GLOBAL VOICE

The BBC's Global News Division consists of BBC World Service radio, BBC World Television, BBC Monitoring, its international news website bbcnews.com and its charitable arm – the BBC World Service Trust.

Together these services attracted a combined record global weekly audience of over 210 million individuals in 2006.

Its mission is to be the world's best known and most respected voice in international broadcasting thereby bringing benefit to Britain, the BBC and audiences around the world.

It aims to provide the most trusted, relevant and highest-quality international news in the world and an indispensable service of independent analysis and explanation, with an international perspective that promotes greater understanding of complex issues.

Successive independent surveys indicate that the combined BBC international news services outperform other international broadcasters in terms of audience perceptions of its Trust and Objectivity in almost all its major markets.

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GLOBAL VOICE

BRITAIN'S FUTURE IN INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

INTRODUCTION

RICHARD SAMBROOK
DIRECTOR, GLOBAL NEWS, BBC

PREMIUM_Publishing

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RICHARD SAMBROOK

DIRECTOR,
BBC GLOBAL NEWS DIVISION

Richard is responsible for leading the BBC's international news services across radio, television and new media. The division contains BBC World Service radio, BBC Monitoring, BBC World television and the BBC's international facing online news services. The aim of the division is to create a clear, co-ordinated presence in international media, improving the impact of BBC journalism with global audiences. He is a member of the BBC's Direction Group and the BBC's Journalism Board. Previously as Director of BBC News from 2001 to 2004, Richard led the world's biggest broadcast news operation. During his career in BBC News, Richard has worked across radio, and TV, on location, editing programmes and running the BBC's global newsgathering.

INTRODUCTION

Since 9/11, awareness of the inter-relationship of all human affairs has been sweeping the planet. Increasingly, people see the things that affect their lives in global terms, and this has produced an unprecedented appetite for information framed in terms that transcend national boundaries.

This process began with the realisation that the kind of terrorism that confronts us today knows no borders. That insight led to growing appreciation that other issues have also been internationalised. People are now aware that their jobs, pensions and living standards depend on economic developments far beyond their own countries. As climate change has soared up the agenda, no one any longer doubts that the future of our children and grandchildren is now at the mercy of global forces.

This broadening of public perspectives has not simply engendered a new thirst for enlightenment. As people see their fate becoming ever more bound up in world events, they are demanding more of a hand in the shaping of those events. Increasingly they are clamouring not only to be told what is going on, but also to be given a say in what ought to go on.

These developments present international broadcasting with a challenge unprecedented in its 70-year history; and, to complicate matters further, they happen to coincide with a revolution in broadcasting methods.

When Lord Reith launched the BBC World Service nearly 75 years ago, it was with these words:

'Radio is an instrument of almost incalculable importance in the social and political life of the community. Its influence will more and more be felt in the daily life of the individual, in almost every sphere of human activity, in affairs national and international. …it has been our resolve that the great possibilities and influences of the medium should be exploited to the highest human advantage… The Service as a whole is dedicated to the best interests of mankind.'

When he spoke, radio, of course, was a relatively new technology – as the internet is today. Short-wave transmissions could be beamed around the globe to mass audiences. Through the last 70 years, BBC World Service has attempted to live up to the high aspirations behind its launch with, most people agree, considerable success. Today it is listened to by more than 160 million people around the world and its rating for trust and quality are among the highest for any media anywhere in the world.

"The future of our children and grandchildren is now at the mercy of global forces."

However, reading Lord Reith's words again, few would now believe that radio alone could fulfil those purposes in the years ahead. Fewer and fewer people are listening to short wave – BBC World Service now has to enter into partnerships with local FM radio stations to ensure it is heard. Today, television and, increasingly, the internet are where influence lies and are what penetrate the lives of increasing numbers of people throughout the world. There has been an explosion in competition. TV is the dominant medium in the Middle East and large parts of Asia; mobile phones are common in many parts of Africa and the Far East; in some countries more people use the BBC website than listen to us on the radio as the internet emerges as a key news source.

These developments are part of a wider process that has transformed access to information. Long before broadcasting of any kind began, the gathering and dissemination of news became concentrated in the hands of a powerful few. Only a small number of organisations could afford to send reporters to find out what was happening, and to bear the high costs associated with the printing process or distribution. Sometimes, the cost of subscriptions or reception equipment restricted dissemination largely to privileged elites.

Technological change has pulled down barriers to entry in both the generation and consumption of news. Anyone with a laptop and Wi-Fi connection can now distribute any kind of material from anywhere for virtually nothing. Anyone who can get access to the internet can find thousands of sources of free information. All of this leaves traditional news organisations operating in an environment quite different from the one inhabited by their predecessors.

One consequence of this has been a dramatic increase in the competition broadcasters find themselves facing. It is not just easier for new players to enter the arena; more and more actually want to do so. The globalisation of public issues has ensured that ever more governments and companies are seeking to give voice to their own take on the world.

Thus, we see France, Iran, the Arab world, Italy and Russia all intent on opening up new international broadcasting operations.

On this increasingly crowded stage, existing media actors find themselves jostled by newcomers. However, they should not assume they will necessarily be pushed aside. Incumbency brings its own strengths, in the shape of experience, expertise, resources, quality and brand-value. All of these characteristics ought to ensure that some of today's big beasts will remain significant operators for a long time to come. However, to succeed in doing this, they will have to work out what their unique proposition is going to be.

