

THE MEDIA: REPORTER OR NEWSMAKER?

By Kenneth R. Giddens

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He is a board member of the Committee on the Present Danger; a member of the American Security Council; a senior advisor for Young Americans for Freedom; a member of the Media Advisory Committee of the Ethics and Public Policy Center at Georgetown University; and a member of numerous political and civic organizations.

His past activities include the distinguished honor of serving as a peer-elected advisor on the Board of Directors for CBS-TV Affiliates.

Mr. Giddens delivered this presentation at Hillsdale during the Center for Constructive Alternatives seminar, "The Media: Recorders or Makers of the News?"

I am happy to be here today to talk to you about the media, a matter of utmost importance, not only to our own nation, but also to the entire world, for mankind is largely a product of what he knows or believes, and the shaping of man's knowledge and beliefs, by the media, may well be the determining factor in deciding whether man will continue his upward climb to a more comfortable and happy life, or whether the forces of darkness and repression will take man back to those days of the Dark Ages, of ignorance, oppression and servility.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions."



I believe President Lincoln was correct, and if he was, then the dissemination of news, knowledge and understanding and its interpretation is a great responsibility and burden, which in this country falls largely on our private media and those who guide it, control it, and determine what the masses of the people learn, understand and believe. From these things that the public learns and believes, it then logically follows they will do, or attempt to do, whatever seems sensible, based on their understanding and beliefs.

From the early primitive clay tablets, town criers, and the primitive printing press, man's ingenuity has now developed a most complex system of communication which contains some of man's most astonishing accomplishments, such as the instantaneous electronic transmission of news and information, utilizing both sight, sound, satellites, electrons, computers and moving pictures, complete with color and three dimensions. It's all a wizard's dream, but in last analysis, it all has to be selected, controlled, directed, interpreted and utilized by man himself. And the wisdom of the

im•pri•mis (im-pri-mis) adv. In the first place. Middle English, from Latin in primis, among the first (things).

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use of these modern media depends on the knowledge, wisdom, depth, breadth, honesty, and even the humanity of those who control it. In good, wise, honest hands, dissemination of news can be a blessing. In cruel, evil, selfish, narrow, ignorant, uncaring manipulative hands, as was the case in Germany under Adolph Hitler, it can be a curse on humanity, which can lead us back to the savage horrors early man must have for centuries endured. Hitler, with his Dr. Goebbels, through massive use of lies and propaganda, succeeded in leading his people into a war of conquest and aggression that changed the course of history, and today the dictators of the Soviet Union, their surrogates, such as Castro, and their own organs such as the KGB, *Izvestia*, *Pravda*, Radio Moscow and their clandestine radio stations, such as Radio Peace and Progress, and the Voice of Free Iran, in Baku, using massive propaganda campaigns, are trying to subvert the rest of the free world so that the Soviets can become the actual masters of earth.

Certainly, in the case of the Soviet propaganda organs just named, these media are not simple reporters of news. They are vigorous actors in the great struggle now going on between democracy and tyranny, which will determine the course of history for years to come, and decide whether the masses of men will be, as our Declaration of Independence proclaims, "endowed with certain inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," or whether man shall be a creature of the state, a chattel or pawn, and as such, be the property of, and subservient to, the men who control and operate the state: ergo, man's earthly masters. It is important to recognize these facts pertaining to the Soviet media for they illustrate with great clarity that manipulated media become actors in the drama as well as reporters, and if the media is totally controlled, it becomes and frequently is, not a true reporter at all, but an actor or tool of a master using the communication media, not to report, but to manipulate.

This sad fact also applies in some degree to our own and other countries, when the media, instead of reporting factually and objectively, depart from objective and honest reportage, and become to some extent tools or vehicles to control and manipulate the audiences they serve. In these forms, the media takes on many roles as it is controlled variously, by government officials in power, by its economic owners, by foreign agents, or by pressure groups, both from within and without its own nation. Among the pressure groups affecting the integrity of our domestic media are individuals proclaiming themselves to be consumer guardians who, as self-righteous and sometimes impossibly idealistic creatures, such as Ralph Nader, achieve largely through the media a tyranny frequently worse than the evils they profess to fight.

