

Between the Government and the Press

The Role of Western Correspondents and Government Public Relations in Middle East Coverage

Mohammed el-Nawawy and James D. Kelly

Although the source-reporter relationship forms the focal point of newsgathering in any political conflict, most of the source-reporter literature focuses on the routines and values of the reporter. This is the first study that investigates the power dynamics involved in the relationship between the Western correspondents stationed in Egypt and Israel and the official press relations practitioners in the two countries. Approximately 88 percent of the Western correspondents in Egypt and Israel and three government press relations directors were interviewed in late 1998 to determine their role perceptions within the context of two theoretical models: the news-making model and the public relations two-way asymmetric model. Correspondents said analysis of complex issues was their primary role, and public relations officials said theirs was provision of information to correspondents. Correspondents said Israeli officials were far more accessible than their Egyptian counterparts. This makes them easier to work with but makes correspondents more skeptical of the information they provide. The news-making model best describes the relationship.

In the past half-century, the Arab-Israeli conflict has led to six major wars in the Middle East and has cost thousands of lives. It has left the Palestinian people stateless and dispersed, creating frustration and exacerbating regional tension. Moreover, the conflict has diverted billions of dollars from productive investments to the purchase of armaments and has blocked regional cooperation for economic development that would have permitted a more rational and effective use of national resources (Granham and Tessler 1995).

This study investigates how access to information about the Middle East conflict by Western correspondents in both Egypt and Israel is affected by differing professional role perceptions held by those in the governments' information

delivery systems and by the correspondents themselves. The importance of this study emanates from the argument that decision makers rely on information available to them via the news media to formulate state policies. This information, reflecting the concerns, capabilities, and orientations of their adversaries, is a key factor that influences government negotiation strategies in periods of conflict (Wolfsfeld 1997).

At the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a recurrent pattern of misunderstanding and failed communication between governments (Cohen 1990). Western correspondents in two major Middle Eastern countries (Egypt and Israel) can enhance the information flow between the two governments in a way that can reduce misunderstanding on the political scene. Consequently, information exchange between the government and the news media in both Egypt and Israel can affect the decision-making process in both countries (Wolfsfeld 1997).

Egypt and Israel were chosen for this study because virtually all Western correspondents operating in the Middle East are stationed in either Cairo, Jerusalem, or Tel Aviv. And though Egypt is not the only country arrayed in opposition to Israeli policies, it is the largest and most influential in both Arab and Western circles.

For this study, a *Western correspondent* is a citizen of the democratic industrial nations of Central and Western Europe, North America, and Australia (Safire 1993). This Western correspondent was stationed in the Middle East and was reporting to an international audience. The three government press relations directors were the individuals directly responsible for providing accreditation and technical services to correspondents and distributing communiqués and press releases composed by various ministries to local and foreign correspondents.

In Israel, the two press relations directors interviewed were the general director of the Government Press Office (GPO), responsible for representing the government's position to the correspondents, and the director of the GPO's Tel Aviv branch, responsible for dealing with correspondents in Tel Aviv. In Egypt, the press relations director was the head of the State Information Service (SIS), responsible for facilitating the correspondents' job in covering news about Egypt.

The study identifies and assesses obstacles in the flow of information between governments and correspondents. The study also investigates the nature of the relationships between the governments and the press. These relationships are discussed in the context of two mass communication models: the news-making model and the two-way asymmetric model of public relations.

Review of Literature

The term *foreign correspondents* was defined as "media personnel who report and interpret the actions and events of different societies for a selected audience of

readers not native to the country” (Starck and Villaneuva 1992:2). As important gatekeepers in the flow and formation of international news, foreign correspondents contribute to the way people perceive other cultures and societies. The foreign correspondent plays a vital role in the process of cultures communicating with and across other cultures and may be an important factor in the sensitivity and understanding of people of other cultures. As the desire for peace among peoples grows, the role of the foreign correspondent becomes increasingly important and requires closer examination.

The Source-Reporter Relationship

According to Boulding and Senesh (1983), “knowledge is power,” in the sense that there is a close relationship between those who wield political power and those with superior knowledge. Based on that argument, political systems always attempt to enhance the knowledge process by communicating their decisions to all the interested parties through the news media (Boulding and Senesh 1983).

Public relations officials attempt to relate their organizations’ viewpoints to reporters and, in turn, to relate reporters’ questions and views to their organizations. In the process, the official public relations practitioners’ relationships with the reporters can undergo tension and mistrust (Dimmick 1974).

A number of surveys have compared how journalists and public relations practitioners assess each other. Feldman (1961a, 1961b) was the first to conduct such a study, using a Likert-type attitude scale with pro and con statements. Feldman’s survey subjects were 746 city editors of newspapers and eighty-eight officers of local Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) chapters across the United States. Findings of this study did not report statistics, only narrative interpretations. This inaugural study, like all subsequent studies in this vein, found discrepancies in the attitudes of the two groups on dimensions such as credibility, occupational status, and professionalism.

