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## Hard Times for Hard News A Clinical Look at U.S. Foreign Coverage

*John F. Stacks*

In a popular song written after September 11 but before the war in Iraq, country and western singer Alan Jackson caught the combination of sadness and confusion that envelops much of America in the Age of Terrorism. In a key verse, Jackson obliquely blames the news media for his bewilderment:

*I'm just a singer of simple songs  
I'm not a real political man  
I watch CNN but I'm not sure I could  
Tell you the difference in Iraq and Iran.\**

Of course telling the difference is easier now. Iraq is the one the United States occupied, and the other is the one that may actually be building nuclear weapons.

But assuming that Alan Jackson really did watch CNN, he would be in a fairly select group of his fellow citizens who pay much attention to news of any kind. According to the last biennial news consumption survey from the Pew Center for the People and the Press (June 2002), only about a third of the population watched any cable news, and about a third (with doubtless overlap) watched the broadcast news shows. Only four in ten bothered to read a daily newspaper (down from six in ten a decade earlier).<sup>1</sup>

And assuming further that Mr. Jackson watched CNN to find out the difference between Iraq and Iran, he would be in elite company indeed. The Pew survey found

that, even after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, only 21 percent of Americans said they follow international news “very closely.” That represented a six percentage point increase from two years earlier. Not surprisingly, interest in news from abroad is heaviest among older and better educated citizens. Pew found that only 16 percent of the population followed foreign news “intently” and that 90 percent of that group say consistently that it is important that the news contains information about other countries.

If Jackson’s lyrics are true, one suspects that he is not in that core international news consuming group, since they are voracious consumers of news from many sources, not just television. But still, could one watch CNN regularly and not know the difference between Iraq and Iran? CNN is the most straightforward of the cable news channels. Even though Larry King’s dismal celebrity interview show is its most popular offering, it has a stable of serious, professional newscasters (many of whom were cast off by the broadcast networks). Despite having lost the ratings war with Fox and suffering under the collapsed value and enormous debt of its parent, Time Warner, it maintains 40 foreign bureaus.

But for all that, the amount and sophistication of news from outside this country’s borders shown on the domestic CNN service is minimal. The work product from those expensive foreign bureaus winds up most often on CNN International. More worldly, more sophisticated, less parochial, CNN International is more like the admirable BBC,

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\*Alan Jackson, “Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning?” (New York: Arista Records, 2002).

and is in fact staffed by many former BBC news people. Because it reaches a well-traveled, multinational, English-speaking audience, CNN International is tailored to a much more upscale demographic viewership than is the American service. The difference was quite distinct during the invasion of Iraq, when CNN International took a much more standoffish posture toward the enterprise, while the domestic service bordered on cheerleading much of the time. There was a particularly embarrassing moment when Washington anchor Wolf Blitzer was hooked up by satellite phone to a CNN correspondent interviewing an American officer at a suspected chemical weapons dump. "This is a potentially huge story," Blitzer enthused, only to have the calm American officer tell him the chemicals in the buried drums they had found were most likely for agricultural use. Blitzer's enthusiasm could not be turned off, and he kept urging a different conclusion on the officer. Perhaps, Blitzer suggested, "it could be mustard gas." In November, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on British diplomatic and business interests in Istanbul, and while President Bush was in London, the CNN morning report of the strikes was overwhelmed by blanket coverage of the latest Michael Jackson scandal.

Walter Isaacson, a former editor of *Time Magazine* who ran CNN until early 2003, was widely quoted after the September 11 attacks saying that the tragedy was a wakeup call for the American media to get serious again, especially about foreign news. Still, he was under constant pressure to make his corporate numbers. "After 9/11, that pressure subsided," he said. "Viewers wanted to know the difference between Iran and Iraq."<sup>2</sup>

The same disparity between domestic and international content is true at *Time*, the corporate sibling of CNN. In one particularly glaring example, the European edition dated January 20, 2003, carried a dramatic cover picture of a burning American flag and the cover line "Blaming America: With War in

