rooms, wondered if the news we got could ever approximate the news we need to engage the American public in world politics.

The purpose of this paper is to ground the Global Interdependence Initiative in a body of work that prefigures its query. Unlike many social issues with which we struggle — from poverty to the environment — the influence of media on the public's and policy-makers' will to support international interventions and investments has long been recognized. Indeed, the literature of media and foreign policy echoes many of the frustrations that led to the founding of this Initiative, and recommends some interesting ways to create better communications on these and related issues. There are a number of recent studies that hold special meaning for the GII inquiry. This paper attempts to connect the current GII research effort, and the overall mission of the Working Group, to relevant aspects of this recent literature, and to provide a selective, annotated bibliography of those works judged most useful by the author to the work we have undertaken.

## **Key Points from the Literature**

This paper reviews not the literature of foreign policy but the way it is communicated through images, rhetoric and framing, the “pictures in our heads,” to use Walter Lippmann's terms — where we get them, what they are, and why they matter.

This is a subjective review and analysis of the literature, with an emphasis on those aspects that, in this writer's opinion, have the greatest potential utility for the work of the Global Interdependence Initiative, or which are so prominent that they require consideration.

In this paper, we will pursue five key themes that arise from the recent literature on media and international affairs: (1) bad news, or limitations in the quality and quantity of foreign news coverage, (2) bad views, or public opinion and the media's role in forming and informing it, (3) whose news, or tensions between elite diplomacy, democracy and mass media, (4) shutterbug diplomacy, or the press as policymaker, and (5) getting framed, or the language of foreign policy debate and its implications. Each of these themes is described below, first with an overview of the relevant literature, then with examples that illustrate salient subtopics within the theme.

### **1. Bad News, or limitations in the quality and quantity of foreign affairs news coverage**

Far and away the most discussed aspect of media with respect to foreign policy relates to its deficits, either in focus, composition or volume. This literature explores the media's role as an agenda-setter (Iyengar in Bennett and Palatz, 1994), its accuracy in depicting and interpreting world events, its conventions and internal decision-making (sensationalism, pictorialization, vivid case studies, entertainment, editors' views of what makes news, etc.), its sources, the credentials of its reporters and editors, and its ability to sustain foreign coverage. The underlying assumption is that more news devoted to foreign affairs, with more contextualized and informed reporting, would result in greater public understanding of, and support for, enlightened public policy. This assumption places media outlets in the role of educators, and assigns to them responsibility for the effects of media, an outcome that the press often rejects. Moreover, this places American media in the uncomfortable position of an administration public relations representative or "advance man," a role reporters and editors decry as inappropriate to democratic ideals and the First Amendment. Journalists more often describe their role as representing the public interest, with an obligation to investigate crimes in high places and deals sealed behind closed doors, resulting in what diplomats describe as "gotcha journalism." At the same time, journalists' documented over-reliance on official sources (Sigal, 1973; Zaller in Bennett and Palatz, 1994) is viewed by populist critics as an example of collusion between elites. (Entman and Page in Bennett and Palatz, 1994) In sum, the discussion of media's rightful role with regard to reporting foreign affairs mirrors in many respects the dialogue about media's role in general: watchdog, educator, policy player or passive lens?

At the simplest level, this literature looks at trends in the volume of coverage accorded foreign policy and events, often with comparisons to domestic coverage. The Center for Media and Public Affairs reports, "The 1990s have witnessed a retreat from foreign news coverage at the broadcast networks, which began closing foreign bureaus and consolidating overseas operations during the late 1980s...1990 international news accounted for nearly one third (32%) of the network evening news agenda. If we include news about the crisis and subsequent war in the Persian Gulf, the proportion jumps to half (50%) of the entire newshole during 1990 and 1991. Coverage of foreign countries began to drop in 1992, reaching a low of 20 percent in 1996. In 1996 international news accounted for less than one out of six stories on NBC, one out of five on CBS, and one out of four on ABC. That year, only four countries received more attention than did extraterrestrial matters.... The leading topic of foreign news every year throughout the 1990s has been social disorder – wars, coups, demonstrations, etc.... Since 1994 nearly one out of three foreign stories has covered this kind of social strife." (*Media Monitor*, July/August 1997)

A second simple critique is whether journalists "got the story." In this tradition, perhaps the most interesting offering is that of John Maxwell Hamilton, who argues that the press has missed the biggest news by concentrating on communism and American power. Stories that affected more people, including many Americans, were those involving "the disintegration of informal Western control over China, political and economic modernization in Africa, Asia, and

Latin America...” (*Main Street America and the Third World*, 1986: 1) Indeed, Hamilton suggests that “bad views” result from “bad news,” or the inability of journalists to tie important world changes to the self-interest and daily lives of average Americans, at the same time creating a populist “need to know” and tensions between foreign policy elites on the one hand, and the mass press and citizenry on the other (see Section III below).

The issue of media responsibility in this literature arises primarily in the tension between the need to safeguard diplomacy from leaks and terrorism and the “the reporter’s right to ascertain the truth.” (Serfaty, 1991: 8) The goal of the media is to “maintain freedom of expression and satisfy audience demand” (9), not to educate prospectively but to cover contemporaneously. “While journalists claim a responsibility to question policy in the name of the public interest – as is done in Congress, too – they usually disavow any obligation to educate the public on foreign affairs. Yet by serving as the principal means of communication between the governing and the governed...the news media act as the nation’s principal educator on foreign policy matters” (10). At best, this critique leads to a call for more substantive analysis and more sustained attention to foreign issues.

Another theme in the literature of media and foreign policy is concern over what one observer calls “media magnification” (Oakley in Serfaty, 1991: 104) or the power of the media to enhance the importance and presumably the power of marginalized issues promoters. The attention paid to terrorists, whether media should “play the game” and whether the public interest is better served by playing down public anxieties are focal points for this discussion. In this literature, the media is seen to be held hostage by hostage situations because they play into the press’s own need for crisis coverage and episodic reporting. The toll on the United States’ ability to negotiate privately and the effect on public trust in government efficacy are cited as reasons for avoiding this kind of reporting: “When (Walter) Cronkite signed off news broadcasts by saying, ‘And that’s the way it is, Friday, March 28, 1980 - the 146<sup>th</sup> day of captivity for the Americans in Iran,’ (Professor John) Silbey said the anchorman was saying that on that day, again, the American government was powerless.” (Adam Clymer, “The Body Politic,” *New York Times*, January 2, 2000: A20)

Richard Burt argues that “our conspicuous failure to construct a policy framework able to accommodate U.S.-Soviet competition and limited cooperation has led the media to exaggerate every twist and turn in the relationship.” (Burt in Serfaty, 1991: 139) Thus, Burt implies that when a powerful frame is not supplied by policy leaders, the news media must resort to episodic coverage, with the result, as Iyengar has demonstrated (Iyengar, 1987 and 1991), that the public is left with a series of isolated and disconnected instances. Perceptions of randomness, inevitability and helplessness are the result.