Kopenhaver (1985) surveyed forty-seven Florida journalists and fifty-seven PRSA members about their perceptions of the news values and their assessments of public relations practice. Results showed that news values of the two groups were virtually identical but that their views toward public relations practice conflicted. The journalists viewed public relations practitioners as obstructionist and their news releases as publicity disguised as news.

Press and Politics in Egypt and Israel

The political system is interested in how knowledge is used by individual citizens and groups; therefore, the state intervenes in knowledge creation and diffusion, believing its actions will affect knowledge in use, which in turn, will produce behavior supporting the state goals. In doing that, the state can either allow for a free flow of information with minimal restrictions, or it can exercise con-

siderable control over the news media by direct operation censorship, restrictive codes, and control of materials (Boulding and Senesh 1983).

Both Egypt and Israel have a history of censorship dating back to the origin of the state. In Egypt, President Nasser practiced direct censorship over the press and made Egypt the first Arab country to link newspapers with a political organization (McDermott 1988). Succeeding leaders reduced censorship and political control of the media to the point at which today, the press experiences little direct government interference and acts with considerable autonomy. Since the founding of Israel in 1948, the country's press has been subject to a "self-imposed" constraint on its autonomy due to concerns about state security. Throughout its history, security and foreign affairs remained sensitive matters, and there was widespread agreement that the news media should be restricted in these matters. The Military Censor has had direct responsibility for preventing the publication of any material that would endanger the security of the state. While the Military Censor remains in place today, recent decades (especially after the 1973 War) have witnessed a new era, with more emphasis on the public's right to know (McDermott 1988).

Power Dynamics in Source-Reporter Relations

Direct censorship and political control of the press are not the sole avenues by which a government can exercise influence over the press. Governments also influence the news media by undertaking public relations strategies aimed at convincing the journalists of the soundness of the government's policies and conveying the officials' viewpoints on political, economic, social, and other issues to the journalists and the general public (Nimmo 1964).

Only two articles alluded to the question of power between source and reporter. Nicolai and Riley (1972) stated that editorial gatekeepers occupy positions of power relative to public relations practitioners, "whose livelihoods depend on the decision-making power of editors to use their material" (p. 371).

In a brief article, Newsom (1983) provided a sketch of what could be called the adversary theory of the press. Newsom portrayed pressure groups and the media as a combined force holding an unfair advantage over the public relations practitioner, although she cited Washington correspondent John B. Donovan's observation that the media adopt an adversarial position when dealing with a disagreeable administration, but the posture vanishes when the administration is agreeable. Newsom's article plays a trailblazing role in addressing the important issues of power and the adversarial function of the reporter.

Johnstone et al. (1976) categorized journalists' roles into "neutral" and "participant." Under the neutral role, the news media constitute an impartial transmission link dispensing information to the public; in this case, the journalist is a spectator to the ongoing social process, and his or her main job is to transmit faithfully and objectively accurate communications about it. Under the par-

ticipant role, the journalist plays a more active role in imposing his or her own point of view on the events. This is a more challenging role for the journalist who is actively involved in the news-gathering process (Johnstone et al. 1976).

Other roles were identified by Weaver and Wilhoit in later replications of the Johnstone et al.'s (1976) study. These roles included interpreter (investigating government claims), disseminator (getting information to the public quickly), adversary (having a skeptical attitude toward government and business), and populist mobilizer (setting the political agenda) (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996).

News-Making Model

According to this model, both officials and reporters contribute to the selection of events to be reported to the public according to established criteria. This selection is done in accordance with news factors such as timeliness, professional values and organizational interests, media outlets, ability to give an account that satisfies news media criteria of rational acceptability, and other elements common to both sources and journalists as news makers. News making is also accomplished under various organizational pressures existing in a particular source organization, for example, material and technical resources, freedom of information, and organizational visibility. "Through these processes, the source organization eventually transforms the occurrence into an event which is potentially available to the reporter as news" (Ericson et al. 1987:40).

According to Roscho (1975),

the term "news-making" is intended to indicate that news content, overall, is the end-product of a social process that results in some information being published while other information is ignored or discarded. By viewing news as a social phenomenon, one is led to examine the routine procedures underlying news-media performance. (P. 4)

Published news has a "dual origin." As a social product, the press' content reflects the society from which it emerges; as an organizational product, press' content is a result of the workings of specialized organizations whose function is to gather and dispense news. "Together, these intermingled conditions constitute the sociology of news" (Roscho 1975:5).

The single element binding the literature is the public relations practitioner in his or her role as a news source. A *source* is defined as any person conveying information to a news reporter that can be used in a news story, thereby conveying one of many functions of public relations in organizations (Ryan and Martinson 1988).

The relationship between the sources and the news organizations is one in which governmental bureaucrats act as public relations practitioners for their own organization, mediating between the senior members of their organization and the news media to ensure that the right information is released and access is

assured. Sources are continually deciding whether certain information should be revealed, which details should be highlighted or discarded, and when the story should be offered to the press (Ericson et al. 1987). The role of the reporter is perhaps best reflected by the system of news beats, the “routine round of institutions and persons to be contacted at scheduled intervals for knowledge of events” (Ericson et al. 1987:7). Journalists on the beats become socialized into the occupational culture of their sources to the point where the relation between their understanding and values converges with that of their sources (Ericson et al. 1987).