Iraq Looming, Anti-U.S. Sentiment Is Spreading Across Europe." The cover of the domestic edition of the magazine featured an attractive woman in a yoga position with the cover line "How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body." The U.S. edition was obviously a long-planned special feature that attracted a great number of advertising pages, mostly from drug companies and other purveyors of health products. It was no accident that the domestic edition of the magazine was 150 pages; the European edition, in all its seriousness, was less than half the size. The domestic edition of *Time* has a circulation slightly in excess of 4.1 million. The combined foreign editions, mostly *Time Europe* and *Time Asia*, have together less than half that many buyers. The foreign editions, like CNN's international service, reach a more sophisticated mostly bilingual audience. American readers of *Time* that week, as the Bush administration was marching toward war, had no clue from their magazine about the depth of European opposition to that adventure.

The evening news shows from the American broadcast networks once held a dominant share of the market for television news. Ten years ago, 60 percent of Americans said they watched one of the network shows. Only the audience for local television news was higher (77 percent). Now, about a third of the public watches the network shows, about the same as the total audience for all the cable news channels. Since America toppled Saddam and the occupation of Iraq began, each evening show reports some news about the war, and although there is usually some taped footage from Iraq, the story is reported as an essentially American story taking place abroad and overwhelmingly reported from an American, and, increasingly, Washington's, perspective. There has even been a slight increase in stories about Afghanistan, which had nearly disappeared from the news (broadcast, cable, and print) by the spring of 2003.

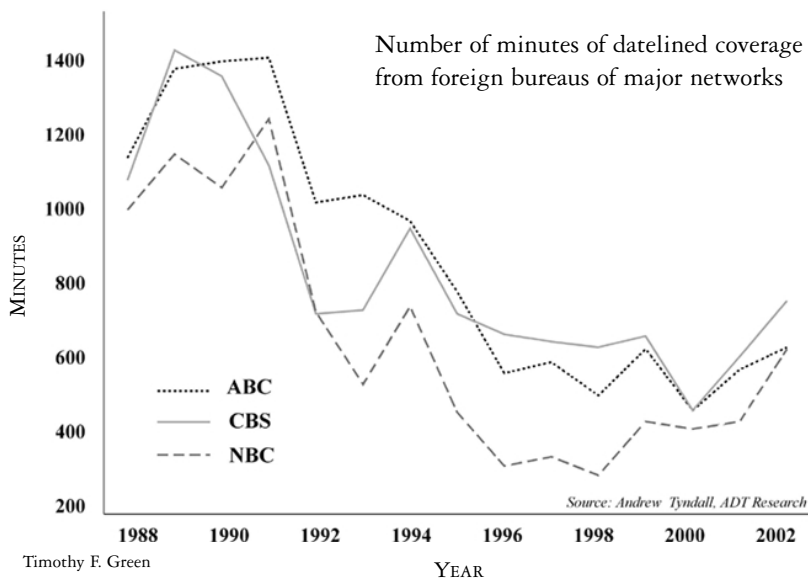
Still, the number of their combined weekly total of 285 minutes (each network show has a mere 19 minutes of news each night) devoted to news from abroad is minuscule. And news from places where American soldiers are not in danger is immeasurably small, because Americans, according to the Pew survey, are not interested. The percentage of people claiming interest in non-war-zone, non-Middle East coverage was in the single digits in the 2002 survey. Indeed,

time” news, as if a news story were a piece of inventory arriving on the assembly line at the right moment to be bolted onto the main product. It’s an apt description of what passes for foreign coverage on the networks.

*Is Print Any Better?*

American newspapers are losing readers steadily, year by year. Most are engaged in lightening up their content with the idea

that if the newspaper is more fun and less work, fewer people will abandon their newspaper-reading habit. The opposite seems to be happening: the less useful the newspaper is in delivering the news, the fewer people buy it. Among American newspapers, only the two family-controlled papers, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, and the Tribune Company’s *Los Angeles Times* still invest substantially in foreign news coverage and devote significant space



Timothy F. Green

the networks in the 1990s basically abandoned real coverage of foreign news, relying instead on video supplied from independent sources, with an occasional narration from one of their correspondents based in London to give a certain foreign verisimilitude to the piece.