As Burt observes, “herd journalism” or the tendency by the media to cover the same issues in the same way, “leads to a ‘sequential’ approach to the news — a stream of different stories from day to day and week to week, reported without

context and perspective. The consequence is that some stories, such as the 'nuclear winter' debate, are reported only briefly and dropped. Other stories, like deployment of INF and arms control, are reported only in pieces, so that it is difficult for the public to establish a connection between NATO's 1979 double-track decision, the actual deployment of missiles in 1983, and the achievement of an agreement four years later." (Burt in Serfaty, 1991: 142)

In decrying "parachute journalism," David Gergen says "it was as if the lights went out over El Salvador, and the country's subsequent struggle to preserve democracy disappeared from sight. Out of sight, it also passed out of mind for American viewers. Television loves sagas in which someone wins and someone loses. It abhors long, tedious, complex stories and will usually ignore them if possible." (Gergen in Serfaty, 1991: 50)

Indeed, content analyses of El Salvador's civil war in both the North and South American press found "a lack of in-depth, analytical material...to place day-to-day events in a coherent framework." Even more interesting is the dominant role accorded to the United States in all media and the invisibility of foreign sources in the U.S. press, leading researchers to charge American journalists with "extreme parochialism." (Soderland and Schmitt in Graber, 1994: 45)

Yet the ability of highly placed officials to "manage news" to fit their intended frame of interpretation is also common. "Both in Washington and in Panama, U.S. officials spoonfed stories about Noriega that portrayed him as a corrupt dictator who had gone mad," writes David Gergen. " 'We kept explaining to our escorts that we needed to see troops on combat maneuvers, military police on patrol, wounded American soldiers, Panamanians being taken prisoner, whatever was happening today that hadn't been reported or photographed,' wrote one member of the pool...Officials at the Southern Command were not interested in showing journalists scenes that would detract from what they regarded as a military triumph." (Gergen in Serfaty, 1991: 59) While officials wished to frame a victory, journalists looked to frame a war.

As Philip Geyelin notes, "to the extent that first impressions matter, the government controls the first impression. The government also wields enormous influence over the packaging and presentation of news." The danger for governments, however, is when the press turns from "megaphone to monitor." (Geyelin in Serfaty, 1991: 24, 28).

"The scoop is all," writes former Arms Control Director Kenneth Adelman, so "the best way to keep an arms control proposal secret is to have the President announce it before the U.N. in a televised address. The worst way is to have negotiators describe it before the Soviets in the private negotiations." Adelman concludes that "the stampeding herd of the working press inverts its priorities of what is most important to peace and freedom. And getting such priorities right is, after all, the press's prime responsibility." (Adelman in Serfaty, 154)

Susan Moeller's examination of the frames journalists bring to the news event, the

“templates” from their professional conventions, provides further evidence of the importance of entertaining over educating. Those conventions, she argues, include a simple and recognizable chronology of events, sensationalized and exaggerated language, metaphors that resonate with Americans and an American connection (Moeller, “How the Media Cover the World, Global Interdependence Initiative, 2000).

## **2. Bad Views, or public opinion and the media’s role in forming and informing it**

Where the public gets its views, what views mean in light of relatively little knowledge of foreign history and geography, the difference between ephemeral opinion and enduring values, how the media cues the public, how media conventions favor elite opinion and lock out dissenters, what prevents the public from holding policy-makers accountable on foreign policy — these have been the main themes of the literature on public opinion and media with respect to international issues. The response to these questions is best summed up by David Paletz: “Public opinion is customarily portrayed as responding to, dependent on, even subservient to elite cues and media content...the public’s predominant attitude on issues of foreign policy can be characterized as government knows best.” (Paletz, 286) To this pronouncement must be added speculation about the role of experience in mediating the effects of news frames (Gamson, 1992), the potential for alternative sources to expand the range of possibilities presented to the public (Graber, 1994; Rotberg and Weiss, 1996) and incentives (including an increasingly hostile electorate) for policy-makers to examine public opinion. (Kull and Destler, 1999; Zaller in Bennett and Palatz, 1994) Absent these developments, however, scholars see a system in which the media is a proxy for public opinion in the eyes of elites (Kull and Destler, 1999; Alterman, 1998; Perlmutter, 1998) and also serves as a handmaiden to the opinions handed down by official sources. (Sigal, 1973; Linsky, 1986)

“The challenge of public opinion research,” writes Shanto Iyengar, “has been to reconcile the low levels of personal relevance and visibility of most political issues with the plethora of issue opinions...that large propositions of the population profess to hold. How do people manage to express opinions about civil rights legislation, economic assistance for the newly-freed nations of Eastern Europe, or President Bush’s performance at the international drug summit, when these matters are so remote from matters of daily life and so few citizens are politically informed?”(Iyengar, 1991, 7)

Indeed, even those who propose a greater role for the public in foreign policy admit the relative ignorance of Americans on most objective tests of their worldly knowledge, citing studies that show “Americans dead last (in a survey of eight democracies) in their knowledge of current international events.” (Adelman, 1998: 11) In a seminal review of public opinion, Michael Delli Carpini and Scot Keeter found that “the public’s level of political knowledge is little different today than it was fifty years ago” (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1989: 17), but argue that

“political knowledge in the United States should be viewed as an issue of political power and access rather than simply as a matter of personal choice and ability” (19). This line of reasoning is closely related to the discussion, in Section III below, of whether information is available to elites in ways that marginalize potential constituencies from policymaking.

William Gamson attempts to answer this same question by observing small group discussions among working-class people and concludes, “People are not so passive. People are not so dumb, and people negotiate with media messages in complicated ways that vary from issue to issue” (Gamson, 1996: 4). Gamson’s research on the Arab- Israeli conflict demonstrated that the cues media give about the role of Americans in this issue are limited to “citizen action...is relevant only insofar as it expresses the concerns and identifies of these two particular ethnic groups.” As a consequence, group discussions demonstrate that “domestic action of any kind on Arab-Israeli conflict is never brought into the conversation. Foreign collective action – in particular, terrorism – is often part of the discussions, but the speakers always assume the role of potential innocent victims.” (Gamson, 1997: 80)

Additionally, Gamson promotes a theory of political consciousness that emphasizes the role of “personal strategies” in mitigating media frames. Put simply, on those issues where Americans have access to mitigating information, such as personal or recounted experience, the effect of media exposure is lessened. The problem for issues that are far removed from opportunities for direct observation, like the Arab-Israeli conflict or nuclear power, is that “media discourse is typically their first resort.” (Gamson, 179) Doris Graber also refers to this “modulator model” that mitigates the effects of media dependent upon the audience’s relationship to the issue. (Graber, 1988) Gamson concludes with an admonition to those who seek to reframe issues for broader public participation that they “search for existing experiential knowledge that can be shown to be relevant for a broader collective action frame.” (Gamson, 184)

