

FILLING THE THREAT VACUUM:
News Objectivity in the Transformation of
the Ideology of World Order

by

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B.A., University of Waterloo, 1990

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

ACCEPTED

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

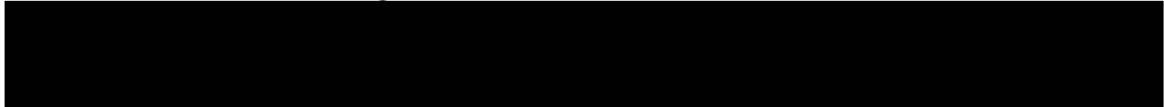

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores popular understandings of world politics through an analysis of mass media news coverage of three recent events: the 1986 bombing of Libya, the 1989 invasion of Panama, and the 1991 war against Iraq. These events are situated in an historical materialist theory of politics and ideology, and this framework is used to explain the ways in which news coverage is conditioned by economic and political power.

By examining these three events, important features of the media industry can be observed. These events represent the first military actions by the U.S. against third world states which were not described in popular understandings as attempts to contain Communist expansion. With the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the traditional role of the U.S. military as a global enforcer of capitalism required new justifications; the construction of these new justifications provides an opportunity to observe the process of ideological control in operation.

The survey of the coverage of these events reveals that the claims made by the state about its actions, about the actions of the states identified as enemies, and about the consequences of its acts, are rarely criticized. Information

that might lead the audience to understand these events other than as the response by the U.S. to a dangerous threat was usually treated as less important than claims of the U.S. demonstrating the existence of that threat. Analysis of the events almost universally accepted the importance of these threats to Western interests.

Having examined this coverage, some well-known explanations of the ideological function of the mass media are considered. While most of these theories possess some validity, it is suggested that an adequate understanding of the media requires a synthesis of various theoretical devices, which can be united around the central requirement of news, the demand for "objectivity."

The thesis argues that this criterion arises from the economic structure of the media as a monopoly capitalist industry, and leads the media to adopt an essentially uncritical stance toward the state as a source of information. Because of this stance, information and analysis that would support an understanding critical of the objectives of the capitalist state are routinely marginalized, reinforcing the dominant ideology of the world order.

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Acknowledgements

The process of creation of this thesis owes much to many who have helped in various ways. In particular, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of my committee for their patience and commitment to me and my education. I would also like to extend my gratitude to all of those from whom I have borrowed books over the last several years.

INTRODUCTION

Those who participate in struggles against oppression generally recognize the ideological nature of those struggles. The existing social order, and the ideas that accompany it, enjoy a relatively widespread acceptance among members of society. A certain set of ideas can be said to be dominant, in that they are rarely contested in public discourse. A challenge to these ideas must be the focus of any attempt to change this order.

One institution that plays an important role in public discourse is the mass media, which, it is generally recognized, functions to reinforce the dominant ideas. But any kind of ideological struggle requires a means of communicating ideas that challenge the dominant ones to members of society at large. Since the media are the primary institutions within our society with this function, activists engaged in struggles often rely on the media to convey their messages and ideas to others. This creates a dilemma, for in order to effectively express dissenting opinions, they must rely on an institution that generally serves as an obstacle to attempts to change the order of society.

Of course, that the media generally reinforces the

dominant ideas does not mean that it will never express critical opinions. To explore the extent to which they are able to communicate such ideas, an investigation of the processes at work in the media is essential. A more detailed understanding of the process by which the mass media reinforces the dominant ideas is necessary, in order to judge how, and why, the media functions in this way.

But determining how and why ideas are reinforced is difficult, especially during periods in which the dominant ideas are stable; that is, when the dominant ideas are successfully being reinforced, and alternatives do not appear. Fortunately, recent years have seen important changes in the structure of political relations that have led to changes in the dominant ideas. These changes have created an opportunity to study the processes involved in the reproduction of ideology, as it makes it possible to observe the factors directing changes to the ideology.

Among the most important of the different oppressions that can be identified as part of the existing organization of global society is the exploitation of the third world by the first world. This relation has been the subject of protest in the past, and the way it is represented in the mass media is an important consideration. It is the representation of this relation which has undergone recent change.

Until recently, struggles against this exploitation have had to challenge the dominant ideology of the cold war,

including the presentation of the threat of the Soviet Union. The presentation of this threat was an obstacle to struggle because the oppression of various forms of resistance to that exploitation was generally justified as an attempt to contain the expansion of the Soviet Union. This served to obscure the power relations between the first and third world.

This threat has, however, almost completely disappeared. Since it functioned to contain opposition to imperialism, it might seem that the end of the cold war would open greater space for such opposition. Hackett, in his discussion of the repercussions of the end of the cold war, makes such an argument. He claims that:

Radical critiques of the social order can potentially unfold without being hampered by the charge of serving a powerful and menacing external enemy.¹

It is in response to this idea more than any other that the present argument is presented.

However, the events of the last few years do not seem to sustain this view. Recent changes to the world order have not led to increased popular opposition to imperialism, nor has such opposition been expressed in the mass media any more frequently since the end of the cold war.

The continued popularity of imperialism, and the relative lack of resistance based on a radical critique, indicate that some new justifications for the oppression of the third world have come to be accepted. Examining how the Soviet threat was

1 News and Dissent, p. 294.

replaced with such new justifications can illuminate how dominant ideas are reinforced. Specifically, for this analysis, I have examined mass media coverage of three events since the end of the cold war in which the oppressive nature of international relations was most evident, those being the U.S. attack on Libya in 1986, the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989, and the war against Iraq in 1991.

We might have expected these events to be most likely to lead to radical critiques of the social order and the ideas that support it, since they were not represented as attempts to contain communist expansion. But they did not evoke a significant degree of opposition from the population of the first world. Thus the way these events are interpreted is very important to the reinforcing of popular understandings of the world.

The first chapter describes in greater detail the assumptions and the theoretical framework that inform the analysis. It discusses the historical materialist understanding of social reality that underlies this kind of study, and applies that understanding to the current world order. The world order includes an ideological component which is described in greater detail in order to make clear the relevance of the coverage of events discussed.

The next three sections describe the coverage of these three instances of military action against the third world,

and the events that led up to them. These case studies, drawn from comprehensive inspection of some of Canada's major daily newspapers, indicate not just that the media serves to reinforce the most widespread understandings of the world, but also indicate what features of the media coverage contribute to this pattern.

The final chapter provides an explanation for the results of the examination of the media coverage. Some common theories about the media are surveyed, and the reasons why they are incomplete are discussed. An adequate understanding of the ideological function of the media, I argue, requires a synthesis of different factors identified by these different theories. The chapter concludes with some conclusions based upon this explanation.

This kind of study of media coverage can illuminate the mechanisms by which dominant ideas are reinforced. Since the task of ideological struggle is to interfere with that process, this kind of investigation should be able to reveal the extent to which it might be possible in the future to find space for this kind of interference in the mass media.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL MATERIALISM AND WORLD ORDER

This chapter describes the understanding of the social role of ideology that informs this analysis of the mass media. In order to apply this understanding to the presentation of the world order, important processes in the world order, and the ideology that accompanies and sustains that order, are discussed. This serves to identify the assumptions behind the discussion of the media coverage of the three instances of military action that follows.

The importance of these events and their coverage is perhaps not obvious, so discussion of them needs to be set in the context of a particular understanding of the world order of which they are an important part. The methods used in studying the media are also described at the conclusion of the chapter.

1.1: HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

This analysis begins with the claim that our lives are shaped by social forces that have three elements: the economic,

the political,¹ and the ideological. My purpose is to understand the relation between the third and the first two elements of the social forces that operate at the global level. Roughly speaking, the economic component is that which satisfies material human needs required for any social order; the political is the material, non-discursive means to ensure the continued maintenance of the social order, and the ideological is the discursive means of sustaining the other two. This description accords some priority to the economic, since material human needs cannot be avoided. For this reason, it can be considered central to a social order; other dimensions of the order are understood as determined, in some sense, by it.

The division of social reality into these three components was noted by Gramsci, who accepted Marx's distinction between the economic base and a superstructure, and further divided the superstructure into relations of force and relations of consent.² These distinctions were also adopted by Althusser, who identified what he called different "apparatuses" of the superstructure that functioned by ideological and coercive or repressive means.³

This framework has been applied to the field of inter-

1 The use of the word 'political' to describe this dimension is borrowed from Amin; in this sense, it is a comparatively narrow use of the word. Generally, it refers to the level of organization of physical violence or the state and its role in maintaining the social order.

2 Prison Notebooks, p 12.

3 Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

national relations by Amin, who refers to the three components as the three dimensions of social reality.⁴ The concept of "social forces" is taken from Cox, who uses this idea to explain world politics.⁵ Social forces are the composite units that condition our lives; they act in particular organized ways along all three of these dimensions. Cox also uses the term 'historical structures' for these forces, to emphasize the fact that they are active processes which are continually reproduced and that they are organized in coherent patterns. A social order is a configuration of different social forces; usually one historical structure is dominant in a society in that it is the most important factor shaping the lives of the society's members.

Three points ought to be made about this description. First, the three dimensions are not concrete entities. Second, they are not distinct and isolated aspects of reality. Third, the priority given to the economic is not a simple causal relation to the other two.

The three dimensions are not rigid or static objects; they are processes, or relations constantly in motion. Althusser described the political and ideological dimensions as a superstructure composed of "state apparatuses", a conception that has been contested by many since. As Williams argues, this conception was inadequate because it led theorists

4 Empire of Chaos, p. 103; also Eurocentrism, p. 147.

5 Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders", p. 218.

to think of 'the base' and 'the superstructure' as if they were separable concrete entities. In doing so, they lost sight of the very processes... which it should have been the special function of historical materialism to emphasize.⁶

The possibility of understanding historical change is lost if we reify these components of structures. The economic order of our society, for instance, is not simply a static relation of ownership or the inequality of wealth, but an ongoing process of accumulation; and this accumulation undergoes changes over the course of history. The other dimensions are processes that provide the conditions in which this process can take place, and they constantly reproduce these conditions.

These three dimensions must not be isolated as separate objects, since every institution involves all three processes in different ways. Althusser's explanation, in terms of separate "apparatuses" also obscures the fact that each of the dimensions is present in every event and every relation in society. To identify specific institutions as "ideological apparatuses" and others as "repressive apparatuses" ignores the material, economic aspect of the former and the ideological functions of the latter. But, as Therborn remarks:

We can... distinguish between practices in which the discursive dimension is dominant, like speech-making or writing an essay on ideology, and others in which the non-discursive predominates, like making love, war, revolution or automobiles.⁷

Such an analytic distinction can be useful.

⁶ Williams, Marxism and Literature, pp. 80-81.

⁷ The Power of Ideology and the Ideology of Power, p. 33

The priority given to the economic should not be understood as a claim that the political and ideological facets of social life are merely a "side effect" of economic relations, or are in any way less "real". The ideological, for instance, is made possible by the economic order, but it also maintains conditions necessary for that order, and thus there is a reciprocal relation between the two. All three are in many ways interconnected and interdependent, and have important effects on the other levels.

These relations, however, are not simple determinations. The economic dimension, which is an immediately material dimension, is limited by the limits of material existence, that is, by fundamental human needs. The other levels do not have such direct constraints, so the limits imposed by the economic are primary. Transformations to the other levels must operate within these constraints. The determination by the economic takes the form of "setting limits and exerting pressures", as Williams describes it.⁸ The economic processes that condition the nature of ideology in society do not, therefore, simply create or produce that ideology; as Thompson says, economics does not determine what the dominant ideology is, but it can determine what it is not.⁹

Within the limits set by the economic dimension, ideology

⁸ Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", p. 144.

⁹ Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p. 17.

or political relations can be transformed and altered, but the normal functioning of the structure ensures that ideological production remains within those limits, so as not to restrain the economic processes that support the social order. Unless these are understood as interacting processes, we cannot understand how changes in them can come about.

The nature of ideology should be clarified. Above, it was described as the discursive means of sustaining the conditions for the economic and political dimensions of social forces. In order for a social force to be effective, the members of the society must understand that order in ways that do not lead them to make significant efforts to change it. Thus an ideology is a representation, or an understanding, of the world that encourages acceptance of an historical structure. The concept of an understanding or a representation is by no means unproblematic, but can be sufficiently clarified for the purposes of this discussion.

All experience of material reality is part of some broader epistemic framework; facts must be organized into larger wholes if they are to make sense.¹⁰ In our continual processing of experiences, we rely on background assumptions that originate in previous experience, or elsewhere. These assumptions help

¹⁰ The best-known discussion of this idea is Kuhn's Structure of Scientific Revolutions, although it is not without flaws. The central problem with Kuhn's analysis is his idealism; Scheffler's Science and Subjectivity deals with this and other inconsistencies in his analysis.

us to decide what to accept as facts and useful generalizations, and what to dismiss as illusory or unhelpful. This includes facts about the social order of the world, as well about inanimate matter, etc.

Although ideas cannot be completely separated into those that pertain directly to important social relations and those that do not, a useful analytic distinction can be drawn along these lines. This distinction is described by Eagleton through reference to the interests to which ideas pertain:

Human beings have certain 'deep' interests generated by the nature of their bodies: interests in eating, communicating with one another, controlling their environment and so on. There seems no very useful sense in which these interests can be described as ideological...¹¹

The term ideology is then reserved for those sets of beliefs and assumptions that bear more directly on complex social and political reality. These ideas can determine whether we accept or reject the basic desirability of the social order in which we find ourselves living.

As Gramsci pointed out, social orders are maintained either through the use of physical force, or by ensuring that the order is understood in a way compatible with its stability. He called this latter form of political rule 'hegemony'. It consists of the reproduction of an ideology, which represents the order as desirable (or at least acceptable). To the extent that such reproduction successfully ensures the domination of that

11 Eagleton, "Ideology: an Introduction", p. 10.

ideology, the order is hegemonic. Hegemony is never absent; it is always present in every social order, along with rule by coercive force, but the proportions vary. Some societies are more hegemonic than others, meaning that ideology plays a greater or lesser role in the reproduction of the conditions in which the process of economic order can continue.

The point here is that the ideas used by members of a society to understand the way the society is organized are not solely the product of autonomous reasoning individuals, but are also conditioned by the society in which they live, and constitute a part of that order. In particular, through the processes of hegemony, we find ourselves living within an ideological or cultural environment in which ideas are presented to us and we come to accept them as natural, often without being aware that they exist, since alternatives may never have been presented to us. Ideology is often absorbed unknowingly.

The ideas that we use to understand the world are part of our culture and they often operate at subconscious level, where we are unaware of them. But they necessarily influence every aspect of our lives, since without such a framework of ideas it would not be possible to make sense of, or to function in, the world. As Williams says,

...hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary... but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which, ...even constitutes the limit of common sense for most people under

its sway.¹²

In particular, our ideological framework includes ideas about our own identities, and represents to us our relation to other members of society. In this sense, it shapes the way we live our lives, and every decision we make about the way we deal with others. Althusser and others have used the phrase "lived relations" to describe this effect of ideology.

Ideology does not simply involve ontological representations; moral ones are included as well. As Therborn defines ideology, it consists of descriptions of what is, of what is desirable (and therefore what is undesirable) and of what is possible (again, also what is impossible.) Moral value judgments must be included, since many of the decisions we make involve them, and without some assumptions about the desirable, we would have no way of making moral decisions.¹³

Ideologies are not necessarily completely consistent sets of beliefs; they may include contradictions. They may represent the existing world in ways which cannot always account for

12 Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", p. 8.

13 Therborn, p. 18. I think that there is a problem in drawing too firm a distinction between what is and what is possible; possibilities are not just things that might happen in the future, but potentials with real existence in the world today. Thus they are part of what exists. But this classification does have its utility, and I will refer to it when it is useful to do so.

people's experience; that is, they may contradict fact.¹⁴ Or there may be contradictions between facts as presented and the values that are inherent in the ideology, between what is and what is desirable; in this case we might expect either some attempt by members of society to attempt to change the order, or the presentation of the situation as unavoidable.

Therborn notes that these three parts of an ideology are connected in a "logical chain of significance"; the description of 'what is' forms a "first line of defence"; when it is no longer possible to secure consent about what is, the description of 'what is desirable' becomes active; should that fail, the inevitability of the order is presented.¹⁵

An important way to examine the relation between ideological and other dimensions of world order is to pay close attention to the way in which the representation of the world order changes along with changes in the economic and political dimensions. Unless such change is examined, it is difficult to understand the influence of the limits and pressures created by the economic; the ideological and the economic and political dimensions of the social order reproduce each other, and the limits to that reproduction are difficult to detect. This is

14 The concept of 'fact' may seem suspect, given the claims made above about the contextual nature of knowledge. However, any discussion needs to make some assertions about material reality, and thus the existence of some uncontested facts must be assumed. It is also required to assume that we have relatively direct access to facts. As Therborn says, "...ordinary human beings are capable of judging, at least in certain circumstances, whether a statement that the sun is shining, or that there is no unemployment, is true." (p. 33)

15 Therborn, p. 19.

also noted by Therborn:

...any theoretical inquiry into the generation of ideologies will have to start by looking at the prerequisites for the reproduction and change of already existing ideologies.¹⁶

This study examines changes to an already existing ideology, specifically, the changes to the representation of world order that accompanied recent changes in that order.

The broadest application of the term 'social order' applies to the world as a whole, and there is a dominant ideology of world order, at least in the parts of the world where ideology is an important element of rule. My purpose is an investigation of the connection between this ideology and the other dimensions of world order. Some analysis of this type has been undertaken by Gill, who discusses the emergence of a consensus among the world elites regarding the world order that assists them in the management of the world economy.¹⁷ Unfortunately, Gill does not discuss the ways in which the consent of the rest of the world's population is garnered for this order; he concerns himself solely with elites. That elites come to a consensus around a hegemonic ideology is important, but his discussion does not explain the stability of the dominance of that ideology.

In order to discuss the manner in which the consent of the

16 *ibid*, p. 43

17 Gill, American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission explains the emergence of the neoliberal conception of international political economy from an historical materialist perspective.

rest of the population is secured, some way of examining popular understandings must be identified. The ideology of world order cannot be reduced to any one material location, as it is inherent in almost every institution, and every facet of modern culture. But the most explicit and easiest location of ideology to identify is in the international news carried by the institutions of the mass media.¹⁸ It is here that most people in the first world get most of their information about the parts of the world of which they have no direct experience. It is therefore safe to assume that such news is the most important shaper of the popular understanding of the world. It makes sense to examine mass media content concerning recent global changes in hopes of understanding how the dominant ideology remains dominant.

Much has been written on the mass media coverage of world order; one example is Herman and Chomsky, who argue convincingly that the mass media does serve to reproduce the dominant ideology behind U.S. control over the third world.¹⁹ Unfortunately, their study is limited to a period in which the dominant ideology did not undergo significant changes; and thus they are not able to produce convincing arguments about why the media functions in the way it does. Analysis of the Canadian mass media coverage of similar subjects has been carried out by

18 Although the term "mass media" is, strictly speaking, the plural of mass medium, I have chosen to use it in the singular, to refer to the industry as a whole.

19 Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent.

Hackett, Zwicker, Nelson and others, in a similar fashion, with similar results, for the same period of stable ideology.²⁰

The most important recent political changes in world order are, of course, the changes resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Empire. The cold war ended with the United States in a dominant position, militarily, over the former Soviet bloc as well as over most of the rest of the world. The power exercised by the United States, and its negative effects on much of the world's population, is rarely discussed and is not often clear to observers in the first world. But this power became relatively evident during three moments, starting in 1986.

The bombing of Libya in 1986, the invasion of Panama in 1989, and the war against Iraq in 1991, if understood not as isolated acts but as part of a larger context, can all serve as explicit demonstrations of the ability of the U.S. government to enforce its will on other states. Since the context of that power relation has changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the way that these events are understood has some importance, in that it can illuminate the way in which the stability of the dominant ideology is ensured.

First, however, important overall patterns in that order must be identified before examining how they are reproduced.

20 Hackett, "Massacres and the Media", and News and Dissent. Zwicker, "War, Peace and the Media", Nelson, Sultans of Sleaze, ch. 3.

1.2: WORLD ORDER

This section is intended to apply this framework of the three dimensions of social reality; the economic, the political, and the ideological, in order to present a description of the operation of the contemporary world order. This will make the function of the three events discussed later and their ideological importance more clear, setting the context for discussion of the mass media coverage of them.

The first two dimensions of the world order are fairly straightforward, and will only be described briefly. But since my argument concerns the relationship between the non-discursive dimension of world order and the discursive, it is important to trace the assumptions that have been made about the economic and political relations that shape our world. Since the discussion will focus on the ideological dimension, a description of the dominant ideology follows a brief summary of the other aspects of world order.

1.2.1: The Global Economic Order

The essential feature of the contemporary world order which any analysis must recognize is the massive inequality of material wealth between the first and third world. This inequality cannot be meaningfully understood as the result of two separate and isolated economic situations, but as part of

a single economy that involves the entire world.²¹

There is some activity in the two parts of the world that does not directly involve other parts of the world, but by and large, the conditions in which economic activity takes place are deeply affected by the economic relations between the first and third worlds.

This inequality is not a static condition but is a result of and is continually reproduced by the world's economic activity. This activity is a single process involving the entire world, which perpetuates the poverty of the majority of the world's population and the wealth of a minority. The economic process is not inherently stable but is actively regulated and sustained by the actions of the more powerful members of global society. The relation is one of continuing exploitation.

This exploitation manifests itself in two important ways. The transnationalization of production has allowed the manufacture of goods and extraction of resources in the third world where labour and other social costs are lower, and where the population has a lower standard of living, for export to and consumption in the first world. Not all production is transnational, but much of the economies of third world states are

²¹ The terms "first world" and "third world" are problematic for various reasons. The terms have normative connotations, imply an illusory geographic separation between the "worlds", and reify the division between them, obscuring the relation between them. But I have not been able to find a reasonably convenient and more accurate substitute, so I continue to use them.

devoted to export sectors.²² This results in a transfer of value, produced by the labour of the population of the third world, to the first world.

The second form of exploitation is the transfer of capital through debt servicing, much of which involves the international financial institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank.²³ According to the latter, net transfers of capital to the first world from the third world totalled over \$50 Billion in 1990.²⁴ Of course, this is related to the first form, since the IMF and the World Bank often impose "structural adjustment policies" on the debtor countries, which facilitate exploitation through transnational production, in order to arrange debt repayment plans.

Exploitive economic processes are also at work within the third world, and within the first world. Economic activity is generally managed on a state level, and the arrangements imposed almost all support this international exploitation, as well as exploitation within the state. In particular, military spending by many of the world's governments consumes resources that might otherwise be available to improve conditions for the population.

22 For further discussion of the transnationalization of production, see Cox, Production, Power and World Order, esp. pp 256-167. Also see Nelson, ch.6 for a discussion of the areas of third world countries, called "free trade zones" designed to encourage this pattern of activity.

23 Korner, The IMF and the Third World.

24 Brown et al., p. 48.

This occurs both in the first and third worlds, but in the United States, with the world's largest military budget, weapons spending has played a significant role in regulating the economy of the country, as well as an international political role and a domestic ideological role.²⁵

Although this military spending and the other economic features of the domestic orders managed by states are generally exploitive, the exploitation "operates more on the world scale of really existing capitalism than it does on that of its centres in isolation."²⁶ Thus the global level of economic activity is a central determinant of the conditions in which much of the world's population lives.

1.2.2: The Global Political Order

This arrangement is, in a non-controversial sense, undesirable for most people in the third world, and for many in the first world as well. Because of the extreme suffering of much of the world's population, organized resistance to the exploitation inherent in the world order is not infrequent among the third world populations. Forceful suppression of organized resistance is one of the ways in which states act to maintain the world's economic order. Those states that have been

25 American defense spending from 1949 to 1986 totalled \$8.2 trillion; see Melman, "Military State Capitalism".

26 Amin, Empire of Chaos, p. 40.

integrated into the capitalist world order resort to the use of coercive force to suppress dissent, in order that they are able to remain part of that order. Robert Cox describes the situation this way:

The state system of the late twentieth century is coming to act more as a support to the opening of the world to global finance and global production, less as a means of defence of the world's populations. Indeed, where states try to act in the protective mode they face retaliation, initially financial, ultimately perhaps military, from the changed state system. The state system skews the distribution of benefits in favour of the economically powerful within the dominant states.²⁷

Not all states, however, accept incorporation into the global capitalist system, and occasionally some states actively resist the exploitation of this system. In some of these cases, military intervention by first world states ensures the continued functioning of the order. Most frequently, it is the United States that enforces the global capitalist order militarily, although other states have participated in this function. Sometimes this is done covertly, or through so-called "low intensity conflict", as was done in Nicaragua by the Reagan administration.²⁸ In other instances, more intense and obvious action is taken, as with the war against Vietnam, or the recent war against Iraq.

It is the consequences of such military action that is most noticeable in terms of the direct effects of the world order,

27 Cox, "Multilateralism and World Order", p. 178.

28 See Thomas Walker, Reagan vs the Sandinistas.

and which has the greatest ideological significance. These acts may not directly cause more suffering among the world's poor than the routine operation of the world economic order, but they attract more attention, and thus are of greater concern to my argument.

1.3: THE IDEOLOGY OF WORLD ORDER

This economic and political system is unstable because the consequences of the military action that backs up the exploitive global economy is ultimately inconsistent with values widely held by members of the first world populations. These values include claims of the existence of universal human rights, such as the right to life, and the value of (some conception of) peace and freedom. These values also contradict much of the situation in the third world on an ongoing basis, but the violence of military action is much more visible and apparent. Thus the contradiction is much more likely to become a serious ideological crisis, in the sense of a failure of the hegemonic process, leading to widespread dissent among first world populations over this form of violence. This began to occur during the war against Vietnam, and may have been partially responsible for the end of U.S. military action there.²⁹

Of course the ideological representation of the world order

²⁹ Gitlin's The Whole World is Watching provides discussion of the reaction to the war in Vietnam.

is most important in the industrialized countries of the first world, where maintaining order rarely requires the resort to physical force. This is not to say that ideology plays no role in political control in the third world, or that force is never used within the first world, but arguably the primary means of control in different countries differs.