During the Vietnamese war, among the pressure groups that virtually silenced some of our media, or by the power of their arguments apparently caused

large and important segments of the media to slant their reportage concerning the CIA and our adversaries, were the "peace at any price" activists opposing the Vietnamese war. Their violent protests also resulted in the extreme slanting of news by ignoring it, or by both the selection and the volume of coverage of the unfolding story. Our intelligence agencies, especially the CIA and the FBI, were frequently the victims of media manipulation, and many other aspects of the war were distorted by the American media, a classic case being their reportage of the battle of Hue.

Our media depicted the battle of Hue as defeat for South Vietnam and America, when in fact it virtually destroyed the military forces of North Vietnam and we could have ended the war as a military victory for America if we had chosen to follow up our success at Hue, as is normally the case in war.

And just as the reportage of the battle of Hue was distorted, so was the reportage concerning the CIA. The truth of this statement may be easily confirmed by studying the findings of Drs. Lefever and Godson, who give the details in their book, *The CIA and the American Ethic*, published by the Ethics and Public Policy Center of Georgetown University.

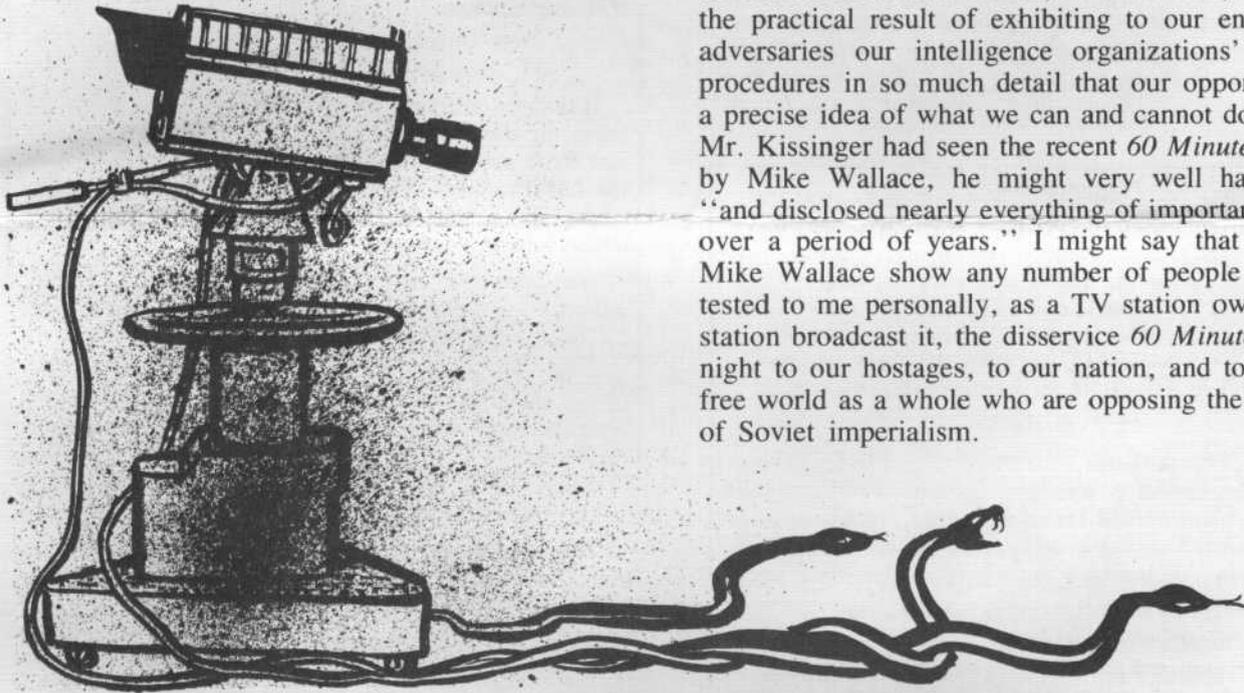
To be specific, from 1974 to 1978, the three networks, CBS, NBC and ABC, carried 1,068 stories about U.S. foreign intelligence operations by the CIA. Of the 1,068 stories carried, 831, or 77%, were critical of the CIA and only 237, or 22%, were supportive of the CIA. Likewise, during the years of the survey, ABC-TV's unfavorable stories on the CIA ranged from 28 minutes unfavorable in 1974 to 86 minutes unfavorable in 1976. CBS's stories ranged from 53 minutes unfavorable in 1974 to 96 minutes in 1976. NBC's stories ranged from 55 minutes unfavorable in 1974 to 81 minutes unfavorable in 1976.