Aronoff (1975) conducted a study involving forty-eight Texas newspaper journalists and twenty-six area public relations practitioners. Aronoff found generally negative attitudes toward public relations by journalists and positive attitudes by practitioners, although “most public relations practitioners and many journalists acknowledge the contribution made by public relations to the process of news production” (p. 51). Aronoff found that journalists view public relations practitioners as low in source credibility.

Information Subsidies

One of the most popular techniques used by governments to control their news sources is the information subsidy. According to Gandy (1982), an information subsidy increases the demand for certain information by lowering its price to the consumer. Just as with other goods, the quality of information is a major factor in its use.

Just as brand names provide consumers with some basis for evaluating the quality of a product with which they have no experience, the credibility of the information source carries some indication of the quality of information in relation to its price. (P. 198)

More sources are heard when reporters resist the temptation to use subsidized information. Likewise, verification of source information is more likely to occur when reporters approach sources with healthy skepticism. Additional work using the information subsidy approach must address how the free exchange of ideas suffers when information is readily available from sources that work expertly to maintain the best possible relations with the press. The other concern, equally important, involves the suppression of information by sources to penalize reporters, manage crisis situations, or reify an authoritarian culture that suppresses ideas and issues (Morton and Warren 1992).

The Two-Way Asymmetric Model

This public relations model, developed by Grunig and Hunt in 1984, describes a process where the official sources use social science knowledge to initiate a persuasive public relations campaign. The underlying concept is that the source

organizations need not change their attitudes, values, or actions; the public relations task is to gain compliance from the public (Grunig and Hunt 1984).

Grunig and Grunig described an asymmetric model as “the manipulation of public behavior that focuses, among other things, on attitude and behavior change, and means of persuasive communication” (Grunig and Grunig 1989:121). According to Grunig and Hunt (1984), asymmetric model practitioners try to understand and anticipate journalists’ behavior so that they can develop messages that suit the communication habits of the journalists. Official sources operating under the asymmetric model have the upper hand over the journalists, as the news does not take place until the source agrees to release information to the reporter (Turk 1986).

One of the major public relations tools used by government officials is the press conference. Journalists who attend a press conference can have access to “on the record” information with regard to government policies. However, the main disadvantage of a press conference is that it makes information so widely available that it becomes devalued (Tunstall 1971).

The government also uses informal or “quasi-routine” techniques to attract journalists. One of these techniques is the “backgrounder,” where the source invites a selected group of reporters to discuss current events. Information dispensed during backgrounders is usually “off the record” (Sigal 1973:111).

In a content analysis study of the terms *public relations* and *PR* in eighty-four public press references, Spicer (1993) found that more than 80 percent of the time, the terms were embedded in negative contexts. Disaster, distraction, and mere fluff accounted for 55 percent of all uses. Bishop (1988) found more innocuous tendencies in his content analysis of three newspapers. The term *public relations* was seldom mentioned in the press; *publicity*, however, was often used. Bishop concluded that journalists view public relations as equivalent to publicity, and this is how journalists tend to use the concept in their writing. Such a view makes sense, given that the interaction between source and reporter usually has to do with publicity.

Research Design and Method

Both a cross-sectional survey (a quantitative tool) and a series of personal interviews (a qualitative tool) were used to collect data. The primary researcher traveled to both Egypt and Israel to administer the survey and conduct the interviews with all Western correspondents in the two countries and the three most senior government press relations officers in Egypt and Israel.

A self-administered paper questionnaire given to correspondents included close-ended questions using mainly Likert-type scales to assess the correspondents’ reporting roles and their access to government officials. Journalistic roles were measured using a scale developed by Johnstone et al. in 1976 and modified

by Weaver and Wilhoit in 1986 and 1996. Correspondents were also asked a series of predetermined questions derived from the literature during a face-to-face interview. The three press relations directors were interviewed using a less structured set of questions based on research by Grunig and others.

One of the main advantages of surveys is that large amounts of data can be collected with relative ease from a variety of people (Wimmer and Dominick 1997). However, a survey might not have yielded enough details needed for a study of this kind, and so the structured interviews were done. They allowed correspondents to raise issues regarding their access to information and the nature of the relationship between the government and the news media, whether or not they were mentioned in the closed-ended questionnaire. Similarly, the interviews with the three press relations directors were based on a predetermined set of questions, but the respondent was free to range considerably in conversation.

These qualitative interviews had several advantages over the survey. They allowed for more flexibility in asking questions and gave the respondents the opportunity to express their views in a more comprehensive way. Moreover, they enabled the researcher to establish rapport with the respondents and to gain their trust (Wimmer and Dominick 1997).