1.3.1: The Dominant Understanding of World Order.

Generally, the version of the representation of world order now widely accepted is of the world as a more or less peacefully ordered society, in which nearly all the states in the world enjoy friendly relations with the others. There are no antagonisms that are likely to become serious military conflicts between major powers on the scale of the previous world wars. Since this marks an improvement over the 40 years of hostility between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, this is, overall, a desirable state of affairs and should be actively maintained.³⁰

Occasionally, however, the peace of the world order breaks down and military conflict erupts. This is seen as a deviation from the norm, not an essential feature of the order. In response, military intervention on the part of the first world is sometimes necessary. Normally, the use of military force is

³⁰ This ideology is not often elaborated explicitly, and so can only be described in broad terms. However, for a brief but relatively explicit statement, see the remarks of U.S. president Bush, "Bush maintains view of U.S. as leader of new world order", *Globe and Mail*, March 6, 1992, p. A6.

undesirable, but it is often unavoidable, because violence in the world order is a product of particular actors, either states or their leaders, in the third world. It is not a predictable response to exploitation, but an irrational response by unreasonable political forces which refuse to accept integration into the apparently peaceful world. Because they are unreasonable, the only response is to destroy the threat to peace with greater military force.

This understanding embodies Therborn's three-fold understanding of ideology; the existence of a peaceful order punctuated by occasional threats; the desirability of maintaining this order, even through violence; and the impossibility of responding to these threats with non-military options. It is this third level that is crucial: the threats are not simply opponents with different ideas about their role in the world, but they are also dangerous, irrational and unwilling to conform to the needs of the world order. Without this understanding of these threats, the violence against them that supports the world order would not appear as necessary, and thus might generate some dissent among those in the first world who apply common moral values to these actions.

The existence of a dominant ideology does not entail the complete closure of all discussion. Some matters are open for debate, and it is possible to express some alternative understandings to it. In particular, a second version of the

understanding of world order described above has some legitimacy within official discourse, and can be considered a modified ideology that, although it allows for disagreement with the above, still serves to reproduce consent for the existing order.

In this second version, the occasional violence in the world, involving dangerous threats, is partly due to the failure of our efforts to promote peace. Arguments are sometimes made that military intervention should involve countries other than the U.S., or multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, more often, or that more efforts to negotiate should be made before the resort to violence. But the existence of dangerous threats to peace are still accepted, and the intentions behind military actions are still seen as the preservation of a worthwhile order. The actions of the first world are accepted as peacefully motivated, although they might be considered inappropriate or ineffective. Thus this image of the world is not significantly different from the one above.

This version tends to prevail in Canada, where it is the ground for some dissent over the closeness of U.S.-Canadian relations. The difference in political culture, while not radical, is worth noting.³¹ Its reproduction may be assisted by the presence within the parliament of a social-democratic party, broader welfare state measures, the traditional participation in UN peacekeeping operations, and lack of direct involvement

³¹ Hackett argues that a "softer" version of the cold-war ideology has prevailed in Canada; News and Dissent, pp 129-31.

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³¹ Hackett argues that a "softer" version of the cold-war ideology has prevailed in Canada; News and Dissent, pp 129-31.

in the military actions of the U.S. for most of its history. But this version still does not question the global inequality of wealth, the violence that sustains it, or the threats that are used to justify that violence.

1.3.2: Threats and the Global Consensus

An important assumption behind the dominant ideology described above, in both versions, is that the order is based on a harmony of interests, without any inherent conflicts. All states, and their populations, have an interest in joining a 'community of nations' and participating in its order, including the economic order. Thus any threat of violence originates with some actor (generally some third world government) that does not act on its own interest, i.e. which is irrational.

This global consensus of interests is presented without making a distinction between the first and third worlds, which serves to make the conflict of interest between them invisible.

Amin makes the point in this way:

"In recent years the dominant media have repeated over and over that the East-West confrontation is winding down and that all local and regional conflicts can now find peaceful solutions in their turn. This position proceeds quite simply from the West's claim that the North-South conflict does not exist."³²

This ideological construction of a consensus strongly resembles a similar construct noted by Hall et al in their

³² Amin, Eurocentrism, p. 102

analysis of media coverage of a series of muggings in Britain in the 1970s. Specifically, this idea of a consensus assumes that

what unites us, as a society and as a culture... far outweighs what divides and distinguishes us as groups or classes from other groups.³³

The authors claim that the idea of this consensus serves to reinforce the deviant nature of the identified threat (criminal elements responsible for the muggings) and to reinforce the common identity of the members of the society. They use the concept of a "moral panic", borrowed from Cohen's discussion of the media coverage of minor riots in Britain in the 60's. As Cohen says, the presentation of such threats and deviances "informs us about right and wrong, about the boundaries beyond which one cannot venture."³⁴

As Hall et al note, this consensus derives from the universalization of the interests of the ruling class, those who benefit from the social order, presenting these interests as if they could be adopted by all. A similar dynamic takes place in the representation of the world order: threats are presented as "criminal" elements in the community of nations, and all others are presented as if their interests are threatened, whether or not they benefit from the order.

This reinforcing of the identity of the member of the society is part of what Althusser terms "interpellation"; the

33 Policing the Crisis, p. 55-8.

34 Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics, p. 17.

ideology here serves to constitute the individual by presenting an identity for the individual to accept, and to employ in understanding the relation between the individual and others. In the case of the ideology of world order, it constitutes the individual as a patriotic citizen of the state, but also as a citizen of the "new world order". We are all assumed and expected to be, and come to assume and expect ourselves to be, consumers in a global capitalist market. The presentation of this identity, including the threats to world order and the destruction of them, is part of our everyday activity. In this way, it can be said that ideology, including the ideological representation of world order, takes the form of "lived relations".

1.3.3: Contradiction and Crisis

This dominant ideology is definitely inconsistent with facts about the social organization of the world. In many cases, the facts that contradict this representation are simply not presented by the media institutions responsible for disseminating information. For example, the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor and the world's response to it are mostly unknown.³⁵

In some cases, however, the violence behind the world order cannot be denied or ignored. In this case, the contradictions

35 See Ramos-Horta, Funu: The Unfinished Saga of East Timor

can lead to a serious breakdown of the consensus around the existing order. This kind of crisis is prevented by the appropriate presentation of these events. That they are understood in ways consistent with dominant values entails more than the usual extent of interpretative activity. This interpretation may involve selective presentation or emphasis of facts, or other interpretative practices such as the use of particular language forms. It is during such events that the interpretation becomes most apparent and detectable.

The most important of these events in the post-cold war era have been the bombing of Libya in 1986, the 1989 invasion of Panama and the war against Iraq in 1991.³⁶ Ways in which attempts are made to force these events to conform to the dominant ideology are of interest.

It should be mentioned that there are sophisticated analyses of world politics which are consistent with most of the facts, and which are based on radical reinterpretations of words like "peace", "freedom", "violence", etc. This is based on a conception of human nature that equates freedoms with formal opportunities to participate in an economic and political market, which is logically consistent. For instance, first world violence and terror targeted against innocent civilian

³⁶ 1986 is usually not considered late enough for the end of the cold war, but this was the first U.S. military action not justified through the threat of communism, and so I take it to signal a change in the ideology of world order. Reforms to the Soviet Union were just beginning at the time.

populations of the third world may be brutal, but it is the only way to ensure that those populations are "free" in the sense of belonging to a capitalist economy, and can enjoy peace and security in the sense of knowing that exploitation will continue uninterrupted. This position avoids these crisis points, perhaps, but clearly does not promote human well-being, and can be considered to be inconsistent with the widely held values.³⁷

1.3.4: The Change from the Cold War View

This understanding is different from that of the cold war which it replaced.³⁸ In that case, the threat of the Soviet Union was an essential part of the way the world was understood. That threat was not deviant; conflict was a normal part of world order. The Soviet threat was seen as an "evil empire", but was considered to be rationally furthering its own national interest. Thus conflict between the two sides in the cold war was accepted as inevitable.

This presentation, while it may have focused on important aspects of the world order at the time, served, in both camps, to mask the conflict of interest between the first and third

³⁷ Hackett points out the implicit nature of this conception of freedom in the dominant ideology, News and Dissent, p. 126; I think it fair to claim that this would not appear to be consistent with most people's moral ideas, were it made explicit.

³⁸ For elaborations of this ideology, see Hackett, News and Dissent, p. 45-9; Zwicker, War, Peace and the News, Herman and Chomsky, pp 29-31, and Canada (Secretary of State for External Affairs), "Competitiveness and Security", p. 37. For an equivalent of the more sophisticated version of this ideology, see Morgenthau, Politics among Nations.

worlds:

The Cold War presents a framework within which each of the superpowers can use force and violence to control its own domains, against those who seek a degree of independence within the blocs themselves - by appealing to the threat of the superpower enemy to mobilize its own population and that of its allies.³⁹

What is important for the argument later in this thesis is that the ideology that emerged as a result of the changes to world order was not the only one that might have emerged. It may seem natural that the collapse of one of the antagonistic sides in the central conflict in the world order would be represented as the triumph of capitalism in a peaceful world. But dissolution of the Soviet Empire might have resulted, for instance, in the suggestion that, since the reasons given for past U.S. intervention in the third world no longer existed, such intervention should cease and the third world should be left to solve its own conflicts.⁴⁰

But such a representation did not become the dominant one; in fact it was rarely articulated. Examining why the dominant representation did become dominant can help explain the process by which ideology is determined by material dimensions of world order.

³⁹ Chomsky, "The Cold War, the Third World and the Arms Race", p. 224.

1.3.5: Other Aspects of the Dominant Ideology

The representation of these political and military relations does not exhaust the ideology of the world order. Many other ideas related to world order are part of the dominant ideology, and are also reproduced as part of the hegemonic processes. Some other constituents should be mentioned.

Racism is a relevant feature because of the racial structure of the world order. In the particular case of the events discussed here, racism directed towards Arabs is very relevant, and can be said to have played some role in the legitimation of two of the attacks discussed.⁴¹ The moral superiority of the first world, with its white population, as Amin notes, is based on an assumption of technical superiority of European culture. It is widely assumed in the first world that "imitation of the Western model by all peoples is the only solution to the challenges of our time."⁴² This attitude makes attempts to lead societies away from integration into the Western model seem irrational and deviant, helping to construct those non-western societies as irrational and dangerous.

This technical superiority of the Western model makes a "genetic" racism redundant. Amin further points out that "The

40 I do not mean that this suggestion is morally or rationally superior; I merely suggest it as an alternative to indicate that there must be some reason that the ideology which did emerge as dominant was able to do so. The alternative still fails to account for the inequality of wealth between the first and third worlds, and might have served for some time to maintain consent for the exploitive order, except that eventually it would have allowed states to resist that order.

41 see Amin, Eurocentrism; Said, Orientalism; and Chomsky, Necessary Illusions, p 285. Briemberg, in "Sand in the Snow", discusses the role of racism in the coverage of the war against Iraq in Canada. I have chosen not to discuss this aspect, as I feel it played a complex but subordinate role.

42 Amin, Eurocentrism, p. vii.

most primitive form of the racist line is somewhat discredited these days."⁴³ Instead, we have a construction of Arab and other non-white races as not inherently inferior; they can be our equals if they choose to replicate our social organization. If, however, they choose a different and separate path, they have chosen inferiority. This helps to displace the racism from third world populations to the leaders of governments there.

Importantly, the dominant ideology also presents a positivist conception of science and knowledge, including a strict distinction between values and facts. Scientific knowledge, including political science, is presented as neutral and value-free, and thus objective. The ideology of global capitalism itself is seen as such a neutral, value-free set of truths, as opposed to a value judgement. This is crucial, since it masks the ideological nature of this interpretation.

Since the world order is presented as being based on an objectively true set of ideas, and not on someone's interests, there is no justification of limits to the freedom of expression of other ideas. Although the dominance of the ruling ideology is essential for the continued functioning of the order, this does not completely preclude discussion or thought about that order. Features of the order that do not bear on its essential characteristics can be debated, and the dominant understanding is open to some debate over secondary issues. This gives the ideological order the appearance of openness, masking its

43 *ibid*, p. 97.

domination.

The diversity of opinions is not infinite, however; rigid boundaries exist around the range of opinions that are widely expressed. These boundaries involve the essential features of the ideology; in the case of the representation of world order, this means the presence of threats and the global harmony of interests. Other features, such as the methods used to deal with these threats, are open to debate, in a "balanced, neutral" way.

The distinction between facts and values, important to the objectivist conception of knowledge, is central to my argument and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

1.4: METHOD OF ANALYSIS

In order to investigate the ways that the changes in economic and political order influence the transformation of ideology, a survey of the mass media coverage of the important events mentioned above was undertaken. The content of the mass media is not the only location in which the ideology of world order is presented, but it does contain almost all of the information about ongoing changes to the world order that most people receive. For this reason, conclusions about the changes to the dominant understanding of world order can be made on the basis of an examination of mass media content. The three chapters that follow discuss the results of such a survey of some mass media coverage of three events from recent years with considerable

ideological significance.

The three events, the bombing of Libya, the invasion of Panama and the war against Iraq, represent the most apparent demonstrations of the power relations between the first and third world in recent times. Examining this coverage can give some idea as to how the presentation of these relations changed, and how the post-cold war ideology of global co-operation emerged.

An understanding of the media coverage of events such as these is more complicated than a simple numerical survey of stories. Hackett presents the results of such a study, in which stories were classified according to a distinction between positive and negative reports about third world states.⁴⁴

He concludes that there is not enough evidence to claim that a double standard is applied to coverage of human rights abuse in third world countries on the basis of their political alliance with either the West or the Soviet bloc. He fails to understand, however, the difference between identifying dissent, in the sense of "negative" coverage of an allied country's human rights record, and the identification of assumptions about U.S. foreign policy that are implicit in the story. Many stories critical of human rights abuse in American-allied third world states can still be based on the assumption of a U.S. policy designed to stop such abuse. As Gans points out,

44 Hackett's Study is in News and Dissent, pp 178-192.

The values in the news are rarely explicit and must be found between the lines- in what actors and activities are reported and in how they are described.⁴⁵

Hackett's analysis, since it rests on too simple a distinction between good and bad coverage, is of little interest.

In order to reach more important conclusions about media coverage, it is necessary to take a closer look at the stories. Every news item involves a great number of decisions on the part of newswriters. From the large number of facts available every day, a few must be selected and declared important enough to be considered news. Some of these must be accorded more importance than others, and are placed at the beginning of the newscast or on the front page. Other facts are omitted completely, or left as minor stories in less prominent locations.

When the relative importance of different facts has been decided, particular forms of language must be employed to describe the facts. This is a crucial step, as different vocabulary entails the use of different categories with which to understand events. The most familiar example of this effect involves the word "terrorist".⁴⁶ Different words have different connotations that may not be explicit but do have effects.

The production of news also involves complex and important decisions when it involves any kind of analysis, questioning

45 Gans, Deciding What's News, p. 39-40.

46 Herman, The Real Terror Network (Boston: South End Press, 1987)

of sources, or background information designed to supply context for facts. Although it is frequently claimed that the news lacks sufficient context, some is usually provided, and the commentary pages of newspapers do supply some analysis. Decisions must be made about what kind of context and what kind of analysis to supply; these decisions are important shapers of ideology.

All these decisions must be made by newswriters who hold some particular assumptions, which are often implicit, unnoticed and accepted uncritically by the audience in order to make sense of the news. In order to identify the assumptions behind these decisions, it is necessary to do more than categorize the stories and compare the quantities in each story.

For each event, the relevant coverage was examined in detail; each related news story, commentary piece, and editorial was read, and any important statements that revealed particular assumptions, as well as significant omissions of fact, was noted.

Particularly important to this kind of study is the recognition of alternatives to the decisions that were made in the actual production of the news. By identifying alternatives which were available and which might have presented the facts differently, the assumptions that led to the decisions which were made can be made more evident. If particular words are not the only possibility for describing an event, then the reasons for using the ones used may be suggested.

To be useful, this procedure must identify repeated

patterns in the coverage. Ideology is not the product of any individual story; important assumptions behind the coverage are those that shape the news on a regular and repeated basis, and so it is important to examine as much of the coverage as is relevant, in a comprehensive way.

The three case studies involve an examination of the coverage of events relevant to the attacks starting with the initial reports concerning the states, continuing through the period in which the attack took place, until it faded from the news as an important story.

The media examined include the *Vancouver Sun*, the nationally-distributed *Globe and Mail*, and *Maclean's* magazine. The choice of print media as opposed to television media means that the medium with the largest audience is ignored, but newspapers, especially those marketed towards upper-income audiences, tend to assume greater importance as initiators of stories for other sources, and as information for elites who are often more likely to be involved in important decision-making at the state and economic level.⁴⁷ This makes it possible to draw conclusions about the dominant ideology from an examination of these sources.

The media coverage examined is Canadian, not American. This does not produce significantly differences, since (as mentioned above) there are only minor difference in the ideological

⁴⁷ On the importance of newspapers, see Taras, pp. 88-9, and Hackett, pp. 14, 95.

climate in the two countries. Generally, Canada's role in the world order is very closely allied to that of the United States, and the view of the world which prevails here is not significantly different. The institutions of the mass media rely on the same agencies as sources for information; according to Hackett, the Canadian print media rely on American sources for 57.5% of their foreign news.⁴⁸ Thus there is not likely to be a significant distinction between the ideological orientation of the two.

Conclusions about the dominant ideology based on analysis of the mass media apply particularly to the ideological representation of world order, since the mass media is the primary source of information about this subject to which people are exposed. However, when dealing with other constituents of the dominant ideology, for instance, ideas about gender, other cultural factors influence the reproduction of ideology. Thus my conclusions about the connections between material power and the ideology of world order should not be taken to apply more generally than they do.

48 Hackett, News and Dissent, p. 102.

CHAPTER TWO: LIBYA

The April 15, 1986 bombing of the Libyan cities of Tripoli and Benghazi was the first American military action since the second world war justified without reference to the Soviet threat. Although the reforms of the Soviet Union had only just begun and American-Soviet relations had not fundamentally changed, the possibility of those changes was emerging at that time. The third world, and not the Soviet empire, was becoming the focus of popular security concerns. Thus the incident represents an example of the presentation of a new threat, contributing to a new interpretation of the world order.

This chapter presents results of an examination of the content of the news coverage related to this attack. The survey of coverage began with the terrorist bombings in the Rome and Vienna airports in late 1985. It is at this time that attention was first devoted to Libya in connection with terrorism. Coverage was surveyed for a period ending two weeks after the attacks on Tripoli and Benghazi, as no further action was taken by either the U.S. or Libya, and regular news concerning the event ceased at about that time.

The analysis presented here begins with a description of the historical background and the events that lead directly to

the air strike. A discussion of the media's coverage of the more immediate context follows. The next section of the chapter discusses the media's focus on Muammar Qaddafi during the crisis. The coverage of the attack itself is discussed in the fourth section, and the final section discusses the opinions expressed in commentary pieces and editorials after the attack.

2.1: BACKGROUND

Muammar Qaddafi took power in Libya in the revolution of 1969, which overthrew the pro-Western government of the time. The revolution promised a redistribution of the country's oil wealth, from which few of the country's people had benefitted. Qaddafi's government was never particularly sympathetic to either the US or the USSR. Although it had armed itself with weapons from the latter, trade with western nations, primarily in oil, was not insignificant.

The production of oil in Libya, which began in the early 1960's, increased the GNP greatly. Oil profits were extremely important to the Libyan economy in general, accounting for 98% of GNP by 1986¹. Libya relied heavily on foreigners for the skilled labour that the oil industry required,² and even at

1 "Peres urges oil boycott to stop terror", *Vancouver Sun*, Jan 6, 1986, p. A8.

2 Kaldor, Mad Dogs, p. 96.

the time of the American attack, there were many Americans working for oil companies in Libya. But Libyan-U.S. relations were never friendly under Qaddafi.

The American government, since the election of Reagan in 1980, had considered Libya an enemy. Relations with Libya were cut off in May of 1981, and in that year, American jets flying over the Gulf of Sidra, near Libya, confronted and shot down two Libyan jets.³ Libya had also been involved in military action in Chad, which borders Libya, in reaction to the French intervention there; this was cited as reason for the deployment of American forces.

In March of 1982, Reagan declared an embargo on Libyan oil and restrictions on exports to Libya. The justification for this action was a report of Libyan assassination squads in America, trying to kill the president. The reports turned out to be unfounded, but the embargo continued. The U.S. imported 35% of Libyan oil until this time, and two large corporations (Exxon and Mobil) withdrew from Libya.⁴ Other smaller companies and many American workers stayed in the country.

The escalation of tensions between the U.S. and Libya began a new phase on July 8th, 1985, when U.S. president Reagan spoke publicly against terrorism, describing Libya, as well as Iran, North Korea, Cuba and Nicaragua, as the centres

3 Jonathan Bearman, Qaddafi's Libya, p. 231.

4 Bearman, p 231-3.

of world terrorism, and describing the leaders of these countries as "misfits and loony tunes".⁵

These claims, while indicating the orientation of the American government towards Libya, did not lead directly to any action; it was not until later in the year that Libya became a major focus of public attention. On Dec. 27th, 1985, armed gunmen opened fire with machine guns on crowds of passengers outside the El Al ticket counters at the Rome and Vienna airports. The death toll reached 20, including three of the attackers.⁶ A note found on the body of one attacker stated that the attacks were in retaliation for the bombing by the Israeli air force of the Tunis offices of the PLO the previous October, in which 73 people died.

Within days, responsibility for the attacks was attributed to Libya by the United States. The grounds for this was the discovery that the attackers were using Tunisian passports that had been seized by the Libyan government earlier in the year. This evidence was not sufficient to convince other Western leaders, including those of West Germany, Greece, Canada, and, importantly, Italy and Austria, where the attacks took place, nor those of Israel, whose citizens were targeted. On January 25th, the Israeli government announced that it had

5 "'Acts of War' condemned by Reagan", *Globe and Mail*, July 9, 1985, p. A1.

6 "Terrorist raids in Rome, Vienna, leave 17 dead, 116 wounded", *Globe and Mail*, Dec 28, 1985, p. A1.

evidence that implicated Syria, "rather than Libya", and that "Damascus served as a training place... there they received their instructions."⁷

After attention became focused on Libya's alleged role in the El Al attacks, the U.S. began to look for support for European trade sanctions against Libya, and to conduct naval manoeuvres near the Libyan coast. Libya had occasionally announced claims on the Gulf of Sidra, a part of the Mediterranean that lies between points of land in Libya. The Gulf is mostly outside the 12-mile limit generally recognized as territorial waters, but since the Gulf of Sidra contains no direct shipping routes to anywhere except to Libya, no other nation could plausibly claim to have a vital interest in access to these waters.

The U.S., however, claimed that it had the right to conduct naval exercises there, and proceeded to do so in late January of 1986. Qaddafi warned Reagan that the fleet should not cross what he called the "line of death" that demarcated the northern edge of the waters that lay between points of Libyan land, and the Libyan forces went on alert.

The first set of exercises did not result in any military

⁷ Canada: "Reagan talks to Mulroney before broadcast", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 8, 1986, p. A10; Italy and others: "Call for sanctions dismissed", *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 9, 1986, p. A12; Greece: "'US call for Libya sanctions gets cool reception in Bonn", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 22, 1986, p. A11; Israeli claims, "Israel now links Syria to airport shootings", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 25, 1986, p. A13. None of these references are front-page stories.

The first set of exercises did not result in any military confrontation. A second set followed late in March of 1986. This time, the U.S. forces did cross Qaddafi's line, and the Libyans fired missiles at the destroyers. The American forces, greatly superior, destroyed the surface-to-air missiles, the launch site, and two patrol boats. This response occurred in two different actions, separated by a day. The attack on the second day was, as the U.S. admits, unprovoked by Libyan fire. The justification given was the determination that the missile launch site at Sirte was not fully destroyed in the first day's attacks. The net loss of life stood at about 150, according to media accounts.

The next major incident in the conflict was the bombing of the La Belle discotheque in West Berlin on April 5th. The blast killed one American soldier and one German. The Reagan administration blamed this on Libya immediately, before any evidence could have been uncovered. The bombing came too quickly after the confrontation in the Gulf of Sidra to be seen as unrelated to it; any Libyan link could only be seen as retaliation for the deaths caused by the American action two weeks previous. Nine days after this attack, the U.S. claimed that it had certain proof that Libya was involved, and launched a wave of bombers to attack Tripoli and Benghazi.

2.2: COVERAGE OF EVENTS LEADING TO THE ATTACK

The media presented the attack on the cities as an attempt to deter Libya from sponsoring further acts of terrorism. That Libya was behind acts of terrorism in the months before the attack was assumed and rarely questioned; evidence to the contrary was reported but not considered important. The consequences of the bombing of the cities was also downplayed; the victims received much less coverage than the victims of attacks by Arab terrorists did earlier. Media coverage also marginalized the underlying causes of the acts of terrorism, and instead focused on the threat posed by the Libyan government, and its leader, Muammar Qaddafi.

Coverage of the El Al attacks is an example of an important pattern in the press; the motivations for acts of violence against the interests of Western states are often left unexplained. The acts are thus portrayed as unprovoked and irrational. They may not be justifiable, but they usually are motivated by some reason; ignoring the reasons makes it seem necessary to respond with force instead of dealing with root causes.

The El Al attack was designed to retaliate against the Israeli bombing of the PLO offices three months earlier, but this fact was not mentioned in the reports on the airport attacks. It was certainly an important piece of information that ought to have been included in the background. Even at

the time, the bombing was a less important story than the El Al attacks. The Israeli bombing ceased to be a story after two days, and was discussed in one editorial in *The Globe and Mail*. "Tit for tat in the Middle East" discussed the reasons behind the Israeli attack, and other events in the Middle East previous to it. It described the attack as an act of retaliation, although beyond the "proportionate response" that Israel's situation called for.⁸

In comparison, the El Al attack warranted front page stories in the *Globe* and the *Sun* for approximately a week. The editorial discussing it did not mention the reason given for it, so there was no way to judge whether or not that response was in proper proportion to those reasons. Instead, it described the airport attacks as "barbarism".