The Center found that the facts presented about the CIA on the three evening TV network news shows lacked balance, depth, and perspective, and gave inordinate attention to real or alleged misdeeds of the CIA to the almost total exclusion of the CIA's positive contributions to U.S. foreign policy. The Georgetown University Center for Ethics and Public Policy further reported that the negative character of the TV news stories on CIA intelligence activities broadcast by the three networks resulted, at least in part, from the failure to report the reasons for the CIA activity abroad which had taken place under Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon.

The cumulative effect of the reportage of the American media, not just as reporters, but also as actors and "newsmakers," resulted in what many now believe to be the abandonment of our South Vietnamese allies, permitting their communist conquerors to engage in mass murder, starvation and attempted extermination of Vietnamese-Chinese (the boat people), the Cambodians, and the Khmer.

In their study of the programming of the three

networks' news programs, the Georgetown Center also found that a cluster of twenty evening TV news stories concerning our long-time Latin American ally, Chile, focused on the periods before Chile's first and only communist president, Mr. Allende, who had been put in power by only 38% of those voting in the election. Furthermore, the stories broadcast by the three networks did not make it clear to the American viewers that the Allende Marxist regime was pursuing Marxist domestic and foreign policies with the close collaboration and support of both Moscow and Cuba.



In all twenty of the stories, the Center found only one reference to the Soviet Union: Senator Frank Church was reported as saying the United States was lowering itself to the Russians' level by intervening in the affairs of other states.

Responsible journalism should report both the pro and the con, challenge and response. But in this case of Chile, so effectively analyzed by Dr. Lefever, the networks reported only the U.S. response, without naming the Soviet Union as the challenger, who was threatening to disrupt and communize all of Latin America. Washington and the CIA were generally portrayed by the U.S. media as big bullies from North America, attempting to frustrate progress or block democracy in "poor little Chile."

Dr. Lefever also found that without additional information no viewer would have guessed that U.S. policy, however wise or inept, was in fact intended to help democratic Chileans keep alive the opposition parties, an opposition press, an independent legislature, and a supreme court—all in the face of powerful internal pressures attempting to mold Chile into a communist totalitarian state, in order to establish communist power on the Latin American continent, in

flagrant violation of our Monroe Doctrine, and with the intention of preventing the United States from having access to Latin America's natural resources.

It is my contention that when a media element slants or distorts in any manner the simple story of an event, the media then ceases to be a reporter and becomes an actor in the drama.

The recent Mike Wallace *60 Minutes* documentary of March 2 on U.S. activities in Iran might well be described as Henry Kissinger some years ago described our congressional investigations of alleged covert CIA activities in Iran, when he said, "They had the practical result of exhibiting to our enemies and adversaries our intelligence organizations' operating procedures in so much detail that our opponents have a precise idea of what we can and cannot do." And if Mr. Kissinger had seen the recent *60 Minutes* segment by Mike Wallace, he might very well have added, "and disclosed nearly everything of importance we did over a period of years." I might say that since that Mike Wallace show any number of people have protested to me personally, as a TV station owner whose station broadcast it, the disservice *60 Minutes* did that night to our hostages, to our nation, and to all of the free world as a whole who are opposing the expansion of Soviet imperialism.

On March 7, the Associated Press ran a story saying both the White House and the State Department, having learned of CBS' plans to broadcast the story, attempted over a two-week period to persuade CBS not to do so. CBS News' President, Bill Leonard, confirmed the A.P. story and remarked, "We went ahead with it anyway."

Taking into consideration the facts that CBS News may not have been aware of some things known by our government, and the fact that the lives of our hostages may well be at stake, together with the complications and delicacy of the entire Iranian-Middle East situation, the action taken by CBS, despite protests by both the Department of State and the White House, was arrogant and unwise, for CBS, even now, cannot know whether or not its broadcast further endangered, delayed, and complicated the situation of the hostages and the findings of a satisfactory solution to our Iranian problem. Certainly this is an illustration of a media element injecting itself into the on-going drama and becoming a newsmaker rather than maintaining its role as a reporter.