At the BBC, we are in no doubt. There is no question of us saying that in this new competitive environment we are going to abandon what we have done for the last 75 years and start afresh. Instead, we shall focus even harder on what has been our core strength up till now, and try to make sure that our audience is absolutely clear what we stand for and what we can deliver to them better than anybody else. We believe this to be independent, impartial international news. That is, news that can be trusted to be accurate and fair – news which will not be skewed to the right, to the left or to any other angle.

"The globalisation of public issues has ensured that ever more governments and companies are seeking to give voice to their own take on the world. Thus, we see France, Iran, the Arab world, Italy and Russia all intent on opening up new international broadcasting operations."

We see our task not as telling people what to think, but as enabling them to make up their own minds. In Britain, people sometimes ask why their taxes should be spent on foreigners or on informing people in repressive countries who do not deserve their support. The answer is that promoting freedom of expression is of value to the UK as well as to the wider world. Offering a high quality news service brings credit and goodwill back to Britain and helps promote British values of democracy, debate and reason.

Studies show that media freedom is directly linked to both economic and democratic development. It is political freedom that underpins the legal framework on which commerce ultimately depends. That is why repressive regimes try to block our output: they understand that independent, high-quality information promotes democratic thinking that may well threaten their stranglehold. The UN General-Secretary, Kofi Annan, called the BBC 'Britain's greatest gift to the world', because of the impact of its journalism.

Until the early 1990s, BBC World Service pursued its mission solely through radio services, first in English and then in other languages too. All these services have always been funded by a grant from the Foreign Office. After the launch of the Atlanta-based, 24-hour global news service CNN, it became apparent that we should need to go into television as well, and we should have preferred to do so with the same funding model. However, the government of the day declined to put public money into an overseas television service, so we decided to proceed instead on a commercial basis, with what has become BBC World.

Now, with the arrival of another new technology, a similar issue confronts us again. If we are to retain our position globally, we have got to expand into on-demand, streamed and broadcast internet services, mobile TV and more, just like our competitors. Once again, this will cost money. Yet, however we resolve the problem this presents, our mission will remain the same. On whatever platforms we disseminate our message, that message will remain independent and impartial, though its form may change as we try to integrate the proliferating distribution systems through which it flows.

Meanwhile, we have to remember that the bulk of our audience are still radio listeners. Each week, 40 million listen to the English-language service, and around 120 million receive programmes in their own local languages. BBC World gets 65 million viewers, and 14 million people log on to our internet services, though of course that figure is growing rapidly. Although two-thirds of the radio audience still listen to short-wave transmissions, this figure is in long-term decline, and short-wave listening seems to be on the way out except in the most remote rural areas.

"In Britain, people sometimes ask why their taxes should be spent on foreigners or on informing people in repressive countries who do not deserve their support. The answer is that promoting freedom of expression is of value not just to the UK but also to the world. Offering a high quality news service brings credit and goodwill back to Britain and helps promote British values of democracy, debate and reason."

Our task now is to manage the transition from being primarily a global short-wave broadcaster into one relying on FM frequencies, local partners, television and new media as well. All of the BBC's international services are destined to become a combined multimedia operation, although we shall still call them the 'World Service'.

Fortunately, we know we can rely on the faith people have in what we do. In the surveys we conduct regularly in different regions, the BBC consistently comes out as the most trusted of the international news providers. It is, of course, our independence that inspires this trust, and successive British Governments have had the foresight to recognise our credibility stems from our independence from political influence. Rival services that are perceived as disseminating government-sponsored propaganda pay a high price in the loss of credibility that this inevitably entails.

"We recognise that our audience can enhance our output. There is far more expertise available in our audiences than we could hope to muster ourselves. We aim to use this to strengthen our services."

We therefore believe that the world's peoples will trust us to host the ever-widening global conversation that is getting under way. We are aware that audiences no longer want to have tablets of stone handed down to them. They are now in a position to compare different sources of information, and to challenge what they are told. This means we shall have to build a different kind of relationship with our listeners and viewers. It will mean absorbing information from them, as well as distributing it to them. We shall have to develop a much more open, transparent relationship with the public, and this goes at least as much for the developing world as it does for Western Europe or the United States.

We have always taken note of letters and calls from members of our audience, but new technology is putting this kind of dialogue on a wholly different footing. News has always required eyewitness testimony, and increasingly, much of this will come from our own listeners and viewers through e-mail, texts, camphone pictures or video uploads. We have always enabled the public to participate in our services through phone-ins, letters and so forth. The arrival of user-generated content, blogs and much else will allow us to expand this involvement dramatically.

We recognise that our audience can enhance our output. There is far more expertise available in our audiences than we could hope to muster ourselves. We aim to use this to strengthen our services.

An example of what we are now trying to achieve is an interactive programme that we run in Africa called *Africa Have Your Say*. This has proved successful beyond our expectations. Africans love to talk, and they appreciate the way the BBC now gives them the chance to air their views. Through this programme, we have been able to connect people in Nigeria with, say, people in Ghana, in a way that other broadcasters can only dream of. In the process, we have helped Africans not only to share attitudes, but also to get a sense of African

consciousness that transcends individual nationalisms. People around the world are responding to similar opportunities.

I believe that international broadcasters ought to extend the openness with which they must now treat their audiences to their own operations. Transparency about our judgements and choices is as important as the journalism and programmes in fostering trust. This book is a contribution to such transparency as well as the debate on international broadcasting and public diplomacy.

In the pages that follow you will find frank and illuminating insights into the issues with which global broadcasters are having to wrestle. These come from some of the most distinguished practitioners in the field, from well-placed observers and from people who have experienced directly the impact on events of broadcast output.