The problem for foreign policy that results from this research is then experiential. “Most of the public have no personal experience; they have not been to the developing world. They have no ballast – no equivalent sense of the norms, the unexceptional aspects of life in the developing world – to set against the constant reporting of the exceptional,” as Peter Adamson notes in an address to the UNICEF National Committees. (Cate in Rotberg and Weiss, 20)

“Evidence from a half a century of polling in the United States supports the proposition that the more citizens know about politics and public affairs, the more firmly they are wedded to elite and media perspectives on foreign policy issues,” says John Zaller. (Bennett and Palatz, 186) “Elite and media influence is likely to be limited to those citizens who are sufficiently attentive to politics to be aware of what elites are saying...and then the most politically aware citizens are most susceptible to influence because they are most heavily exposed to an elite consensus that they have no partisan basis for resisting.” (188) Zaller further suggests that “as news issues come up, the public looks to public statements by its political leaders — partisan, ideological, religious, ethnic, and so forth — to

decide what should be done, and is willing, within broad limits, to go along with what the majority of leaders advises. Then, as the consequences of elite initiatives become apparent in the form of policies that succeed or fail, the public judges its leaders accordingly..." (202)

There are two important points from this analysis. First, Zaller asserts that the sources who speak to political issues offer the public important cues about what to think about those issues. One problem with foreign policy coverage as it affects opinion, then, is the limited number of views reflected. The primary validators of expertise, says Robert Sahr (Spitzer, 154), are government officials. When journalists feel they need to demonstrate "balance," the president's party and the official opposition party leadership "define for journalists the range of legitimate debate regarding policy issues, both domestic and foreign...[and] journalists normally ignore those experts who do not hold such views." The overrepresentation of official sources in news reports, as opposed to "indigenous peoples," results to a great extent from the traditions of journalistic practice, but is perhaps heightened in foreign news. As Herbert Gans notes, "Actors outside the government hierarchy are harder to evaluate." (Gans, 1980: 148). Second, following government policy is "efficient" in determining the importance of any potential story. "Journalists often follow American foreign policy in selecting foreign news because it supplies a quick and easy importance consideration and because no other equally efficient model is available." (Gans, 149)

Moreover, there is not exactly a hue and cry from alternative spokespersons to suggest new frames of foreign affairs coverage. As Linsky relates from his study of policymakers, "by a substantial margin, those who worked in foreign policy were least likely among all the policy arenas to have initiated over 50 percent of the stories about their agencies." (Linsky, 92) This reactive or passive approach to international coverage assures that the same sources will continue to dominate the news, and that the public will have few indicators of divergent opinion.

"Experts, those perceived as having experience and technical knowledge and nonpartisan credibility...have very sizeable effects" on opinion change, according to Page, Shapiro and Dempsey. (Graber, 1994, 135) "A policy alternative that experts testify is ineffective or unworkable tends to lose public favor; an alternative hailed as efficient or necessary tends to gain favor...(G)roups perceived to represent narrow interests generally have no effect, or even a negative impact, on public opinion."

The second point Zaller raises is the public's ability or determination to hold candidates accountable for bad international policy-making. If this is the case, "Why don't elections reward those who get it right and replace those who don't?" ask Steven Kull and I. M. Destler. (1999: 229) Speculating about the public's frustrations over the policy gap that exists between elite views of foreign policy and popular opinion, these authors ask, "Why doesn't the prospect of electoral defeat drive practitioners – members of Congress in particular, but also high-level executive branch officials – to close the gap?"

Their answers are two-fold. One addresses the theme taken up in Section III, the

collusion between policy and media elites or, as Kull and Destler state it, “[A]ccurate readings of public attitudes is not a day-to-day necessity for U.S. foreign policy practitioners, and because the political market does not punish those who misread the public, myths about public attitudes can persist.” (247) The second explanation addresses Section V, or the myths that haunt policy-making: “Because of the end of the cold war and the rising conservative trend in American politics...it is understandable that the myth that did take hold was that of a public tired of involvement in the world, particularly multilateral involvement through the U.N.”

“Over the quarter-century from the Kennedy inaugural to the Reagan election, the American people have used evidence of policy success and failure supplied to them by the press in forming their evaluation of presidential performance,” says Richard Brody. (Bennett and Palatz, 210) “Given the fact that most people do not directly experience the world of politics, impressions of presidential success or failure are drawn from daily news.” In a study of public opinion and media coverage of the Gulf War, Brody demonstrates that “news reports of policy outcomes were the main ingredients of public evaluations of the president.” (225)

“Foreign policy issues,” Wander notes, “have traditionally been used to secure party advantage. But we can no longer afford political partisanship that exploits popular ignorance for the sake of taking office.” The debate is “distorted by a willingness on the part of the electorate to allow state managers, aspirants for office, along with their scientific and military ‘experts’ to set the agenda, determine the issues, and select the vocabulary. As a consequence, the debate over foreign policy rarely gets to fundamental issues, such as what will, in the long run, serve our ‘national interests.’” (Medhurst et al, 173)

The lack of contact between policy elites and the general public may make the former all the more reliant upon the media as a proxy for public opinion. (Alterman, 1998; Perlmutter, 1998) In a study of the actual impact of what he termed “icons of outrage,” or those famous photos widely credited with having had an impact on foreign policy attitudes among the public, David Perlmutter (1998) found instead a “first person effect where discourse elites feel that a picture has an effect on them (or should have one) and then, often falsely, project this effect on the general viewing public” (xiii). Since the public is not perceived by experts as being informed or rational about foreign policy choices, it is presumed that emotion will direct their attitudes. In fact, the only factor that was seen to alter public opinion conclusively was the number of American casualties associated with an intervention. (Perlmutter, 1998: 48; Mueller 1994)

However, the fact that these highly charged images produce little effect on the public does not mean that they do not drive policy. Indeed, Perlmutter found that pictures such as those associated with Tet or Tiananmen have a powerful effect on policy-makers. First, “policy is explained by pointing at specific images in the press” (5). Second, they speed up decision-making (4), an effect that will be discussed below in Section IV as a further tension between democracy and diplomacy. Third, the very belief in its power encourages a response; it makes issues more salient to discourse elites themselves.