As veteran CBS foreign correspondent Bob Simon harshly noted during a panel discussion in 2002, “We are no longer a news gathering organization.” When terrorists took over a Moscow theater in 2002, ABC sent a correspondent from New York to do a standup outside the theater. ABC’s vice president for international news gathering, in an interview with the *American Journalism Review*, called this type of coverage “just in

to news from abroad. The *Wall Street Journal* also spends significantly on foreign coverage and although it devotes considerable space to economic news from abroad, its political analysis from other nations is always first-rate. In the case of the *Times* and the *Post*, it is not just the wishes of the Sulzbergers and the Grahams that account for a decent investment in international news, it is the markets the two newspapers serve. The *Post* has a near monopoly in a city that demands attention to events overseas. The *Times*, in addition to being the only quality New York daily, has built a national circulation, skimming the upscale markets across the country. This past fall, it was not uncommon to find half of the first news sections

of the *Times* devoted to foreign news, with nearly all the stories produced by staff correspondents based in the newspaper's 27 overseas bureaus, the largest presence abroad for any single American newspaper.

The *Chicago Tribune*, and its smaller property the *Baltimore Sun*, are much better-than-average American newspapers, although neither has much to brag about in its coverage of the world outside the United States. The *Times*'s subsidiary, the *Boston Globe*, still does a decent job with foreign news, given its position as the only quality paper serving the academics of Boston and Cambridge. The common denominator is that the newspapers with the best foreign coverage are those that serve the largest markets, in which a significant subsection of the readership demands that attention be paid to the world at large.

The elite newspapers invest in foreign coverage because their markets require it, which is not to say that the editors and publishers don't have a commitment to informing their readers about the rest of the world. But, in a sense, they are outstanding in the coverage of foreign news because they have to be to maintain their reputations and their readership.

Beyond these markets, newspapers are woefully derelict in the amount of foreign news they give their readers. On a typical Sunday in the fall, for example, in the lone newspaper in a New England city of 45,000, there was no foreign, or even national, news on the front page. A second section packed about eight national and foreign stories into eight pages, including advertising.

The slim foreign pickings in local newspapers is the result of editorial decisions, not the unavailability or even the cost of such coverage. The Associated Press is the largest news gathering organization in the United States, with 242 bureaus around the world (about 100 of them outside the United States) and 1,700 U.S. newspapers buy some level of service from the AP. The

wire service will not say how many papers actually buy its premium service, which includes a full daily menu of foreign stories. Nor will it say how many of the foreign stories actually appear in the newspapers that do subscribe.

Not to put too fine a point on it, editors don't run many foreign stories because they believe their readers would rather read something else, almost anything else. But the leaders of the journalistic trade constantly try to persuade the editors otherwise. A few years ago, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) compiled a list of survey results to reinforce this exhortation from one editor: "Don't underestimate Americans' endless curiosity about the world." ASNE reported that a study for the Knight-Ridder chain (which has become infamous in the newspaper business lately for cutting costs by reducing space for news stories, firing reporters, and driving its managers crazy in the pursuit of ever higher profit margins) showed that "almost no matter what year or what market, roughly six in ten newspaper readers are 'highly interested' in international news." Another survey concluded that 55 percent of Americans are concerned about the fact that there is too little coverage of international news. And a Yankelovich study in 1996 showed that 56 percent of Americans aged 13 and over are either "very" or "moderately" interested in international news.

But those surveys are misleading. The answers are the rough equivalent to polls in which respondents swear they eat only healthy foods. The men and women, editors and business people, who produce most of America's newspapers, newsmagazines, and broadcast and cable news shows are not fools. They know what sells and what doesn't. And the 2002 Pew survey shows they are right.