I should like to thank all of them heartily for the trouble they have taken. I should also like to thank you, the reader, for giving our activities some of your attention. I do not think you will find you have wasted your time. International broadcasting is not just fascinating; it is also destined to bear ever more responsibility for helping to ensure that a turbulent and interconnected world feels its way towards peace, prosperity and stability.

The ideas explored in this section show a wide range of opportunities in global news delivery for companies that seize the moment and harness the emerging technology. Key players offer their picture of the challenges ahead in the fast changing world of broadcasting.

PRACTITIONERS

CHRISTOPHER J. AHEARN

PRESIDENT, REUTERS MEDIA

Chris leads Reuters' two principal business groups: Reuters News Agency and Reuters Consumer Services.
Reuters News Agency provides text wire, video and picture services to virtually every major broadcaster and publisher globally. Reuters Consumer Services brings Reuters news and information directly to consumers through its Interactive News Network. The Network distributes products via Reuters branded and partner online, mobile and interactive TV platforms. It is available in over a dozen different languages.
Prior to his appointment as President of Reuters Media in 2002, Chris was the Executive Vice President in charge of Reuters Research & Advisory business where he developed the Reuters Knowledge product line.

1.1 MEDIATORS MUST BECOME MODERATORS

Chris Ahearn believes the time is ripe for a new golden age of journalism. News providers need to seize this moment and harness what technology can offer to engage everyone who wants to participate. He describes some of the ways in which Reuters is bringing news and information to its audience in new and innovative ways.

The Muhammad cartoons controversy of 2005 made it blindingly clear to all news organisations that some assumptions of the past no longer apply. Historically, if a small Danish newspaper published a set of provocative cartoons, the rest of the world would see them only if distinguished editors decided to republish them. In this case, most news providers decided to hold back, but across the world people who wanted to see for themselves were almost immediately doing just that – courtesy of the internet.

Until recently, if a news organisation ruffled feathers, the resulting uproar might have been restricted to the country in which publication occurred. Yet, *Jyllands-Posten*'s cartoons brought about a violent demonstration in Pakistan, deaths in Afghanistan and Somalia and attacks on embassies in Syria and Lebanon. Another kind of barrier had been overcome, this time not only through changed technology but also through the growing globalisation of attitudes and ideas.

Mainstream news providers no longer control the flow of information to the public, and news transcends national and other boundaries. Broadcasters and publishers who want to survive have to learn to accommodate these changing realities.

Disintermediation

Broadcasting as we define it today will cease to exist. The challenges of broadcasting, narrowcasting, personalcasting and interactive experiences will be overcome. Certainly, the traditional model of a lean-back

audience that passively enjoys linear playback exclusively is on its way out.

We now have a true engaged audience model. The audience decides what they want to watch, arrange for it to be saved and pull it up with their remote control devices at times of their own choosing. They declare a desire for a specific kind of sport, news or comedy and demand that it be satisfied. It is not difficult to see that this is based on the interactive experience that the internet provides.

The world we live in today is one in which everyone is a consumer, everyone a distributor, everyone an aggregator and everyone a producer. News organisations must realise everyone is both a potential partner and competitor. A 19-year-old sitting in a dorm room cranking out scoops and gossip about the cable news networks, a well-established journalist-cum-blogger like Dan Gillmor, or a respected academic all have an equal right to have a voice. That is not to say that all voices carry equal weight or carry equal truth to the populace. To matter in the future, news providers need to be absolutely clear about what their brand promise is and live up to that with every story, every topic, every day.

Repositioning news providers

News organisations can play a vital role in the ongoing rebalancing of the news marketplace. Collectively, we face real challenges and opportunities to move away from being just creators of content. We can and should evolve further into the role of moderators and editors, not just of our own content but also of other people's. If we do this, we can help our audiences better understand the world and help ourselves.

At Reuters, we operate the world's largest international multimedia news agency and we take the role of news seriously. We know that people make financial, security and life decisions based on the veracity of our news. We see a future where we can better enable our audience to understand the different perspectives on any given story, while remaining true to our cherished values. This will mean continuing to focus on objectively reporting the news, but also providing our audience with the varied perspectives that may be associated with the news we report. It is important for our audience to understand how contrasting perspectives can affect societal views, political views and market views, and how those views influence decision-making. Assuming that other voices do not exist, or are having no impact, would be foolhardy.

Even in a changed world, providers of commercial services will of course need to make money. Money can be made by delivering your content and exposing other brands. Moderating other people's content and providing information about alternative content will deliver

returns. Payment may be derived from the re-direction of eyeballs, from pay per view and/or enhanced subscription services. Regardless, it will create greater engagement with one's core audience because the news provider is increasing the value and utility of its offering. An engaged audience is a valuable and loyal one.

The Pro-Am model

As people demand more control of the information they consume, they are less patient with cultural restraints. Both domestic and global services have to broaden their outlook, as they cater to the next generation of consumers. These people are increasingly aware they live in a world awash with ideas and attitudes that they may not encounter in their own immediate vicinity.

Are people going to continue to be content to see the world merely from the perspective of the anchors of the BBC or CNN? Won't they prefer to hear from a variety of authentic voices? The willingness of people to turn to blogs or to scour the internet to find alternative views ought to give us pause. At present, too much professional attention is paid to the conspiracy theorists and other eccentrics. The reality is that quality will always rise to the top.

"As people demand more control of the information they consume, they are less patient with cultural restraints. Both domestic and global services have to broaden their outlook, as they cater to the next generation of consumers."