### **3. Whose News, or tensions between elite diplomacy, democracy and mass media**

The debate over public opinion gives rise to the discussion of whether the mass media can and should perform the job of educating the electorate. (Alterman, 1998) “Social responsibility theory holds that the press, if necessary, in conjunction with government, should be engaged in building a more pluralist and more tolerant society. (Neuman, Just and Crigler, 1992: 118) “Informed citizens are better citizens in a number of ways consistent with normative and pragmatic notions of what constitutes good citizenship” (Delli, Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 18) But, if foreign policy is best performed behind closed doors, as many diplomats appear to believe, is the role of media to be confined to exposing scandal, explaining administrative policy and action, and “rallying round the President” (Mueller, 1994)? Or is the job of journalists to raise difficult questions about policy, acting as “the public’s surrogates”? (Seib, 1997) The identification of both reporters and policy experts as part of the “discourse elite” and their reliance upon each other for information about popular opinion (Sigal, 1973; Alterman, 1998; Perlmutter, 1998) gives rise to speculation about what political actors really know about the public’s foreign policy preferences. (Kull and Destler, 1999) Policymakers, it is argued, watch television to learn what the public thinks about a specific action and what interests the public overall, giving media the appearance of translator when it may in fact be nothing more than an echo chamber. (Perlmutter, 9) Real concern for the victims of wars, famines and displacements – and its correlate, compassion fatigue – may both be figments of elite fictions about the effects of pictorial journalism on the policy inattentive and illiterate public. (Perlmutter, 1998) Equally, the widely held view that Americans will call to pull out the troops at the slightest sign of American casualties may also prove an elite fiction. In a system in which public views don’t matter, these fictions circulate to the political advantage of elite policy-makers who use them as clubs to drive specific policies. (Alterman, 1998; Perlmutter, 1998, Wander in Medhurst et al, 1997)

“The modern day foreign policy establishment is less concerned with its own ability to conceal or disclose selectively than with the public’s ability to muck up its work with inconvenient interference and ignorant objection,” writes Eric Alterman. (1998: 7) “Its members contribute to the shielding of foreign policy from democratic scrutiny by treating foreign policy as if it occurred without significant domestic ramifications.”

Whether this ignorance of public opinion is intentional or merely convenient is open to speculation, but its effect is to allow policy-makers to avoid comparing the course laid down by professional diplomats with public preferences. “[T]he American people do not accept the foreign policy establishment’s definition of the nation’s priorities in the world but do not know how to force a reassessment.... They believe, by vast majorities, that ‘U.S. foreign policy should serve the U. S. domestic agenda rather than remain focused on traditional internationalist problems.’” (Alderman, 1998: 14; Times Mirror Center for the People and the

Press, news release, November 2, 1993)

Alderman's assessment echoes that of Steven Kull and I.M. Destler, who offer four explanations for the gap between public attitudes and policy practitioners' perceptions of the public: "[P]olicy practitioners fail to seek out information about public attitudes, incorrectly assume that the vocal public that opposes engagement is representative of the majority public, incorrectly assume that Congress and the media are mirrors of the public, and generally underestimate the public's ability to grasp the need for international engagement" (228). In this equation, policy elites are responsive to public surrogates, if not to the public, in the form of constituent/special interests and media.

The question that arises is: What is the incentive or motivation for taking the public pulse? If foreign policy is best left to those who have the requisite education and inside knowledge to make wise decisions, then why let the public into the discussion at all? One possibility might be fear of reprisal, but public acquiescence in foreign policy can always be assumed by the "dearth of large-scale protests." (Alderman, 165) Moreover, media reinforces policymakers' assessment that they are not out of sync with public sentiment. "Once information (both verbal and visual) actually appears in media...it may act to confirm its own importance to the discourse elites *even if they are the sole and original source of this information* [emphasis in the original]." (Perlmutter, 9) Another form of reprisal is electoral, but as Kull and Destler assert, that is seen as unlikely at virtually every level of elected politics.

"The American public does not give priority to international issues when it chooses public officials. The executive branch does not give priority to public opinion when it makes foreign policy. The legislative branch cares a great deal about public opinion, but not opinion on international matters and especially not opinion on those matters as it is reflected in polls. Members of Congress have no overriding stake in getting that opinion right because they are unlikely to be punished by voters for getting it wrong. And individual policy practitioners, particularly in the executive branch, do not challenge the widely held belief in public neoisolationism because they fear they will be labeled unrealistic or even naive, and that this will undercut their influence." (Kull and Destler, 1999, 230)

Rather than focusing on what the public needs or wants to know, media and legislators often focus on exposure of the executive branch, which is seen as the true source of policy direction. "Legislators and journalists," writes Robert J. Kurz (in Serfaty, 1991: 12) "share a common rivalry against the executive" as they all "seek to discover what the executive is up to, uncover wrongdoing, or expose inherent contradictions in policies or in their implementation."

Public officials routinely discount polling data, according to Kull and Destler. "The government's willingness to mislead the public for political purposes, coupled with the public's own well-documented ignorance about even the broadest outlines of major foreign policy issues, makes polling data on these issues particularly suspect. Governing elites believe themselves justified in ignoring the professed desires of large majorities of the American people because,

lacking both information and access to relevant levers of power, those majorities have no means of sanction....[R]esearch indicates that approximately one-third of the time, U.S. foreign policy fails to reflect what the public says it wants.” (Alderman, 166)

Another tension in this relationship between the channels of diplomacy and the channels of information lies in the speed with which information is communicated to the public. As Perlmutter (3) has observed, “The instantaneousness of media imagery bypasses the normal channels of political decision-making [and]...is seen as a threat to the traditional mechanisms and timetables of foreign affairs decisionmaking.... The CNN phenomenon...creates a tension with the measured and deliberative folkways of national decision makers.” In effect, news forces the hand of foreign policy-makers in ways they resent and report as disruptive to successful policy outcomes. “Sensational news undercuts policymakers’ caution,” concludes Philip Seib (1997, xvi). “Dramatic television pictures of brutalized civilians can create pressures to act that transcend concerns about the absence of a compelling national interest. Presidents are susceptible to such pressures.”

Moreover, the fact that news is “out of control” – especially television and Internet reporting – in ways that violate the old collusion between newsmakers and policy-makers, violates the sense of hierarchy so entrenched in military and diplomatic life. “We are witnessing the departure of the gatekeepers,” says David Webster in an assessment of the impact of new technologies on the old relationship between media and foreign affairs. The result is the creation of a “populist diplomacy.” “By creating an instantaneous transborder imagery difficult to assess and impossible to control, it has added to the complexity of international relationships.” (Serfaty, 221)

Dean Rusk said that “the press operates in a field of opinion and officers of government operate in a field of decision.” (Linsky, 205) Simply put, a role has yet to be asserted with sufficient power to get the public into the foreign policy debate.

Civic journalism theorist Jay Rosen argues that journalists need a “compelling public function” and suggests that it should be as “advocates for the kind of serious talk a mature polity requires... They should announce and publicly defend their legitimate agenda: to make politics ‘go well,’ in the sense of producing a useful dialogue, where we can know in common what we cannot know alone and where the true problems of the political community come under serious discussion.” From the perspective of most scholars, foreign affairs reporting remains far from this ideal, both in intent and effect.