In the "end of history" period that followed the Cold War, international coverage not only nearly vanished, the scramble for audience led to the extravagantly awful

news judgment exemplified by the O.J. Simpson indulgence. Old-fashioned newsmen, trained in the era when all foreign news was a way of keeping abreast of the U.S.-Soviet face-off and who still believe it is a news organization's duty to offer some coverage of the rest of the world, were accused of suffering from a syndrome called, with perverse prescience, "Afghanism," a blind devotion to pointless stories about weird places that didn't matter to Americans.

Even the crusaders for more international coverage have to acknowledge it is not easy to stuff this information into the brains of their readers. Edward Seaton is a past president of the ASNE and editor in chief of the *Manhattan Mercury* in Kansas. He is a crusader for more international coverage, but even he admits that the best way to get foreign stories into the paper, and to get them read, is to trick the reader into thinking they are local stories. He told the *American Journalism Review* that he worked Afghanistan stories into his paper by covering a local college dean who happens to be from Afghanistan.

Says one veteran *New York Times* correspondent who has been posted abroad and in the United States, "Americans were interested in foreign news when it seemed like we could all be blown up the next day. Now they're only interested if their brother or cousin is in danger of being blown up while serving in the military." That's a touch harsh, perhaps, but not untypical of reporters who have spent many years, even at the *Times*, fighting for space for serious stories.

#### *What Advertisers Want*

Editors, but especially publishers and advertising sales people, know what sorts of stories their advertisers like to see next to the space or air time they buy. When the war in Iraq began last spring, advertisers deserted the newsmagazines in droves, even though those issues were some of the best newsstand

newsstand and among the most thoroughly read of the year. But the trouble started well before that.

Most advertising purchase decisions are made by young media buyers in the big ad agencies. Judging by my own exposure to them over the years, their appetite for hard news per se is limited, and their interest in politics and world affairs is nearly nonexistent. Whereas it was once a favorite selling ploy to bring political and foreign correspondents to talk with agency people, thus demonstrating how well-informed an organization's correspondents were, the practice is vanishing as correspondents now find themselves facing the blank stares of media buyers who could not have less interest in the world those reporters cover.

The power of the advertiser was pervasively enhanced at the end of the last decade, as all media organizations were slammed with the worst advertising slump anyone remembered. By that time, most large news organizations had become parts of large conglomerates, often managed by entertainment executives. The new behemoths were usually burdened with debt and driven to move stock prices upward rapidly. Cost cutting was the only way to meet aggressive financial goals, and the easiest target was the cost of gathering and printing news from abroad. As noted above, the broadcast news shows simply gave up their own foreign bureaus.

Magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* began to prune staff posted abroad, often leaving stringers in place where there once had been full-time employees. Since the advertisers weren't interested in foreign news, the business-side executives applauded the cuts and the consequent reduction in the sort of news one former *Time* publisher dismissively called "homework." As former *Time* editor Walter Isaacson observed, "There is always a balance between what you should be doing and making more money."<sup>3</sup> But in most large media organizations, it wasn't a contest. In the age-old struggle in the organiza-



tions that tried to balance mass versus class, the economic and corporate imperative won easily. And, tellingly, although advertising is still not robust, there is little evidence that abandoning foreign news coverage has damaged overall audience figures, although at the margins, it must be reducing the demographic quality (read educated and wealthy) of those audiences.

#### *Where Have the Serious Readers Gone?*

That little slice of serious news readers and viewers has migrated away. The *Economist*, for example, now has a paid U.S. circulation of 429,000, up 82 percent from ten years ago. And that is high-quality circulation; an annual subscription to the American edition of the British magazine costs \$129. On a net basis, the *Economist* collects \$102 annually, more than twice what is collected by *Time*. In the newspaper field, the *New York Times* sells about a million newspapers a day across the country, a circulation that has grown as the quality of local newspapers has diminished (and as the *Times* itself has begun marketing itself as the national, quality newspaper). The *Financial Times* of London now sells 130,000 papers a day in the United States.