The great search engines of the world should be given enormous credit for the way in which they enable people to get a comprehensive view of a story, event or thought. This is something that the world's traditional media does not do very well. Why is it that search algorithms can provide a path to a Reuters, *New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal* perspective of the same news event, and yet the publishers and broadcasters of the world do not? The future will have quality news providers, taking on board a wide range of ideas and user-generated content to give a comprehensive account of events.

Combining professional perspectives will not, however, be enough. It ought to be possible to integrate professional journalism with the insights of amateur contributors in a valuable way. News providers will still need to perform the traditional professional job of letting people know what is happening, but they have the opportunity to do more.

They can develop the capacity to engage their viewers, listeners and readers more directly and put them in touch with the raw material from which news stories are derived. Everyone ought to

be able to consume the same raw information as professionals sitting in a newsroom at ITN, *Le Monde* or *El Pais*. We should not be shunting people away and telling them they are not smart or sophisticated enough to handle unmediated reality.

Developing particular methods of delivering the full range of information to both media professionals and ordinary individuals will become one of the means by which news organisations differentiate themselves. The more they succeed at this task, the more they will grow the market for news as a whole. This is already starting to happen in the United States, where some of the big-name organisations have said they intend to link up with other providers and to use third-party infrastructure from providers such as Pluck. They are starting to use social media tools to drive audience interaction with their output, because this enhances engagement with their services.

The future will be about mixing and matching the voices that deliver the most value – be they professional or 'amateur'.

Finding a role and audience

At Reuters, where our news and information reaches over a billion people per day, our speciality is providing news that informs the world. People need to know. If something is news, we get it out. We want people to talk about it, to know about it and to make better, smarter and faster decisions because they are aware of it. We are not owned or controlled by a state. Our money comes from shareholders, not from a government or a large conglomerate whose real interest is in selling entertainment. We are wholly international and independent, in a way the BBC, for example, cannot be. We happen to have our physical headquarters in the UK, but our CEO is American, our editor-in-chief is Dutch, and we operate out of 192 bureaux in 130 countries.

Our audience must believe that we are working on their behalf to find out what is happening and to hold the powerful to account. At the same time, we are commercial and must earn an appropriate return on our shareholders' money. At Reuters, we do things because they are right, are consistent with our Trust Principles and are valuable. Our financial information services rely on our news operations to power the world's markets. The world's media professionals rely on our news services to power their offerings.

"The future will be about mixing and matching the voices that deliver the most value – be they professional or 'amateur'."

As a result of this, Reuters news services are not going to be for everybody. In fact, we do not want to be for everybody. We have our eyes fixed firmly on a particular audience. It is not defined by one

geographical area, but spread throughout the world in concentrated pockets. It is less defined by socio-economic characteristics than by its psychographics. The audience we seek to engage are independent and influential individuals whose horizons are not bounded by the borders of their nationality. These people are not simply the 'rich' or elitists. They are usually affluent citizens who are interested and engaged in what is happening in the world, not just intellectually, but because it affects their lives. They are usually business professionals. The decisions they make impact others and they seek trusted information that helps them be smarter and grow richer.

"Our audience must believe that we are working on their behalf to find out what is happening and to hold the powerful to account. At the same time, we are commercial and must earn an appropriate return on our shareholders' money."

For example, they might be the business woman working in Beijing, the investment adviser working in Boston, the news professional in Berlin or the software entrepreneur working in Bangalore. They might be an independent farmer, fisherman or trader in a developing nation anxious to understand what prices they should be charging to get the proper reward for their efforts. Such people need news and information that gives them both utility and enhances their knowledge. They are independent in the way they think, and we believe they will recognise the same quality in us.

Reuters is continually exploring how to bring news and information to this audience in new and innovative ways. Reuters currently offers its content across a range of subscription, pay per use and advertising-supported news services. We make these news services available to both the media professional and consumer audience. These services are accessible over traditional and digital platforms including online, mobile and IPTV (Internet Protocol TV). In addition, we are constantly looking to build new and worthwhile news services such as in communities like Second Life, a virtual world with one million-plus residents. Reuters also has an alliance with Global Voices Online, an international network of bloggers that provide perspectives on news events.

In order to reach the growing audience of blog readers, we recently added editor-chosen blogs to our advertising-supported consumer service and to the roster of syndicated news, photos and video that we provide news organisations with around the world. In working with Pluck, we now offer a service that identifies the best and most relevant blogs to our professional media audience, which allows them to choose what is relevant to their audience. It allows

them to present third-party information they choose, alongside related news and feature stories on their own websites. In the end, our clients are able to protect their brands and their viewers' experience is deeper and richer, resulting in a more engaged audience.

Another example of developing audience can be seen in a new 24-hour English-language television news service in India, called Times Now. This is a joint venture between Reuters and the *Times of India* group. The latter provides local content, operations and marketing, while Reuters provides enhanced business news and international coverage. The service is multi-platform and will likely evolve to multi-channel. It is a subscription and advertising-supported model and distributed principally on satellite and cable. Within a year it has emerged as a very creditable player and is distinguished in serving the needs of the aspiring, influential and affluent urban Indian.

Viewers of Times Now are not going to consume international news 24/7, but they appreciate understanding the global landscape in stocks from a Mumbai perspective, in entertainment from a Bollywood perspective, in Delhi from a political perspective and in Bangalore from an IT and business services perspective. We believe this is a replicable model in other markets such as China and Brazil.

Conclusion

The steps we are taking should enable us to forge an engaged relationship with the influential media professional and consumer audience that matters to us. If our news services make this audience smarter and richer, that will be a good thing for the societies in which they live. The news business is not able to cure all the world's ills, but it lets people know what those ills are, so they can make informed decisions about them. We believe the time is ripe for a new golden age of journalism to flourish. News providers need to seize this moment and harness what technology can offer to engage everyone who wants to participate. If we do, in five years' time, we believe people will be saying, 'I never realised it could be this good'.