Approximately 88 percent of all Western correspondents who operated on a permanent basis in Egypt and Israel at the time the study was conducted (the last week of September to the end of October 1998 in Israel, and the first week of November to the end of December 1998 in Egypt) were included in the study. The population lists were provided by the Foreign Press Association (FPA) bureaus in Egypt and Israel. Only foreign nationals on the FPA lists were interviewed. Egyptian and Israeli nationals working for foreign agencies were excluded. Both governments require foreign journalists to register on these lists. The primary researcher interviewed 94 of the 106 correspondents in Israel (88.7 percent) and 74 of the 85 correspondents in Egypt (87.1 percent).

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do Western correspondents view their role in the government-media relationship, and are the roles similar for correspondents in Egypt and Israel?

Research Question 2: How do government press relations directors view their role in the government-media relationship, and are the roles similar for press relations directors in Egypt and Israel?

Research Question 3: Does the government press relations apparatus in Egypt have the same level of accessibility to Western correspondents as the Israeli government information establishment has among Western correspondents?

These research questions address the perceived relationship between governments and news media in Egypt and Israel as well as any differences between the professional roles undertaken by correspondents and government officials.

Findings

Although there is no such thing as an “average” correspondent, a statistical profile provides some insight into how the journalists interviewed differed from the average domestically based journalist. More than two-thirds were male (67.9 percent), with a median age of forty-two years (65.5 percent were between 35 and 54). The average time working in the Middle East was 8.24 years. A third of the correspondents were from the United States (33.9 percent), and nearly all the rest were from Western Europe (56 percent), with Germans (14.9 percent), French (9.5 percent), and British (8.3 percent) making up the largest contingent. Although there were more Jewish correspondents in Israel than there were Muslim correspondents in Egypt, the majority in both countries practiced no religion. Arabic was more widely spoken by correspondents in both countries than Hebrew. Virtually all had college degrees (94.6 percent). On average, then, Western correspondents working in the Middle East were quite similar to American journalists generally, although somewhat older (median age of U.S. journalists was thirty-six in 1996).

The Role of the Western Correspondents

The news-making role in this study was measured using scales created by Johnstone et al. and modified by Weaver and Wilhoit in their studies of U.S. journalists. Correspondents were asked to rate thirteen items about the role of the news media using a range of 1 (*extremely important*) to 4 (*not really important*).

Although Weaver and Wilhoit’s scale used to measure the news-making items is counterintuitive (in that 1 = more and 4 = less), it was used without change in this study because that is the way Johnstone et al. set the scale.

First, a comparison was made between foreign correspondents’ answers (in both countries combined) and the answers of the U.S. journalists from Weaver and Wilhoit’s 1996 data; then, correspondents in Egypt were compared with those in Israel. Three journalistic items were rated *extremely important* by a majority of Western correspondents: providing analysis of complex problems (67.3 percent), investigating government claims (55.4 percent), and getting information to the public quickly (54.8 percent). These same items had been ranked highly in the Weaver and Wilhoit study, but where journalists in the United States said getting information to the public quickly was the most important item, Western correspondents said providing analysis of complex problems was most important. Other items showed considerable difference, in that the correspondents were much less concerned with items such as entertainment and

Table 1

U.S. journalists' and Middle East correspondents' ratings of the news-making roles (percentage saying *extremely important*)

News Media Role	U.S. Journalists W&W 1996 Study		Middle East Correspondents	
	Rank	%	Rank	%
Get information to public quickly	1	69	3	54.8
Provide analysis of complex problems	2	48	2	67.3
Investigate government claims	3	67	1	55.4
Avoid stories with unverified content		49		38.4
Discuss national policy		39		35.8
Serve as adversary of government		21		29.4
Serve as adversary of business		14		24.4
Set the political agenda		5		4.2
Concentrate on widest audience		20		24.0
Provide entertainment		14		3.0
Develop intellectual and cultural interests		18		18.0
Influence public opinion		N/A		13.4
Let people express views		48		25.7

Note: W&W = Weaver and Wilhoit.

expression of views by the public. The primary emphasis in the United States is getting the news out quickly. In the Middle East, the main role is to provide analysis of the complex problems existing between governments (see Table 1).

Given the heightened priority of analysis by Western correspondents, a comparison of correspondents in Egypt and Israel again suggests agreement on the most important roles but a difference in emphasis. Correspondents in both Egypt and Israel agreed that it was extremely important that they provide analysis of complex problems, investigate government claims, and get information to the public quickly. And while both said analysis was absolutely the most important role, correspondents in Israel said investigation of government claims was more important than did the correspondents in Egypt.

Another striking difference between correspondents in the two countries was the relative importance of "avoiding stories with unverified content." Approximately 47 percent of the correspondents in Egypt said it was extremely important that the news media undertake this role, compared to only 31 percent in Israel (see Table 2).