The El Al attacks were accorded some analysis, though. The *Globe* presented the El Al attacks as part of a broader pattern of terrorism, and ran a background column on the same day as the report of the attack, titled, "El Al raids just latest in long list of attacks".⁹ A chronology is provided of 8 incidents, in which 162 people, including police officers, terrorists and their hostages died. The bombing of the PLO offices in Tunis was not included in this list, despite the fact that it caused more deaths than any of the listed

8 Oct. 3, 1985, p. A6.

9 *Globe and Mail*, Dec 28, 1985, p. A3.

attacks. This kind of context is decidedly different from that provided for the Israeli air raid.

Among the comment pieces and editorials that followed the accusations and threats from Qaddafi and Libya after the El Al attacks, the *Globe* included one claiming that "Col. Qaddafi's influence... rests on the fact that, in Arab eyes at least, he has a cause." This kind of statement does indicate that acts of anti-Israeli terrorism might not be unprovoked, but the use of the phrase "in Arab eyes at least" denies legitimacy to the "cause" by transforming it into a subjective perception.¹⁰ (In another article after the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi, the same author again describes the context as Libyan "resistance to what Arabs and Moslems see as U.S. imperialism."¹¹) Such delegitimizing phrases are often used, and make it likely that descriptions of the historical setting that challenge the dominant interpretation are not taken as objective and factual.

The El Al attacks are an example of the lack of critical reflection on the claims of the state. Within days of the attack, the American government directed blame entirely towards Libya, and the Canadian media did not disagree. The *Globe and Mail* featured an editorial about the "bad, bloody

10 "Gaddafi content to be in midst of political storm", *Globe and Mail*, Jan. 10, 1986, p. A9.

11 "Attack expected to fuel terrorism's flame", *Globe and Mail*, April 16, 1986, p. A11.

hands" of Qaddafi.¹² The government of Israel later blamed Syria and not Libya, but the American government continued to lay all of the blame on Qaddafi, and the media continued to report the American accusation in end-of-story background sentences.¹³ The fact that the Israeli statements challenged the American government's claim against Libya did not cause reporters to question the American drive for European trade sanctions against Libya, or the naval exercises that were conducted off Libyan waters shortly after those statements.

Other important events were ignored. On February 4th, the murder of four Salvadoran citizens, most likely attributable to the American-backed government of El Salvador, warranted a short story on an inside page, no front page stories, editorials, commentary or analysis pieces.¹⁴ The Vancouver *Sun* did not report the story at all. American support for the Salvadoran government's use of terrorist tactics in the form of "death squads" was never mentioned in the discussion of Reagan's accusations that Qaddafi was a supporter of terrorism, although this might be useful in forming a judgement about U.S. intentions.

12 "Bad, bloody hands", *Globe and Mail*, Dec 31, 1985, p. A6.

13 For instance, "Force not ruled out, US warns Libya", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 28, 1986, p. A1; "Libya said ready for embargo", *Sun*, Feb. 7, 1986, p. A16.

14 "Murder of Salvadorans linked to right-wing squads", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 5, 1986, p. A10.

The confrontation in the Gulf of Sidra was precisely what could have been predicted before the beginning of the manoeuvres. The American government admitted this, saying that they "expected the Libyan leader to fire missiles."¹⁵ Given that such a response was expected, the exercises can only be seen as a provocation of violence by the U.S. forces.

But reports of the battle generally did not use the word "provoke". *Maclean's* reported that the U.S. state department did not feel that the exercises were unusual; "what is unusual is that Qaddafi chose to react to it by force."¹⁶ Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark was asked if he thought the action by the U.S. was a provocation, and he replied "Not in my judgement."¹⁷ One analysis piece did state that "nobody believes the president has three aircraft carriers off the coast of Libya to assure freedom of the seas. His navy commands the ocean and can go anywhere it likes."¹⁸ But no alternative motivations for the exercise were suggested.

Shortly after the confrontations, Maltese prime minister

15 "US confrontation with Libyans planned as 'message' to Gaddafi", *Globe and Mail*, March 26, 1986, p. A1.

16 "Across the line of death", *Maclean's* April 14, 1986, p. 14.

17 "US gets Canadian backing", *Vancouver Sun*, March 25, 1986, p. A4.

18 "Reagan plays 'chicken' without stating his aim", *Sun*, March 26, 1986, p. A5.

Carmelo Bonici offered to negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict. The offer, and its rejection by the U.S., were not seen as significant enough to merit a headline, and was instead described in a story about the ongoing naval manoeuvres in January.¹⁹ Also underemphasized was a proposal from Mikhail Gorbachev of a mutual withdrawal of fleets from the Mediterranean, which Reagan also rejected.²⁰ These facts are important, since they might lead the reader to interpret the violence as at least partly the result of an American refusal to negotiate.

In response to the actions and statements of the American government, some terrorist organizations, and Qaddafi himself, often made statements about increasing the intensity of terrorist attacks against American targets. Such statements contribute to the portrayal of these groups and individuals as violent, but what is important about these stories is the way they are interpreted. Headlines about such threats are generally written as if the threat was a certain danger, when, as the same stories say, the threats are conditional.

Two examples of this come from the coverage of the Gulf of Sidra confrontation. "Libya threatens to take 'holy war' against US beyond battleground", is the title given to a story

¹⁹ "US navy draws near 'line of death'", *Globe and Mail*, January 29, 1986, p. A2.

²⁰ "US rejects proposal for fleet withdrawal", *Globe and Mail*, March 28, 1986, p. A10.

which reports remarks by Qaddafi: "If they want to expand the struggle, we will carry it out all over the world."²¹ After the Israeli air hijacking of a Libyan executive jet, a story was headlined: "Radical Arabs warn that suicide squads may strike at US",²² but the story indicated that the threat was again conditional, that squads *might* be formed *if* such hijackings occur again. What is considered important in these stories is the violent actions that Arabs are willing to use, not the actions of Western states that might prompt such violence.

A poll of American opinion was reported by the *Sun* after the confrontation in the Gulf of Sidra. The poll "found that 67% supported the US military retaliation although Libyan missiles failed to hit American planes" illustrating the assumptions of the defensive nature of U.S. actions.²³ The question itself contains the assumption; the poll did not ask whether people thought it acceptable for the US to provoke a Libyan attack. This was the only poll reported on the incident.

Blame for the La Belle attack was attributed to Libya, within one week. This time the accusations were more plausible, since they could be understood as retaliation for the attacks in the Gulf of Sidra. But few pointed out that this

21 *Globe and Mail*, March 26, 1986, p. A10. Emphasis added.

22 *Globe and Mail*, Feb 5, 1986, p. A9.

23 "Americans fear more terror", *Sun*, March 26, 1986, p. A5.

attack might be considered a reason not to conduct provocative military actions. One analyst did present this point of view, and also presented the opinion of a member of the PLO. When asked about terrorism, the response from the PLO member was "What do you call air attacks on refugee camps?"²⁴ This rhetorical question and the idea that the causes of terrorism should be addressed were not found widely in the press. The only other example was an article that made the claim that "For every Israeli killed by Palestinians, there have been at least 100 Palestinians killed by Israelis." Noting that Palestinian terrorism has roots in the fact that they are deprived of a state, the author states that the problem of terrorism "will only disappear when" Palestinians "have a country to go back to."²⁵

These two articles are examples of the comment that could help readers understand the reasons for these attacks. But apart from these two examples, the roots of anti-American terrorism are not probed in any of the daily stories in the *Globe* or the *Sun* about Libya and terrorism from the time of the Gulf of Sidra confrontation. If terrorism was a problem on the scale purported, it would seem that its causes, such as the problem of Israeli aggression against Palestinians, would warrant more attention in the press than it received.

24 "Terrorism turning world into battleground", *Sun*, April 12, 1986, p. B1.

25 "Evolution of Terror", *Sun*, Jan 7, 1986. p. A5.

This neglect was not due to any lack of examples of such aggression at the time. On Feb. 5th of that year, Israel intercepted a jet en route from Libya to Syria, forcing it to land in the desert.²⁶ An editorial on the event, titled "What is fair in war", concludes, "The pity for Israel is that Tuesday's hijacking has peeled away one more of the layers of law abiding statehood that have distinguished it from its enemies."²⁷ This is further indication of a double standard whereby acts of violence committed by Israel are simply not taken as evidence that it is a violent state, whereas that committed by Arab states is taken as proof of their violent nature.

Less than two weeks later, Israeli forces attacked a Palestinian village with tanks and helicopter warships.²⁸ Unlike the La Belle bombing, the event did not appear on the front pages, nor did it appear in the *Sun* at all. The story disappeared after a single story on the inside pages of the *Globe*, even though it occurred in a time of heightened tension between Arab states and Israel's Western allies.

Beyond the issue of neglecting the context of the La Belle attack, Libyan responsibility was never questioned. The

²⁶ "Arabs threaten to avenge Israeli hijacking", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 5, 1986, p. A2.

²⁷ Feb. 6, 1986, p. A6.

²⁸ "Israelis storm Lebanese village", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 18, 1986, p. A12.

a priori assumption of Libyan guilt was explicitly expressed by Reagan, who said in a speech that "the U.S. will respond when it has enough evidence that Libya is behind terrorist attacks on American targets."²⁹ The American government's lack of commitment to the principle of the presumption of innocence did not draw any comment in the media.

Another feature of administration remarks that might have drawn comment, but did not, was the variation in the amounts of evidence produced. At first, only weak links were provided to link Libya to the La Belle bombing, but on April 11th, "incontrovertible evidence" had been discovered, according to the *Globe's* front page story. But the next day, the White House was "coming close" to concluding that Libya was responsible.³⁰ The proof that was eventually used, a telegram from Libya to the embassy in East Berlin that the White House claimed to have intercepted, was never revealed publicly, reportedly for the sake of security of the source. There are reports that it never existed,³¹ and others that it did not provide real evidence that Libya was directly responsible.³² None of these reports were discussed in the mass media.

29 "US, Libyans exchange warnings", *Sun*, April 10, 1986, p. A1.

30 "Terror blast alert five minutes late, US officials say", *Globe and Mail*, April 11, 1986, p. A1; "Fleet on alert but White House silent", *Globe and Mail*, April 12, 1986, p. A12.

31 Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, p. 149.

32 Bearman, *Qaddafi's Libya*, p. 295.

2.3: DEMONIZING QADDAFI

The media devoted considerable attention specifically to Muammar Qaddafi during the time in which the Reagan administration was targeting Libya. Reagan himself made many references to Qaddafi, and the media reproduced this focus on him. Arguably, Qaddafi exercises more power in Libya than do leaders of liberal states, but it is difficult to believe that all political decisions and responsibility can be attributed to a single person; there must be some popular support, or at least a wider circle of ruling elites to support him. Other leaders in Libya were almost never mentioned in reports concerning the events. Qaddafi is also not the only head of state in the world to hold such power, and it is doubtful that many members of the public would be able to recall the names of other dictators as easily. This is a result, not only of Reagan's rhetorical strategy, but the practice of the media of reproducing it.

The personification took many forms, the most obvious being the use of language. References were made, in this case, often not to "the Libyan government" or "the Qaddafi administration", but to Qaddafi himself. The name of the leader and the name of the state eventually came to be interchangeable.³³ Very importantly, the military forces of

³³ For example, "Reagan reported studying military strike against Libya" opens with a discussion of the possibility of a "military move against Muammar Gaddafi". *Globe and Mail*, April 8, 1986, p. A1.

Libya were frequently described as "Qaddafi's forces."³⁴ Comparable expressions, such as "Reagan's America", or "Reagan's forces" were much less common. Domestic and allied leaders are not immune to the tendency to personify, as this practice is based on a particular understanding of politics in general. But the nature of the personification differs; it is the negative aspects of enemy states that is attributed to their leaders, whereas positive or neutral aspects of allied states are represented by their leaders.

The practice of blaming Qaddafi for specific acts of terrorism began shortly after the attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports. A few days after the attacks, the *Globe and Mail* editorial on the event was titled "Bad Bloody Hands", referring to those of Qaddafi. According to this editorial, the fact that the attackers carried the passports of Tunisians that had been confiscated by the Libyan government is proof that Qaddafi himself is personally responsible for the deaths in Rome and Vienna. No such accusations were levelled against Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, nor was he mentioned at all, in the editorial discussing the bombing of Tunis by Israeli jets.

Analysis pieces and commentary on the situation often included articles whose subject was Qaddafi, rather than

³⁴ "US fighter planes, warships renew attacks in Gulf of Sidra" *Globe and Mail*, March 26, 1986, p. A10.

Libya, Reagan, Palestinians, Israel, or any other figure. Examples of titles include: "Qaddafi safe from reprisals, analysts say"; "Qaddafi revered at home, reviled abroad"; "Qaddafi content to be in the midst of political storm"; and "How long can Qaddafi survive?"³⁵ At times, Qaddafi would be mentioned for no apparent reason, especially in headlines. An article reporting that the American government had "not ruled out any" group or individual as a suspect in the bombing of a passenger jet late in March was headlined "Qaddafi still suspect, U.S. claims."³⁶ A story describing the view of Henry Kissinger that Iran and Syria, and not Libya, should be the appropriate target for the administration's anti-terrorist efforts was headlined "U.S. focus said misdirected at Libyan leader."³⁷

Occasionally, photographs of Qaddafi were printed beside articles or commentary that had little to do with the attached text. An example is the analysis piece titled "Middle East powder keg where nuclear war looms." In approximately 25 column inches, Qaddafi and Libya are mentioned once, noting his unsuccessful attempt to acquire nuclear weapons. The

35 *Globe and Mail*, Jan 7, A11; Jan 8, A10; Jan 10, A9; Jan 17, A7;

36 *Sun*, April 2, 1986, p. A6. At this time, only the El Al attacks had been blamed on Qaddafi, and the Israeli government had rejected that accusation. But only Qaddafi, and not the Syrian government, nor others that had not been "ruled out", was mentioned in the headline.

37 *Sun*, April 14, A1; emphasis added.

accompanying photo was not one of any of the leaders of nuclear-capable countries, but of Qaddafi instead.³⁸

One article did provide reason to question the assumption that Qaddafi was personally responsible for widespread terrorism. This piece reported that it was known that Qaddafi did not "dictate most of the action of dissident Palestinian cells of Shia suicide squads."³⁹ No conclusions were drawn, however, about the justifications given by the U.S. for its military actions, or about the amount of focus on Qaddafi.

There was also a large amount of attention paid to the personal character of Qaddafi. He is described as "radical and unpredictable", "a loon", "murderous", "the strutting colonel", "provocative and unstable," and "an erratic half-baked leader" by newswriters.⁴⁰ All this comes in the wake of remarks from Reagan and other officials describing him as a "misfit", "loony tunes", "barbarian", "flaky", "possessed", "incoherent and unstable", a "mad dog", and "a clown,

38 *Globe and Mail*, March 10, 1986, p. A7.

39 "Libya gets support from non-aligned", *Sun*, April 21, p. A9.

40 "Libyan clashes serve aim of Reagan, Khadafi", *Sun*, March 25, 1986, p. A4; "World Watch", *Sun*, April 16, 1986, p. B5; "The line of death", *Globe and Mail*, March 26, 1986, p. A6; "Reagan and Gaddafi profit from dangerous skirmish", *Globe and Mail*, March 29, p.A9; "The warlike and the wary", *Sun*, March 26, 1986, p. B4; "Attack expected to fuel terrorism's flame", *Globe and Mail*, April 16, 1986, p. A11.

murderer, and a liar."⁴¹ After the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi, *Maclean's* emphasised the violent nature of the leader of the victims, featuring his picture on the cover, with the headline "The Fury of Khadafi".

Along with the focus on Qaddafi's character, attention was paid to life in Libya under his rule. Most were negative, relating food shortages and long line-ups required to purchase consumer goods, and the occasional reference to the failure of the Qaddafi government to supply education and health care after the collapse of oil prices in the mid-70's. There is discussion of public executions and corrupt civil servants, and the organization by the state of public demonstrations of support. One analysis article that appeared in both the *Globe* and the *Sun* did mention the provision of education and health care and the increase in standard of living for the country's poor, but generally this was not mentioned elsewhere.⁴² An article in *Maclean's* described only Qaddafi's promises to provide such services, but did not report that his government

41 "'Acts of war' condemned by Reagan", *Globe and Mail*, July 9, 1985, p. A1; "Gaddafi revered at home, reviled abroad", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 8, 1986, p. A10; "Khadafi's visions", *Maclean's*, Jan 13, 1986, p. 15; "Reagan mum on plans for 'mad dog' Gaddafi", *Globe and Mail*, April 10, 1986, p. A1; "UN debate indicates resolve against terrorism", *Globe and Mail*, April 17, 1986, p. A11.

42 "Khadafi's visions", *Maclean's*, Jan 13, 1986, p. 15; "Gaddafi revered at home, reviled abroad", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 8, 1986, p. A10; "Libyans live on diet of promises", *Globe and Mail*, March 31, 1986, p. A1; "Libyan democracy everywhere in view and hard to find", *Globe and Mail*, April 4, 1986, p. A1; "Gaddafi: the man and the myth", *Globe and Mail*, April 19, 1986, p. A9; "Libya says sanctions based on fallacies", *Sun*, Jan 8, 1986, p. B1.

made significant attempts to act on these promises until revenues from oil sales dropped dramatically.⁴³

The focus on Qaddafi, as well as providing much negative comment to portray Libya as a dangerous threat, distracts attention from other more significant factors that might lead the audience to understand the events more critically.

2.4: INTERPRETING THE ATTACK

The articles describing the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi on April 15 placed little emphasis on the amount of destruction and the loss of lives involved. There was little attempt to report an accurate number of deaths. An estimated death toll was not immediately available, but even as the extent of the damage was evident later, the news tended to focus on other facts.

The second day of coverage of the attack and its effect did include a story specifically discussing the damage. Initiating a larger pattern, the story focused on Qaddafi's adopted infant daughter, who was killed by bombs dropped on the tent where Qaddafi often slept.⁴⁴ In the 16 stories over the first two days after the attack, this is the only one

⁴³ On social spending and oil sales: Kaldor, Mad Dogs, p. 96, Bearman, Qaddafi's Libya, p. 125, 265-6, 270.

⁴⁴ "Adopted baby daughter killed as 'terror' hits Gaddafi family", Globe and Mail, April 16, 1986, p. A10.

specifically about damage done. There is no report of others killed or wounded, although there is description of buildings destroyed.

By the third day, estimates of the number of deaths emerged. The *Globe* again focused on the leader of the country, with a story headlined "Qaddafi's home filled with rubble,"⁴⁵ and chose to include the official death toll, which stood at 13 at that time, deeper in the story. The *Sun* also decided against highlighting the deaths, and included an estimate of 100 deaths in a story headlined "Thatcher battles critics of raid aid."⁴⁶ The *Globe* later included this estimate in stories in the next two issues, the latter of which was a front-page article. The *Sun* made one further citation of the death toll on an inside page on the 18th.⁴⁷ *Maclean's* made one passing reference to the more than 100 deaths.⁴⁸

The same pattern was followed after the confrontation in March. Then, two of the patrol boats which had approached the American destroyer were attacked and sunk; in the press, quoting a presidential spokesperson, this became "disabled two

45 *Globe and Mail*, April 17, 1986, p. A11.

46 *Sun*, April 17, 1986, p. A5.

47 "Thousands of angry Libyans chant 'holy war' at funeral", *Globe and Mail*, April 19, 1986, p. A13; "Gaddafi in tent during US attack", *Globe and Mail*, April 19, 1986, p. A1; "I saw children killed, says air raid witness", *Sun*, April 18, 1986, p. A6.

48 "The Fury of Khadafi", April 28, 1986, p. 18.

missile-carrying patrol boats... there are no apparent survivors." The reference made to this in the story the following day said that "at least 150 crew were believed aboard... it was unclear if any survived." This sentence, with its very passive description of the deaths, appeared in two different stories in that issue.⁴⁹

This might not be considered significant unless compared to the coverage granted the body count of terrorist acts against Western citizens. Nearly every article on the El Al attacks mentioned it; the headline on the first story in the *Sun* read "17 Die in Airport Attacks," *The Globe's*, "Terrorist raids in Rome, Vienna, leave 17 dead, 116 wounded."⁵⁰ Statements of the scale of the human costs were standard features of the background given over the next two weeks in articles describing the remarks of Reagan, Thatcher and others. A number of wounded Libyans was nowhere given in coverage of the bombings of Tripoli and Benghazi.

The execution of three hostages in Lebanon in retaliation for the bombings was discussed in an editorial.⁵¹ Yet those who died in the bombing, numbering over one hundred, evoked no

49 "US jets retaliate against Libya", *Globe and Mail*, March 25, 1986, p. A1; "US confrontation with Libyans planned as 'message' to Gaddafi", *Globe and Mail*, March 26, 1986, p. A1; "US fighter planes, warships renew attacks in Gulf of Sidra", *Globe and Mail*, March 26, 1986, p. A10.

50 *Sun*, Dec 27, 1985, p. A1; *Globe and Mail*, Dec 28, 1985, p. A1.

51 "Three who died", *Globe and Mail*, April 19, 1986, p. A6.

mention in any editorial, or in many stories.

Another result of the bombing raid was the destruction by an American bomber of a residential area of Tripoli, including heavy damage to the French Embassy, and the death of at least 24 civilians. This may not have been an intended target; but even so, this single error resulted in more deaths than the El Al and La Belle attacks combined. But relatively little space on the front pages or in headlines was awarded to this error. It was not totally ignored; the *Globe*, on the first day of this news, included 3 column inches on an inside page titled "U.S. says crippled jet may have hit civilian homes."⁵² No mention of the loss of civilian life was available at the time, one supposes, since none was included in the story. The next mention came four days later, in a front page story, titled "Qaddafi in tent during US attack",⁵³ which ends with reference to the bombed neighbourhood and the official death toll; the bombing of the area was not considered important enough for its own story.

The *Sun*'s first mention of the neighbourhood comes in an article headlined, "Search for jet called off,"⁵⁴ leading one to think that the story concerns the fate of the one jet

52 *Globe and Mail*, April 17, 1986, p. A12.

53 *Globe and Mail*, April 21, 1986, p. A1.

54 *Sun*, April 17, 1986, p. A5.

reported missing after the raid. But the lead sentence in the story is "A massive bomb from the U.S. jet lost during the attack on Libya may have fallen on a neighbourhood in Tripoli, damaging civilian homes and the French Embassy." *Maclean's* also mentioned the neighbourhood in one story describing the strike.

These facts, despite the lack of emphasis given them, did evoke some negative reaction. But often, the negative reaction is confined to statements from witnesses, and not reported as facts. The *Sun* carried a story titled "I saw children killed, says air raid witness."⁵⁵ This story marks a significant deviation from the dominant interpretation, reporting the remarks of a Libyan who states that the American air attack was the "real terrorism, a criminal act." Yet this view was explicitly rejected on the same page, with the headline "European community promises tougher curbs against terrorism", describing actions targeting Libya, and not the U.S.

The same assumption of the benevolent intention is found in the *Globe's* sympathetic analysis following the bombing, which quotes a "Western diplomat" as saying "we didn't realize 'surgical strike' meant that babies would need surgery."⁵⁶ This statement questions the ends used to achieve the strategic aims of the U.S., and implies that the destructive

55 *Sun*, April 18, 1986, p. A6.

56 "Washington surprised jubilation isn't shared", *Globe and Mail*, April 19, 1986, p. A1.

consequences of the chosen means are an unforeseen error. Although this statement is one of the most critical carried by the *Globe*, the objectives of U.S. policy are still not challenged.

The coverage of the attack itself exhibit a strong tendency to underemphasise the damage done and the civilians killed, while again focusing on the fate of Qaddafi and his family. As well, the attack was presented in a manner consistent with the U.S. administration's stated aims of deterring terrorism with a minimally destructive attack, although sometimes the appropriateness of the means employed was questioned.

2.5: THE RANGE OF DEBATE

The official reason for the air strike, as stated by Reagan, was the destruction of Libya's capability to sponsor terrorism. Almost all of the analysis of the event in the media continued to accept this explanation.

The first *Globe* headline reporting the story was "US planes attack Libya in reprisal for terrorism." This type of description did not start with the attack; through the four month lead-up, the expulsion of Libyan diplomats from Europe, and other moves against Libya were described in headlines as "anti-terrorist moves", designed "to curb terrorism", and

Reagan's agenda was an "anti-terrorism policy." Editorial and commentary writers also assumed that the government was searching for a "most effective therapy for the terrorist disease."⁵⁷ After the attack, a headline appeared that read "U.S. wants NATO role for its anti-terrorism fight."⁵⁸

The debate that accompanied the coverage, including the dissenting opinions, almost all fit within the interpretation based on the stated aims of the American government. Not all the discussion was completely supportive of the military action, but nearly all accepted that the intentions were as stated. The only subject of much debate was the efficacy of the tactics, with the debate centring on whether or not the attack was likely to succeed in decreasing the amount of terrorism in the world. The *Sun's* editorial on the day of the bombing led the writers to frame the question precisely; the editorial was titled "Will Qaddafi come to heel?". The question assumes that the intentions behind the bombing were to make the 'mad dog' do so; but often writers said it might not succeed.

Although both papers were generally supportive of the bombings in their editorials, some analysis critical of them

57 "France expels two diplomats in anti-terrorist moves", *Globe and Mail*, April 7, 1986, p. A10; "Europeans seek to curb terrorism", *Globe and Mail*, April 18, 1986, p. A10, "Carriers move into position off Libya", *Sun*, April 12, 1986, p. A5, "Attack expected to fuel terrorism's flame", *Sun*, April 16, 1986, p. A11.

58 *Globe and Mail*, April 25, 1986, p. A9.

was expressed. On the day after the bombing was first reported, one article described the event as a demonstration of "America's moral confusion", and recommended a "return by the U.S. to even-handedness in the Arab-Israeli dispute." The reference to confusion indicates that the violence committed is seen as an aberration, and not inherent in the world order.⁵⁹

The range of debate was summarized by *Maclean's* in their statement that "in the worldwide debate that followed the raid, the attack was described as either a timely blow against terrorism or a dangerous adventure doomed to increase it."⁶⁰ Once in the surveyed coverage, however, there was opinion that may be said to go beyond the bounds of the dominant interpretation. "Terrorist defined: Reagan fits meaning" went as far as to use the term normally reserved for enemies to apply to Reagan, and as such, this was unique.⁶¹ The article is critical, but only discusses the bombing as an isolated event, and only describes its consequences, not its motivations. It argues that Reagan's choice of tactics, and not the policy objectives, made him a terrorist. Other acts of the Reagan administration that might usefully be considered

⁵⁹ "Attack expected to fuel terrorism's flame", *Globe and Mail*, April 16, 1986, p. A9.