WADAH KHANFAR

Wadah Khanfar is the Director-General of the Al Jazeera Network which includes the flagship Al Jazeera Arabic Channel, Al Jazeera English, Al Jazeera Sports, Al Jazeera Mubasher, Al Jazeera Documentary (Q1-2007), as well as Al Jazeera.net.
Mr. Khanfar has covered the world's significant political zones for the Al Jazeera Channel since 1997. In 2001/2002 he was a war correspondent in Afghanistan and during the war in Iraq, he reported from Kurdish-controlled territory in the North. Later, he was appointed as the Chief of the Baghdad Bureau and was successful in re-establishing the bureau in the wake of Iraq's new political landscape. Mr. Khanfar became Managing Director of the Al Jazeera Channel in 2003.
Mr. Khanfar's academic background includes Philosophy, African Studies, and International Politics.

1.2 THE SECRET OF OUR SUCCESS

Wadah Khanfar analyses the reasons for Al Jazeera's success and offers some advice for new international news services.

After what is now a decade of offering millions of people a fresh, independent perspective on events, I think we at Al Jazeera can claim a measure of success. We now have more than 40 bureaux and dozens of correspondents covering the entire world. They service news, current events, documentary and sports channels, together with Arabic and English-language websites. Recently, we were recognised as the world's top news media brand. I am often asked how we have achieved all of this in a relatively short period of time.

I believe that the most crucial ingredient in our success is a profound understanding of the collective mind of the Arab world. Before Al Jazeera most of the media either addressed the Arab audience from the outside, as in the case of Western media, or with a very biased view from the inside by Arab media which were usually the mouthpiece of governments. In contrast, Al Jazeera brought not only free reporting to the region for the first time, but because we came from the inside we were also able to emanate from within the social and cultural fabric of Arab society.

This is not to say that we simply aligned ourselves with popular sentiment or nationalistic fervour. We were determined to discuss, challenge and question the Arab world's deeply rooted cultural, religious and political ideas. However, our audience could see that we were doing this from an essentially Arab standpoint, rather than questioning the validity of such a standpoint. A chemistry developed between Al Jazeera and its audience based on the synthesis between our approach to reporting and our bond with the region. This made viewers feel that Al Jazeera belonged to them.

The power of their attachment to Al Jazeera still manages to surprise me. Recently I was in a small town in Morocco. It was a beautiful place, devoted mainly to tourism. You would hardly expect

a great deal of interest in politics in such surroundings. Yet from the moment I arrived, I was flooded with questions and opinions about Al Jazeera's coverage. In Turkey, where Arabic is not widely spoken, I found people watching Al Jazeera. Even though they do not understand what is being spoken on screen, they still watch the pictures and feel they are getting a sense of what is happening. The same thing happens in other non-Arabic speaking countries.

Wherever you go now in the Arab world, even in remote areas, you find that Al Jazeera is regarded as one of the most important and credible sources of information. Statistics, whether collected by news organisations or academics, back up this view. We feel this gives us a responsibility we must live up to by working to maintain and enhance the trust that our viewers place on us.

When Al Jazeera burst on to the media scene its journalism transformed the media landscape in the Arab world. Its programmes hosted unprecedented live debates on key political and cultural issues that none of the traditional Arab media dared to bring up. This raised questions of all kinds. To many, it came as a shock to see, for the first time, an Arab TV station providing a platform for opposition leaders, including Israeli and US administration officials, as well as giving airtime to unorthodox opinions. As a result, some imagined that Al Jazeera might be the tool of an American or Israeli conspiracy against the Arabs. However, as soon as people realised that they were being presented with honest reporting by Arab journalists who understood the region, they responded with enthusiasm.

"When Al Jazeera burst on to the media scene its journalism transformed the media landscape in the Arab world."

From the beginning, we insisted on high standards and we were able to match our independent approach with professional implementation. We were fortunate, with the closure of the BBC Arabic television service in 1996, to recruit many of its editorial staff and we were open to learning from established international media organisations. Since then we have been able to evolve and develop our techniques in our own way. This means that our methods can no longer be regarded as simply having been borrowed from the traditions of Western journalism. We have forged our own approach, rooted in elements that are international and universal, but which also embody our own unique perspective.

Al Jazeera's focus has been on ordinary people living on the margins who do not necessarily hold public positions. In the developing world, and especially in the Arab region, people who appear powerless are sometimes even more important than they may be elsewhere. Such people often turn out to be the crucial drive for change within

their societies. One of the pitfalls that many media institutions have allowed themselves to fall victim to is to concentrate on subjects that are already well covered and understood. The emphasis is all too often on stars, big names, distinguished people, official conferences, grand celebrations and governmental business. In contrast, because we have always had a real grip on grass-roots activity, we have rarely been surprised by new phenomena emerging in the Arab world. Usually, we have been tracing such developments from their earliest manifestations.

"Our aim is never to start coverage after a major development has occurred. We intend to be there before things happen."

Another element in the Al Jazeera approach has been our concentration on diversity. Within our newsroom, we have people from more than 65 nationalities. In addition, the variety of our journalists across the world has ensured that our output retains its authenticity from wherever it may be sourced. We try to report with a deep-rooted understanding of all the areas from which we report.