At the same time, the BBC is expanding its U.S. audience for both radio and television news. Some 220 public television stations around the country now take the BBC's news bulletins and its half-hour evening show broadcast from Washington. Distributed through FM stations, the BBC's radio news service claims an audience of 3.9 million, a 70 percent increase in the last two years. Will Americans who are seriously interested in international news have to rely on the British for coverage around the world? The answer, if one is a fairly assiduous surfer of the World Wide Web, is an emphatic no.

Twenty-five percent of the respondents to the Pew survey in 2002 said they used the web to get news at least three times a week. The number hadn't changed much

since two years earlier, and if one applies the percentages of people intensely interested in foreign news, those using the web for foreign news can be imputed to be in single digits.

Nonetheless, as more of a paper reader than a web surfer, I have been astonished by the richness of foreign news available all over the Internet. AOL, CNN and *Time's* sister, maintains a site that is a treasure trove of foreign news. If one clicks persistently underneath the little word "World" that appears on the site's home page, one finds batches of stories from every country in the world. They are, of course, not the product of AOL's reportage, but rather an assemblage of "open source" stories, that is, stories from the wire services who license their services to AOL and other sites like Google, Yahoo, and MSN.

The cost, therefore, of gathering and disseminating the news, even from exotic places, is negligible, which is what makes the web so very rich in news (and of course any other information). Even if the audience is relatively small, the feast of international news is not making or breaking the budgets of the big websites. Nor do the news sites make any money to speak of. The only ad on a recent world news home page on AOL was a house ad for a CNN news show.

Google has its own deep news pages, interestingly organized. A recent "World" page had 20 stories, each with multiple versions from various news organizations. It also has a feature that lets users customize their news so that, with a few clicks, stories on the same topic are quickly displayed.

And the British are very much in this game as well. The site of the *Guardian* newspaper is superbly deep, with links to other newspapers all over the world. The *Economist* site is just as good as the magazine itself and reports getting 1.2 million "monthly unique viewers," more than half from North America. Embedded in the site are a series of several dozen "country briefings," which are collections of the

magazine's articles, pieces from the Economist Intelligence Unit (a high-priced corporate research branch of the company), and links to the relevant country's government websites and some local newspapers. The most intense foreign news junkie could spend days working the magazine's website. After the beginning of the war in Iraq, the use of news websites jumped dramatically, of course. But according to Neilson//Net-Ratings, the increase in visits to the British sites run by the *Economist*, the *Guardian*, and the wire service Reuters was double that for U.S. sites like CNN's. Reuters itself registered a 218 percent increase in "unique visitors" between February and April 2003.

There are other, unexpected sources for foreign news on the web. The Drudge Report was dreadful during the Clinton scandal plague and still traffics in sensationalism. (Recent main story headline: THE HYBRID EGGS WERE PUT BACK IN THE WOMB!) But it has links to the AP's world wire, United Press International's world service, Agence France Press, Reuters, and many foreign newspapers. It's true: if one read the Drudge Report assiduously and used its resources, one would have no need to subscribe to any magazine or newspaper.

Relatively new to the web is the Arab satellite news channel al-Jazeera's English-language site, which provides a large menu of news written from its own perspective and is especially interesting in its coverage of the Iraq occupation. Yale University has a site operated by its Center for the Study of Globalization that features papers and studies it sponsors, and provides links, organized by region, to major news organizations. The Council on Foreign Relations has a similar site, featuring pieces from its *Foreign Affairs* magazine, and is establishing links with other news sites with rich overseas coverage. There are also many specialized sites that aggregate news and information from specific regions, such as Johnson's Russia List, whose host at the Center for Defense Information asks for a \$25 annual contribution,

and the Caspian List, which offers diverse views on oil and pipeline issues.

Beyond the branded news sites, there are countless web logs that amount to a kind of do-it-yourself journalism from all over the world. Some of the content is interesting, but without the supervision of established news organizations, these raw reports are of dubious reliability. While they represent a real democratization of the once elite trade of foreign reporting, they may obscure more than they illuminate.