⁶⁰ "The Fury of Khadafi", *Maclean's*, April 28, 1986, p. 18.

⁶¹ *Globe and Mail*, April 24, 1986, p. A7.

are not used to pass a judgement.

There were many reasons to question the attack's stated goals of retaliation for terrorism (as the *Globe* claimed), or as the defensive destruction of Libya's ability to support future attacks (as Reagan claimed). The disproportionate scale of the air strike, the choice of military targets such as airports which play little role in terrorism, and the difficulties in stopping terrorism by destroying buildings⁶² all gave reason for scepticism. And terrorism did not decrease but in fact increased immediately after the attack, as was pointed out in a single story in the *Sun*.⁶³ Reports of this increase were not repeated, or mentioned in any analysis of the attack.

But the most obvious fallacy with all of the printed explanations is their failure to explain the support of the American government for terrorism in Central America and elsewhere. To cite just one example from the time, on February 17, a Swiss aid worker and 4 other civilians were killed and 9 were wounded when they were ambushed by U.S.-supported contras in Nicaragua.⁶⁴ This did not merit front page news, nor did it cause writers to question the anti-terrorist

62 See U.S. Defence Secretary Weinberger's remarks that the raid was successful because it destroyed a military headquarters, "NATO consultation urged", *Globe and Mail*, April 24, 1986, p. A13.

63 "Terrorism surges after raid", *Sun*, April 17, 1986, p. A1.

64 "Briefs" column, *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 12, 1986, p. A12

motivations the American state claimed for itself.

Given the implausibility of the stated reasons for the attack, critical media coverage might have included discussion of possible other motives. Yet no alternative explanations for the raid on Libya were presented in the mass media.

Other motives are, in fact, not difficult to find. There were domestic gains for the Reagan administration; the creation of the Libyan threat would justify further military spending, and Reagan's popularity probably increased with the attack on the enemy they had constructed and presented to the public.

Another factor may have involved access to oil; at the time of the raid, West Germany imported most of its oil from Libya. The American effort to isolate Libya may have been designed to increase Europe's consumption of American client states in the Middle East.⁶⁵ An additional reason might have been Libya's intervention in Chad, the Sudan and Morocco, and other independent actions in North Africa, which the Reagan administration may have considered a threat.

⁶⁵ These reasons are discussed in Bearman, Qaddafi's Libya, p. 293-6.

2.6: CONCLUSION

Whatever the reasons for the decision to attack Libya, nowhere in the mass media does one find mention of any of these possible motives. Media coverage systematically refused to accept any motives other than the implausible ones claimed by the U.S.

At the same time, the press served American state interests by presenting almost uniformly negative information about Qaddafi, failing to devote enough attention to the reasons for acts of violence against Western interests, and by minimizing the destructive consequences, including the human costs, of the action.

CHAPTER THREE: PANAMA

The second major example of American military action in the post-cold-war era took place shortly before Christmas, 1989, when U.S. forces invaded and took control of Panama. In the months before the invasion, Soviet client states in Eastern and Central Europe were being overturned by popular protest, and the end of the cold war looked imminent. At the same time, the Bush administration was promoting its "war on drugs" in Latin America as an important component of its foreign policy, and had identified Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega as an important contributor to the international drug trade. The invasion served as a test of the popularity of the war on drugs, and of the ability of the administration to replace the Soviet threat.

Coverage was surveyed from the 3rd to the 17th of May, 1989, which covered the Panamanian election of May 7th; the two weeks following the coup attempt of October 3rd; and the period from the 15th of December, shortly before the invasion, until the end of January, 1990, at about which time stories concerning Panama ceased appearing daily.

The analysis here is again divided into five sections.

The first presents an overview of the history of Panamanian-American relations before the invasion. The second surveys the coverage of events in the months before the invasion, during which time Panama was an important ongoing story. The third section describes coverage of the invasion and its immediate consequences. The fourth part of the chapter concerns the ways that the media attention focused on Manuel Noriega himself, which is once again an important part of the ideological function of the media. The final section describes the debate and analysis in the pages of the press which followed the invasion.

3.1: BACKGROUND

The invasion of Panama in December of 1989 was the product of a long, complex relationship between the two countries, and not an isolated act committed by one state against another. At no point in its history could Panama be considered an effectively sovereign state; the U.S. intervened in 1903 to ensure the formal independence of the country, and has intervened many times since. The events that led up to the invasion in 1989 cannot be meaningfully separated from the rest of the country's history, since no point of origin of an independent Panamanian history can be identified.

It is important to begin somewhere, however, in order to gain some understanding of the context. The most useful

starting point might be the signing of the 1977 Carter-Torrijos treaties. U.S. president Carter reached an agreement with the nationalist president of Panama, Omar Torrijos, to transfer control of the canal from the U.S. to Panama. A Panamanian was to be appointed head of the canal commission by Jan. 1, 1990, and a decade later, complete control was to revert to Panama.¹

After Torrijos' death in a plane crash in 1981, Manuel Noriega, leader of the Panamanian Defense Forces, came to hold real power in the country. Neither had ever been elected. In 1984, Noriega installed Nicola Barletta as president through a fraudulent election, and Barletta's inauguration was attended by U.S. secretary of state George Schultz. A year later Noriega had him removed from power in order to replace him with Erico Delvalle.²

The first moves against the Noriega government by the U.S. came in 1987. On June 7th of that year, Diaz Herrera, the second in command of the defense forces, made public allegations that Noriega had been involved the 1985 murder of the popular leader Hugo Spadafora, as well in the election fraud of 1984, and that he had participated, with the CIA, in the killing of Torrijos in 1981.³ These accusations prompted

1 Weeks and Gunson, Panama: Made in the USA, p. 38.

2 *ibid*, p. 14.

3 *ibid.*, pp 55-57.

demonstrations against Noriega's rule in the streets of Panama City, which were met with the imposition of a state of emergency. The U.S. then imposed trade sanctions against Panama, and soon after cut off financial aid.

On the 25th of June, 1987, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution calling for the removal of Noriega, until Herrera's charges could be investigated. The Organization of American States attempted to intervene by setting up negotiations between the Reagan administration and Noriega's government, but blamed the U.S. when the talks failed.⁴ The OAS also passed a motion calling on the U.S. to stop interfering in Panama's domestic affairs.⁵

Herrera's charges did not include any evidence of Noriega's involvement in the drug trade. But such charges had been investigated in the US, and his connections to the Iran-Contra scandal were uncovered in June of 1986. The administration did not act on these charges then, but in February of 1988, two grand juries in Florida found Noriega guilty of drug offenses.⁶ He had been on the payroll of the CIA during most of the 1970's, officially as an informant for the Drug Enforcement Agency's attempts to prevent the smuggling of

4 "Failed OAS negotiations, failed coup", *Central America Update*, Sept/Oct 90, p. 15.

5 Weeks, John, "Of Puppets and Heroes", *Report on the Americas*, July/Aug. 1988, p. 19.

6 Dinges, Our Man in Panama, p. 154.

drugs to the U.S. George Bush, as Vice-president, had insisted on rehiring Noriega in 1981. But there is evidence that the White House was aware of Noriega's involvement in the drug trade at the time.⁷

After this, the U.S. administration decided to support president Delvalle, who, after meeting with American officials, announced Noriega's retirement. At that point, Delvalle was removed from office by Noriega, and the U.S. announced it would officially recognize Delvalle as head of state, despite his lack of an electoral mandate.⁸ At this point, it seems that the U.S. plan was to remove Noriega but leave the rest of the governing structures in place.

The sanctions, which were imposed in June 1987, were gradually strengthened as time passed. Eventually they came to have dramatic effects on the population. By mid 1989, unemployment had grown, Panama's GDP had fallen by 17%, and the vital banking industry had suffered deeply from capital flight.⁹

Elections were scheduled for May, 1989, and it was widely assumed that there would be massive fraud to ensure Noriega's victory. The United States supported Guillermo Endara for the presidency, and contributed \$10 million for his campaign.

7 *ibid.*, pp 47, 49.

8 Weeks and Gunson, p. 62.

9 *ibid*, p. 75.

Given that Panama is a poor country with a population of 3 million people, this contribution was significant.

The election was held, and when even his interference with the process could not give Noriega the win he desired, he declared the election void. Demonstrations and riots filled the streets of Panama city, and Guillermo Ford, the opposition vice-presidential candidate, was attacked and beaten by security forces at a demonstration. Pictures of a bloodied Ford appeared in the pages of North American newspapers and magazines.

After the election was cancelled, the U.S. announced it would recognize Guillermo Endara, the opposition candidate, as head of state. An extra 1,800 troops were sent to the bases in the canal zone, an act that was described by the Panamanian government as an "act of war."¹⁰ The OAS met and called for Noriega to retire.

After the election and the violence, Panama ceased to be a front page story until October 3rd, when an attempted coup by members of the Panamanian Defence Forces failed to oust Noriega. Some limited support for the coup was given by American forces, but those plotting the coup refused to hand Noriega over to the U.S., and crucial support was denied.

Two months later, large numbers of troops were sent to the U.S. bases in Panama at night and began an invasion

¹⁰ "Bush troop move called act of war", *Sun*, May 12, 1989, p. A5.

shortly after midnight on the 20th. The forces included tanks, helicopter gunships, and the new F117A stealth bomber. The invasion came after a week of scattered confrontations between American and Panamanian military personnel; the last such incident was one in which a U.S. soldier was killed and one other wounded by Panamanian guards at a vehicle checkpoint. The American driver had refused to stop for the checkpoint, and Panamanian guards fired on the car, killing a passenger.

The main thrust of the attack was directed at the headquarters of the Panamanian Defense Forces, where Noriega was believed to be at the time. The headquarters were located in the center of the El Chorillo neighbourhood, home for many of the poor residents of Panama city. It was heavily bombed for four hours at the beginning of the invasion, and nearly completely flattened; many of the residents were killed and most lost their homes and all their possessions.¹¹

As the invasion began, Noriega disappeared from the PDF headquarters, and eventually took refuge in the Vatican embassy. The American forces, which were still occupying Panama city, surrounded the building. He surrendered on January 3rd, was arrested and taken to Miami where he was held in a prison until he was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to life in prison.

11 Weeks and Gunson, pp 8-9.

3.2: COVERAGE OF EVENTS BEFORE THE INVASION

The invasion was presented by the media as a quick, highly accurate operation, the goal of which was Noriega's capture. But such an image is highly selective; the damage left in the wake of the invasion, including the loss of human life, was considerable. The history of U.S. foreign policy gives reason to suggest that motives other than the capture of the head of state and the restoration of democracy were involved.

The event was justified as a decisive act in the war on drugs, and this motivation was rarely held up to critical scrutiny. More discussion of the past history of Noriega's involvement in the drug trade while he was employed by the CIA, and the support of the Reagan/Bush administration for his rule through the 1980's would have made this motivation much more questionable, and might have turned attention to the U.S. interest in retaining the military bases that accompanied the canal. By failing to direct the attention of the public to these other factors, and instead focusing on the personality of Noriega, the media allowed the U.S. government to construct another threat to the interests of the West.

Panama became an important news story for the first time during the election in May of 1989, with daily stories for more than two weeks in most newspapers. The important features

of the coverage of the election can be seen by comparing it to that of another election that occurred in Latin America a few months earlier, the El Salvadoran elections in March. There were other elections that year in Latin America, but many of these, such as that of Argentina¹², received minimal attention.

The lead story in the *Globe* on the day following the El Salvadoran election, reporting the victory of the right-wing ARENA party, did not mention any electoral irregularities or any of the pre-election violence that had occurred.¹³ This was despite the fact that, a week previous, stories had appeared on inside pages titled "Soldiers indicted for massacre", "Troops killed peasants, El Salvador army says", and a story on the day following the election about a different issue which mentions that two weeks earlier, "the United Nations passed a resolution which stated that 'there has been an increase in politically motivated violations of human rights in El Salvador'."¹⁴ A story a few days later reported "several air force bombings just days before the election" in which 5

12 "Menem triumphs in Argentine election", *Globe and Mail*, May 13, 1989, p. A1, does not discuss the fairness of the election at all. Also see "Ex-dictator takes lead in Bolivian elections", *Globe and Mail*, May 8, 1989, p. A11; this was the only story on this event.

13 "Government of El Salvador concedes defeat", *Globe and Mail*, March 21, 1989, p A9.

14 *Globe and Mail*, March 16, 1989, p. A18; March 13, 1989, p. A5; "Groups urge Canada to stop deportations", March 21, 1989, p. A16.

civilians were killed.¹⁵ However, *Maclean's* concluded that "the election appeared technically clean."¹⁶ The Panamanian election, in contrast, was treated with greater scepticism, even before it took place; "extensive vote tampering" was expected.¹⁷

Throughout the coverage of the Panamanian election, phrases such as "military strongman Noriega" and "his brutal response" to the elections were not uncommon.¹⁸ The negative image generated by such descriptions contrasts with the images used to describe the dictatorship which rules El Salvador. The editorial in the *Globe* following the election there claimed that the government of Jose Napoleon Duarte had "proved unable" to "introduce much needed social and economic reforms", despite the efforts of the U.S.¹⁹ These claims assume that the intentions of the U.S. and its client states are benevolent, and that those of its enemies are not.

The electoral violence in El Salvador, which received at

15 "Killing of journalists in El Salvador part of military plan, official says." *Globe and Mail*, March 25, 1987, p. A8.

16 "A shift to the right", April 3, 1989, p. 23.

17 "Extensive vote tampering expected in tomorrow's election", *Globe and Mail*, May 6, 1989, p. A8.

18 "massive election fraud claimed in Panama", *Sun*, May 8, 1989, p. A3; "OAS targets Noriega and calls for transfer of political power", *Globe and Mail*, May 18, 1989, p. A10.

19 "Arena for El Salvador", *Globe and Mail*, March 22, 1989, p. A6.

least tacit support from Bush, did not lead the media to question the selective nature of Bush's call, before the Panamanian election, for "all nations that value democracy to speak out against election fraud in Panama."²⁰ The article reporting this statement also mentions the fraudulent practices that had already occurred, and Bush's allegations of the harassment of soldiers in the canal zone, but it does not mention the US interference with the economy of the country over the past two years. Although there is reference to the fraudulent elections in 1984 which installed Barletta, the U.S. support for those elections is not mentioned.

This comparison indicates that the mass media considers it more important to condemn electoral fraud in enemy states, than to discuss electoral violence and fraud in allied states.

The past history of Panama was discussed in several background articles at the time. One typical example is a piece in the *Sun* just before the election, titled "Noriega owes power to U.S." The article does not discuss Noriega's employment by the CIA, his ties to George Bush, or the historic support of the U.S. for the rule of the puppet governments he had put in power in the past. Instead, it tells of the "clumsy" attempts to remove him from office by the Bush administration, and the electoral irregularities before the election, concluding that

20 "Panama's Noriega curbs reporting on Sunday vote." *Sun*, May 3, 1989, p. A4. The fact that it is still felt necessary to identify Noriega in this headline indicates that personification is only beginning at this point.

Bush's incompetence, and not his past support, had helped Noriega.²¹

The Panamanian election was an important running story, receiving daily attention in the press before and after the event. This was not unusual, but very little mention was made of the past friendly relations between the U.S. and Panama. The only direct reference was in an editorial which referred to the fact that Bush "played footsie with" Noriega.²² Given the amount of coverage, it cannot be claimed that the failure to bring this history to the public attention in an unambiguous way was a result of a lack of space.

The event that received the most attention was the beating of vice-presidential candidate Ford. This may have been a newsworthy incident, and the press perhaps should not be faulted for distributing such images simply because they coincided with the aims of the American government's foreign policy. However, it is likely that similar events take place in other elections that involve widespread fraud as well, but are not reported when Western reporters are not present. This was at least the case with the violence after the 1984 elections in Panama, which did not receive the same attention.²³ The disproportionate amount of attention on the Panamanian election was the important feature of media

21 May 5, 1989, p. A20.

22 "The flag as refuge in Latin America", *Sun*, May 9, 1989, p. A10.

23 Dinges, p. 187.

behaviour. Had a vice-presidential candidate in an election in El Salvador been beaten by the government, it is likely that there would not have been any reporters on hand to witness the event, and the public would not have been exposed to such images.

The 1989 OAS resolution against Noriega was mentioned in a *Globe* headline,²⁴ in contrast to the 1987 resolution that called on the U.S. to end its interference in the Panamanian affairs. That call was not mentioned in stories, nor were the efforts of the OAS to mediate at that time, and its conclusion that the U.S. was preventing a peaceful solution to the crisis. At the time, Herrera's revelations and the demonstrations that followed, did receive some minor attention.

The editorial in the *Globe* following the May 1989 election bore the title "The perils of Panama." This editorial tells of the U.S. efforts to influence the elections by covertly sending \$10 million to the opposition.²⁵ The "perils" referred to in the title were the dangers that the situation presented to American policy. The danger consisted in the fact that, although Bush would like to have Noriega removed, electoral means had failed and military action would be

24 "OAS targets Noriega and calls for transfer of power", May 18, 1989, p. A10.

25 *Globe and Mail*, May 10, 1989, p. A6. The financial support for Endara was not often reported in news stories.

unpopular in America and might even make Noriega more popular. Any perils to the people of Panama, such as the fact that the U.S. had tried to use its financial power to influence the outcome of their election, went unmentioned, reinforcing the assumption that the important threats are those to the United States.

The idea that the Bush administration might suffer from an invasion of Panama is expressed again in the opinion pages of the *Sun*, under the title "US intervention only brings trouble."²⁶ The author argues against an invasion, since that might harm American interests, and claims that "US policy in recent years might be expediently defended if it had displayed the slightest chance of overturning the Sandinista government or installing an uncorrupt and reasonably representative government in Panama." Only the lack of success, and not the policy goals of the administration, are criticized, as is the norm with the comment in the press. A *Sun* editorial also cautioned against an invasion, recommending the U.S. seek the support of other Latin American countries to oust Noriega. None of the comments considers the possibility that the U.S. interest might be other than the installation of a democratic government in the country.

The editorial comment after the election and the violence that followed provided another opportunity for the press to comment on the history of American support for Noriega and past electoral frauds. The *Sun* featured a background article

26 *Sun*, May 15, 1989, p. A10.

describing the recent history, referring to "allegations of vote-rigging" in the 1984 elections, and mentioning the ousting of both Barletta and Delvalle, but again neglecting to mention the American support for those acts.²⁷ The *Globe's* editorial did refer to this support, stating that "US authorities say they knew in 1984 that he had subverted the balloting."²⁸ The fact that Noriega had received military training at an American base and his involvement in the shipment of arms to the contras were mentioned in a feature story in the *Sun's* weekend edition,²⁹ but these facts seem to have been unknown or unimportant to writers of news stories.

The next time media attention was devoted to Panama, and the next opportunity for the press to discuss the role of the U.S. in the crisis, came with the attempted coup. The major focus of coverage was the extent of American involvement in the coup attempt. The desirability of a military coup d'etat was accepted as fact: the *Sun* described the event as "the coup the world had been counting on to remove Noriega..."³⁰ This kind of statement also illustrates the assumption of a global

27 "Military dominates Panamanian politics", *Sun*, May 12, 1989, p. A5.

28 Dinges, p. 187.

29 "Risking it all", *Sun*, May 13, 1989, p. B8.

30 "Anti-Noriega forces considered no threat", *Sun*, Oct 5, 1989, p. A5.

consensus around the existence of the threats originating in the third world.

The Globe editorial following the coup attempt is of interest, since it mentions other Latin American states. The rulers of El Salvador are referred to as a "right wing government", not a "regime"; the contra forces in Nicaragua are "rebels" and "political opponents" of the Sandinistas, not "terrorists"; and Noriega is referred to in the editorial as a "military strongman and indicted drug-runner." The instigators of the coup are described as improving "the prospect for a return to democratic rule" in Panama, as "young officers promising fair elections and an end to corruption."³¹ This last claim contradicts the information contained elsewhere in the same paper. The only reference to the motivations of the coup leaders appeared in the front-page story on the coup attempt that day, which reported the statement by a member of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs that the plotters "are not making a clamorous call for democracy, they just want their turn at the trough."³² That the editorial writers would ignore such a comment and base their analysis on the otherwise-mentioned claims that the plotters promised free elections reveals a readiness to assume benevolent motivations of those opposed to the enemies selected by the U.S.

31 "Washington's candidate in Managua", Oct 4, 1989, p. A6.

32 "Noriega forces crush coup attempt", p. A1.

The comment on the coup, focusing on the question of whether or not the U.S. was prudent to intervene, reveals the prevailing assumption of the right of the U.S. to interfere in the affairs of other states. This is apparent in an analysis piece, titled, "Failed coup forces U.S. to review restraint." The restraint referred to is "the restraint that has kept the U.S. from intervening more forcefully in smaller nations" in the region in the past.³³ No evidence for the existence of this restraint is offered; some could of course be produced, since it is always possible for the U.S. to intervene more forcefully than it does in any situation. But to emphasize its restraint, instead of its willingness to intervene as forcefully as it does, indicates that the author assumes the appropriateness of American intervention, and merely questions the optimal forcefulness.

Occasionally the assumption of the benevolent intentions of the U.S. led to simply inaccurate coverage. One analysis piece claimed, falsely, that "In 1985, it [the U.S.] cut aid to Panama in protest of his [Noriega's] removal of president Nicola Barletta, the first directly elected president since a coup in 1968."³⁴ This is an example of acceptance of dominant assumptions even without any supporting evidence.

33 *Globe and Mail*, Oct. 10, 1989, p A9.

34 "The cara de pina won't be denied", *Sun*, Oct. 5, 1989, p. A19. The U.S. did not cut off aid until 1987, and Barletta was fraudulently elected, with the support of Noriega and the U.S. (see section 4.1.)

3.3: INTERPRETING THE INVASION

The invasion was presented by the media as a sudden, precise operation of which the essential component, and therefore the criterion of success, was the capture of Noriega. The number of civilian deaths resulting from the invasion was not a prominent item in stories about the invasion. Most references to the toll used the official U.S. estimates of 202. There are many good reasons to question such a low figure, although most news reports did not. The best reasons might be drawn from official sources themselves: the relatively conservative Catholic Church in Panama gave 655 deaths, a number they report as the result of a check with hospitals and morgues.³⁵ These estimates then do not include those killed who were not taken to hospitals and morgues, or those who were buried in mass graves. Several other sources for estimates in the thousands have arisen.³⁶ For instance, former U.S. attorney general Ramsay Clark, who visited the country after the invasion, reported a death toll of at least 4,000.³⁷

Mass graves were discovered after the invasion; *The*

35 "The Numbers Matter", *Central America Update*, Nov/Dec. 1990, p. 1.

36 Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, pp 164-165.

37 "Scepticism growing in Panama over official invasion casualty toll", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 8, 1990, p. A9.

Nation reported a month later that 111 bodies were found in a single mass grave.³⁸ More later turned up; in April, a single story reporting the finding of 124 bodies quoted a Panamanian source saying that "about 8 other graves exist."³⁹ This gives a rough estimate of over 1000 deaths, several times the official figures, in addition to the count made by hospitals and morgues. A year after the invasion, however, a story about the death toll reported figures from a group called Physicians for Human Rights, who claimed that 600 civilians and 50 soldiers had been killed. The story did not mention any higher estimates.⁴⁰

Besides the stories concerning Clark and the Physicians for Human Rights, the death toll was reported in 11 stories in the *Globe* and the *Sun*. All of these report the death toll between the middle and the end of the story, and most give the figure as 300 or less. *Maclean's* referred to civilian deaths twice, and both times the toll was reported as about one thousand; the second mention is to the claims of U.S. politician Jesse Jackson, in the last paragraph of a four

38 Alexander Cockburn, "Beneath a Peak in Darien", *The Nation*, Jan 29, 1990, p. 114.

39 "Mass Graves in Panama puts US toll in question.", *Globe and Mail*, April 30, 1990, p. A9.

40 "Civilian deaths 6 to 1, group says", *Sun*, Dec. 20, 1990, p. A3.

paragraph story.⁴¹ No headlines actually reported a death toll, as is common with attacks against American enemies, leaving the numbers as secondary facts in other stories.⁴²

The deaths of non-Americans were directly marginalized by a reporter who "asked if the invasion was worth the deaths so far of 21 U.S. servicemen". Bush's positive reply was headlined; if any reporter had chosen to ask whether or not the killing of Panamanian civilians in the bombing had been justifiable, it was not reported.⁴³

The destruction of El Chorillo was also de-emphasized. Photos of the flattened buildings were published,⁴⁴ but little attention was paid to this destruction in news stories of the invasion; it was mentioned in only four of the nearly 100 stories in the coverage of the first three weeks after the invasion in both papers. A typical instance was a *Globe* story shortly after the invasion, which was titled "Streets in Panama returning to normal" even though the area was still

41 "The Last Stand", Jan 8, 1990, p. 16; "Counting the hidden costs", Jan 22, 1990, p. 22

42 For instance, "Panama president calls for US trial", *Sun*, Jan. 2, 1990, p. A1; "US troops pester Vatican assembly", *Sun*, Dec. 27, 1989, p. A1. For a comparison, see the discussion in the first case study of coverage of the El Al attacks of 1985.

43 "Invasion worth loss of life, Bush says", *Sun*, Dec. 22, 1989, p. A1.

44 "Refugees of the invasion", *Sun*, Dec. 20, 1990. p. A3.

filled with rubble a year later.⁴⁵ The condition of the slum, a fact which serves as counter-evidence for the claim in the headline, appears at the end of the story; that the slum was inhabited by some of Panama City's poorest residents is not mentioned.