Field reporting is essential to our coverage. We understood from the beginning that this would be a vital element in our approach and we have developed our own ways of doing it. During the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006, we had reporters based in every major Lebanese town. In Afghanistan we maintained a similar kind of presence. In Iraq, we had six teams reporting from all the major provinces. At the beginning, as a field correspondent, I headed up a team covering the war in the Kurdish area to the north of the country. This approach enabled us to reach out to ordinary Iraqis. We were able to speak the language, to see what was going on through the eyes of ordinary people and use our cultural understanding to win trust. People who might have been reluctant to speak to other journalists were happy to talk to someone coming from a society similar to their own. Most of our reporters in Iraq were Arabs and many were Iraqis.

Other broadcasting networks have reported from different parts of Iraq, but not all of them have had the opportunity, or gone the extra mile, to show the consequences of a missile's impact on a house in clear detail. We understand that it is important to report on the human cost of war in an attempt to one day end the bloodshed. Many times our audience themselves are victims of the wars we report. We have been prepared to show the human impact of the war without attempting to sanitise it. This is part of the reason why Al Jazeera's coverage not just of Iraq, but also of Afghanistan, Palestine and Lebanon has been so attentively followed.

Recently, Al Jazeera has been providing some of the most thorough reporting available of events in Somalia. We had 17 people

operating in Mogadishu before the Union of Islamic Courts seized power, so we knew what was happening and were able to foresee what was going to happen long before the rest of the international media caught up with the story. Our aim is never to start coverage after a major development has occurred. We intend to be there before things happen, with a well-developed understanding not just of the leaders of the relevant movements and the politics of the area, but with an understanding of the people themselves.

"It is not our policy to be in favour of any side, or against any side, or in alliance with anyone. Nor is it our policy to be politically correct, or to avoid saying anything that might anger someone."

The final element in the Al Jazeera approach is how we report on authority. We have never pursued a particularly comfortable relationship with those in power. We have sought no special arrangements with local, regional, national or international political bodies, or with cultural, religious, ideological or economic authorities. In fact, Al Jazeera has tried to rethink and question the whole idea of authority, particularly insofar as it serves to promote the interests of élites above those of the common man or woman.

This approach has sometimes provoked hostility, particularly from people firmly committed to authoritarian and ideological positions that they expect to see implicitly supported. Yet, we believe that someone has to provide an avenue to challenge those who hold power, and I think that our approach has made a difference. Instead of resorting to conspiracy theories and relying on rumours, the Arab audience has learned to understand issues in much more depth and to have a critical point of view on the behaviour and policies of those who rule them.

Such a stance might have been expected to attract support in the West, and indeed up until 2001 Al Jazeera was celebrated even in the USA as a voice of freedom and democracy in the Arab world. But things changed with the invasion of Afghanistan. We had the only TV crew inside Kabul, and we were able to show the world the consequences of the war on ordinary human beings and its effects on the infrastructure of the country. The American and other Western governments believed that by showing the other side of the story, we were advancing the cause of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and also inciting hostility against American policy towards the region. Something similar happened when Iraq was invaded, and then again during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

However, it has always been our policy to show opinions from all sides. Though Western officials approve of this approach in theory,

when they find themselves embroiled in a conflict, their commitment for all-round comprehensive coverage sometimes is lacking – they do not want points of view aired which may clash with their own. Many such criticisms which we have received from the West have generally been politically motivated, even when they have masqueraded as criticisms of our professional standards.

When criticism is offered on genuinely professional grounds, we accept it and indeed welcome it. If we make mistakes, we correct them – this is part of our code of ethics. However, it is not our policy to be in favour of any side, or against any side, or in alliance with anyone. Nor is it our policy to be politically correct, or to avoid saying anything that might anger someone. That has always been our approach. Between 1996 and 2001, this got us into trouble with Arab governments and since 2001 it has created problems for us from both Arab governments and from outside the region. But we will not let this affect our editorial policy. If we did we would rapidly lose our credibility and our audience.

The code of ethics that governs our journalism is available for anybody to look at. Its central principles grew up among Al Jazeera's original journalistic team, and we decided to crystallise these principles and put them down on paper so that our editorial teams would be able to apply the code consistently across the world. Our standards are not that different from those of other international news organisations. We recognise that our journalists will be subject to pressure and we require them to deal with the issues on agreed-upon principles. We provide detailed and specific guidelines on matters such as playing tapes provided by organisations such as al-Qaeda and the transmission of graphic footage of violence.

"Our code of conduct generally limits us from showing strong graphic images. However, since we are living in a region that includes six of the most volatile hotspots in the world, blood is unfortunately a reality in the field."

For example, the tapes we receive are treated like any other news and are subject to a vigorous editorial process of authentication and determination of what their news value is. Sometimes we get very long tapes but only show a few minutes of newsworthy material. If we decide that a segment of a tape has news value we air the segment and contextualise it with analyses and commentary from specialists and experts across the world. This helps to clarify and many times demystify the contents of the material.

In addition, our code of conduct generally limits us from showing strong graphic images. However, since we are living in a

region that includes six of the most volatile hotspots in the world, blood is unfortunately a reality in the field. When it is ascertained that there is a strong editorial necessity of showing some of these images they are pixilated and there is warning for the audience. Our code makes it clear on what basis we should act.

Now we are aiming to extend our reach further across the world. We began simply as a regional network which steadily became a global service in Arabic. This made Al Jazeera an important source of information for the rest of the international media. It therefore seemed logical for us to launch Al Jazeera English. Since English is a global language, it will make our approach to journalism directly accessible to every region of the planet where English is spoken. The English-language channel has its own editorial team. However, all of our operations share the same spirit, the same code of ethics, the same standards of conduct and the same brand of reporting. We have a joint editorial forum to help ensure that this remains the case.