One of the most interesting services now being delivered by the web is Stratfor.com, produced by the Austin, Texas, company, Strategic Forecasting. The company was started in 1996 by George Friedman, who had run the Louisiana State University's Center for Geopolitical Studies. He touts his service as providing "intelligence" as opposed to news, but the postings the service sends to its roughly 100,000 subscribers most closely resemble highly sophisticated news analysis.

Stratfor.com employs 25 analysts in the home office, headed by a former Russian intelligence officer, and another 30 staff people abroad. Much of the raw information presented is open source material culled from various news websites, but Stratfor's stock in trade is intelligently spotting and explaining key developments around the world. Many of its news gatherers are "stringers," but not usually traditional news people. They may be foreign intelligence operatives, business and government people, or academics. Stratfor's website invites readers to become informants, asking who they are and what they think they know about. "We get a lot of information from our readers," Friedman says, "most of it of poor quality." But its subscribers include foreign ministries and even CNN.<sup>4</sup>

"The Internet," says Friedman, "is as fast as television and as big as print. But print is always late, and television is too brief." What is most interesting about Stratfor is that it doesn't sell a lot of information,

but its analysis is smart and sophisticated, and on target. It asserted well before the American invasion that whatever weapons of mass destruction that existed in Iraq posed no imminent threat to U.S. interests. It is also relatively expensive, at \$450 a year. That is, however, a pittance compared to what a corporate client pays for the Economist Intelligence Unit's customized services. Like the Intelligence Unit, Stratfor sells corporate memberships that entitle subscribers to ask for customized reporting in their particular areas of interest.

### *The Vanishing Sense of Public Obligation*

Before the days of the media conglomerates and their attendant profit needs, and before the fracturing of audiences and the consequent diminution of profits for the news branches of these media giants, most professional news managers thought they were fulfilling a public responsibility in salting their broadcasts and publications with the most important or interesting foreign stories.

Everyone at *Time*, for example, knew that the celebrity news in the "People" section was the best read part of the magazine. Nonetheless, some significant part of the magazine was devoted to foreign news. This was seen as a journalistic duty.

That sense of public obligation has vanished from most of the largest media companies. In the face of shrinking audiences and shrinking revenues, survival is more important than any gauzy notion of public responsibility. That fraction of the American public that is interested in news from abroad is, however, able to find a richness of offerings, thanks to the Internet, that exceed anything served up in the past. The high-end magazines like *The New Yorker* under David Remnick and the newly invigorated *Atlantic Monthly* offer foreign reportage and analyses of news from abroad. National Public Radio's reports from overseas are similarly illuminating. But all these quality sources have limited "circulation" and

reach just about the same universe of readers and listeners. In other words, more people know less about the rest of the world, and a few people know a good deal more.

This phenomenon is not, of course, limited to foreign news. The dumbing down of print and broadcast news savages serious coverage of topics from politics to economics to science. In company with a political culture dependent on sound bites, photo ops, and "spin" (the ubiquitous synonym for lying), the democratic ideal of an informed electorate is dying before our eyes. Perhaps we were spoiled. It is worth remembering that foreign coverage and, indeed, the quality of the American press as a whole was woeful before the Second World War. Reporters were poorly educated and performed mostly as stenographers to the powerful. When the distinguished columnist James B. Reston began his journalistic career, reporting first for the Associated Press and then for the *New York Times* from London in 1938, covering the British Foreign Office amounted to little more than taking down and reporting nearly verbatim the pronouncements issued by the government. Washington coverage was not much better until after the Cold War began, when reporters like Reston began to write in a more informed and analytical style.