One analysis piece in the *Globe* stated that "no mass graves or flattened neighbourhoods have yet been found."⁴⁶ The first part of this claim was true, but it assumes that mass graves would not be found, since the author would not have included this fact had their existence been considered a possibility, or would have waited until more time had elapsed. But this rhetorical consideration aside, the claim that no flattened neighbourhoods had been "found" was false. Pictures of the flattened area had appeared in the media; that a reporter would deny its existence indicates at least an uncritical reaction to the events.

45 Dec. 26, 1989, p. A1; see also *Sun*, Dec. 20, 1990, p. A3. The *Sun*, in a similar front-page story did not refer to the neighbourhood; see "Panama life returning to normal", Dec. 28, 1990, p. A1.

46 "History of relations of US with Panama mutes denunciation", Dec 30, 1990, p. A8.

3.4: DEMONIZING NORIEGA

Noriega became an easily recognizable figure in North America, as the media focused almost exclusively on his role in the Panamanian government. After he was finally captured and brought to a Miami jail, one newspaper advertisement for a commercial airline in a British paper featured a photograph of him, with no identification provided, but with the caption "Only one man can get to Miami for less than 50 pounds."⁴⁷ Presumably, advertising would not make reference to a news figure unless they were widely recognised. There was only one reference to another member of the Panamanian government in the coverage examined;⁴⁸ although Noriega probably exercised more personal power than most leaders of liberal democratic states, it is difficult to accept that there were no other figures in the country's government worth naming.

The major focus of the media after the invasion was the attempt to capture Noriega, who sought refuge in the papal nunciature in Panama City. Daily front-page stories discussed the chances of his surrender or his ejection by the Vatican, the tactics used by the invasion force to ensure his capture, etc. This distracted attention from the effects of the invasion on the population, including the homelessness of the

47 From *The Observer*, reprinted in *Globe and Mail*, Feb 5, 1990, p. A7.

48 "Debt of Gratitude", *Sun*, Jan 12, 1990, p. A3.

residents of the El Chorillo slum destroyed in the invasion, and the chaos of looting that followed the invasion as the domestic police force was eliminated. The report of the Commission for the Defence of Human Rights in Panama describes many of the attacks on unarmed civilians by the invasion force, including the destruction of a bus that killed 26 passengers, the destruction of a secondary school, and other instances of the deliberate targeting of noncombatants.⁴⁹

The absence of these details from press coverage cannot be attributed to shortage of news space. Even after his capture, the press found it important to report each event in the legal proceedings against him in Miami. The prison mugshot of Noriega was featured on the front pages of newspapers and in newsmagazines.⁵⁰ Photographs of bombed civilian slums in Panama city did not receive the same exposure; the condition in which Panama had been left by the invasion was mentioned, but only after details of his capture. As well, stories in all three sources discussed the quirks in Noriega's lifestyle. An example is the story headlined "Luxury, self-promotion, Noriega's style",⁵¹ which reported on his mansion, providing details of its furnishings. That a dictator of a third world country should have an luxurious home is not surprising, and

49 CODEHUCA, "This is the Just Cause", p. 26.

50 Jan. 3, 1990.

51 Globe and Mail, December 26, 1989, p. A12.

the same headline probably could have been accurately written about almost any of the heads of state in the world. This story serves no useful function other than to attract negative attention to Noriega, instead of to conditions in Panama that resulted from the invasion.

These stories relied on mainly unidentified sources and circumstantial evidence for details. *Maclean's* featured a story titled "Lifestyle of a dictator" that reported claims that Noriega had once raped a 13-year old girl, that his troops used water cannons filled with acid, that he had an illegitimate son, and that he was a bisexual; the story did not identify the source of any of these claims, nor were these claims repeated in any other story.⁵² *The Sun*, immediately after the invasion, reported that Noriega had "deteriorated mentally", that he suffered paranoia, and that he drank constantly; these charges were attributed to "intelligence sources."⁵³

Noriega was no doubt particularly corrupt, but the nature of his rule was in no way similar to that of the governments supported by the U.S. in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador; there is no evidence that human rights abuse was endemic in Panama the way it is in these states. Descriptions of Noriega as "one of Latin America's most brutal and despised fugi-

52 Jan. 1, 1990.

53 "Noriega eludes US troops", Dec. 20, 1989, p. A2.

tives"⁵⁴ are at least exaggerated and extremely misleading.

The focus on the personality of a head of state as opposed to the structural forces in play in that state is not unique to enemies; but the negative nature of the focus is of importance. The *Globe* featured an editorial about the personalities involved, entitled "The presidential frustration factor", claiming that president Bush's personal feelings about Noriega were the key determinant of the decision to invade, and that "The personal nature of Mr. Bush's reaction is evident in his words."⁵⁵ Both Western and non-Western leaders are treated as more important than facts might warrant, but the nature of the focus on Bush was markedly different, however, from that on Noriega.

The individual focus on Noriega is also evident from the near-total lack of information about Panama in the media after Noriega's capture. For the two weeks following the invasion, both newspapers printed daily stories about Noriega, including stories which repeatedly reported the Vatican's refusal to eject him from the embassy.⁵⁶ Some stories reported the fact that Noriega was moved from one jail cell in Miami to another,

54 "The Last Stand", *Maclean's*, Jan 8, 1990, p.12.

55 *Globe and Mail*, December 28, 1989, p. A6. This theme was repeated in coverage of the war against Iraq.

56 e.g., *Globe and Mail*, "Vatican refuses to deliver Noriega", Dec. 30, 1989, p. A8; "Vatican urged to expel Noriega", Jan 2, 1990, p. A12; "Charges coming, pressure rising for Noriega", Jan 3, 1990, p. A8. All these stories contain essentially the same information.

his request to appear in court in formal dress⁵⁷, and the order of a judge to have him held without bond. Articles discussing the legality of trying a citizen of another country in a Miami court for crimes committed outside the U.S. were carried,⁵⁸ although most articles reported dismissals of this concern as unlikely to be a successful legal defense. Most of this information and opinion originated with state officials.

Events in Panama before the capture that were given less importance include the raid by U.S. troops on the residence of the Nicaraguan ambassador,⁵⁹ the refusal of the U.S. to send immediate aid to those made homeless by the invasion,⁶⁰ the United Nations condemnation of the invasion,⁶¹ and the visit by Clark to the country. Some of these important facts were printed on the front pages, but none of them were turned into a running story, as was the continuing situation of Noriega in the embassy and in prison.

57 "Fallen dictator asking for suit and tie", *Sun*, Jan 13, 1990, p. A11. The use of a passive verb, "fallen" instead of the more active "captured" here serves to obscure the role of the US in the court case.

58 For instance, "Noriega rejects US jurisdiction", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 5, 1990, p. A1.

59 "US says hot tip, mixup, led to raid on diplomat", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 3, 1990, p. A8.

60 "US aid urged for economy of Panama", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 10, 1990, p. A1 .

61 "UN opposes US invasion of Panama", *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 21, 1990, p. A4.

3.5: THE RANGE OF DEBATE

The official reasons given for the invasion, protection of the canal, drug charges against Noriega, protection of the lives of the U.S. troops stationed there, and restoration of democracy, were reported, and came under considerable scrutiny. Many opinion pieces questioned the official reasons, saying that some of the reasons given were not sufficient justification for an invasion. But only rarely was it mentioned that most of these reasons are considerations the U.S. government routinely ignores; other more believable reasons for the action were rarely suggested.

The *Globe* editorial immediately after the invasion, "The invasion should be condemned"⁶² illustrates the range of debate. The reasons for condemning the invasion were that it "will offend many Latin Americans", and that it is "out of keeping with the trend in political events elsewhere". The death of perhaps thousands of civilians, and the violation of the UN charter, were not mentioned, and the right of the U.S. to impose its will on other countries was not questioned.

The invasion was discussed by two other editorials in the *Globe*. The next, "The presidential frustration factor" has been discussed; the third, "The invasion of Panama", repeated the condemnation in the first editorial with the same reasons. The raid on the Nicaraguan ambassadorial residence was not

62 Dec. 21, 1989. p. A6.

mentioned, nor were any of the more plausible unmentioned reasons for the invasion. This editorial argues that

"if the intention of the military adventure was to capture General Manuel Noriega, protect the lives of U.S. citizens and better the lives of Panamanians, it must be judged, at least in the short term, a tragic failure."⁶³

That consideration is given to the possibility of these being the intentions further displays the lack of critical distance between the media and the state.

The *Sun's* first editorial, "Pious U.S. bully flushes a crook", was similar in regards to the invasion, describing it as "sullied by its circumstances." Here the capture of Noriega was seen as the essential act in the invasion, and the rest of the action constituted "circumstances" for the invasion. The damage to the city, the death toll, and the history of American policy in Central America are not mentioned in this editorial either.⁶⁴

Only two of the 23 editorial and commentary pieces in the coverage examined can be said to be critical of the goals of American foreign policy. "Panama: nothing new about U.S. intervention" listed 51 separate instances of American intervention in the region, and claimed that

US policy in the Latin America has always been aimed at domination of the region, and too bad for the living conditions of the vast majority of

63 *Globe and Mail*, Jan 3, 1990, p. A6.

64 *Sun*, Dec 21, 1989, p. A10.

people there.⁶⁵

The other example was the *Globe's* opinion piece entitled "Grenada and U.S. self-interest." This piece asserted that only American interests were involved in the invasion of both Grenada and Panama, and that they had little to do with bringing democracy and freedom. Given the evident similarity of the invasion of the two countries, frequent comparisons, or at least references to Grenada, might have been useful in examining the issue. However, this item was the only one to make the comparison to Grenada.

The rest of the analysis provided was mostly highly supportive, although criticism of the invasion on grounds of imprudence was often expressed. Some statements that explicitly expressed their acceptance of the fundamental assumptions of the dominant interpretation of the American role in the world order, are worth repeating. They include the claim that "There is no question of U.S. commitment to human rights and its strong moral fervour in international institutions",⁶⁶ the claim in an editorial from the New York that "civilized countries, with the U.S. usually in the vanguard, oppose foreign intervention in the affairs of sovereign countries",⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Sun*, Dec. 28, 1989, p. A15.

⁶⁶ "The guys in the white hats end up with their faces red", *Sun*, Dec. 28, 1989, p. A15.

⁶⁷ "Sound enough reasons", *Sun*, Dec. 22, 1989, p. A9.

George F. Will's remark that American national character "is bound up with acceptance of a responsibility to further democracy,"⁶⁸ the assertion that "the primary goal is to rebuild a political structure that will sustain a democratic non-military government,"⁶⁹ and the claim that George Bush "wanted to put things right for democracy and the forces of good."⁷⁰

More plausible reasons for the change in policy towards Panama and the invasion can be identified. One possibility was that Panama had become an important financial center, and that the Bush administration wanted to put an end to Cuba's ability use Panama to avoid an American embargo.⁷¹ Bush was able to dispel the image of "wimp" that had plagued him, and to present a successful campaign in the "war against drugs" to the voters in the U.S. As well, the use of the new stealth bombers in the invasion justified continued Pentagon expenditures on such equipment, at a time when the cold war appeared to be coming to a rapid close.⁷²

Although the canal was an important American interest in

68 "A democratic and neighbourly invasion", *Sun*, Dec. 21, 1989, p. A10.

69 "Why did Bush finally decide to send his troops to Panama?", *Globe and Mail*, Dec. 21, 1989, p. A7.

70 "The hidden reasons why Bush invaded Panama", *Sun*, Jan. 11, 1990, p. A11.

71 Weeks and Gunson, p. 77.

72 "Stealth fighter passes combat test in Panama", *Sun*, Dec 27, 1989, p. B8. In fact, the bombs dropped by the stealth jet missed their targets by several hundred metres. See Sharkey, Under Fire, p. 98.

the region, it was not put in danger through any of these changes of government, or during the invasion. The large military bases that protected the canal were probably of more concern to the US. They served as an important point from which to project power over the entire region, having been used, for example, in actions in Nicaragua and El Salvador, in violation of the 1977 treaties.⁷³ These bases were to be given up under those treaties by the end of 1999; CODEHUCA concluded that "the real reasons underlying its invasion" included the need "to maintain its Military Bases in the Canal Zone."⁷⁴

3.6: CONCLUSION

The coverage of the invasion is nicely summarized by the *Sun* in the column designed for use in high school classrooms, "Starting point for students".⁷⁵ Facts about the invasion are listed, some criticisms of the action taken are suggested, and two questions were put forth for students to consider. It was asked whether or not restoring democracy was a good enough reason for the invasion, and whether or not the killing of the American soldier and the declaration of war by Panama were

73 Dinges, p. 148-9.

74 CODEHUCA, pp 73, 74.

75 *Sun*, Jan. 16, 1990, p. B4.

reason enough. Nowhere in the summary is it suggested that the U.S. might have had motives other than those stated. Nor is the implausibility of the restoration of democracy as a motivation for the invasion considered. The death of civilians is not mentioned, nor were the details about the killing of the soldier or any historical information about US-Panama relations given.

As with the coverage in general, this summary leaves room for debate over the invasion, but only within the framework of the acceptance of the stated motives of the government. Any independent perspective from which to form a judgement of the event would be difficult to support given the presentation of information in the sources surveyed. Although most of the important facts relevant to the invasion were reported at some point, many that would support a critical perspective capable of explaining broader patterns of international behaviour were absent. Those which were present were considered less important than those facts, most of which are supplied by the American government, which support the dominant understanding of world order.

CHAPTER FOUR: IRAQ

The 1991 war against Iraq represented the first event undertaken by a united capitalist world against a threat to that order. The new friendly relations between the Soviet Union and the U.S. made international co-operation on the matter possible; in the past, the Soviet Union would certainly have vetoed the UN Security Council resolution which authorized the use of American and allied military force.

As in the case of Panama, the U.S. changed its policy and acted against a state that had been a former ally. This required the media coverage to begin to portray that former ally as a dangerous threat, as it had done with Libya and Panama when the U.S. government decided to act against them.

This chapter, as with the others, begins with an overview of some of the relevant history of Iraq. The second section discusses the coverage of some of the events shortly before the invasion of Kuwait. Although the war and the media coverage have been the subject of much discussion, most of that discussion begins with the coverage of the events of late July and August, 1990. The coverage described here includes coverage of an important set of events in March and April of that year, since this coverage is important in understanding

the role of the media in making possible the war nearly a year later. The events of July 1990 which led to the invasion of Kuwait are also examined in this section.

The third section of this chapter discusses the coverage in the two weeks following that invasion. This period is crucial, since at this time Iraq suddenly became an enemy state, and the character of the media coverage changed accordingly. The fourth section deals at length with the media's focus on Saddam Hussein, since this focus was of unusual intensity. The fifth section, as with the previous two studies, deals with the coverage of the war itself. The coverage analyzed includes that between January 1st and March 5th of 1991. The last section discusses some of the commentary and analysis that accompanied the coverage, and the extent to which the debate stayed within the bounds of the dominant interpretation of the war.

Coverage of the war presented the event as a relatively precise attack which successfully forced the Iraqi armed forces from Kuwait, removing a dangerous threat to the peaceful order of the free world. Facts that might lead one to question this interpretation, such as the American destruction of Iraqi armed forces beyond the scale required, the destruction of the industrial civilian infrastructure in Iraq, and the support of the U.S. for undemocratic governments in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, were rarely presented as

a meaningful part of the context of the war.

4.1: BACKGROUND

The Middle East has great strategic importance to Western powers because of its huge oil reserves. Industrial economies are heavily dependent on oil as a source of energy, and its price has important effects on those economies. The region contains most of the world's proven reserves of oil, and nearly half of its annual production.¹ The "Carter doctrine" of 1980 made clear that Persian Gulf oil was seen by the American government as a vital interest.²

Most of this oil has been under control of pro-Western governments since its discovery. Iraq, Kuwait, and other Gulf countries were created by Great Britain in 1922 after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. The borders that were drawn were arbitrary, among the consequences being the statelessness of the Kurdish populations of Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey. Kuwait remained a British colony until 1961, when it achieved formal independence under the family that had governed it since its creation, and which still is in tight control of the country.³ Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have been ruled by pro-

1 "Where the Oil Flows", *Fortune*, September 10, 1990, pp 48-49, with calculations.

2 Stork and Wemger, p. 35.

3 The history is discussed in Frankel, p. 16.

Western governments since their creation. All the governments of Middle East have very poor human rights records, and none is democratic by western standards.

The United States had supported Iraq during its war with Iran, which ended in 1988. They had also lent covert support to Iran, which may have contributed to the eventual inability of either side to win a victory. Little attention was focused on Iraq after the end of that war, but the American government continued to support the government of Saddam Hussein with economic aid.⁴

But in early 1990, Iraq again became a subject of attention in the press. In March, the government of Iraq tried and executed British journalist Farzad Bazoft for spying for Israel, and sentenced his driver to 15 years in prison.⁵ The British government, as well as others in the West, condemned the execution, although no important actions were taken against Iraq.

Soon after the execution, the discovery of an attempt to send "krytons" to Iraq was reported by the British government.⁶ The Iraqi government claimed that they were designed for use in a university laser research project, but the

4 "Bush pushed aid for Iraqi leader, U.S. paper says", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 24, 1992, p. A9.

5 "Britain expresses revulsion at execution", *Globe and Mail*, March 16, 1990, p. A10.

6 "Three charged in suspected Iraqi n-arms plot", *Globe and Mail*, March 29, 1990, p. A1.

British authorities insisted that they were intended for use as triggers in nuclear weapons.

Following this story, the Iraqi government made claims that it was willing to use chemical weapons in response to an attack by Israel.⁷ Israel is known to possess an arsenal of approximately 100 nuclear weapons, as well as chemical weapons⁸ and also possesses missile technology with a range great enough to reach targets in Iraq. Chemical weapons had been used by Iraq in its war against Iran, and against Kurdish civilians.

The last major event to draw the attention of the press at that time was the intervention of a shipment of what the British government claimed were parts for a "supergun".⁹ The company that produced the steel tubes stated that the parts did not even fit together, and could not be used to fire a warhead.¹⁰

In July of that year, ministers of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries met to settle a dispute about the quota system that was used to set oil prices. Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates had long been exceeding their established quotas, and the price of oil had been falling

7 "Iraq threatens use of nerve gas in response to any Israeli attack", *Globe and Mail*, April 3, 1990, p. A1.

8 "Minister says Israel has chemical weapons", *Globe and Mail*, July 28, 1990, p. A8.

9 "Suspected gun parts seized by customs officials Britain", *Globe and Mail*, April 12, 1990, page A2; "Iraqi gun plot suspected", *Sun*, April 12, 1990, p. A5.

10 "British firm denies pipes were meant for Iraqi gun", *Sun*, April 16, 1990, p. A3.

steadily below the target price. Iraq also accused Kuwait of taking oil from disputed lands near their border. Hussein described the situation as "economic aggression" against his country. During the dispute at the OPEC talks, Iraqi tanks and troops were massed on the Kuwaiti border.¹¹ On August 2nd, when the Kuwaiti government refused to give in to Iraq demands, Iraq invaded and seized control of the country.

The invasion was rapidly condemned in the West; an emergency session of the Security Council was convened, which passed a resolution condemning the invasion and demanding unconditional and immediate withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. American forces were sent to the Persian Gulf on Aug. 8th. Later, more troops were sent in October, as the Bush administration endorsed a policy of confrontation. On Nov. 29th, the UN security council passed a resolution authorizing member states to "use all necessary means to uphold" the previous resolution, and to "restore international peace and security in the region".¹² The resolution set a deadline of January 15 for Iraqi compliance; when this failed, the war began.

The war involved 40 days of bombing of a variety of targets, including any industrial facility that could have been used by the Iraqi military. Most of the important bridges

11 "100,000 Iraqis sent to border with Kuwait", *Globe and Mail*, Aug 1, 1990, p. A9.

12 Text of the resolutions from Gulf War Reader, p. 156.

in the country were destroyed, as was every electrical power generating station, and many water treatment plants.¹³ A ground war followed, in which most of the Iraqi forces that had survived in Kuwait attempted to retreat back to Iraq. Extremely little resistance to the attack was encountered, and the Iraqi government surrendered after four days.

4.2: COVERAGE OF THE EVENTS BEFORE THE WAR.

Media attention on Iraq began with the trial and execution of Farzad Bazoft in March. The trial had aroused interest from the press in the West,¹⁴ and his execution was reported world-wide. A few days later, the event was discussed in editorials in both the *Globe* and the *Sun*, and was featured in a story in *Maclean's*.¹⁵ What the editorials failed to mention, and what the press coverage failed to emphasize, was the fact that Bazoft, while perhaps not a spy for Israel as Iraq had claimed, had offered to sell the British government information at least four times.¹⁶ This claim, although it lends some credence to the Iraqi charges, was presented only once in the

13 Arkin, "On Impact".

14 "Britain expresses revulsion at execution", *Globe and Mail*, March 16, 1990, p. A10.

15 "Executed in Iraq", *Globe and Mail*, March 16, 1990, p. A7; "Iraq: death dealer", *Sun*, March 16, 1990, p. A20; "Death of a reporter", *Macleans*, March 26, 1990, p. 37.

16 "Israeli ties suggested in execution", *Sun*, March 17, 1990, p. A3.

eight stories and editorials on the matter.

The *Globe* story about his execution was accompanied by a smaller story, lower on the same page, reporting that in 1989, 53 reporters had been killed around the world, 14 in El Salvador alone. But none of these journalists, at least some of whom were probably killed by governments or their death squads, were named or received the extent of coverage granted to Bazoft.

One example of a similar but neglected story was that of the killings of an El Salvadoran journalist and editor five months later, in September of 1990. Despite clear evidence of a government cover-up of a death-squad killing, neither the *Sun* nor the *Globe* chose to report it. The newspaper which did report the event did not associate it with the broader trend of political killings of reporters, in the manner the *Globe* did with Bazoft's execution.¹⁷ By devoting unusually large amounts of coverage to Bazoft's killing, and ignoring crucial details, Iraq had been cast as an enemy state well before the invasion of Kuwait.

The announcement of the interception of the shipment of krytons made the front page of the *Globe* and other papers shortly after this.¹⁸ Subsequent coverage tended to assume that the krytons, as the American government claimed, were to be

17 "Journalist's death suspicious", *Calgary Herald*, Oct 12, 1990, p. C15.

18 "Three charged in suspected Iraqi n-arms plot", March 29, 1990.

used as triggers for nuclear explosives. The Iraqi government's claims that they were intended for use in a university laser research project were not considered important. The truth of the claim is of little interest; what is relevant is the amount of attention that this event garnered, in comparison with other states' attempts to develop nuclear weaponry.

An article appearing a few days later concerning nuclear proliferation¹⁹ also mentioned Pakistan, Brazil, India, Argentina and other states which had attempted to acquire nuclear weapons since the adoption of the non-proliferation treaty. Again, it was Iraq's efforts to join the superpowers in their possession of nuclear weapons that was seen as important enough to initiate discussion of the larger context of proliferation, even though the editorial stated that "Iraq's program is far behind the other four".

The announcement of Iraq's willingness to use its chemical arsenal was covered in a front-page story by the *Globe*, as well as a story in the *Sun*, and was followed the next day by an editorial entitled "The threat of chemical weapons".²⁰ No mention was made in this story of the 1981 Israel air strike on the Osirak reactor in Iraq, nor Israel's possession of chemical and nuclear weapons; knowledge of these

19 "Sanctions urged to curb weapons' spread", *Globe and Mail*, April 18, 1990, p. A9.

20 "Iraq threatens use of nerve gas in response to any Israeli attack", *Globe and Mail*, April 3, 1990, p. A1; "Iraq threatens to fight Israel with chemical weapons", *Sun*, April 3, 1990, p. A3; "Threat of chemical weapons", *Globe and Mail*, April 4, 1990, p. A10.

might make Iraq's assertion of its right to defend itself through such a deterrent seem more acceptable. But the announcement was described as a threat, not an intention to defend. Later, when Hussein offered to dismantle the chemical weapons in return for similar disarmament from Israel,²¹ the *Globe* chose to put the story on an inside page, and not on page one.

Throughout the war, references to the threat of chemical weapons were most often to Iraqi chemical weapons, and not to those of the U.S., Israeli or Syria.²² Syria later declared its possession of a stockpile of chemical weapons, but the fact was not considered important enough for a front-page story or an editorial, as was Iraq's announcement.²³ Other states' willingness to use them was not described as a "threat"; reports of similar statements made by Canadian officials during the war, said that the government "has not officially renounced the right to use chemical weapons as a retaliatory weapon".²⁴

The supergun shipment was also featured in several stories. Although the British manufacturer of the steel tubes

21 "Iraqi president offers hint of dismantling toxic arms", *Globe and Mail*, April 13, 1990, page A8.

22 For instance, "Poor man's nukes", *Sun*, Jan 30, 1991, p. A5.

23 "Newest ally's chemical weapons concern US", *Sun*, Nov 17, 1990, p. A3.

24 "Canada reserves right to retaliate with chemical weapons", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 12, 1991, p. A15.

claimed that the parts could not be used as a weapons system, the *Sun* continued to refer to the equipment as a gun in subsequent headlines.²⁵ The incident was referred to several times in background pieces later during the war, along with the krytons and the killing of Bazoft.²⁶

A pattern is identifiable in the stories; they were all (with the exception of Hussein's declaration) initiated by the British or U.S. governments, and probably would not have been important stories had states not made efforts to draw them into the public spotlight. The British condemned Iraq for the Bazoft execution, and the secret service there was important in the uncovering of the kryton and alleged supergun parts shipment.

Events in July of 1990 also attracted attention. The *Sun*, for instance, in its first story on the conflict within OPEC,²⁷ reported Kuwait's claims that Iraq was stealing oil from it, portraying Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates as the victims of a market glut, instead of the creators of the market glut who had inflicted economic damage upon Iraq. *Maclean's* took a similar approach, reporting negatively on Hussein's rule in

25 "Son insists Bull not involved in gun project", *Sun*, April 19, p. A18.

26 "Widening Gulf", *Sun*, Aug 3, 1990, p. A3.

27 "Iraq digging illegal wells, Kuwait says", *Sun*, July 19, 1990, p. A8.