Nonetheless, to some extent the English and Arabic languages require different ways of thinking. Since the English language (which has its own mind and culture) shapes the phraseology and terminology used in our English-language service, the service's output will inevitably diverge in some respects from that of its Arabic-language counterpart. Also, news priorities will be different, since the interests of Arab viewers will not always be identical to those of a global English-speaking audience.

We are determined that our new service adds something significant to what is being offered by existing global news providers. Since its launch, the English Channel has already shown itself to complement the existing international news channels with its own distinctive reporting. Because Al Jazeera is based in the Middle East, we have made the developing world the departure point from which we view events, not the industrialised West. That means we place special emphasis on news from the developing South, filling an important gap in existing coverage.

We have also made every attempt to make sure that our new service reflects our commitment to diversity. The staff of the English Channel manning our newsrooms in Doha, Kuala Lumpur, London, Washington and our bureaux all across the world intimately understand the social and cultural fabric of the countries they are covering. This provides an essential and necessary depth to their journalism.

Many other new international news services are currently being launched and we welcome this. In light of Al Jazeera's experience, I would advise newcomers to the field to make sure they do not seem to be outsiders peering in at the world in which their intended viewers live. They should also make sure that their editorial policy is

utterly distinct from that of any government. If audiences suspect that a new TV station is just another source of propaganda they will not be interested in watching its output.

Since 9/11, governments have become more interested in international issues, and many of them are trying to increase their influence on global events. In particular, they want to address the Arab world. If they try to do so by peddling an overt agenda, they can expect to fail. The Arab world has had a great deal of experience in attempts to shape its thinking from outside. What it needs now is free and impartial information, not another attempt of political manipulation.

Our ambition is not merely to extend our own activities, but to try to enhance the impact of journalism as a whole. The mainstream media face a global crisis of confidence in their truthfulness and relevance. Al Jazeera's success has been rooted in establishing credibility. I hope we will continue to play a part in the restoration of confidence in journalism as a whole.

The communications industry is undergoing massive upheaval. This section of essays looks at the role of the institution in shaping a better world. The history and achievements of broadcasters are analysed, and forces that shape the role of communication are identified. The section concludes with an exploration of the relationship between broadcasting and freedom and the value of 'soft power' to make a difference in our world.

OBSERVERS

JOSEPH S. NYE JR

UNIVERSITY DISTINGUISHED SERVICE PROFESSOR, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

He is also the Sultan of Oman Professor of International Relations and former Dean of the Kennedy School. He did postgraduate work at Oxford University on a Rhodes Scholarship, and earned a PhD in political science from Harvard. He has served as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs; Chair of the National Intelligence Council; Deputy Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology; Director of the Institute for East-West Security Studies; Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He is the US representative on the United Nations Advisory Committee on Disarmament Affairs. A prolific author, in 2004 he published *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics; Understanding International Conflict* (5th edition); and *The Power Game: A Washington Novel.*

2.4 SOFTLY, SOFTLY...

The internationally acclaimed academic and expert on 'soft power' explores the relationship between broadcasting and freedom in the fast changing world of international news gathering.

Power is essentially the ability to get other people to do what you want, and there are three ways in which you can do this. You can coerce people ('the stick'), you can offer incentives ('the carrot') or you can get others to want the same outcome as you do by attracting them. This third way I have christened 'soft power'. It can grow out of the appeal of your culture, policies or values, and can thus be conjured up from a variety of resources without the need to rely on a battery of sticks and carrots.

These resources can range from pop culture to high culture; as we say in the United States, from Hollywood to Harvard, and as you might say in Britain, from Harry Potter to Oxbridge. People are attracted to the countries generating the cultural artefacts they would like to emulate or participate in. Policies that are regarded as legitimate and appealing can generate soft power as well. By making overseas development and peace-making central to its foreign policy, Norway has gained the ability to punch above its weight. Values such as freedom, democracy or human rights, if applied at home as well as preached abroad, can also enhance a country's appeal.

During the Cold War, the openness and freedom expressed by the Beatles or Hollywood movies did much to persuade the Soviet people of the benefits of the Western way of life. Today, the ruling mullahs of Iran may present the USA as the Great Satan, but young Iranian teenagers want nothing more than a Hollywood DVD they can watch in the privacy of their own home.

News services have a particular role in the generation of soft power. For many years, radio has been the primary medium for global news, but television is of growing importance. This is not just because

more people are watching instead of listening. Images can create an effect beyond that of words. When the former US President Ronald Reagan made speeches, the backdrops were designed to be visually striking and to create an optimistic impression. Some believed it was the visuals rather than the text that was decisive. Whatever the truth of this, television news has come to play a crucial role in world affairs.

In 1990 and 1991, for example, after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, the dominance of CNN and the BBC allowed the issue to be presented as cross-border aggression. If the dominant world TV news service had been based in Baghdad, it might have been successfully presented as Iraq's recovery of a lost province. By the time of the coalition invasion in 2003, on the other hand, a number of locally based channels, most notably Al Jazeera, had arrived on the scene, and these have had the incidental effect of forcing the state channels to liven up their act. Together, these developments denied the coalition control of the information agenda. Thus, viewers and listeners were presented with a choice between the news that a coalition of friendly powers had entered Iraq to free the people, and the news that the Americans had invaded the country. You could argue that both of these statements were correct, but one framed the event quite differently from the other.