It has always been the case that only an elite group of Americans paid much attention to the rest of the world. It has been assumed that people with economic stakes in other nations, academics, and public officials could find out what they needed to know, if by no other means than by their own personal intelligence networks. But this may not be true. Strobe Talbott, a former *Time Magazine* editor who became deputy secretary of state in the Clinton administration, was and is a close reader of foreign news. "There has been an inexcusable and inexplicable decline in coverage of foreign news," he says. It may be explicable, but it is not excusable. The consequences, said Talbott, now the head of the Brookings Institution,



even affect the policymakers in Washington. "I have often remarked," he said, "that one of the big secrets of government is that even after you have gotten all the clearances and codes for classified information, the stuff is often not as good as what one read in the *Financial Times* the week before. The intelligence is 'sexed up' because they go to such trouble to collect it, and it is not very well presented. It is only useful at the margins of a particular problem. The policymaker's view of the world is of a piece with what the intelligent public knows."<sup>5</sup>

And what of the rest of the public? An astounding 70 percent of those surveyed in September 2002 by a *Washington Post*-ABC poll believed Saddam Hussein was in some way involved in the attacks of September 11. That number was a direct product of a failed mass media, of an insular and inattentive public, and of the Bush administration's constant and cynical effort to justify the war against Iraq. In fact, the president himself was so embarrassed by the success of this disinformation campaign that he took to television later in September to try to correct the record—and his own vice president—about the absence of any evidence linking Saddam to the World Trade Center attacks.

Strobe Talbott believes that "America is less informed about the world than it was twenty years ago." The perils of public ignorance then, in the middle of the Cold War, were of course serious. But the consequences are no less so now, in an era of pre-emptive war and international terrorism. The American public at large needs to know more about the rest of the world, not less.

One of the ways the larger public understands the world is through its own government and the reporting from Washington about the government's foreign policy. But the Bush administration, in the words of one long-time Washington bureau chief, is the "most clozemouthed, closed-doored" in memory. President Bush has held fewer press conferences at this point in his presi-

dency than any president since Richard Nixon during his truncated second term. He has had almost no private interviews with a major news organization other than the conservative Fox Network and has made himself available only to a select group of conservative columnists. His cabinet officers are similarly inaccessible, and when they or their deputies do grant interviews, minders from the press office sit in to make sure there are no deviations from the official line. In the 20 years I covered Washington and the White House, I can remember only a few disagreeable times when press officers were permitted to sit in on interviews. One was with the president's father, when he was vice president under Ronald Reagan.

Frequent and open conversations with the press, even if the information imparted was to be used as background, not only produced a more sophisticated and knowing press report, it also provided officials with a sense of what was on the public's mind through the questions asked. We have recently learned that the president himself does not read the newspapers. He thus knows only what he's told, or whatever he knew before he became president.

The reporting from Washington, for example, about the decision to go to war in Iraq, was abysmally thin. The full texture and shape of the internal government debate (and one assumes there was some debate) was not known to the public. Without knowing much about the stakes and the reasons for the war, the public supported the president. Now there is surprise and anger at the consequences.

As things have gotten rough in Iraq, some government officials have begun to leak bits and pieces of what they thought before the war. CIA and State Department officials, in particular, are now telling reporters that they knew all along that the evidence of the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was weak and that they knew how difficult it would be to occupy the country. What if the press had been able

to report those positions before the war? Might there have been a bit more caution? A bit more debate? A bit less urgency to rush into Iraq with few allies?

Where the citizenry lacks a wider understanding of the world, public opinion can be easily manipulated, as it was before the Iraq invasion. Would the American public have been supportive of the war, and would their feckless representatives been so quick to endorse it, had an honest estimate of the costs been presented beforehand?

It is no surprise that public support for the war is declining rapidly. Whatever public consent was present before the invasion was based on disinformation, ignorance, and the fear of future terrorism. The Bush

administration bears a large part of the responsibility for misleading the public. But the press and the public too must shoulder some of the blame. If the United States, the world's most powerful nation, is determined to impose order and democracy around the globe, it must first better understand the worlds it seeks to conquer. ●

## Notes

1. Pew Research Center Biennial News Consumption Survey, June 2002.
2. Interview with author.
3. Interview with author.
4. Interview with author.
5. Interview with author.