#### **4. Shutterbug Diplomacy, or the press as policymaker**

While most observers of foreign policy in recent years acknowledge the growing influence of media on policy-makers, there is no consensus on the degree to which this has changed, the nature of the change, or whether the change is

desirable or lamentable. This literature tends to look at the way news coverage sets the agenda, distorts or distracts, and frames the issues for policy-makers. It also takes up the way policymakers attempt to influence coverage, the amount of time they spend doing so, and their success in managing their press relations. In general, press coverage is seen as having a stronger effect on the foreign policy agenda than on domestic issues. (Linksy, 1986) Several studies show that the press has consciously played a role in shaping foreign policy, sometimes to its own ends (Evensen in Graber, 240) sometimes as part of its perception of patriotic duty to support a sitting president during foreign policy crises (the “rally phenomenon” as Mueller and Brody call it), and sometimes simply because the press lacks direct access to news events and sources. (Hatchen in Graber, 1994) The result of media management by the military is a “picture book war” with a vast global audience, sometimes called the “CNN effect,” in which the audience is spared the grim details of conflict. Media attention to certain policies can catapult them onto the public agenda, when diplomatic or semi-private negotiations were preferred by policy-makers. (O’Heffernan in Graber, 1994) At the same time, the media are seen as being over-reliant on government officials who serve as their prime sources. (Bennett in Bennett and Palatz, 1994; Cohen in Bennett and Palatz, 1994; Sigal, 1973; Zaller in Bennett and Palatz, 1994) Throughout the literature, the role of “leaks” occupies a large portion of the debate, especially in assessing the manipulation of policy through the media.

Bernard C. Cohen, arguably the dean of the study of media and foreign policy, reviewing the last 30 years of related scholarship, points to the increasing importance of television journalism as one of the most important changes. “While the media...have always been able to force a different set of priorities on policy makers from those they themselves would otherwise prefer, in the past that has required a convergence of all the media in pursuit of agreed standards of ‘news.’ Now television alone, in pursuit of its own independent and unique norms, can do it. ‘Elite dissensus,’ or even ‘official conflict’ will matter less in the shaping of foreign policy news than the fully opened eye of the television camera.” (Cohen in Bennett and Palatz, 1994: 10)

Indeed, Cohen’s famous dictum remains one of the cautionary tales about media effect and distortion: “[T]he press...may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*.” (Cohen, 1963: 13) It is precisely this ability to set the public agenda by turning a beacon on one crisis over another, one area of the world over another, that is often decried by policy-makers.

In his earlier work, Cohen went so far as to suggest that the press is an “intelligence service” or agent to the political process, providing the facts and analysis that give policy-makers and the public the knowledge they need to make “sound foreign policy decisions.” Linksy asserts that officials need to think about reporters as “colleagues in public affairs.” (Linksy, 1986: 205) This view sets up the critique explored above (see Section I), as it allows critics to measure the utility of current news against such demonstrable policy goals as accuracy, reliability, responsibility and verification.

While policy-makers may pay little attention to the public as represented in polls, they pay an inordinate amount of attention to the public's surrogate, the media. As former investigative journalist and arms control negotiator Richard Burt opines, "One thing is clear: U.S. officials spend far more time worrying about what the news media is saying about them and their decisions than is commonly understood by either the public or the media themselves. Early morning staff meetings in government departments focus as much on press problems as 'real' problems, as much on how to depict a policy to the press as on what policy should be in the first place. And the higher one goes within the bureaucracy, the more time is devoted to press 'spin control' and damage-limitation." With a decline in investigative journalism, Burt worries that this kind of foreign policy coverage – in which leaders are taken to task for weapons systems and strategies not explained to the public – "will be replaced by a People Magazine approach focusing on personalities and bureaucratic in-fighting while ignoring the substance of policy issues" with the result that "real issues are forgotten." (Burt in Serfaty, 1991, 146, 144)

"It is impossible to separate the role of the press from the policymaking.... That pattern was repeated throughout our three years of research into how the press affects policymaking," concludes Martin Linsky. The implications of this impact, however, pose problems for the way the members of the press conceptualize their role. If they are actors, as Linsky and others assert, then they are to some degree part of a government system, not entirely outside it. This raises questions about the impact of objectivity as well as ethics and responsibility — issues on the other side of news delivery that journalists have traditionally shied away from. As Linsky puts it, "Walter Pincus would not be relieved of some responsibility for the neutron bomb deferral just because he is a reporter." (Linsky, 1986, 35, 88)

Cohen's early observation that "at times [State] Department policy is fashioned in direct response to press opinion" (Cohen, 1963, 234) has led to the coinage of the media as "surrogate state department." (Evensen in Graber, 1991: 241) Instances of intentional influencing of policy by media are seen as evidence of the media's desire to be a player. "The editorial board of the *New York Times* considered the newspaper as uniquely qualified to influence the course of American foreign policy at the coming of the Cold War. The paper's publisher saw the *Times* as an American institution now called upon to preserve the country's basic freedoms through vigorous editorial crusading," which Evensen traces in its directing U.S. Middle East policies against President Truman's wishes.

Even when policy-makers are shown to be attentive to the public impact of news revelations, it is more likely to be in service to damage control than to democracy. Negative stories were found to command greater attention and reaction from policy-makers than positive stories. (Linsky, 142) "Twice as many of the senior officials in our survey believe that positive coverage has no effect as believe that about negative coverage." "If the mass-marketing of foreign policy has become doctrine, it then becomes important to decide whether these sales efforts — which also rely on media imagery — create more demagoguery than democracy in foreign affairs," says W. Lance Bennett. (Bennett and Palatz, 14)

Those who look to democratize foreign policy question whether there is any useful distinction between reporters and policy-makers, as members of the same elite who often hold both jobs. “The elite foreign policy media views itself as very much a part of the policy-making establishment – witness the recent shuttling back and forth of such reporter/policymakers as Leslie H. Gelb, Richard K. Burt, and Strobe Talbott.” (Alterman, 1998: 9)

Add to this dynamic the interplay between the press and policy-makers that goes on under the private cloak of anonymity — anonymous background provided to the media, suggestions of sources and outright leaks. Forty-two percent of the officials captured in Linsky’s study of federal policy-makers said they leaked, a number he suggests is understated. (Linsky, 1986: 172) While leaks are often viewed as bringing the public into a discussion that was meant to stay secret, they more often have the opposite effect, with policy-makers circling the wagons to shut out further leaking. What is incontestable is that the press is given a role in the policy arena, albeit a circumscribed and directed one, through its access to private information. To the extent that it finds such a role irresistible, the press becomes a factor in decision-making, far removed from its role as translator to the public. The dependency this suggests of press on policy-maker for conferral of status further confuses the objective distance between the two estates.