In view of all the foregoing, I think the question can be asked with justification, "Has national televi-

sion adequately alerted and informed the people about the serious matter of the SALT II Treaty which President Carter signed and which many knowledgeable and patriotic Americans sincerely believe, if ratified by the Senate, would give the Soviets permanent military domination of the earth?" And the answer seems to be a resounding "no!" National television has not fully informed the American people of the dangers which the SALT II Treaty contains for America, despite the fact that more than 1600 retired admirals and generals have signed petitions opposing the treaty. On the other hand, the American Security Council has produced a documentary on the subject, "The Salt Syndrome," and has persuaded local TV stations to broadcast it, both commercially and as a public service, but I am not aware of comparable productions or broadcasts by any of the three networks.

The same question asked about radio and newspapers should receive about the same answers, but the answer about magazines would be a bit better. Several of the more serious and responsible magazines, such as *U.S. News and World Report* and *Reader's Digest*, have covered the SALT II controversy extensively. Ben Wattenberg, of the American Enterprise Institute and the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, says, "We are suffering from a series of self-inflicted wounds that led to an erosion of our power and influence." Certainly, while we were destroying the CIA and permitting our Army, Navy and Air Force as well as our nuclear missile forces to become vastly inferior to those of the Soviets, the bulk of all the media remained substantially silent, or led the parade to subservient status by acting as guides and cheerleaders toward reduction of military spending—while at the same time failing to point out, with sufficient repetition and emphasis, the mortal danger of the path we as a nation were following in relation to the Soviets.

Our media have not given the deserved attention to, nor sufficiently reported, the Soviet activities in overthrowing the Shah of Iran; inciting the Iranian masses to wreck and loot U.S. installations; the KGB penetration and recruitment of the Iranian oil industry workers; urging a united front between Islam and Marxism to oppose the United States; and operating a clandestine radio station in the Soviet Union, at Baku, with giant transmitters beaming Persian language broadcasts into Iran, condemning America as imperialist monsters and urging the masses to revolt, even as Chairman Brezhnev was warning President Carter not to intervene. These clandestine Soviet broadcasts also actually called for a national holy war against the Shah and "American imperialism." The failures of our domestic media to adequately inform our citizens of the serious implications of events taking place in Iran, in my view, constitute a massive dereliction of duty by the media or an abysmal lack of understanding of the Soviet Union and its relentless drive to dominate the earth.

There is usually continuous conflict somewhere in our world, and the line between war and peace is often vague. The recent Soviet conventional military expansions, plus their tremendous capability for conducting a devastating nuclear war, laid upon our media a great obligation to see and understand the developing peril and to assiduously alert and inform our nation's citizens of the clear, present, and growing danger confronting them, and also to inform America of the most reliable and advanced measures that might be taken by the United States in the face of those dangers. I do not deny there was some reportage and some dissemination of constructive information as to the Soviet preparation for war and steps we should take for our protection and resistance, but in general the media responded in a rather shallow, lackadaisical, lackluster way, hardly responsive to the magnitude and urgency of the danger we face. There is reason to believe that both the print media and the broadcast media have given less space and airtime to this matter than they have devoted to such matters as Bert Lance's overdrafts.

One of the most potent forces that has damaged our intelligence capability over the last decade has been the excessive and sensational criticism of the CIA and FBI by the American media, often trafficking in frequently false and lurid allegations, which ended in the ridiculously restrictive legislation enacted under the guidance of Senator Frank Church that is very harmful both to our nation and to our free world allies. Also, the American media, instead of attacking and opposing the CIA and other of our intelligence agencies engaged in supporting official foreign policies, should strive to present a fair and balanced picture of them and try to see that they are understood, respected and supported by the American people.

It seems to me that when media elements engage in these rather mindless attacks, they are ceasing to be reporters and join the ranks of the actor-newsmakers. There may well be some reason to believe the KGB has infiltrated the American media sufficiently to impose some restraint, at least because of some expressions of disapproval by "fellow travelers" on media elements who would otherwise be more active in opposing the Soviet moves and objectives.