The Role of the Government Press Relations Directors

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the three top government press relations directors in Egypt and Israel: Moshe Fogel, general director of the Israeli GPO; Jenny Koren, director of the Tel Aviv branch of the Israeli GPO; and Nabil Osman, head of the Egyptian SIS. These interviews suggested that both the

Table 2

Western correspondents' ratings in Egypt and Israel of the news-making roles (means: 1 = highest, 4 = lowest; percentage saying *extremely important*)

News Media Role	Correspondents in Egypt			Correspondents in Israel		
	Rank	Mean	%	Rank	Mean	%
Get information to public quickly	2	1.5	54.1	3	1.5	55.3
Provide analysis of complex problems	1	1.5	63.5	1	1.4	70.2
Investigate government claims	3	1.7	50.0	2	1.5	59.6
Avoid stories with unverified content		1.9	47.2		2.1	31.5
Discuss national policy		2.0	30.1		1.8	40.2
Serve as adversary of government		2.3	26.8		2.1	31.5
Serve as adversary of business		2.4	25.4		2.2	23.6
Set the political agenda		3.1	2.7		3.1	5.4
Concentrate on widest audience		2.2	25.7		2.4	22.6
Provide entertainment		2.8	5.4		3.2	1.1
Develop intellectual and cultural interests		2.2	22.9		2.4	13.9
Influence public opinion		2.7	12.3		2.7	14.3
Let people express views		2.1	31.1		2.2	21.5

Egyptian and Israeli officials viewed themselves as conveyors of government information and mediators between the government and foreign news media. "The head of the GPO has a mandate to give interviews and to represent the government's position," said Fogel. "We act as the liaison between foreign correspondents and life at large in Egypt; my mandate is to facilitate, not to restrict. I am here to serve the correspondents if the need arrives," said Osman.

Despite the similarities in the way they viewed their roles, the Israeli and Egyptian officials differed in the way they carried them out. The Israeli government provides several spokespersons. "Every ministry in Israel has its own specialized spokesperson; however, the GPO is a representative of the government's points of view in general," said Koren. In contrast, the Egyptian government provides only one official spokesperson for the foreign news media. Osman said,

I am the spokesman for Egypt vis-à-vis foreign correspondents. I speak on behalf of all the ministries. And if I don't have the information, I seek it from the concerned departments. I proposed several times that there should be a spokesman's office in some ministries, but up till now it has not been implemented.

The Israeli government provides several public relations services to the foreign correspondents. According to Fogel, the GPO provides them with official announcements, organizes press conferences and news briefings two or three

Table 3

Western correspondents' perceptions of the accessibility of government officials in Egypt and Israel (range: 1 = *very accessible* to 7 = *not at all accessible*)

Country	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Egypt	73	5.07	1.48
Israel	93	2.29	1.22

Note: *t*-value = -12.92; *df* = 138.26; *p* < .0001.

times a week, and provides important information through the GPO's official Internet site, beepers, e-mail, and telemesser (audio messages heard over the phone).

The Egyptian government also provides public relations services to the correspondents. Osman said,

I'm available to correspondents twenty-four hours a day. Whenever they wish, they can call me to decipher anything for them or to get information from other sources. If they want to do a field visit, initiate contact, or take photos in an area that requires permission, they come to me or they go to the Press Center.

It was clear from the interviews that both governments try to provide public relations services to foreign correspondents. This is done in the context of the public relations asymmetric model, as those officials try to maintain an upper hand over the news media by giving accreditation to correspondents and by requiring permissions for them to cover certain issues. The Israeli government provides far more services and more access to official information than does the Egyptian government. Moreover, unlike the Egyptian government, which provides only a single official spokesperson, the Israeli government provides a specialized spokesperson for every ministry. This allows for a more professional public relations apparatus and makes the correspondents' job easier by giving the feeling that all officials are accessible.

The Accessibility of Press Relations Apparatuses

A statement asking correspondents to rate the general accessibility levels of officials on a scale of 1 (*very accessible*) to 7 (*not at all accessible*) measured the variable of interest. A *t*-test showed a significant difference between correspondents in the two countries (see Table 3). To get a better understanding of this difference, the correspondents' interview responses were examined. An overwhelming majority of them agreed that Israeli government officials are easier to reach than are Egyptian officials.

An Associated Press correspondent in Tel Aviv said Israeli officials were very interested in expressing their views and being available to the news media. They bombarded the correspondents with e-mail messages, phone calls, and press releases.

Israel is informal in that you can call an important official at home at 10 o'clock on a Friday night [Jewish Sabbath holiday] to inquire about anything. It is not a business-hours mentality in Israel. You can call officials anytime and anywhere, and they will be available. This is not the case even in the United States.

Another U.S. correspondent in Jerusalem said, "The Israeli government floods correspondents with information through beepers, e-mail messages, and phone calls. . . . It is lots of information, but only what they need to tell us, and they put their own 'spin' on it."

Jim Hollander, chief photographer for Reuters in Jerusalem, said the Israelis were very "savvy" about delivering their side of the story to the foreign news media. According to Hollander, "The Israeli officials are very literate and very professional in presenting their points of view and availing themselves to the media." A prominent U.S. correspondent in Jerusalem said, "The Israelis are professional 'spinners,' in that they are media conscious and media 'savvy' and they know how to get their views through."

In this same context, Nicolas Tatro, the bureau chief of Associated Press in Jerusalem, said,

Each Israeli government is different; they all flood us with information, but this current government has been more aggressive in presenting its points of view. It very much has an edge to it. The rhetorical factor is much higher than it has been since the early days of the Begin government.