Iraq.²⁸

Not all newspapers, however, presented the same interpretation at that time. In the *Globe and Mail*, Kuwait and UAE were described as "chronic oil-cheaters"²⁹ in a story in the business section. The *Globe* also ran an editorial on July 23, mentioning Hussein's reluctance to compromise on the price of oil, but also his "moderate stand" on Israel, and alliance with "moderate Jordan and Egypt" as the "side of Mr. Hussein that must be encouraged".³⁰ In an analysis piece, it was mentioned that the Iraqi government had "distributed oil wealth equally", according to an Iraqi.³¹ Early after the invasion, it was remarked that Hussein had spent "his country's oil wealth on wiping out poverty and illiteracy and building housing, public transit systems and roads", that he had done more than any other Arab government to protect the rights of women, and that his cabinet included women.³² These details might be seen as important, but positive comment about life in Hussein's Iraq, or about Iraq's grievances against Kuwait and UAE, was almost totally absent after the invasion

28 "A Gulf Showdown", *Maclean's*, Aug 6, 1990, p. 31.

29 "OPEC agrees to cut oil output", July 28, 1990, p. B5.

30 "Iraq bids for dominance over the Arab world", *Globe and Mail*, July 23, 1990, p. A6.

31 "Iraqi president enhances stature", *Globe and Mail*, July 30, 1990, p. A8.

32 "Hussein has always put himself on line", *Globe and Mail*, Aug 11, 1990, p. B1.

of Kuwait.

Almost none of the coverage of the events concerning Iraq in the months before the invasion of Kuwait dealt with the relations between Iraq and the United States or other Western powers.³³ This is an interesting fact, since the Bush administration was at that point continuing its assistance to the government of Iraq, and none of the events that were recorded in the media led to any calls for diplomatic or political action against Iraq. It was only after the invasion of Kuwait that Bush and other Western powers openly took an anti-Iraq position.³⁴

4.3: THE INVASION AND OCCUPATION

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait triggered off an intense negative reaction from leaders of Western countries, especially Bush, and the reaction from the press was similar. Nowhere was a comparison to Panama made, although such a comparison might have been useful in comprehending the motivations behind the U.S. position.

The invasion provoked some comment on the political

33 The exception is "Death of a reporter", *Maclean's*, March 26, 1990, p.37, which reported that Britain had suspended ministerial visits, and repeated the claims of Thatcher's government that "stronger action, such as cancelling a \$475 million export credit guarantee negotiated with Iraq last November, would not influence Hussein..."

34 "Who will stop Saddam Hussein", *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 7, 1990, p. A13, reported that "Two days before the invasion, US president George Bush's administration was still telling congress that it would be wrong to impose sanctions on Iraq."

situation in Kuwait. On Aug 2nd, along with stories of the invasion, the *Sun* ran a second-page story concerning conditions in the country. Life in Kuwait city was described as follows: "In all but the low-rent expatriate worker areas, the capital of Kuwait is a showcase of oil-gush indulgence."³⁵ Another comment piece in the *Sun* called Kuwait an "impressive experiment in developing statehood". And the *Globe* described Kuwait as "nominally a constitutional monarchy", and *Macleans*, in the most negative description, called it a "conservative kingdom".³⁶

Some vital details are left out of these descriptions, such as the fact that the majority of the population of the country were expatriate workers, who did not live in the wealthy areas, who had no political rights, and were subject to instant deportation without any judicial process. In fact, only 3% of the country's 2 million inhabitants could vote for the parliament, which was later dissolved by al-Sabah. The press in Kuwait was heavily censored, and political parties and unauthorized trade unions were illegal. Amnesty International has accused the Kuwait government of using torture on political prisoners.³⁷ And little mention was made of the

35 "A tale of two cities: one rich, one poor", *Sun*, p. A2.

36 "Canada's divisions exposed", *Sun*, Jan 14, p.A1, "Quick facts on Kuwait", *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 3, 1990, p. A14, *Macleans*, "Tyrant of the Gulf", Aug 13, 1990, p. 20.

37 Sherry, "What the Democratic Forces Want", and MacShane, "Working in Virtual Slavery".

economic effects upon Iraq of the Emir's policy of violating OPEC production quota agreements, which had led to the invasion.

Kuwait was not the only country presented in an excessively positive light. Saudi Arabia, ruled by King Fahd, was also an important subject of discussion.³⁸ There is mention of the discrimination against the country's women, and the repression of religions other than Islam, but also mention of a practice in which "each leader confers with the people" in sessions at which "any Saudi male has the right to attend". In a *Maclean's* article on Saudi Arabia, the country is described as "authoritarian" and "completely dominated" by King Fahd's family, but a Prince is cited as saying that moves toward democratic government would be "disastrous" if they took place too quickly. While such a statement may be true, similar comments could probably be made in regard to Iraq as well, but were well outside the range of discussion of Hussein's rule. Saudi Arabia has also been accused of torture by Amnesty International,³⁹ and it would be difficult to argue convincingly that King Fahd is any less brutal than Saddam Hussein. Yet the coverage of the two states left that impression.

Another nation worth mentioning in this regard is Israel. Although Israel possesses and has threatened to use chemical weapons, has invaded Lebanon, and once launched an unprovoked

38 "The New Crusaders", *Sun*, August 11, 1990, page B1

39 See Sherry, "Democratic Forces"

attack on Iraq, it was not discussed as a threat to peace in the region. Israel has long been the largest military power there, and it was only when Iraq began to challenge this superiority that it was represented as a threat.

Syria was treated similarly. Hafez al-Assad, a traditional enemy of Israel and the U.S., joined in the coalition of forces against Iraq. What was rarely said was that both Hussein and Assad are leaders of Baath parties. This is not insignificant; although there may not be formal ties between both Iraq and Syria's parties, Baathism is an ideology that guides both.⁴⁰ That Assad ordered the massacre of at least 10,000 protesters in 1982, or that his picture is omnipresent in Syria as part of a personality cult, or that the secret service is also omnipresent⁴¹ were not frequently mentioned. In contrast, the massacre of Kurdish civilians ordered by Hussein, and the personality cult in Iraq were common knowledge. One commentator claimed that Hussein's rule "makes nations like Syria look like liberal democracies", although no evidence to support this comparison was provided.⁴²

Other western-allied governments, including that of Qatar, where Canadian forces were stationed, can be placed in a similar category, both in terms of the nature of the

40 Luttwak, "Agencies of Disorder", p. 293-4.

41 "The outlook after the war", *Maclean's* Feb 4, 1991, p. 36; "Syria's favourite pin-up lives a hidden life", *Globe and Mail*, May 28, 1992, p. A17; "Quiet opposition to Assad approach", *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 5, 1991, p. A12.

42 "The Pen and the Sword", *Sun*, March 17, 1990, p. A7.

political system and its representation in our media. Later on, as the war began, one story discussing the feeling of Canadian troops there claimed that it was "ironic that they are defending democracy from a base in Qatar, a conservative sheikdom..."⁴³

When seen in the context of the very few mentions of the Iraqi government's more equitable distribution of resources, these portrayals of other states are disproportionately negative, and serve only to ensure the further support for the war against Iraq, a war which was partly justified by George Bush as an effort to restore the "legitimate government of Kuwait".⁴⁴

Coverage of the occupation of Kuwait continued to assume the evil nature of Iraq. Many reports of repressive tactics used by Iraq were headlined by both newspapers during the occupation, including two separate reports from Amnesty International.⁴⁵ The claims were taken as fact by the media, as seen in the headlines that appeared on November 28: "Kuwait tells of Iraqi horrors", and "Kuwaitis tell of Iraqi atroc-

43 "Van Doos and Desert Cats", *Maclean's*, Jan 21, 1991, p. 24.

44 This phrase appears in almost all of the speeches by Bush in the Gulf War Reader, as well as in a letter to the American people published in *Newsweek*, Nov. 26, 1990, page 28-9.

45 *Globe and Mail*: "Iraqi soldiers torturing Kuwaitis, rights group says", Oct. 3, 1990, p. A13, "Iraqi atrocities cited by Amnesty", Dec 19, p. A1.

ities".⁴⁶ That both newspapers chose to use the verb "tell" and not "allege" or "claim" indicates more credibility being granted to the Kuwaiti sources than might be the case with others. The fact that the same verb is used in two different newspapers is also of interest; coincidence is one possible explanation, but it is more likely that the story originated with the public relations firm Hill and Knowlton, who worked for the Kuwaiti government during the occupation. Further support for this hypothesis lies in the vocabulary used in the stories. The *Sun* referred to babies that had been "yanked from incubators", and the *Globe* to babies who had been "torn from life support systems." The verbs "removed" or "disconnected" might seem more objective and less emotional, but neither paper used them.

Reports that Iraqi soldiers had removed incubators from Kuwaiti hospitals, resulting in the death of infants, first appeared on September 7, when the Kuwaiti ambassador to the United Nations distributed a letter to the UN describing the event.⁴⁷ The claim was cited repeatedly in subsequent stories, and the allegations were made again in U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus hearings on Oct. 10, by a 15-year old Kuwaiti identified only as "Nayirah". She claimed to have witnessed Iraqi soldiers removing 15 infants from incubators

46 *Sun*, p. A1, *Globe and Mail*, p. A10.

47 "Patients killed, Kuwaitis say", *Globe and Mail*, p. A14, "Iraq accused of causing deaths in Kuwaiti hospitals", *Sun*, p. A4, Sept. 7, 1990.

and having "left the babies to die on the cold floor".⁴⁸ One story that reported on the hearings mentioned Iraq's denials, but ended by affirming the story, saying that "for Nayirah, ... her nightmarish experiences hold a terrible truth."⁴⁹

The fact that the story went unquestioned at the time and was repeated later,⁵⁰ indicates a tendency to accept the credibility of ideologically useful claims, despite contrary evidence. Nayirah, it was later reported, was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the U.S., and so probably did not live in Kuwait at the time of the invasion, and probably would not have remained even if she had been present.

Hill and Knowlton, in fact, played a large role in shaping information about Kuwait during the occupation. A vice-president of the firm presented the witnesses, including Nayirah, to the congresspersons who organized the hearings; they were aware of her identity.⁵¹ The firm was paid \$10 million for their work, which included distributing "video news releases" to more than 700 television stations around the world. A member of the firm reported that the releases were sometimes broadcast in U.S. newscasts without identifying the

48 "Remember Nayirah, witness for Kuwait?", *New York Times*, Jan 6, 1992, p. A17.

49 "Witnesses to Terror", *Maclean's*, Oct 22, 1990, p. 32.

50 The alleged events were repeated in "Babies die as doctors flee Kuwait", *Globe and Mail*, Dec 10, 1990, p. A10, and "Iraqi atrocities cited by Amnesty", which refers to the babies being "left to die on cold floors."

51 "Remember Nayirah?" (see note 48).

source.⁵²

The claims of others who were present in Kuwait, such as Stephen Nunn, who reported that "reports of brutalities were exaggerated, adding that Iraqis are not pillaging and raping", an Icelandic doctor who claimed that "reports of deliberate mistreatment of hospital patients by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait had been exaggerated", or others who said that "they witnessed no brutality against civilians by the occupying army"⁵³ were never reported in headlines, but were relegated to the ends of stories.

After the ground war, as coalition troops were able to enter Kuwait city, these allegations were made even more dubious as many who had been in the city for the occupation were asked about conditions. According to one story, all of them "denied any knowledge of... systematic Iraqi brutality against Kuwaiti civilians".⁵⁴ This single story represented the only such statement, but was not presented on the front page, or lead to any significant attempts to change the way the occupation was commonly understood.

The reporting from the Persian Gulf was, as is well known, heavily censored by the U.S. military, which controlled

52 Sharkey, *Under Fire*, p. 116. The president of Hill and Knowlton, Craig Fuller, is a former chief of staff to vice-president Bush.

53 "Winds of War", *Maclean's*, Aug. 20, 1990, p. 25; "Babies die as doctors flee Kuwait", *Globe and Mail*, Dec 10, 1990, p. A10; "Kuwaitis tell of Iraqi atrocities", *Globe and Mail*, Nov 28, 1990, p. A10.

54 "Atrocity charges denied", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 26, 1991, p. A17.

the movements of all reporters.⁵⁵ This censorship covered all reporters from all countries, and thus constitutes global control of the flow of information. Although the censorship was officially for security reasons, some of the details of the censorship are difficult to understand as security measures. One reporter from an American newspaper who described bomber pilots returning from missions as "giddy" had that word replaced by "proud" by military censors.⁵⁶ This one example might not seem significant, but we may never know how often this kind of censorship took place.

Canadian military officials also intervened in the dissemination of information to ensure that the coverage of the deployment of military forces in the Persian Gulf was not negative. One example was a report by Paul Koring of the *Globe*, whose story featured a description of the low morale among soldiers on one vessel. After that story, the military commander of the Canadian forces ordered that Koring be given no co-operation from soldiers and no access to bases.

The censorship was noted and mentioned by the *Sun* and the *Globe* regularly, which carried small reminders that the reports were subject to censorship. But *Maclean's* did not feel a need to do so, although they did carry a story about the media coverage of the war. Reporters inside Iraq were "under strict Iraqi censorship", while Western journalists in the

55 Sharkey, Under Fire, ch. 9.

56 *ibid*, p. 130.

region

had to adhere to limitations on what they could report. The US military limited escorted trips by journalists to the front lines to those chosen for special pools, and it reviewed at least some of the resulting reports before they were distributed to other reporters.⁵⁷

One way in which the deployment of troops was presented was as part of the search for a "peaceful solution."⁵⁸ Since the American demand from the very beginning was for an unconditional withdrawal and since Iraq was facing the largest deployment of military power since the second world war, it is difficult to consider any possible alternatives as a "peaceful solution", yet this was the phrase often used by the media. It reinforces the assumption of a peaceful world order interrupted only by events such as the invasion of Iraq.

4.4: Demonizing Iraq

The media coverage of events before the invasion of Kuwait represented the role of Saddam Hussein in a manner similar to typical references to other heads of state. Reports generally referred to "Iraq" in the headlines, and most of the stories made a single reference, or none at all to, "Iraqi president Saddam Hussein." These references to the person of the leader were used to describe his statements, and not those

57 "The Prime-Time Conflict", *Maclean's*, Jan 28, 1991, p. 43.

58 For instance, "UN backs use of force in Gulf", *Globe and Mail*, Nov 30, 1990, p. A1.

of the government of Iraq. Most of the stories did not make immediate reference to the Iraqi leader. Often he would not even be mentioned, or only mentioned near the end of the story, in contrast to later coverage that almost always began with reference to him. Claims were generally made by "Iraq" at that point, even if they were his statements.⁵⁹ Some of the stories did not even refer to any people, and stuck to referring to the actions of countries.⁶⁰

Only two items, both in the *Globe*, focused specifically on Hussein during the OPEC talks before the invasion. The first was not particularly critical of him,⁶¹ although the second was more negative.⁶² This was a news story reporting that the Baath party had ensured that it would not lose power by changing a proposed constitution that might have led to elections. The story asserted that Hussein had a "single-minded ambition to become leader of all Arabs", and that "some in the West took his actions as proof he is an irrational personality."

59 "Quota violations amount to war, Iraq warns oil-cartel members", *Globe and Mail*, July 19, 1990, p. A1; "Death of a reporter", *Maclean's*, March 26, 1990, p. 37.

60 "Iraq digging illegal wells, Kuwait says", *Sun* July 19, 1990, p. A8.

61 "Iraq bids for dominance in the Arab world", July 23, 1990, page A12.

62 "Iraqi president enhances stature", July 30, 1990, p. A8.

4.4.1: The Use of Names

Throughout, the *Globe* nearly always referred to him as "Mr. Hussein" throughout the war, as did *Maclean's* generally. The *Sun* began by referring to him with his title and full name, but after August 3, he was referred to as "Saddam".

The *Sun* ran a story discussing this use of nomenclature.⁶³ It was claimed that headlines in Iraq and other Arab states use the first name, but gave no real explanation of why Western customs are applied to other Arab leaders. Nor does this explain why some publications in Canada, including the *Globe* and *Maclean's* chose to use his first name. In particular, the *Sun* neglected to explain its own use of "Mr. Hussein" in stories that appeared before the invasion, and the change that took place afterwards.

One explanation is that the newspapers wished to appear consistent with the statements made by government leaders in the West, who almost always used "Saddam" and whose statements and pronunciations were carried by the broadcast media. If this is a factor, it represents another means by which the content is influenced by the state.

The point is not merely semantic. The use of a first name to refer to adults in our society by someone in a position of power can be considered derogatory; if newspapers were to

63 "Saddam Hussein name game can cause confusion", August 7, 1990, p. A2.

discuss statements made by "George", "Brian", or "Margaret" it would be seen as derisive. Although specifying the precise effect of the use of the given name is not possible, it may have some relation to the habit of using given names to refer to children. Portraying Hussein as a child, and therefore as less rational, would help to make the use of force seem more necessary. The *Globe*, however, occasionally went out of its way to include Hussein's last name in square brackets inside quotations from government officials that mentioned "Saddam".⁶⁴

4.4.2: Personifying Iraq

Perhaps the most significant feature of the coverage was the way in which, after the invasion of Kuwait, the press focused upon the person of Hussein instead of the state of "Iraq". This focus took many forms.

One form was the portrayal of Hussein as the only decision maker in Iraq. This was common after the invasion of Kuwait: one article asserted that "as long as Saddam stays in power, Iraq will act as a bully boy."⁶⁵ An editorial described the purpose of the blockade of Iraq as "to dissuade Iraq's belligerent president Saddam Hussein from further territorial

64 For example, "Fear permeates Jordanian capital", Jan. 10, 1991, p. A6.

65 "A Gulf Showdown", *Maclean's*, Aug 6, 1990, p. 31.

acquisitions."⁶⁶

As mentioned above, coverage of events before August 1990 usually only mentioned Hussein in the end of the story, if at all, and reference then was often to claims made by "Iraq" or by "Baghdad". But after the invasion, many stories referred to the leader specifically. In fact, often "Iraq" and "Saddam" were used interchangeably. Headlines in particular tended to read "Saddam says...", not "Iraq says...". This seems innocuous until statements such as "Saddam assails Egypt"⁶⁷ or "Saddam Hussein bludgeoned Kuwait"⁶⁸ start to appear in headlines and editorials, and stories refer to "his rape of Kuwait".⁶⁹ This parallels the words of Bush, who said that "Saddam Hussein ... raped, pillaged and plundered... Kuwait".⁷⁰

Such statements are highly metaphorical, but the imagery is misleading. One human being cannot do these things; they require the co-operation of at least a few leaders, and the support of an army. But these others were rarely mentioned and never blamed. Sole blame for the war was explicitly attributed

66 "Why Canadian destroyers must help restrain Iraq", *Globe and Mail*, Aug 13, 1990, p. A10.

67 "More ships steam to Gulf as Saddam assails Egypt", *Sun*, Aug 13, 1990, p. A1.

68 "Middle East tremors shock Wall Street", *Globe and Mail*, Aug 6, 1990, p. B5.

69 "Let us leave our enemies with an example", *Sun*, Jan 15, p. A3.

70 Speech of Jan. 16, 1991, Gulf War Reader, ed. Sifry and Cerf, p. 311.

to Hussein, such as editorials that claimed that "The world faces war in the Middle East because of the intransigence of one man," or that "Saddam has had every opportunity... to call the whole thing off."⁷¹

Another result of the focus on the leader was the description of the Iraqi military as "Saddam's army", and not "Iraq's". References to the military of Iraq as "Hussein's stockpile" and "his one million man force"⁷² were quick to appear in all three news sources. Sometimes these references were gratuitous, such as the *Globe* story that began "Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, whose forces easily overran tiny Kuwait..."⁷³ What must be noted here is that although the U.S. president is commander in chief of military, there were no constant references to "George Bush's army" or "Bush's nuclear arsenal". One commentator even mentioned this oddity of coverage, saying that "in popular rhetoric, it is Saddam that is fighting the war"⁷⁴ but no explanation of the political consequences of this rhetoric ensued.

Another form this personalization took was the frequent

71 "The world unites against Saddam Hussein", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 17, 1991, p. A16; "Let's now hope the Gulf War will end soon", *Sun*, Jan 17, p. A14. The first quote again assumes a global consensus.

72 "The thief of Baghdad", *Sun*, August 3, 1990, p. A8; "Bush's Gambit", *Sun*, August 9, 1990, p. A3.

73 "Foreigners held in Baghdad, U.S. says", *Globe and Mail*, August 8, 1990, p. A1.

74 "Saddam remains untargeted, for complex reasons" *Sun*, Jan. 19, 1991, p. A3.

mention of the Hussein in headlines of stories that have very little relation to him. For instance, a story that concerned military deployments of the allies was titled "More ships steam to gulf as Saddam assails Egypt".⁷⁵ The verbal attack on Egypt was not new, surprising, or very consequential, and thus not of interest to those who wished to become informed of events, yet the name "Saddam" was inserted into the headline. A story that had little to do with a speech by Hussein was accompanied with the headline "Hussein calls for holy war in Persian Gulf".⁷⁶ This practice can be seen as an attempt to appeal to a commercially viable attitude of focus on Hussein beyond the need to learn about events in the war.

One further effect the habit of portraying Hussein, and not the Iraqi people as the victim of any allied military activities, which meant that the victims of the war were often ignored. An editorial titled "The world must act to contain Saddam Hussein", and stories describing the creation of an allied coalition as "The world unites against Saddam Hussein"⁷⁷ helped to reinforce the idea that Hussein was the only important Iraqi. This obscured the idea that our governments might be killing innocent civilians. It is much easier to

75 *Sun*, August 13, 1990, page A1.

76 *Globe and Mail*, August 11, 1990, page A1. The reference to a holy war was frequent during the crisis; see section 3.3 for a discussion of the term 'jihad'.

77 *Globe and Mail*, August 3, 1990, p. A12; *Globe and Mail*, Jan 17, 1991, p. A16.

obtain consent for a war against one evil man than a war against a civilian population. A clear explanation of this was expressed in a quotation by an American soldier from a comment piece reprinted from the Washington Post:

No kraut, wip or nog. You'd think Luke the Gook would have turned into Zeke the Sheik or Ahab the Arab... It's as if the Arabs don't even exist. The sole demon and scapegoat is Saddam Hussein.⁷⁸

The same comment piece quoted another soldier saying that "The battle cry is not going to be 'Free Kuwait'. We have become so focused on Saddam Hussein."

4.4.3: Demonizing Hussein

Given the identification of the entire country of Iraq with its leader, that leader was then subject to a strongly negative focus upon his personal character. Examples are too numerous to discuss with any comprehensiveness here; almost every reference to him throughout the crisis made some judgement about his intentions, his values, or his personality. Often he was characterized as a "brutal tyrant",⁷⁹ or a madman, and the word "strongman" was used more than could be counted.⁸⁰ Other adjectives employed were: violent, impulsive,

78 "Waiting for war", *Sun*, January 12, 1991, p. B1.

79 "The new crusaders", *Sun*, August 11, 1990, p. B1.

80 For example: "US leads drive for UN sanctions", *Globe and Mail*, August 4, 1990, page A9; "Invasion first war over oil for OPEC", *Sun*, August 3, 1990, page A11.

extreme, unpredictable, a dictatorial thug, dangerous, ruthless, menacing, monstrously inhumane, fiendish, murderous, and megalomaniacal. The media sometimes changed his title from "Iraqi president" to "Saddam Hussein, Iraq's dictator".⁸¹

The nature of his rule in Iraq was subject to some intensely negative representations, and may have been the most important part of the process of constructing the enemy. A comment piece described him as "the cruellest and certainly the most dictatorial of the various tyrants of the Arab world".⁸² This second sentence may not be strictly false, but since it is difficult to measure the comparative cruelty or dictatoriality of totalitarian states, it indicates a distraction from the reporting of facts and useful analyses, and an emphasis on the emotional.

The point is not that Hussein was not a tyrant, but that at other times, leaders are described in value-neutral terms so as not to convey a judgement, and often both sides of a story are sought out and presented. Yet the media in this instance chose to accept uncritically that Hussein was evil, without passing similar judgements on other leaders.

The discussion of Hussein's character did allow some debate over the reasons for his evil acts. One theory presented was that he was insane; the other was that he was very

⁸¹ One example is "Death of a reporter", *Maclean's*, March 26, 1990, p. 37.

⁸² "The Pen and the Sword", *Sun*, March 17, 1990, p. A7.

intelligent but was willing to die for the cause of Arab nationalism as a martyr. The choice between the two is summed up in a story headlined "Madman or Mideast Messiah?"⁸³ Another story claimed that "Hussein is an enigma to Westerners. They tend to dismiss him as a madman, but he seems too cunning to write off so easily."⁸⁴ Neither of these views allow us to see Hussein as a leader whose rational choices failed to solve his problems.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Hussein had good reason to act the way he did. His attempts to raise the price of oil were certainly not motivated by insanity but were in the economic interests of his own nation. And in a conversation with U.S. ambassador April Glaspie on the 27th of July, he was told that the American government had "no opinion" on the border dispute between Iraq and Kuwait. Glaspie also told Hussein that she had "a direct instruction from the president to seek better relations with Iraq."⁸⁵ The Bush administration had also recently acted in ways that would be perceived as friendly, including the provision of military aid.⁸⁶ This probably led him to believe that the United States would not

83 *Globe and Mail*, Aug 11, 1990, p. A9.

84 "Flames of War", *Maclean's*, Jan. 28, 1991, p. 19. The use of the third person to describe Westerners indicates again a pretence of objectivity, as if the writer were not part of presentation of the subject.

85 Complete transcript in The Gulf War Reader, p. 122.

86 "Bush pushed aid for Iraqi leader, U.S. paper says", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 24, 1992, p. A9.

retaliate after the invasion. But these facts were not widely printed as were those facts that served as evidence for either the "madman" or "messiah" explanations of his behaviour.

In fact, unpredictability could have been attributed to Bush, whose radical change of policy towards Iraq could be seen as inconsistent, whereas Hussein only invaded Iraq after threatening to do so. But it was always Hussein, and not Bush, that was represented as unpredictable.