The continued warnings of the Committee on the Present Danger and other such groups, beginning largely in 1976, should have been sufficient to have awakened the American media to the fact that while the Soviet Union was mouthing platitudes about detente, it was vigorously engaged in the greatest peacetime military build-up the world has ever known. The warnings, because they constituted a frightening and unpleasantly realistic view of the world, ran counter to the passionate wishfulness of many of the press, who along with the extreme liberals, did not want to face facts. The Carter Administration and a substantial part of the Congress ignored the developing threat and did not alert and sufficiently inform the public of the

looming likelihood of war. Even today, the media as a whole is not keeping the possibility and the increasing chance of a world war before the American people, even though that war would destroy the United States, most of our people, and a large part of the remainder of Western civilization. This failure of the media to diligently serve the national interest on so serious a matter, while diverting the people's attention with a constant flow of trivia and shallow political gossip and scandals, seems to me to constitute a major default of responsibility to the people of our nation.

In addition to parts of our media, there are others who lack a philosophy or conviction and just go along thoughtlessly with the fashion of the moment, be it extreme liberalism or extreme or radical conservatism, as many did in the days of Senator McCarthy. And there are those who are just plain lacking in breadth and depth of education or life experience. Too many of our present day "specialists," even graduates of some of our more prestigious schools and colleges, have been awarded degrees without having had the broadening influence of studying history, physics, geography, economics, literature, ancient civilization, philosophy, or the arts and sciences, which together make an educated person better fitted to comprehend and cope with the immensely complex world in which we live. Journalists without such an education and experience are frequently not adequately equipped to interpret for others as reporters.

Furthermore, it has become out-of-fashion for our students, including journalistic students, to study foreign languages and other such cultural elements that were once considered mandatory for well educated people. The lack of such study lessens the ability of many of our journalists to understand different people and cultures of the world. Furthermore, many of our colleges, including schools of journalism, are not much more than trade schools, equipping their students more in the mechanics of radio, TV and writing form, than in the more important subjects so needed for the understanding and interpretation required in the proper performance of their future media professions.

Unfortunate also is the fact that too few rank-and-file editors and reporters know of the great thinkers of geopolitics, such as McKinder or Admiral Mahan, with Mahan's theories that, in large measure, the control of the land and continents is dependent on control of the oceans. And yet it is the media people who, somewhat ignorant of these things, decide what the media will carry, the direction and emphasis of their

stories, plus the relative importance of the stories to the people whose lives the stories may well affect.

Reed Irvine and his organization, AIM, an acronym for Accuracy in Media, is regularly exposing media inaccuracies, slanting, distortion, etc., and calling them to task. Irvine says, "You can't trust *60 Minutes*, despite the fact that it has a huge audience." He and I are in agreement, at least on the matter of objecting when a news reporter such as Mike Wallace or Dan Rather ceases to be objective and moves from the role of telling an audience what has happened to becoming an actor in the action, as Dan Rather did in Dallas some years ago when he challenged the then President Nixon. By chance, I was in Dallas and witnessed the incident, and I recall the thought that instantly ran through my mind. It was, "Mr. Rather, instead of being a reporter, you are an 'agent provocateur.'" On such occasions, such reporters certainly become newsmakers, about whom other reporters can report, and when they get out of line, as I think Dan Rather did in Dallas and CBS News did on the Mike Wallace segment of *60 Minutes*, I also think they should be taken to task.

It is also my belief that except in very unusual and rare circumstances the role of "newsmaker" is improper for a reporting journalist. Simply because he is in the role of "newsmaker," he cannot be totally detached and objective. He is a "newsmaker" and therefore part of the action to be reported.

And so we can come back to the title: "Media: Reporter or Newsmaker?" It is some of both. If the reporter is so much a part of a story or so emotionally involved that detached objectivity is difficult, it is my contention that he becomes a co-star, a "newsmaker." Such was the case of Woodward and Bernstein in Watergate. Even today, some people question whether there was an actual Deep Throat, and even granting Deep Throat existed, it cannot be denied that the reporters became newsmakers.

The dual role of reporter-newsmaker is one of the serious problems of the media, and as the frequency of such involvement in the newsmaker role increases, the more difficult the essential element of objective, unbiased and balanced reportage becomes. And since it is only first-rate, accurate, objective news, served with courage and deep understanding of the serious dangers our nation faces, that we so desperately need today, the media should except in very rare instances stick to its historic role of reporter.

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High school students wishing to become better acquainted with Hillsdale College should contact:

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