Lyse Doucet, a Canadian reporter for BBC, said Israel has a very well-established public relations body that is unparalleled in the Middle East because the Israelis love to talk to the media and they are good at it. According to Doucet, Benjamin Netanyahu (the Israeli prime minister) was the "ultimate spin-doctor." A German correspondent in Israel said,

BB [Benjamin Netanyahu] is the master of the sound bite, and he does it the American way. He believes that what is important is not what you say but the way you say it. He is regarded as a superficial politician who prefers style over substance.

Paul Holmes, Reuters bureau chief in Jerusalem, said the Israeli government was very active in setting the news agenda and very professional in its public relations techniques. According to Holmes, "In other countries, one has to go and

seek information or run after it, but here we get information on a more systematic and professional basis that reflects a more American approach to news.”

An Australian correspondent in Jerusalem said,

While it is very easy to be critical of the Israeli government, their information channels are much better than other governments in the area. I have reported from many countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and in many ways, getting information here is much easier than most of the countries I have worked. However, making sense of this information is not easy. I do not think correspondents can, in any way, “blame” Israel for the manipulation of data or material. It is the responsibility of correspondents to ensure they cross-check information with other sources.

The majority of foreign correspondents in Egypt said the Egyptian government was not always accessible and did not release sufficient information on the conflict. Claude Guibal, a Cairo-based French correspondent, said,

The Egyptian government gives us the minimum, and often no information. The Press Office of the Ministry of Information never calls me to say if there is going to be a press conference or a visit. I know of press conferences from my colleagues, not from the government officials.

Michel Rauch, a German correspondent in Cairo, said the Foreign Ministry was the only place to find accessible sources in the Egyptian government.

The strange thing is there may be bilateral talks going on in Cairo on the Arab-Israeli conflict, but the hot place to get faster access to reliable information about these talks is Jerusalem, or the sources closer to the Israeli side.

Cairo-based Associated Press chief correspondent Gerald La Belle said Arab governments, like all governments, wanted to get their point of view across. However, in most cases, they were not attuned to the needs of the news media. Thus, Arab governments were willing to disseminate plenty of information about the conflict, but it was largely repetitive and often did not speak to the issue immediately at hand, said La Belle. Alexander Buccianti, a Cairo-based correspondent for *Le Monde*, said there was a general secrecy trend in the Egyptian government, and this trend was inherited from the late-Egyptian President Nasser’s era. According to Buccianti, the general problem in Egypt was that only the “boss” can release the important information, and usually, this “boss” was not accessible. “The PR [public relations] machinery in Egypt is anti-productive, and it works against the policies of the government because of the inaccessibility of government sources,” Buccianti said. The lack of government announcements

on the Arab-Israeli conflict creates misunderstanding and contributes to the misconceptions that make the public encourage war against Israel, Buccianti said.

Similarly, Associated Press's La Belle said Arab officials are often late in commenting on developments, and lower officials refuse to comment until ones higher up have indicated the political direction. Therefore, an Israeli comment or accusation often goes unanswered until the Arab answer is no longer news. When the comment finally does come, it is often in the form of an editorial in the state-run press or from an unidentified official, which does not carry the same weight as a government leader or official spokesman, said La Belle.

Patrick Angevin, a Cairo-based French correspondent, said, "The Egyptian government is totally inefficient in its dealings with the news media. In six years, I have not received one single press release." According to Angevin, speaking with foreign correspondents is regarded by officials in Egypt as something "dangerous." Volkhard Windfur, the correspondent for Germany's *Der Spiegel* magazine in Cairo and chairman of the Cairo Foreign Press Association (FPA), said the Israeli government was more successful in presenting its point of view to the foreign news media than the Arab governments because the Israelis have a better public relations apparatus. According to Windfur, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has spokespersons, but they are disorganized and inaccessible to the foreign press. "The Egyptian Foreign Minister attended a press conference organized by the FPA only once in five years. We are dismayed and astonished by that," said Windfur.

In her assessment of the accessibility of Egypt's public relations apparatus, Eileen Alt Powell, a correspondent for the Associated Press in Cairo, said,

Egypt has nothing like the public relations machinery that has been developed in Israel. There [in Israel], you are overwhelmed with interviews, facts, figures, and translations of pro-government editorials and the like. Here, translation services are weak. Government statistics are getting better, but they are still released with considerable delay. And sometimes briefings are done only for the Egyptian reporters assigned to a particular ministry. Other reporters, whether Western or local, are excluded.

The interviews supported the statistical test of the accessibility question: Israeli officials are accessible and quick to put their perspective forward; Egyptian officials are inaccessible and slow to respond to breaking news.

Discussion and Conclusions

Like the U.S. journalists in Weaver and Wilhoit's study, the majority of Western correspondents in Egypt and Israel identified with three journalistic roles: providing analysis of complex problems, investigating government claims, and getting information to the public quickly. However, results showed that analyzing complex problems was more important to Western correspondents than to

American journalists. The role of professional journalists is to investigate and analyze current events regardless of where they are stationed. However, local reporters play roles other than newsgathering and investigation such as entertainment, setting the political agenda, or discussion of national policy. Understandably, these items were not considered important roles by the foreign correspondents.