More speculation involved Hussein's intentions. Usually, it is difficult to make assertions about a person's intentions, since the standards of professionalism usually require the media to restrict themselves to making factual observations about a person's behaviour. But different standards seemed to be in place during the war. Repeatedly, it is claimed that Hussein wanted to rule all of the Arab world or more, e.g., "Allow the Iraqi leader to take one inch of Kuwait and he will try to take the rest of the world."⁸⁷ No good reason for this claim was produced at any time in the coverage surveyed. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was ordered because of Kuwait's refusal to accept Iraq's demands for higher oil prices; it does not imply that he is power hungry or that he had any intention to invade and annex Saudi Arabia or any other nation in the Gulf or elsewhere. Yet this was the continual claim of analysts and observers in the media, which supported Bush's original justification of sending troops to

87 "The world can stop Iraq", *Globe and Mail*, Aug 8, 1990.

the Gulf, "to assist the Saudi government in the defense of its homeland."⁸⁸

Two more examples of the negative focus on Hussein explicitly dehumanize him. An editorial in the *Sun* referred to the dangers of American policy towards Iraq with the phrase "a mad dog is most dangerous when it is cornered."⁸⁹ And the title of one commentary column in *Maclean's* proclaimed that "Saddam Hussein is not a human being".⁹⁰

Perhaps the most powerful descriptions of Hussein that appeared were the frequent comparisons to Adolf Hitler. These appeared almost immediately, the first the day following the invasion of Kuwait, when Israeli foreign minister Moshe Arens drew the similarities.⁹¹ George Bush quickly adopted the comparison, and it became common. *Maclean's* was able to assert with conviction that "[h]is invasion did, indeed, have a Hitlerian quality."⁹²

A different, but at least as plausible, parallel was drawn and appeared in the mass media once. Don McGillivray's

88 Speech by George Bush, August 8, 1990, in The Gulf War Reader, p. 197.

89 "Choices tough for Saddam", *Sun*, Aug 8, 1990, p. A10.

90 March 4, 1991, p. 15.

91 "Israelis anxious but smug", *Globe and Mail*, Aug 3, 1990, p. A1.

92 "Tyrant of the Gulf", *Maclean's*, Aug 20, 1990, p. 19, see also "The Arab response to Iraq", *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 8 1990, p. A12. An American weekly newsmagazine went so far as to modify a photograph of Hussein, shortening and thickening the moustache to make him appear more like Hitler on the front cover. The photograph was captioned "Furor in the Gulf". *The New Republic*, Sept 3, 1990.

analysis drew the comparisons with the "new world order" rhetoric issued by Bush and that used in Nazi Germany by Hitler.⁹³ Hitler used the phrase "great new order" in Berlin in 1941, and a collection of his speeches was titled "My New Order." But this comparison was not made by other analysts.

4.5: INTERPRETING THE WAR

The war destroyed much of the industrial infrastructure of Iraq, including water purification facilities and electricity generating stations, making hospital and other services impossible. 84,200 tons of bombs were dropped on the country, and despite the U.S claims to great accuracy for the precision of the bombing, less than 9% of the weapons used were the laser-targeted "smart bombs", and success rates of 80% were extreme exaggerations.⁹⁴

Reports of the death toll were minimized throughout the war, by both the Iraqi and US governments, and also by the media. The first official US estimate of the number of Iraqi military deaths, 2,000, was reported in a front page story by the *Sun*, although it was not a lead story.⁹⁵ In contrast, a missile attack on Tel Aviv, which caused 3 deaths, warranted

93 *Sun*, January 21, 1991, page A6.

94 Sharkey, Under Fire, pp 146, 149.

95 Jan 23, 1991.

a banner headline on the *Globe's* front page that day.⁹⁶ A report a few days earlier predicting "enormous amounts of civilian damage" even if 95% of weapons hit their targets was consigned to the inner pages.⁹⁷ A front page story did mention attacks on residential areas, mosques, schools, bridges, and roads, and the claims of UN doctors that the country was "threatened with epidemics after coalition bombers crippled the infrastructure", but only in the last third of the text.⁹⁸

The underemphasis on civilian deaths is most conspicuous in an editorial immediately following the war, which listed winners and losers in the war. The winners included several of the coalition countries; the losers were: "Iraq's economy", the PLO, Jordan, and Kuwait. The people of Iraq, including the Kurds, were not mentioned.⁹⁹

After the war, the Greenpeace report, "On Impact", gave an estimate of at least 146,000 dead up to May of 1991, with perhaps as many likely to perish in the aftermath with practically no medical care as a result of the destruction of the electrical generating capacity in the country.¹⁰⁰

96 "Missile Strikes Tel Aviv", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 23, 1991.

97 "Innocent bystanders will suffer, experts say", *Sun*, Jan 18, 1991, p. A6.

98 "New raids batter Baghdad", *Sun*, Feb 20, 1991, p. A1.

99 "Tallying up the war's winners and losers", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 28, 1991, p. A20.

100 Arkin, "On Impact".

One of the more lethal events of the war was the February 12th attack on a facility on the outskirts of Baghdad in which hundreds of civilians died. Although both newspapers described the event as the bombing of a shelter, *The Globe* story devoted 12 paragraphs to the Pentagon's claims that the building was a military bunker, into which civilians had been directed, and that their death was therefore not the fault of the U.S. It spent one paragraph reporting that 3 reporters, who had seen the bunker "shortly after the attack, and saw no evidence that the shelter was a military target."¹⁰¹

Macleans referred to the attack as "Baghdad's bunker bombing", and stated that U.S. forces "blew up a bunker in Iraq's capital." There was no report of official Iraqi claims that the building was a shelter, although they cited unidentified Iraqis charging that the U.S. was targeting civilians.¹⁰² This story ignores the fact that the U.S. had admitted that the building was a civilian shelter, and that one US military officer had claimed that there was "not a soul who believes that it was a command and control bunker."¹⁰³ Military spokespersons apparently were not asked about this statement.

The *Sun* featured a story on the attack, focusing on the political costs to the US, and referring to the event as

101 "500 civilians killed in shelter, Iraq says", *Globe and Mail*, Feb. 14, 1991, p. A1.

102 *Macleans's*, Feb 25, 1991, p. 16.

103 "US defends strike on shelter", *Globe and Mail*, Feb 15, p. A1, 1991.

"priceless propaganda for Iraq." Only in the second half of the story, in the inside pages, is the report of the non-military nature of the shelter mentioned.¹⁰⁴

The media's habit of referring to the recapturing of Kuwait City as a "liberation" is also significant. The practice followed Bush's use of the term in his speech announcing the beginning of the air war.¹⁰⁵ Bush had always claimed that the goal was to restore what he called the "legitimate government of Kuwait"; the media did not challenge either of these descriptions in its day-to-day references to the war, despite the fact that the government restored was a dictatorial monarchy.¹⁰⁶

The end of the ground war led to large numbers of Iraqi casualties. The destruction of a convoy of thousands of vehicles fleeing Kuwait city on the highway to Basra caused the death of untold numbers of Iraqis, many of whom were incinerated in their vehicles. Descriptions in the media were relatively unrestrained, and included references to the scene as a "slaughterhouse", and a "traffic jam from hell."¹⁰⁷ Photographs of the highway were carried by most sources, but

104 "The Fallout: Political risks shown in war against Iraq", *Sun*, Feb 13, 1991, p. A3.

105 Speech by George Bush, Jan 16, 1991, Gulf War Reader, p. 313.

106 For instance, *Sun*, Feb 28, 1991, p. A1, "Kuwait is liberated", a banner headline.

107 "Coming home", *Maclean's*, Mar 11, 1991, p. 18-19.

close-up photographs of the victims, while available, were not distributed by the wire services.¹⁰⁸

What was not as prominently mentioned was the broader context. The destruction of this convoy was only one incident in the pattern of similar events in the ground war. References to the fact that the entire ground operation was conducted against an army "in full retreat" were not emphasised, but were left to the end of stories on the inside pages. For instance, a military spokesperson's statement that the US forces were "attacking and continuing to attack a retreating force" was included at the end of a small story on the bottom of an inside page in the *Globe*.¹⁰⁹ *Maclean's* included one sentence describing the victory as a "turkey shoot, ... like fish in a barrel,"¹¹⁰ and made no further comment. The obvious conclusion from such a pattern of attack, that the U.S. was attempting to do more than drive the Iraqi forces from Kuwait but was in fact working to destroy the military power of Iraq, was only commented on once.¹¹¹

Other opinions were expressed repeatedly. The *Sun* chose to carry commentary claiming that this was a "war of... reluctance. It is almost a clinical exercise in economizing

108 Sharkey, *Under Fire*, p. 147.

109 "Pilots report traffic bumper to bumper on road from Kuwait", Feb 27, 1991, p. A11.

110 "The 'final phase'", *Maclean's*, Mar 4, 1991, p. 24.

111 "Crushing Iraqi military US aim, officials say", *Sun*, Feb 23, 1991, p. A5.

violence,"¹¹² while *Maclean's* was able to assert that "the problem is that Hussein is ruthless but we are not."¹¹³

4.6: The Range of Debate

It should be noted that there were points at which the dominant interpretation of the war as a defensive act of peacekeeping by a benevolent power against an insane tyrannical threat to world peace broke down. One of these occasions was the decision by the *Sun* to carry an article about Noam Chomsky's lecture in London, in which he asserted that the war was "being fought to protect the old world order, in which the West savagely repressed former colonial empires to protect its economic interests."¹¹⁴ Similar analysis was presented in the *Globe* by Ahsis Gupta, who explicitly compared Iraq's invasion of Kuwait with US policy towards Latin America.¹¹⁵ But these two articles represent the sum total, in the surveyed coverage, of the coherent critique from outside the dominant ideological perspective.

Other dissent, which accepted the dominant frame, was presented. *Maclean's* attempt to summarize the entire debate

112 "Ending a Century of Violence", Jan 21, 1991, A10.

113 "Cold feet could lose the Gulf War", Feb 11, 1991, p. 11.

114 "War being waged to save world order, Chomsky says", Jan 19, p. A4.

115 "A new crusade of hypocrisy", Feb 1, p. A13.

between "pro" and "con" on a single page in one issue,¹¹⁶ demonstrates the range of the debate within the mass media. The question is framed as one between those who support a war, and "those who want additional attempts to obtain a peaceful solution." As noted above, no such attempts had been made, and thus no "additional" attempts were possible; the arguments against the war are undermined in the question itself.

A similar article was carried by the *Globe*, featuring a debate between two academics, one arguing for each side.¹¹⁷ The "con" side mentioned "US adventurism in Central America", but calls Hussein a "monster, a thug, [and] a mass murderer". The tendency even for arguments against the war to spend more time criticizing Hussein than Bush was typical.

Negative commentary in the *Sun* included articles claiming that Bush's foreign policy "lacks clear prescription"¹¹⁸, and that "Bush hinders pursuit of peace".¹¹⁹ Such claims contribute to the conception that our policy objectives are just, but through our incompetence, our foreign policy may not succeed at bringing about a truly peaceful world.

116 "War and Peace", Jan 21, 1990, p. 34.

117 "Should Canada be at war?", Feb 4, 1991, p. A13.

118 "Blurred Vision", Feb 18, 1991, p. A3.

119 Feb 20, 1991, p. A3.

4.7: CONCLUSION

Media coverage of events related to Iraq, as they were largely shaped by the influence of western states, began to influence the perception of the government of Iraq well before the invasion of Kuwait. The censorship of the media by the U.S. military may have been significant in limiting the selection of facts that were communicated, but it does not explain the degree to which the content of the press remained within an interpretive framework compatible with the interests of the Bush administration.

The range of opinion expressed in the commentary, and the treatment of Saddam Hussein were not the product of interference by military censors, yet they remained within the dominant interpretation. Coverage of events prior to the beginning of the war, the selective manner in which historical context was presented, and the uncritical acceptance of the claims of the government about its intentions also indicate that more than censorship was at work.

As in the other studies, the production of the news concerning the war against Iraq presumed the benevolence of the U.S. as the protector of a peaceful world order against threats that it identified. This assumption, although rarely made explicit, was present at a very deep level, and informed the overall nature of the coverage. This assumption was explicitly questioned only at a few moments, despite its

inability to explain a great deal of the events.

CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLAINING MEDIA IDEOLOGY

In this chapter, the reasons that the news media reaffirm dominant understandings of the world order are discussed, based on the results of the three case studies. That the ideological and the material dimensions of social reality are connected is assumed; therefore, we can operate with the assumption that the dominant ideas of our time are those of the dominant groups in our society. But whether the mass media is bound to reproduce those ideas, or has some autonomy through which alterations to the dominant ideology might be introduced, is a question that is so far unanswered. The reason for discussing the relation between the media and the reproduction of dominant ideology is to address this important question. If the media does possess a significant type of autonomy, then perhaps it can be used as an important tool for social change. However, if the connections deny such autonomy to the media, then it is unlikely that this could be a useful strategy to pursue.

Many explanations have been presented to account for the ideological orientation of the news, and most have some relevance. However, most of them are incomplete. After discussing some of these theories, this chapter presents an explanation

that incorporates different factors from several of these theories, identifying what is essential to the process of hegemony in all of them.

5.1: RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF CONTENT

As the case studies indicate, the media present a supportive interpretation of the world order and the violence that is used to sustain it. Several distinct important features of the coverage contributing to this view can be identified.

First, the coverage is characterized by a significant selectivity of the presentation and emphasis of information. Facts that demonstrated the violent nature of the enemy state were often emphasized, whereas facts concerning the provocative nature of the actions of the U.S., or its tolerance of violence that does not interfere with its objectives, was unreported or not considered worthy of emphasis. Many of the facts that were considered important originated with the state, meaning either the government of the U.S., or allied governments. Claims of the state were accepted more or less as fact, whereas official statements of the third world governments or other claims based on more critical understandings of the events were either excluded, qualified and delegitimated.

Secondly, language used to describe Western and allied leaders was generally much less negative in connotation than

that used to describe the victims. The leaders of states attacked were portrayed as dangerous, irrational, and inhuman, whereas the leaders that ordered the attacks were almost never portrayed in a similar fashion. That enemy leaders had acted in a violent or offensive manner was rarely questioned, regardless of the facts.

Thirdly, beyond relying on information provided by the state, the claims of the American government regarding the objectives of its policy were often accepted as fact and not as opinion, and reason to question statements about these objectives, which were often quite obvious, were not usually presented. Facts that might lead the public to question this understanding were often not considered important or emphasized.

Finally, dissenting opinions that were expressed nearly always fell within the limits of this discourse which assumed the peaceful intent of the U.S. Although arguments against the actions taken were presented with relative frequency, only rarely did these arguments reject the basis for that action, in the assumption of the threat from the victim, which marks the core assumption of the hegemonic framework.

These four characteristics of the coverage can most simply be explained by the conclusion that the media adopts an uncritical and deferential attitude toward the state and its claims about its own objectives. This attitude was what allowed the state to construct new threats that helped to

legitimize the continuing violence against the third world in the absence of the Soviet empire.

The ideological importance of the presentation of these threats should not be ignored. It is these threats which allow the actions to be seen as defensive, and therefore unavoidable and legitimate. Without the ability to secure the first world population's acceptance of these actions, exploitation of the third world would be much more difficult as more and more of the population of the third world would resist in stronger ways, and first world governments would be constrained in their ability to respond. Thus these threats are crucial to the preservation of global capitalism.

Ideological significance does not lie in any particular news story or interpreted fact; the entire running story, which begins before the attacks and continues through the aftermath, during which time patterns in the coverage emerge, must be understood as a unit. These larger units, although not the product of any single source, are generally initiated by the claims and actions of Western states.

In the first case, the first references to Libya in the context of events that led to the attack were the unsubstantiated claims by the U.S. government that Libya, and Colonel Qaddafi in particular, bore responsibility for the El Al attacks. Panama became an important news story not as a result of an illegitimate election (as a comparison with coverage of other such events in region would reveal) but as result of the

U.S. government's attempts to remove Noriega from power. The coverage of Iraq in early 1990 also originated with the claims of the U.S. and British governments, and helped make Iraq and its leader appear as a danger to world order, even before the invasion of Kuwait.

The reliance on and deference to the state allowed the state to fill what Hackett refers to as the "threat vacuum"¹, and accounts for the shift in ideology from cold war anti-communism to post-cold war internationalism. The continued justification of the world order supported by U.S. military intervention in the third world was assured through the creation of the new threats, selected by the U.S. administration. Unless some reason can be found to suggest that this reliance on the state might fade, this pattern is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. If such a reason exists, it is to be found through an examination of the reasons for this reliance.

5.2: EXPLAINING THE RESULTS

The generalization that the state is respected by the mass media as a source of information, and that it is granted privileged access to the media as a source, is not very

1 News and Dissent, p. 292.

controversial.² But a further explanation for this behavioral norm of the media is required. A description of an arbitrary habit of the media is not useful, since such an observation does not explain why it is that this character of the media persists, or whether it is likely to continue to exist.

Some explanations have been presented that are worth considering. Theories about the ideological nature of the media include those based on the ability of the state and capitalist elites to manipulate information, the concentrated ownership of the media, the need to attract advertising dollars, the function of the market, and the operation of internalized norms or "news values". All of these theories have some merit, but none is complete in itself. My explanation involves the operation of some of these, but also relies on what can be considered the primary criterion that news must meet, the nearly-universally accepted standard of "objectivity", that unites these various factors.

5.2.1: Elite Information Management

One explanation for the ideological function of the news is the claim that the state, as well as large corporations, which possess great financial and organizational resources, are able to influence the content of the news through their

² Empirical evidence for the claim with regards to the U.S. mass media is presented by Herman and Chomsky, p 25; for the British media by Hall et al, p. 58, and discussed by Hackett, p. 72.

ability to present information in a careful and convenient fashion. This can involve carefully-staged press conferences to which selected news agencies can be invited or excluded, widely-distributed press releases, etc. Those without such resources have greater difficulty influencing the news, and so the selection of information carried in the media is in part made by the state before the media is involved. This factor appears in Herman and Chomsky's model, and is also used as an explanation by Hertzgaard and others.³

This ability of the state, and other elites, to manage the information that the media receives is further increased by the fact that newspapers and broadcasters are under competitive pressures and must often gather and process information quickly in order to meet deadlines. Since limited resources are available to news agencies in a competitive market, conveniently-supplied information is more likely to become news. These facts can be exploited by those who wish to present their point of view and who have the resources to do so.⁴

This certainly does influence the content. But it cannot account for the respect shown to the state as a privileged source. One reason is existence of many sources of information

³ Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent, pp 18-25; Hertzgaard, On Bended Knee, pp 32-35; Hackett, News and Dissent, pp 71-73; Milliband, State in Capitalist Society, p. 251; Hall et al, p. 58.

⁴ This is part of the argument made by Hertzgaard, who demonstrates that the Reagan administration employed the strategy of "manipulation by inundation" routinely.

critical of U.S. actions that are readily available to the mainstream media, which are routinely ignored,⁵ indicating that there is little desire on the part of the media to use such information.

A second reason is that economic constraints do not give reason for newswriters to refrain from asking questions at press conferences or writing background information in their stories that shed doubt onto the dubious claims of the state. Nor can it explain why the media accept the claims of a government which has so often in the past distorted and withheld information about its own activities. History gives many reasons to be sceptical about of the state's claims about its own policies; yet such scepticism is not displayed. This cannot simply be attributed to the greater resources at the state's command.

This is not to deny that the state's information-management capacity is significant. As the war against Iraq demonstrated, the censorship power of the state can also be a large influence on the news.⁶ But this power cannot explain why major news corporations refused to take part in the lawsuit against the government, launched by small alternative

⁵ One could list many such sources. Apart from the alternative press such as the weekly *The Nation*, many organizations such as Amnesty International and various other human rights groups, including Middle East Watch, or Americas Watch regularly release information about conditions in the third world. Alternative news agencies are available which distribute news about various parts of the third world from a critical perspective, such as Cerigua and Salpress from Guatemala and El Salvador respectively.

⁶ see Sharkey, *Friendly Fire*, ch. 7, for a discussion of the impact of this and other military censorship of the world's mass media.

news sources, which challenged that censorship.⁷ Clearly other mechanisms are at work; other explanations need to be considered.

5.2.2: Influence of Advertisers

The reliance on advertising revenue is an important feature of the economic relations that shape the functioning of the media. In capitalist economies, the media generally rely on advertising sales for the vast bulk of their revenue. Newspapers, on average, receive only about one quarter of their income from sales of the newspaper, and the rest mostly from sales of advertising space to advertisers, many of whom are very large corporations. Private television broadcasters rely on advertising for almost all of their revenue; in Canada the CBC is an exception, receiving the bulk of its funding from the federal government, but it is still dependent on selling advertising.⁸

This relation can influence content in direct ways, at times. Advertisers can make demands for "supportive editorial environments" for their advertising; Bagdikian provides evidence that large tobacco companies significantly influenced news coverage about the dangers of cigarette smoking for many

7 Sharkey, "The Media's War", *The Nation*, May 11, 1992, pp 617-18.

8 According to the Royal Commission on Newspapers, 79% of newspaper revenue came from advertising in 1979. Also, see Hackett, p. 67.

years.⁹ Herman and Chomsky provide other details¹⁰, and instances of such pressures can be found in Canada as well. Newspapers in Toronto and Kingston have been boycotted by advertisers; in the latter instance, this may have been a contributing factor in the sale of the independent Whig-Standard to the large Southam chain.¹¹ Another example is the withdrawal by the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce of its advertising during a CBC documentary program critical of logging practices in British Columbia. The program was especially critical of the practices of CIBC's client, forestry company Macmillan Bloedel.¹²

But there is little evidence that this kind of action affects the coverage of world news in a systematic and significant way. Particularly in the case of Canadian media coverage of international events, it seems unlikely that there are large corporate advertisers whose interests are directly affected by support or resistance to aggression against the third world. Occasional special supplements in the *Globe and Mail* designed to advertise the aerospace industry may provide some pressure in this direction, but this is unlikely to influence the overall coverage of the media in general to the

9 Bagdikian, The Media Monopoly, pp 170-5.

10 Manufacturing Consent, p. 17.

11 "Where journalism, commerce meet", *Globe and Mail*, Sept. 15, 1990, p. D1-8.

12 "Bank pulls ads after CBC show on forestry", *Vancouver Sun*, March 8, 1991, p. B3.

extent witnessed. It is also likely that the advertisers are motivated by the need to reach the largest audience more than by their desire to influence public opinion through a single media outlet. Thus the power of advertisers over content cannot be a sufficient explanation for the deference to the state in this case.

5.2.3: Market economics

There are constraints arising from the nature of the market in which the media operate. As Ginsberg argues, market power is not distributed any more evenly in what he calls "the marketplace of ideas" than it is in any other market. The unequal distribution of consumer power leads to the adoption of interpretations of events that are acceptable to upper strata of society. He points out that

"the print and broadcast media are most responsive to the tastes and issues of the more 'upscale' segments of the potential audience... the influence of the upscale audience is a function of the economics of publishing and broadcasting."¹³

Since advertisers need to attract an audience with greater spending power, Ginsberg argues, they do not need to accommodate the interests of the lower and lower middle classes.

Even though in principle everyone has the right to be heard, the loudest voices on the West's idea market are seldom those of the poor and downtrod-

¹³ Ginsberg, The Captive Public, p. 136.

den.¹⁴

But this does not explain the content of the media as a whole, unless we assume that the media are a single, undifferentiated unit. While the mass media does display considerable homogeneity, different segments of the media are marketed to different class audiences. Tabloid newspapers generally advertise lower priced goods from discount stores, whereas newspapers such as the *Globe and Mail* advertise higher-price luxury goods, and make efforts to sell newspapers to members of the upper and upper-middle classes.¹⁵ This difference in marketing produces a difference of style, but it is not clear why it should produce a single homogeneous ideological perspective throughout the mass media. An explanation of this ideological convergence of different segments of the industry is still needed.

5.2.4: Media Ownership

It is commonly suggested that the ideological function of the media is the product of its control by the owners of the industry. The industry is owned predominantly by a few large corporations. Bagdikian has detailed the way in which the ownership has become increasingly concentrated in the United

14 *ibid*, p. 108.

15 *Globe and Mail* marketing decisions are discussed by Heinrichs, "Whose News?".

States,¹⁶ and the Canadian media share the same structure of ownership, with the exception of a publicly owned television network.¹⁷ Ownership of the media around the world, in fact, is becoming increasingly concentrated as well, with Western corporations dominating the industry.¹⁸ Gill claims that

A recent survey reports that 75 per cent of the world communications market is controlled by 80 transnationals. The bulk of such transnationals are American, followed by British and French corporations ...The 1990s are likely to witness the growing dominance of international broadcasting by transnational firms given the vast costs of new technologies and systems (such as satellites.)¹⁹

The increased concentration of ownership means that the industry is more and more monopolistic, and it can be argued that the few owners of the industry, many of whom control interests outside the media industry as well, exercise great power. Bagdikian and Herman and Chomsky demonstrate that owners of the American media have interfered at times with the production of news so as to ensure that it is less critical of the state capitalist order than it otherwise might have been.²⁰

The ownership of many of the major daily newspapers in

16 The most extensive discussion of the concentrated ownership of the American media is The Media Monopoly.

17 Taras, pp 8-17. See also the Royal Commission on Newspapers.

18 Bagdikian discusses the globalizing control of the media in his 1989 article, "Lords of the Global Village". Since then, many events have increased the concentration of ownership, most notably the 1989 merger of Time, Inc and Warner Communications into the largest communications company in the world, with assets of over \$18 Billion. See Newman, "Canada's Richest Man".

19 Gill, American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission, p. 207.

20 Manufacturing Consent, pp 3-14, The Media Monopoly, ch. 1

Canada by two large chains, both controlled by very large companies, gives the owners of those two chains great potential to interfere with the flow of information in the country. That the CBC is owned by and receives about 80% of its funding from the federal government might give reason to suggest that the network would be generally uncritical of the state.²¹ The other major TV network, CTV, is owned jointly by several large companies, and relies almost entirely on advertising revenue.