## **5. Getting Framed, or the language of foreign policy debate and its implications**

In addition to the media’s ability to set the public and policy agendas, its storytelling power also conveys or “cues” meaning. Journalists are “managers of the symbolic arena.” (Gans, 298) And the way a story is framed has important consequences for public understanding and policy preference. (Iyengar, 1994) As we see the same story elements repeated over time, a “structure of expectation” is set up which, in turn, allows us to recognize these familiar parables, and to exclude unfamiliar data and interpretations. (Tannen, 1993) While convenient and efficient, this framing severely limits our ability to envision what is possible, as opposed to what is familiar. Gamson underscores the problems that arise when one works only within media possibilities. “If we relied solely on mass media samples to identify conceptual frames, we would run the risk of missing frames that, although culturally available, have no visibility in media discourse.” (Gamson, 1997: 215) Journalists bring to their work both professional conventions of storytelling (Moeller, 1999) and values that inform the storyline. (Gans, 1980) The result is what civic journalism theorist Jay Rosen describes as a “master narrative” or “the story that produces all the other stories...the Big Story that lends coherence and shape to all the little stories journalists tell.” (Rosen, 1995) The choice of language, the metaphorical patterns, and the frames of meaning conveyed through the press and its expert sources drive reasoning (Lakoff, 1996), often resulting in support for foreign policies that may in fact be antithetical to the public’s innate values. (Kull and Destler, 1999) “Rhetorical motives...have evolved over four decades into powerful conventions of public discourse that diminish the political imagination, undermine the incentive to

envision better alternatives, and thus reduce the scope of practical options available to leaders of both nations. In short, the received wisdom of the Cold War rhetoric prescribes a narrow range of choices for managing international relations realistically. Yet, the stuff of which these durable motives are made is mere metaphor.” (Ivie in Medhurst et al, 1997: 71) While this literature is not as voluminous as those we have considered in other sections, there is nevertheless strong precedent for the focus of the Global Interdependence Initiative on the importance of framing.

At the simplest level, one sees “the framing wars,” as media scholar Charlotte Ryan has dubbed them, in fights over naming. Policy-makers vie for the early identification of a proposal in the media. During the much discussed flap over the neutron bomb, the Carter administration seriously considered changing its name to the “reduced blast/enhanced radiation weapon.” (Linsky, 1986: 29) While this was ridiculed in the press, it was precisely because the administration was late in recognizing that words matter that they were forced to attempt to substitute a positive moniker for what the press had termed a “killer warhead.” “The cherished conservative accusation of ideological bias in the press is wrong where commonly applied, in terms of news stories,” writes Kenneth Adelman. “It is, however, correct where seldom applied, in terms of language choice.” Press adherence to the “Star Wars” moniker for the Reagan research program is but one of many subtle “framings” that confirm this assertion.

At a more sophisticated level, scholars examine what gets selected for coverage and how it gets covered to determine the frames that are being passed to the public as constituting “international issues” worthy of their attention. And, while some critics have argued that the “problem” with foreign news is simply that it is “too foreign” (Hamilton, 1986), others argue that the same values or frames are evident in the selection of foreign news as there are in domestic news. In a study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time 1967 - 1975, Herbert Gans found that most foreign news stories fell into seven categories:

- 1) American activities in a foreign country
- 2) Foreign activities that affect Americans and American policy
- 3) Communist bloc country activities
- 4) Elections and other peaceful changes in government personnel
- 5) Political conflict and protest
- 6) Disasters
- 7) The excesses of dictatorship (Gans, 31-37)

“Foreign news deals either with stories thought relevant to Americans or American interests; with the same themes and topics as domestic news; or when the topics are distinctive, with interpretations that apply American values. Because American news media devote less air time or print space to foreign news than to domestic news, they often limit themselves only to the most dramatic overseas event.” (Gans, 37)

These stories are not value-neutral, but come complete with plot, conflict and moral. As Susan Moeller has suggested, if the story does not fit the conventions of journalism, it is unlikely to get covered. (Moeller, 1999) With respect to humanitarian crises, “The media’s ‘scripted morality play’ includes the victims (‘teeming masses of suffering Africans or Asians’); the heroes (usually ‘angels’ from the Red Cross and private relief agencies); and the villains (‘UN bureaucrats’ and ‘local military authorities’),” according to John Hammoc and Joel Charny. (Rotberg and Weiss, 1996: 7). “Most NGOs are happy with this script; it enhances their own visibility and helps their fundraising efforts” but it ultimately “works against the long-term interests of relief organizations.”

These stories are problematic over the long run because they attach to mental models and belief systems that the public holds and that can, in some cases, become barriers to more progressive views. In exploiting the public’s beliefs, one adds to the “structure of expectation” that this model will continue to explain reality in the future. As policy goals shift, the old models do not. In an exploration of “The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy” (Medhurst, 1997), Philip Wander analyzes the escalation of conflict in Vietnam as an evolution of worldview from “technocratic realism” with its cult of expertise to the devil-theory of prophetic dualism. In the one, teams of experts were dispatched to the Third World in a kind of globalization of the domestic War on Poverty, with the expectation that enlightened management would triumph over debate and conflict. “Instead of a Holy War...technocratic realism looked to peaceful, through vigorous, competition. How does one win such a contest? Not through harsh religious sentiments, but through hard-headed calculation.” But this worldview came with entailments. “Technocratic realism has, from an official point of view, the advantage of doing away with the need to consult those affected by specific policies about their social, political, or economic preferences. Natives are not in the position to make informed judgments. They do not possess the facts. They have no experience in the potential of modern techniques for nation building.” By contrast, “the tendency to treat the other side as the ‘enemy,’ the conflict as irreconcilable, and the struggle as a Holy War” became increasingly evident with the “growing need to mobilize public opinion in the United States for what could no longer be characterized as advisory, logistical, or merely technical assistance, but had become or was about to become an even larger military effort.” (168)

Why, then, can’t we simply “reframe” the debate by substituting a new metaphor or by talking back to the old assumptions? What follows are three case studies of “reframing” attempts, aimed at reversing the negative consequences of what are perceived to be misguided perspectives on foreign policy. These three cases come from diverse sources: from the field of rhetoric, Robert Ivie’s historical study of three policy shapers, what they tried to do and why they failed; from policymaker and political scientist Robert Reich, an analysis of the myths that drive conservative reasoning on foreign policy, and suggestions for a new liberal model; and from theorists of international relations Richard Mansbach and John Vasquez, evidence that the old paradigms that guided decision-making on foreign policy are bankrupt for reasons that have to do with the limitations of their worldview, and some suggestions for elements of the new frames.