According to the majority of correspondents interviewed in this study, Israeli press relations directors are more accessible and more professional in releasing information about the Middle East conflict than their Egyptian counterparts. Correspondents' answers showed that the Israeli government applies the public relations asymmetric model in a more subtle and sophisticated way, using a Western style and manner that seems natural and spontaneous. In contrast, the Egyptian government is more blunt and less professional in applying the public relations model. This is reflected in the unavailability of Egyptian officials to correspondents. Moreover, as the senior press relations officials in Egypt and Israel indicated, the Israeli government provides a professional spokesperson for every individual ministry, whereas the Egyptian government provides only one official spokesman for all the ministries. Israel is more likely to hold timely press conferences, issue fact-laden press releases, and generally provide more useful information than Egypt.

Based on these findings and the two-way asymmetric model, one might assume that the correspondents in Israel would be less investigative and less suspicious of the Israeli government's announcements than their counterparts in Egypt. However, results showed that considerably more correspondents in Israel thought it was extremely important to investigate government claims than did their counterparts in Egypt. Despite their satisfaction with the amount of information released by Israeli officials and the overaccessibility of Israeli public relations directors, correspondents in Israel maintain a heightened skepticism.

This is evident in comments made by Gisela Dachs, the Jerusalem-based bureau chief of *Die Zeit*, the German newspaper, who said, "Journalists should not fall in the public relations trap set by the Israeli government." Similarly, Lisa Beyer, Jerusalem-based bureau chief of *Time* magazine, said, "The current government is very open, but it deliberately gives false information." Heinz-Rudolf Othmerding, bureau chief of the German news agency DPA in Tel Aviv, said, "The Israeli officials are very professional in presenting the facts in a way that we swallow, and therefore, we have to carefully check what they tell us and compare it to what they said the day before."

Statements as these and similar comments by other correspondents suggest that the professionalism and sophistication of the Israeli public relations apparatus are not necessarily indications of complete success in influencing the correspondents. The correspondents apparently do not buy into the Israeli public relations system completely. Indeed, a public relations system as slick and as

sophisticated as the one developed by the Israelis may actually have counterproductive results. Such a system can lead to more scrutiny, more fact-checking, and more critical attitudes on the correspondents' part. That correspondents in Israel are being regularly spoon-fed information by the Israeli officials makes them more suspicious of the completeness of the official information they obtain. In Egypt, however, where the government officials more completely control the flow of information by denying reporters access to information, most correspondents have less difficulty verifying the official information they get.

Paradoxically, the professionalism of the Israeli officials raises accusations of manipulation, while the inefficiency of the Egyptian officials seems to raise fewer problems of credibility, only of insufficient efficiency. This inefficiency on the Egyptian officials' part seems to make for more authenticity, making the correspondents' need to conduct further investigation on their own less acute than it is the case with the Israeli officials.

Correspondents in Egypt seem to cope with the frustration of working with official sources by less critically accepting the limited information they do get. The less Westernized, more controlled Egyptian society may in a way confirm their behavior by making it difficult to investigate government claims. Ascribing greater authenticity to Egyptian official sources may reassure correspondents that they are doing a good job in a difficult environment. In contrast, correspondents in Israel find the job a bit too easy, and their suspicions are increased. They become more vigilant in an effort to satisfy their perceptions of themselves as analysts and investigators.

Whether these rationalizations result in more or less critical coverage of either country is beyond the scope of this research. Such speculation could be studied systematically by conducting a content analysis that compares the information released to foreign correspondents by the governments and the information actually used in the correspondents' stories. A case study of a major wire service such as Reuters or Associated Press might more accurately indicate the amount and extent of investigation done by the correspondents to double-check the information and claims fed to them by the government officials in both countries.

Implications for Government-Press Relationship in the Context of the Middle East Conflict

The news-making model is more comprehensive than the asymmetric model in its description of the relationship between the government and the news media. The news-making model addresses the government's role in disseminating information, and it also addresses the journalists' role in investigating the government's information. The public relations asymmetric model, however, deals only with the dissemination role of the government, and it neglects the

journalists' investigative role, which, as this study showed, is highly valuable and important to the foreign correspondents.

One of the basic premises made earlier in the study is that decision makers rely on the information made available to them by the news media to make political decisions in periods of conflict. Consequently, the decision-making process in Egypt and Israel is affected by the information exchanged between government and news media in both countries. In a region such as the Middle East, there are lots of misconceptions among governments and a general lack of understanding that result in conflicts. Western correspondents have been accused, especially by the Arabs, of contributing to this misunderstanding by not being objective in their reporting and by presenting half-truths about the conflict.