Such interference can, in fact, be identified in some instances. Heinricks and Michaels have pointed out some cases of direct interference in news stories by publishers of the *Globe and Mail*, who were appointed by its owner, Canada's wealthiest individual, Ken Thomson.²² The CBC's response to the recent Senate investigation into the CBC documentary "The Valour and the Horror" indicates that the government is capable of ensuring that material too critical of official state ideology is dealt with disapprovingly.²³

However, none of these economic arguments, which have been termed "instrumentalist" arguments, produce an adequate explanation of the ideological nature of the content of the media as a whole. Normally, newswriters are accorded a significant freedom to produce the news on their own and are

21 Desbarats, Guide to the Canadian News Media, p. 63

22 Heinricks, "Whose News?" and Michaels, "The Globe Wars."

23 "Valour reruns to reflect Senate report", *Globe and Mail*, Jan 27, 1993, p. A10.

not often told how or what to produce. A few instances of interference should not be taken to indicate a systematic manipulation of the representation of events to the audience. The relative infrequency of the interference by owners indicates that such interference is usually unnecessary, and that the ideological orientation of the news is not imposed by those who control the industry, but must be a product of the some other aspect of the process of news production.

Nor does the concentration of ownership of the industry explain the variety of perspectives found in the media, and the quantity of its content critical of particular practices of capitalists and the state. Although there is certainly an ideological perspective adopted by the media, the media often present information that is not obviously in the interests of the government to have exposed. If news ideology were simply an expression of the interests of the owner or the advertisers, this content would not be present. This variety of support must be explained.

This does not imply that it is simply a coincidence that the media is generally controlled by the capitalist class and that its content legitimizes the exploitive social order from which they benefit. We must assume that there is some important relation between ownership and the advertising market in which the media operate and the content of the news. But the exact nature of that relationship must be elaborated.

5.2.5: News Values

Other explanations have been put forth that attribute the ideological nature of the content of the mass media to the operation of "news values" or "routines". As Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott assert,

Studies of the political economy of media organizations must be closely related to, and supplemented by, analyses of the professional ideologies and practices found in these organizations.²⁴

Explanations of media content that involve ownership and other economic structural factors do recognize that there are implicit ideals, which Herman and Chomsky refer to as "internalized norms", that are accepted by the workers in the industry, making explicit interference redundant. As Gitlin says:

Their standards flow through the process of recruitment and promotion, through policy, reward and the sort of social osmosis that flows overwhelmingly in one direction: downward.²⁵

These standards, and not the opinions of the owners, are then the determinants of the media's ideological perspective. Some kind of ideological factors must mediate the relation between the owners and other economic influences and the content of the news. Herman and Chomsky include anti-communism as one of

²⁴ Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott, "The study of the media: Theoretical Approaches", p. 19.

²⁵ The Whole World is Watching, p. 259.

their filters;²⁶ Bennett lists personalization (an assumption that individual personalities are the most important agents in the news), dramatization, (a search for the sensational) and fragmentation (the failure to set events in a historical context) as well as the standard of objectivity (which he calls 'normalization') as influences;²⁷ Hall et al identify some of these as well as negativity and novelty as important news values;²⁸ Gitlin describes the use of news "routines" by journalists that incorporate ideas about the news;²⁹ and Hackett describes "certain traditions and practices" in news discourse that give it "a weight of its own."³⁰

These factors cannot be ignored by any explanation of the ideology of news; many of these ideas make important contributions to news ideology. But such explanations are not adequate in themselves; they are incomplete for three reasons.

First, as the case studies show, these news values are often applied selectively. The media use the personality of one leader to represent entire nations, but this textual strategy is employed differently upon different nations, depending on its political utility. Similarly, historical context is lacking for a great deal of events described in the

26 Manufacturing Consent, pp 29-31.

27 News: The Politics of Illusion, ch. 2.

28 Policing the Crisis, pp 51-53 ??

29 The Whole World is Watching, pp. 258-69.

30 News and Dissent, p. 74.

news, but varying amounts are present for different stories, and the nature of that historical context is often quite selective. For instance, feature stories describing the recent history of terrorism as a tactic of anti-Western groups are sometimes provided, but the history of U.S. intervention in the third world is almost never discussed at length. The selectivity of the application of these norms indicates that this explanation is, in important ways, incomplete.

Secondly, unless one can specify a reason why these particular ideas should play such a prominent role, the explanation is also incomplete in the sense that it is merely a generalization from observing the content. Since ideas about anti-communism, the role of the individual, the importance of history, etc, are part of the dominant ideology, it is somewhat tautological to assert that their presence is the cause of the media's reproduction of the dominant ideology. Identifying them gives no reason why they, and not other ideas, should have become, or continue to be, so effective in influencing the media.

In order to avoid this arbitrariness, an explanation that relies on "news values" ought to provide some reason why such values are assumed in news coverage. The implication of this kind of argument is that these values are imposed by the audience, and that the media simply produce what the audience wants by adopting those values which are common in society.

Such arguments are essentially idealist, since the

dominant ideology is understood as autonomous and self-generating; the fact that audience demand is conditioned by the news is ignored. They cannot account for changes to the ideologies, such as the changes to the representation of world order in recent years.

Thirdly, these arguments rest on the assumption that the audience, which includes almost all of the members of the society, all demand the same kind of news. This may be more or less true but it is certainly not some natural state of affairs, and requires some explanation. The explanation for this situation is closely connected to the reliance on the central requirement of mass media news, objectivity.

5.3: THE ROLE OF NEWS OBJECTIVITY

The most important fact ignored by theories of the media which focus on structural determinants is the limitation of the influence of owners or advertisers by the standard of "objectivity" that is expected of the media. This idea has a force that other "news values" do not. While claims that the media is too sensationalist or lacks context are relatively common, the notion of freedom of the press is, in most cases, unquestioned. The expectation is that the media ought not be connected to or influenced by any particular interest in society, and should thus be able to report news from no particular perspective, but objectively, from a universal

perspective. This idea, accepted by almost all in society, including newswriters, owners, advertisers, and the audience, and in some cases mandated by legal controls over broadcasting, must be taken into account if the factors described by instrumentalist theories are to be considered. Clarifying the role of the standard of objectivity requires elaboration of three separate points.

Firstly, the standard, while it limits interference in news production process by the owner, also limits the freedom of the newswriter and thus constrains what can be expressed in the media. It is a criterion that the news must meet, since it is accepted and applied by the audience.

Secondly, it is not an arbitrary standard, but one that has origins in the material, economic system of production of which it is a part. Its continuing influence is a product of that system.

Thirdly, the concept is philosophically problematic in an important way. There is no objective position from which to report events; since facts are always tied to some values and interests, presenting information as objective only serves to mask those connections.

5.3.1: Ideology as an Audience Demand.

Theories that focus too heavily on political economy, imply that changing the structure of the political economy of

the media will ensure that the media are more critical and less likely to serve to legitimize the current order. But, as Hackett points out, "a struggle to change the media is also a struggle to change audiences."³¹

The audience accepts the idea of an objective media, and expects the content of the media not to appear to represent any particular interest. In Gitlin's words:

The audience must believe that what they are viewing is not only interesting but true, and the reporters must be permitted to feel that they have professional prerogatives to preserve.³²

Owners who were to systematically and directly interfere with the content of the media they control, or who were to let the advertisers influence content, would find themselves with decreasing audiences, and thus lower revenue from advertisers. To fail to understand this is to miss the point of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, that the ideology that serves to legitimate power is accepted by those over whom power is exercised as well as by those who hold power.

This process of hegemony, then, is more than the "trickle down" of ideology from the owners to the workers within the news organization. The process involves the active discretion of the audience in accepting what they consider to be reliable news. Of course, as Hackett states, the process is guided by the media institutions, but not completely controlled by them:

31 "For a Socialist Perspective", p. 151.

32 The Whole World is Watching, p. 259.

...without alternative sources of making sense of a situation in which they lack direct experience, audience members will, in the long term, tend to adopt the media's agenda of political issues and even the media criteria for evaluating them. ... But, ...it is wrong to regard the audience as passive.³³

The standard of objectivity is internalized by the audience as well, and that means that the relation between the media and the audience is not unidirectional. It is in some sense circular, with the audience's reaction on the media mediated by the advertisers. Because the audience demands objectivity of the news, the advertisers demand it of the media in which they advertise. This active role of the audience must be recognized in any explanation of the ideological function of the media.³⁴

5.3.2: Origins of News Objectivity

The criterion of objectivity, unlike the "news values" identified by some theories, has roots in the material, economic function of the media. In order to understand the

33 "For a Socialist Perspective", p. 146.

34 The role of the audience is a complicated subject, beyond the scope of this discussion. But it is clear that the audience is neither a passive receptor of news, nor an autonomous origin of ideological demands on it. Hall claims, in "Encoding/Decoding" that the audience plays an active role in negotiating a meaning from the text presented; Smythe sees the audience actively engaged in work producing itself as a consumer and interpreting the media's content appropriately. While these may be correct, I believe that the question of the active role of the audience in the function of the media is not central to my argument.

connection between these two dimensions of the social order, certain characteristics of the modern mass media must be described. The uniformity of the content of mass media news is important; without it, the standard of objectivity (or any other) could not be applied to the news. It is specific to recent times, and is directly related to the conception of objectivity that is implicit in the content of the news.

As Smythe points out, the mass media are a product of monopoly capitalism,³⁵ in the sense that a monopoly capitalist economy is composed of industries, including news media, with concentrated ownership, and a homogeneous product. This means that members of such a society will have access to a relatively homogeneous source of information.

But the homogeneity of the mass media involves more than the ownership of most of the industry by a few corporations or the fact that most cities only have one daily newspaper. The media industry includes other organizations that participate in the distribution of information; both newspapers and television broadcasters rely on wire services and other news agencies.

Many of the stories in newspapers in Canada originate with The Canadian Press, which is owned co-operatively by its subscriber newspapers, including almost all of Canada's dailies. Many stories also come from a few other services such

35 Dependency Road, ch. 2.

as Associated Press, Reuters, or UPI.³⁶ Canadian television networks rely on video news stories from foreign networks as well, with agreements for this purpose in place between networks.³⁷ Many media corporations also have entered into news-sharing agreements, sometimes with corporations in other countries.³⁸ These arrangements, which are a result of the functioning of the economy of scale as much as concentrated ownership, lead to a convergence of the style and ideological perspective of the media as a whole. Reading different newspapers or watching different TV networks is unlikely to present the world in a significantly different way; in fact, it is likely to expose one to precisely the same stories repeatedly.

For this reason, I have chosen to make judgements on the media as a whole, even though, arguably, different sectors of the media target different audiences, with the division roughly along class lines. Tabloid-style newspapers such as the *Sun* chain or the *Vancouver Province* and *Maclean's* magazine might appear to present a different perspectives on the world, perhaps significantly more supportive of military action and more conservative generally, than broadsheets designed to

36 News and Dissent, pp 92, 102.

37 Taras, The Newsmakers, p. 106.

38 For instance, *The Globe and Mail* and the *Wall Street Journal*, the largest daily paper in the U.S., have recently reached agreement to share news stories. "Globe, Journal trade news", *Globe and Mail*, Dec 12, 1991, p. B2.

serve more middle and upper middle class audiences such as the Vancouver *Sun* or the Toronto *Star*, or nightly newscasts such as CBC's *The National*. But much of the news stories that all of these carry come from the same wire services and shared news gathering agencies. Thus, despite differences in style, it is difficult to claim that there is any substantial difference in the ideological perspective of these different formats of media.

This relatively homogeneous mass media emerged out of a more competitive and diverse press. In his discussion of the economic history of the British media, Curran describes the critical media that arose after official state censorship was ended, before the rise of monopoly capitalism, noting that it was not an insignificant factor in the politics of the time: "the radical press had become a powerfully disruptive force."³⁹ Although this media was largely supported by members of the working class, its power came as a result of its large distribution:

...leading radical newspapers gained circulations far larger than those of their respectable rivals throughout most of the period 1815-55.⁴⁰

This genre of newspaper did not subscribe to today's demands for objective reporting of events.

39 "Communication, Power and Social Order", p. 225.

40 *ibid.*

They sought to describe and expose the dynamics of power rather than to report 'hard news' as a series of disconnected events. They saw themselves as class representatives rather than as disinterested intermediaries and attempted to establish a relationship of real reciprocity with their readers.⁴¹

Although the legal freedom of expression fostered by the state and popular literacy that made such media possible still pertain, there certainly is no powerfully disruptive radical press in contemporary society. This result can be attributed to economic factors. Simply put, "objectivity... is a commercial consideration."⁴² Specifically, the increasing industrialization of the process of news production led to larger and larger markets for news, and the logic of the market forced the press to adopt a standard of objectivity, making a radical press unlikely to survive. As Curran points out, "[M]arket forces succeeded where legal repression had failed in containing the rise of a radical press..."⁴³

The operation of the market constrains the operation of the media in different ways. One way is the limitations on the ability of media controlled by interests that cannot compete with monopoly capital. Entering the mass market became more expensive as the distribution increased.⁴⁴ The capitalist press was able to deal with the increase in cost, whereas the

41 Curran and Seaton, Power Without Responsibility, p. 18.

42 Gans, Deciding What's News, p. 186.

43 "Communication, Power and Social Order", p. 225.

44 Curran and Seaton, pp. 38-41.

radical press, often initially financed by trade unions or collectives of workers, could not. As Murdock states, "...the escalating costs of entering the major mass media markets means that they are only effectively open to those with substantial capital."⁴⁵

But this does not explain the disappearance of the radical press which had wide circulation before the increase in start-up costs. The other important factor in the changes was the increased reliance on advertising. The radical press relied almost exclusively on sales for its revenue; the establishment press, however, was able to decrease their price by selling advertising. Their strategy for competing against the radical press was

to gain as large a circulation as possible to attract advertising. Since partisan reporting and editorials would alienate large blocs of readers, newspapers were forced to become more objective in their approach...⁴⁶

The requirement for large audiences to attract advertising was also a product of the monopolization of the economy, since the most regular and reliable sales of advertising spaces would be to the largest monopoly corporations. Taras points to the availability of advertising revenue from department stores such as Eaton's for the widespread distribution of the first mass media news in Canada in the late

45 Murdock, p. 144

46 Taras, The Newsmakers, p. 51.

nineteenth century.⁴⁷ Such widespread distribution is an important source of the standard of news objectivity.

Although Canada probably never possessed a radical press similar to the one that emerged in Britain, Taras discusses the "partisan press" in Canada before world war one, similar to the British press at about the same time period. Although not as critical as a radical press, this can also be understood as an example of media that did not subscribe to the notion of objectivity. Instead, papers were aligned with particular political parties and represented their views explicitly. It existed before the advent of monopoly capitalism in Canada, but after the economy of scale had effectively eliminated the radical press in Britain. It was eventually supplanted by a mass media based on the "objective" reporting of news, which incorporated views of different parties.⁴⁸

The already-existing establishment press, partisan and allied with political interests, could continue to exist by merely adapting its appearance to a more "objective" position, whereas the critical voices of the radical press could not survive. Thus the radical press ceased to exist, and the partisan press that remained was able to project a universally acceptable image by ceasing to be partisan, and appearing

47 *ibid*, p. 50.

48 *ibid*, pp 41-53.

"objective".

One important consequence of the adoption of this standard of objectivity is that the media are required to be very similar in their approach. Since the standard applies to all members of the media industry, and since the standard involves the detachment of the media from any interests in society, all the media ought, then, to have the same interpretation of events. Thus any newspaper or broadcaster that makes an effort to present a different interpretation of the social order from others appears to be inaccurate and potentially biased and unobjective. Thus only one voice is heard, despite the variety of owners or advertisers that ultimately control what is said.

5.3.3: The Impossibility of Objectivity

Of course objective descriptions of phenomena as complex as international political relations are impossible. As mentioned in the discussion of ideology above, all fact and description, if it is to make sense at all, necessarily must be embedded in some theoretical perspective or broader world view. The claim that the news can exist outside of all perspectives, and does not rely on any assumptions about the world, is false. Any kind of judgement about the complex political events in our world is contestable, as it must

necessarily rely on other beliefs about the world. The presentation of news as objective makes the news seem more credible and reliable, and acceptable to larger audiences. It also serves to make beliefs on which the news depends invisible and thus not contestable.

This conception of objectivity is part of a complex ideological system, and cannot be described fully. It arose as "part of the sweeping intellectual movement towards scientific detachment and the culture-wide separation of fact and value."⁴⁹ This separation is of importance. News is understood as being required to communicate facts without values attached. The division of newspapers into news sections and editorial and commentary sections reifies this distinction.⁵⁰ Facts must come from an authoritative and unbiased source which has no interest in the issue being described. Information from interested sources would not be objective, nor credible, since those are too heavily connected to the values and opinions such sources are likely to hold.

As well, this conception of objectivity includes beliefs about the state and its role in society. Essentially, the state is seen as representative of societal interests as a whole, not attached to any particular interest. It is seen as outside any conflict of interest, as a neutral and independent mediator or umpire, through which society expresses different interests and reaches a compromise acceptable. This apparent

49 Gitlin, The Whole World is Watching, p. 268.

50 See Hackett, News and Dissent, p. 84.

neutrality grants a legitimacy to the state's claims as well as its actions; since it appears unconnected to other interests, there is no basis on which to pass value judgements about its acts or claims. Only the technical accuracy of its claims or the prudence of its actions serve as bases for legitimate debate.

These two ideas, the fact/value distinction and the state as neutral umpire, lead the media to rely on the state and to present its claims much less critically than might otherwise be the case.⁵¹

In contrast, the understandings of typically critical sources of information, connected to activist organizations or interest groups, or any of a number of "alternative" news services, are not presented in the same way as official state spokespeople. These sources, because they are connected to particular interests, are not considered as reliable sources of information. It is assumed that, unlike information provided by the state, the connection between these groups and the causes which they advocate will influence the information they present; these sources are seen as incapable of distinguishing facts and values. Such sources may occasionally be used to complement information about other stories, but rarely will information from such sources be considered an important story of its own. Thus long-running stories which are necess-

⁵¹ Hertsgaard also explains the content of the media through the assumption of the neutrality of the state. On Bended Knee, pp. 65-76.

ary to present countries or their leaders as threats to the world order will not likely originate with these sources.

This conception of objectivity, of course, does not make negative coverage of particular political policies or ideas about politics impossible. In order to be objective, the media must be seen to present "both sides" of an issue. But there are always more than two sides to a story, and the practice of presenting two sides marginalizes other perspectives on the issue, while reinforcing ideas that are common to the two perspectives presented. This practice makes the difference between the two sides appear to be central or essential to the issue.⁵²

In particular, these sides may support or oppose a particular government policy or statement. Dissenting views from within state institutions, such as parliamentary opposition, tend to be used to balance the government's claims. But ideas which challenge the fundamental justice or legitimacy of the system as a whole, or that question the government's intentions and values, are not considered within the scope of "objective" opinions. Usually these kinds of challenges originate with organizations connected to those who do not benefit from the social order supported by the state.

The distinction between bias and ideology should be made clear. It is not being claimed that the media are biased;

⁵² Hackett, News and Dissent, p. 83.

different newspapers or television broadcasters may be biased towards the liberal left or the conservative right, but this is not the issue under discussion. "Journalistic 'objectivity', the very absence of 'bias', is itself part of the media's ideological functioning."⁵³ By presenting more than one set of opinions, the media avoids the appearance of excluding others, while precisely excluding any serious challenge to the social order.

This understanding of the state and the fact/value distinction on which it relies is not unique to the content of the mass media; it informs most of the organization of our society, and cannot be separated from the capitalist nature of our social order any more than the state is. The fact/value distinction, in particular, is a very central feature of the conception of objectivity that is the root of the modern conception of knowledge in general. It is the foundation of empiricism and positivist science, and certainly this system, which is not simple or easy to describe, has political and cultural implications.

Discussion of the broader role that this ideological system plays in the modern social order is beyond the scope of the current argument, and it is not my intention to discuss its origins. It ought to be remarked, however, that objectivity is not simply a product of the mass media but is instead

⁵³ Hackett, "Towards a Socialist Perspective", p. 147.

part of a dominant ideology that involves much more than what is contained in standards that are applied to the media.

But the scientific understanding of knowledge and its accompanying standard of objectivity are not applied to all forms of human intellectual activity; art criticism, for instance, possesses some immunity.⁵⁴ For some time after the scientific understanding of the world became dominant, discussions of politics in the press shared this immunity; it was only after the rise of mass-distribution newspapers that this standard was applied to the media. Thus we cannot simply attribute the presence of this standard in the media to the predominance of the positivist conceptions of knowledge in society in general.

5.4: CONCLUSIONS AND SOME IMPLICATIONS

The presentation in the mass media of Libya, Panama and Iraq as threats to world peace served to justify the violence inflicted upon them by the U.S. military. Although this pattern of violence was interpreted as a strategy designed to protect a peaceful and democratic world order, it can be much more effectively understood as an attempt to ensure the expansion or maintenance of open markets for investment. Thus the interpretation of these countries as threats contributes

⁵⁴ It is for this reason that the *Globe and Mail* is able to carry a weekly column by a writer as critical of the capitalist order as Rick Salutin, which appears in the Arts pages.

to the reproduction of the control of the world's economy by a transnational capitalist class.

These threats also help to unite citizens of the industrialized countries, providing them with an identity as global citizens and consumers in a world market, with a collective interest in protecting the existing arrangement. This is the form in which the interest of the dominant class is universalized and comes to be accepted by the population as a whole. Through this universalization of the identity and interests of elites, the media creates the impression of a consensus that unites the population around these threats. The nature of the most appropriate responses to them is contestable within the media, but the existence of the threats, and their importance, is not.

Justifying the violence that enforces this exploitive order forestalls the potentially radical critique that one might expect to develop in response to the violence of these acts. In the past, this kind of critical reaction was generally marginalized by the presentation of the Soviet threat to Western interests. With the collapse of the Soviet empire, the entire military and economic structure of power, which includes the exploitive domestic order of first world economies as well as the relations of force between the first and third worlds, appears even less necessary and therefore might become a focus for dissent.

This threat was replaced, however, in popular under-

standings of the world, as a result of the mass media's uncritical attitude toward the state. This attitude allowed the state to communicate information that supported understandings of the world order compatible with its interests, and to interpret the relevant events in the appropriate manner. The lack of resistance to, or the popularity of, the military actions against Libya, Panama, and Iraq indicate the effectiveness with which the state was able to fill the 'threat vacuum'.

An important part of the interpretation of all three events was the representation of the threats with the image of the leaders of the enemy states. Each of these three individuals gained instant recognizability, and became symbolic of dangerous irrationality and violence. Using the individual leader to represent the state facilitated the construction of the entire country as dangerous, and allowed the other victims of the military action to escape attention. That such treatment of leaders is relatively specific to the states selected as enemies by the U.S. government demonstrates the media's usefulness to the state.

In all three cases, the media displayed a remarkable lack of willingness to challenge the claims of the state, including the basic assumptions behind the state's preferred interpretation of events, or to question its stated motives, despite the availability of evidence that ought to lead one to raise such questions. Not only in the coverage of the military

actions, but throughout the series of events that led up to each of them, the state's perspective on events was dominant.

This uncritical attitude can be explained as a result of the requirement of objectivity that arises from the monopoly nature of the media industry. Major newspapers and television broadcasters attempt to reach as large and broad an audience as possible in order to attract advertisers. Their goal is to ensure that the content of the media does not exclude any specific groups; thus the content assumes the possibility of news that has no perspective, in order that none will reject it as partial. The idea that society is divided into different groups with conflicting interests is incompatible with this character of the media industry.

This led to the the marginalization of interpretations of events, analysis and opinion based on a radical understanding of these actions as reproducing exploitation. Such ideas which challenge the stated objectives of the state are seen as value judgements, based on a particular interest, and are thus rejected for failing to meet the standard of objectivity required of the news. Only opinion that falls within the consensus assumed by the interpretation presented by the state is considered to be acceptable; this assumed consensus precludes the idea that there are essential conflicts of interest between different groups in society, such as the state or the capitalist class.

The adoption of an impartial, objective perspective on which to base the assumption of a consensus is, of course impossible: any perspective makes some assumptions and value judgements. Since the mass media industry is controlled by the capitalist class, the conception of objectivity that prevails is one that accepts the role of the state as a neutral actor, which acts on the general interest of all, and not on the particular interest of one segment of society. Thus the state is treated with deference; its claims about events and about its own objectives are accepted uncritically. It is this feature of the news that explains the replacement of the Soviet threat with those discussed in this thesis.

This standard is what ties the ideological to the other non-discursive dimensions of our social reality. It is in the form of this conception of objectivity that material conditions "set limits and exert pressures" on the production of the ideological content of the media. The limits do not simply express the interests of the capitalist owners; rather, they express the conception of objectivity inherent in the structure of a monopoly capitalist mass media. As long as our primary source of information is such an industry, embedded in a monopoly capitalist economy, it is likely that this conception of objectivity will prevail, and that the state will continue to possess a superior ability to disseminate information.

Because these limits are, to some extent, the product of the structure of the economic organization of the media industry, we can expect that, without major changes to the political and economic order, this pattern of coverage of military action against the third world will continue. In the future, when the U.S. government decides military action must be taken against third world states that resist integration into the world capitalist economy, the media will probably continue to accept and repeat the claims made by first world governments regarding the threatening nature of those states.

States selected as threats in the future will most probably be represented solely by their leaders, who will be portrayed as dangers to the entire world. Acts of the enemy state will likely receive widespread negative coverage, whereas violence committed by the U.S. military against them will be interpreted in a way that minimizes the destruction.

This makes it unlikely that the media can be an effective tool for citizens of the first world making efforts to resist military actions of this sort. Those involved in this kind of political activity are likely to be considered to lack a sufficiently objectively perspective, and their claims will probably be regarded as less credible and less important than those of the government.

This conclusion should not be taken to apply to media coverage of politics in general. Issues other than the economic exploitation of the third world might be treated

differently by the mass media, and the expression of radical challenges to other aspects of existing relations between groups of people may be possible. But the continuing exploitation of the world's poor by the rich is unlikely to be frequently challenged at a fundamental level in the mass media.

This does not preclude the possibility of resisting the dominant ideology; it suggests, however, that ways of presenting and communicating radical critique other than the mass media news are necessary if such critique is to become sufficiently widespread to be a serious challenge to the dominant understanding of the world.

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Title of Thesis: Filling the Threat Vacuum: News Objectivity in the Transformation of the Ideology of World Order

Author


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May 10, 1993.