In “Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War Idealists,” Robert L. Ivie analyzes the rhetorical inventions of three reframers — Henry Wallace, J. William Fulbright and Helen Caldicott — and concludes that “the metaphorical concepts guiding ‘idealist’ rhetoric throughout the Cold War have been self-defeating largely because they have promoted a reversal, rather than a transcendence, of the conventional image of a barbarian threat to civilization. Americans traditionally have exonerated themselves of any guilt for war, hot or cold, by decivilizing the image of their adversaries.... Contrary to tradition, Cold War ‘idealists’ have attempted to decivilize America’s image rather than the enemy’s.” (Ivie, 119)

Henry Wallace “called for playing by the rules in a friendly game of power politics,” but “said hardly anything to assure the public of Russian’s inherent goodwill and commitment to fair competition” while continuing to blame the United States. While Wallace talked about a sick America, Fulbright emphasized its psychological immaturity. Ivie finds that Senator Fulbright’s “metaphorical system stressed the culpability of the United States almost exclusively” and failed to explain how Soviet behavior “could be expected to promote accommodation over confrontation.” Finally, Caldicott’s imagery portrays an America gone mad and the Soviet Union as the “victim of America’s craziness.” In all three cases, Ivie concludes that the metaphorical reframing was doomed to failure because it failed to take into account the legacy of the old frames, the “learned” and reinforced reality of the Soviets as a problem as well as the entrenched myth of America as good and righteous.

Ivie concludes his analysis by calling for a “replacement metaphor” that supercedes “the traditional opposition of savagery and civilization. He went so far as to outline its contents, based on his reading of current frames applied to foreign policy and the lack of success of the reframes cited above:

It must encompass “the superpowers within the same system and (identify) a common enemy.” It “must take into account the evidence that both parties are rational and irrational, aggressive and pacific, competitive and cooperative, independent and interdependent. It cannot ignore, for instance, established perceptions that the Soviets are obsessed with a paranoid desire for security.... It cannot deflect attention, though, from other less threatening observations about the Soviets: that they possess a rich culture, suffer from limited resources and an inefficient economy, are basically conservative managers and technologists.... The replacement metaphor must serve the goal of coexistence by redefining the ideal of global freedom (or world Communism) to one of mutual security and continued competition...a metaphor that legitimizes collaboration between antagonists. Each must have something to lose from the other’s demise and something to gain from the other’s survival.” (Ivie in Medhurst et al, 121)

We’ve quoted from this author at length because, although the characteristics of the new metaphor are viewed within the narrow confines of Cold War politics, they take on new meaning as part of the “fairy tale” presented by George Lakoff in “Metaphorical Thought in Foreign Policy” (Global Interdependence Initiative, 2000), and as applied by that author to the politics of the Persian Gulf and

Kosovo, two distinctly post-Cold War battles that nevertheless continue to reflect the inclination to demonization, dualism and reductionism.

But it is not merely scholars of language and rhetoric who have been driven to search for new frames of communication in order to reorient public opinion. In “Tales of A New America” (Times Books, 1987), political scientist and former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich identifies four “myths” of American culture which he asserts guide our reasoning about political events:

Reich identifies these four parables as:

- 1) The Rot at the Top, or stories of corruption in high places and conspiracies against the public;
- 2) The Triumphant Individual, or hard work pays off more than class privilege;
- 3) The Benign Community of neighbors helping each other; and
- 4) The Mob at the Gates, or how the society is coming apart from an excess of democratic permissiveness.

For each myth, Reich describes the prevailing versions that arise from our culture, their implications on a number of global and international issues, and suggests the outline of new myths to inform more progressive public policies. With respect to global issues, Reich recounts the tensions between conservative and liberal views as playing out the “Mob at the Gates” myth:

“Consider, first, the new conservative position on foreign policy. For years liberals had sought to appease the Soviets, placate the less-developed nations of the Third World, and coddle our allies. As a result, the story goes, we became an easy mark. The Mob at the Gates took advantage of us. Our defenses were down, the Soviets surged ahead of us in armaments.... Simultaneously, the United States was being taken for a ride by Third World nations that demanded our aid but persistently sided with our adversaries and voted against us at the United Nations. Drug traffickers in Asia and Latin America, undeterred by cynical governments, pump poisons into our cities. Iranian thugs humiliated us; terrorists kill and maim at will. Even our allies have refused to cooperate with us in limiting East-West trade.”

“Liberal indulgence...is thought to have threatened our very survival. The problem, thus posed, admits of only one approach. We must impose discipline. We must regain our credibility, and the way to do that is to get tough with this Mob at the Gates. We should dramatically increase our military defenses...give aid to Third World nations only when they play on our side, and crack down on international terrorists without undue squeamishness about who gets in the way. We should ‘play hardball’ with our allies on trade and defense...”

Reich suggests that this myth allows policy debates to be confined to questions of “being either tough or generous toward ‘them.’” Instead, he proposes a substitution myth. “The proper way to frame the issue is neither as a matter of charity and appeasement nor as a ploy in a competitive struggle, but rather as an

expression of a larger and more enlightened self-interest. The new public philosophy would reject the notion — so deeply embedded within both liberal conciliation and conservative pugnacity — that the central competition of our age is over the division of a fixed quantity of global wealth.... We can do better than we have done in casting such competition not as a struggle for survival, but as a contest in which even the laggards can gain enormously. The faster and less traumatic the transition is for any one group or nation, the smoother and more rewarding it may be for everyone else. Rather than seek to constrain or appease an apparent Mob at the Gates, we would do better to concern ourselves with the ecology of the world economy as it develops and adapts. International policies, if informed by such vision, would aim to make manifest interdependencies and build new institutions to manage reciprocal obligations.... Our trade policies would welcome the transfer of basic industries to poorer nations, steering around the grim choice between deindustrialization and protection. The goal would be to orchestrate a balanced global expansion of wealth creation and exchange; as ‘they’ progressed, so would we.... To the extent we solidified our reputation for pursuing our own interests but respecting those of others, for sincerely seeking to identify and act on opportunities for mutual gains, it would become increasingly difficult for our detractors to plausibly cast the United States as either global patsy or global bully.” (Reich, 1987: 244-45)

While the majority of the literature reviewed in this paper addresses communications issues and foreign policy, it is instructive to note that the search for “a new paradigm for global politics” has arisen, quite independently of this literature, from among those who study political theory and who have identified the bankruptcy of old models as predictive of foreign policy outcomes. Most strikingly, Richard W. Mansbach and John A. Vasquez (1981) contend that the dominant paradigm of foreign policy has “failed to account for and to predict recent political events.” (12)

“Since the birth of the modern nation-state in Western Europe, a single paradigm has held sway over efforts to theorize about global politics. Various called ‘power politics,’ the ‘billiard ball model,’ ‘political realism,’ and the ‘state-centric’ model, this paradigm assumes global politics to be a contest for power among sovereign nation-states in an anarchic environment” (3). They deconstruct this theory as follows:

- 1) Nation-states and/or their decision-makers are the most important set of actors to examine in order to account for behavior in international politics.
- 2) Political life is bifurcated into “domestic” and “international” spheres, each subject to its own characteristic traits and laws of behavior.
- 3) International relations is the struggle for power and peace. This struggle constitutes a single issue occurring in a single system and entails a ceaseless and repetitive competition for the single stake of power. Understanding how and why the struggle occurs and suggesting ways for regulating it is the purpose of the discipline. (5)

The problem with this model, these authors suggest, is two-fold. First, it has failed utterly to predict outcomes. And second, it has prevented “the analysis of a wide range of *logically* possible and empirically interesting models of world politics” (7). In its stead, these authors propose moving from “the issue of power to the power of issues,” and outline a new paradigm which posits, among other elements, “a rejection of the dichotomy between international and domestic politics,” a rejection of the notion that the “pursuit of power” constitutes the “single end of political man” in favor of diverse and multiple values, and greater attention to “the process by which issues are formed, placed upon a global agenda, and taken off that agenda.” (68-73)

Even in areas where we least expect to find communications considerations in foreign policy-making, we discover them. It is because of this recognition of the power of language to frame the debate, to drive reasoning and decision-making, to constrain and catalyze public debate, to map what is possible and what is merely recognizable, that strategic frame analysis remains highly germane to the goals of the Global Interdependence Initiative. Drawing from the work of scholars and practitioners who precede this effort, we are better able to initiate new research that tackles many of the core problems associated with communicating international issues.

## **Conclusion**

Returning to Seattle, we begin to see the event as a kind of political calculus. First, we can see the media as the symbolic arena in which two sides waged framing wars for public attention and policy action. In light of the fact that few policy-makers were likely to pay attention to public opinion showing widespread unease with closed trading meetings or environmental effects implicit in trade agreements, the contestors did not attempt to woo policy-makers with polls. Rather, they used a vocal minority to command media attention and staged an event that conformed to the conventions of journalism: symbols, pictures, events. They even used a conflict frame to assure that it would qualify as news. That conflict frame also anointed new sources who were used to speak against the dominant position; the heads of contesting organizations became opposition leaders, used to balance the opinions of the WTO officials. As the news “rolled out” day after day, reporters looked for new angles to freshen coverage, and often ended up inadvertently providing context and in-depth reporting on the issues that gave rise to the fight. Opinion and editorial pages opened up to “outsiders” who had to be asked to tell their side to achieve “balance.”

Acknowledging the role the media plays as the public’s proxy for policy-makers, the contestors simulated public opinion. Whether the public understood exactly “what that was all about” was to some extent irrelevant in this contest, as the policy-makers were unlikely to have access to the public or to believe that public opinion should drive policy. Bad news got their attention where being out of sync with public views would not have. In this way, the media’s willingness to cover made it a policy player, pushing issues to the top of the news that had not been

there before. The vivid pictures, “icons of outrage,” became policy prodders, as WTO officials realized that they were being broadcast around the world. The “CNN effect” forced policy-makers, from Clinton and Gore to Bradley and McCain, to take a stand on the WTO.

Whether, in fact, the public was informed or influenced substantively by these events remains to be seen. It is possible, for example, that the very vividness of the images, what qualified the contestors for news in the first place, shielded the public from the deeper content of the story, and that the drama of protestors and looters outweighed the issues. Media effects experiments have much to tell us in this regard. Whether the contestors can sustain their pressure on policy-makers after the event is history, and whether they can do this without evidence of broad public concern expressed on media-covered stages like candidate forums are also important questions. But as far as a single event can go in providing a case study rich in the application of communications principles, the battle in Seattle delivered. This is not meant to imply a judgment about the merits of either side, but rather to acknowledge the utility of the literature of media and foreign policy as a prism for understanding a given event. Evidence of its endurance as a turning point, and as a “reframe,” remain to be seen.

## **Addendum: Recommendations from the Literature**

*There are a number of specific programmatic (as opposed to research) recommendations that occur in the literature summarized above. We offer them here in the spirit of reconsideration.*

Charles Bailey, a former editor of the *Minneapolis Tribune*, proposes that foreign news be given “a local angle, that transforms foreign news into local news, with an explicit emphasis on ‘the domestic economic impact of international developments.’” (Bailey in Serfaty, 1991, 14) Bailey took John Maxwell Hamilton’s suggestions and devoted extensive coverage to localized international coverage in the *Tribune*. He stresses that the key variable in their success was relevance: “What does this story mean to the people who read this newspaper, who earn a living in this community? How is this news connected to this church, this business, these jobs, this farm co-op?” (185). Bailey also sees a growing role for newspapers to take over this arena: “[T]oday the public is receiving a growing portion of its news from a medium whose broadcast outlets seem likely to devote a shrinking share of their programming to serious coverage of foreign affairs...Newspapers have a chance not only to continue their agenda setting role but also to buttress their status as the dominant provider of international news to those members of the public who care about it” (181-2). Hamilton’s “how to guide” might be updated to catch up with the now robust civic journalism movement that has arisen since its publication.

Kenneth Adelman recalls topical retreats and press seminars sponsored by the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Aspen Institute in the 1980s that allowed more contextualized and lengthy explorations of a single foreign policy issue by experts and reporters. The very composition of these meetings — blending administration spokespersons with critics and outsiders — helped draw serious reporters and expand their outlook (Adelman in Serfaty, 1991, 158).

Fred Cate proposes that NGOs combine to “designate and train development journalists” (Cate in Rotberg and Weiss, 25), saving media outlets time for on the scene reporting and providing the kind of in-depth backgrounding no longer supported within news budgets. Cate also suggests investing in “creative alternative programming,” such as cable shows.

Robert McFarlane echoes the suggestion put forth above by Charles Bailey that we domesticate foreign policy, but suggests that we need to do so not merely through media but also through our elementary education system. “The only way to begin to enlighten an isolationist society about its dependence upon the world abroad – how our jobs, paychecks and welfare, from Des Moines, Iowa, to

Graham, Texas, are affected by foreign events – is through systematic education. Only by cranking a generation of Americans through a school system that begins (for a change) to teach things foreign — from language and geography to history, comparative politics and economics — will we begin to produce an electorate that says, “Gee, this is important to me. I should care about the competence of our leaders in these areas” (McFarlane in Serfaty, 1991, 172).

Eric Alterman combines proposals put forth by Walter Lippmann and James Fishkin to suggest the creation of a panel of ordinary American citizens who would serve as an appointed proxy for public opinion over a set period of time. These people would be “hired by the American public to be full-time citizens and foreign policy jurors for a one-time period of, say, six years (Alterman, 1998, 172).

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