This study showed that the Arabs are at least partly responsible for misconceptions about themselves in the Western news media and for increasing the discrepancy between themselves and the Israelis, who are more accessible and open in dealing with the foreign news media. The majority of correspondents interviewed in the Middle East said Egyptian officials hurt the Egyptian cause by not holding press conferences or news briefings, too infrequently distributing press releases, failing to respond to requests for information and clarification, and rarely returning Western correspondents' telephone calls. Israelis do all these things and more and seem to get their position into the Western news media with clarity and precision.

Although Egypt is not directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, it has an impact on the political matters in the region, and it plays a major role in the negotiation and mediation process between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Therefore, the Egyptian officials should deal with Western correspondents not as opponents but as people who can report Egyptian ideas and policies to the Israelis and to the rest of the world. Greater appreciation of the news-making model by the Egyptian official public relations apparatus would be a solid first step toward clarifying the current misconceptions in the Middle East and improving the flow of information between Egypt, Israel, and the rest of the world.

References

- Aronoff, C. 1975. "Credibility of Public Relations for Journalists." *Public Relations Review* 1(2):45-56.
- Bishop, R. 1988. "What Newspapers Say about Public Relations." *Public Relations Review* 14(2):50-52.
- Boulding, K., and L. Senesh. 1983. *The Optimum Utilization of Knowledge: Making Knowledge Serve Human Betterment*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Cohen, R. 1990. *Culture and Conflict in Egyptian-Israeli Relations: A Dialogue of the Deaf*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Dimmick, J. 1974. "The Gatekeeper: An Uncertainty Theory." *Journalism Monographs*, 37.

- Ericson, R., P. M. Baranek, and J.B.L. Chan. 1987. *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Feldman, L. 1961a. "City Editor's Image of PR Man 'Blurred.'" *Editor and Publisher*, July 22:36–37.
- Feldman, L. 1961b, October. "The Public Relations Man as City Editors See Him." *Quill*:16–18.
- Gandy, O. 1982. *Beyond Agenda Setting: Information Subsidies and Public Opinion Policy*. New Jersey: Ablex.
- Granham, D., and M. Tessler. 1995. *Democracy, War, and Peace in the Middle East*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Grunig, J. E., and L. A. Grunig. 1989. "Toward a Theory of the Public Relations Behavior of Organizations: Review of a Program of Research." In *Public Relations Research Annual*, eds. J. E. Grunig and L. A. Grunig. Volume 1. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Grunig, J., and T. Hunt. 1984. *Managing Public Relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Johnstone, J.W.C., E. Slawski, and W. Bowman. 1976. *The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and their Work*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Kopenhaver, L. 1985. "Aligning Values of Practitioners and Journalists." *Public Relations Review* 11(2): 34–42.
- McDermott, A. 1988. *Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak: A Flawed Revolution*. New York: Croom Helm.
- Morton, L., and J. Warren. 1992. "News Elements and Editors' Choices." *Public Relations Review* 18:47–52.
- Newsom, D. 1983. "Conflict: Who Gets Media Attention and Why?" *Public Relations Review* 9(3):35–39.
- Nicolai, R., and S. Riley. 1972. "The Gatekeeping Function from the Point of View of the PR Man." *Journalism Quarterly* 49:371–73.
- Nimmo, D. 1964. *Newsgathering in Washington: A Study in Political Communication*. New York: Atherton.
- Roscho, R. 1975. *Newsmaking*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ryan, M., and D. Martinson. 1988. "Journalists and Public Relations Practitioners: Why the Antagonism?" *Journalism Quarterly* 65:131–40.
- Safire, W. 1993. *Safire's New Political Dictionary: The Definition Guide to the New Language of Politics*. New York: Random House.
- Sigal, L. 1973. *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.
- Spicer, C. 1993. "Images of Public Relations in the Print Media." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 5:47–61.
- Starck, K., and W. Villaneuva. 1992. *Cultural Framing: Foreign Correspondents and their Work*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Montreal, Canada.
- Tunstall, J. 1971. *Journalists at Work; Specialist Correspondents: Their News Organizations, News Sources, and Competitor-Colleagues*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Turk, J. 1986. "Information Subsidies and Media Content: A Study of Public Relations Influence on the News." *Journalism Monographs* 100:1–20.
- Weaver, D., and C. Wilhoit. 1986. *The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and their Work*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Weaver, D., and C. Wilhoit. 1996. *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of An Era*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Wimmer, R., and J. Dominick. 1997. *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*. 5th Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Wolfsfeld, G. 1997. "Fair Weather Friends: The Varying Role of the News Media in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process." *Political Communication* 14:29–48.

Biographical Notes

Mohammed el-Nawawy is assistant professor and director of graduate studies at the Department of Communication Arts of the University of West Florida.

Address: Department of Communication Arts, 11000 University Parkway, Pensacola, FL 32514; phone: 850-857-6276; e-mail: mohammedn99@hotmail.com.

James D. Kelly is the acting associate dean of the College of Mass Communication and Media Arts and associate professor in the School of Journalism at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Address: School of Journalism, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-6601; phone: 618-536-3361; e-mail: jkelly@siu.edu.

Paper submitted February 1, 2001; accepted for publication April 5, 2001.