Nonetheless, international television news services depend crucially on appearing to provide impartial information. This effect is damaged greatly if a service comes to be regarded as propaganda. The new satellite television network which the US government has created at great expense in the Middle East gets few viewers because it is regarded as the voice of government, and therefore not to be trusted. Slick production values have proved no substitute for trust. Similarly, US State Department field workers' efforts to train Iraqis to be independent journalists were completely undermined when the Defense Department was found to be planting its own stories in Iraqi newspapers.

"Values such as freedom, democracy or human rights, if applied at home as well as preached abroad, can also enhance a country's appeal."

Interestingly, the BBC has succeeded in maintaining the credibility of its overseas services. When I was in the Middle East recently, I asked people what they listened to or watched. The BBC came out much better than many of its competitors. People sometimes say that the corporation's reputation for impartiality has been undermined by the present government's support for American foreign policy. However, the number of occasions on which the BBC and the Blair government have failed to see eye to eye has gone some way in mitigating this

impression. If anything were to be done to reduce the BBC's credibility, there would be a huge loss of soft power for Britain.

The value of supposedly independent news services is particularly important in an age in which we are all increasingly swamped by information. Instead of seeking more and more facts, we are all trying to work out what information actually deserves our attention. Sources which can persuade us of their credibility are going to prevail; it is credibility which will determine where eyes and ears are going to be directed. Already, on the internet, rating services which allow users to assess the credibility of postings or blogs are growing in importance.

"The danger with all soft power instruments is that governments are tempted to use them for short-term advantage, at the expense of long-term benefit. The American government is particularly prone to doing this."

It is often said that the role of editors is disappearing as readers or listeners are able to make their own decisions about what they value and to communicate these decisions to each other. Yet, in a world awash with information, people still need to turn to someone who can select on their behalf. Thus, the choices of American television news editors are apparently heavily affected by what happens to appear above the fold in the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*.

The danger with all soft power instruments is that governments are tempted to use them for short-term advantage, at the expense of long-term benefit. The American government is particularly prone to doing this. Thus, finding itself in difficulty in Iraq, it tries to use every possible tool to improve its prospects. The idea behind the new US satellite service in the Middle East, which I mentioned earlier, is to propound an American picture of events in the hope that this will make the USA look more attractive. But once potential viewers suspect that this is the case, the ploy's chances of success diminish. Some people therefore suggest that it might be better to convert this service into an international equivalent of C-Span, the American network which presents the likes of Congressional proceedings without comment.

The argument is that if you really wanted to convince people in the Arab world of the benefits of democracy or of the American political process, you would be more likely to succeed by showing Congressional hearings, seminars during which Middle East issues were openly debated or even, perhaps, a New England town meeting. Credibility would be enhanced by such a demonstration of the ability to embrace self-criticism. Whenever such self-criticism is filtered out, credibility is reduced.

The BBC, thanks to its current credibility, has the opportunity to set a gold standard for the medium. By maintaining its own standards of accuracy and political neutrality, it may help to maintain such standards elsewhere. Already, Britain has been able to command more attention in a region such as the Middle East, but in other regions as well, because of the credibility of the BBC. So long as Britain believes that the BBC can be critical of the British government, and not necessarily serve the day-to-day short-term interests of that government, it will gain the benefits of having the idea of accurate information associated with the country.

As such, the BBC will prove far more useful to Britain than it would as just another competitive propaganda organisation. What Britain can hope for is a preponderance, if you like, of market share of hearts and minds. And when you are trying to influence another government or another people, that can be of enormous value.

Governments are all too often less aware than they might be of the value of such influence. The USA spends getting on for $500 billion a year on its military budget. If you look at what the country spends on public diplomacy, by which I mean things like broadcasting and exchange programmes, it spends a little over $1 billion. So the ratio is 500 to one. Some might say that this doesn't encompass all instruments of soft power. If you added in overseas development assistance and disaster relief, together with special funds to help on HIV/AIDS and so forth, you could get the number up from $1 billion to maybe $15 billion or $20 billion. But that is still a very small amount compared to what we spend on defence.

"The BBC, thanks to its current credibility, has the opportunity to set a gold standard for the medium. By maintaining its own standards of accuracy and political neutrality, it may help to maintain such standards elsewhere. Already, Britain has been able to command more attention in a region such as the Middle East, but in other regions as well, because of the credibility of the BBC."

Of course, some politicians are sceptical about the actual impact of soft power. Does it really make that much difference, for example, that those Iranian teenagers watch Hollywood movies while an extremist regime remains in power in their country? It is often difficult to find a single cause for any development in international politics. However, if you take the case of the fall of Milosevic in Serbia, where it is generally accepted that more people were listening to the BBC and Radio Free Europe than to Radio Belgrade, I think this is a clear instance of broadcasting putting pressure on a government.

Exchange programmes between the USA and the Soviet Union transferred ideas into the minds of people who later became high Soviet officials and were instrumental in *perestroika* and *glasnost*. This was tremendously important in ending the Cold War. So you can find instances where you can trace a relationship between actions forming part of the diplomacy operation and outcomes which have been beneficial. Unfortunately, it is not easy to identify a single cause in a particular situation, as there are so often multiple causes.

"In a world in which propaganda is quickly discounted, but in which objective news can help frame the way issues are perceived, the BBC's overseas services are likely to have positive effects not just for Britain but for the West as a whole."

Generally speaking, however, if you have a climate of opinion which is favourable, you are more likely to be successful than if you do not. When the USA was seeking the backing of Chile and Mexico at the UN for the Iraq invasion in 2003, the loss of popularity of the USA in those countries, and therefore its loss of soft power, made it much harder for their governments to support the USA. Similarly, even though Turkey was offered considerable economic inducements to allow American forces to cross its territory in March 2003, American popularity in the country had fallen to such a degree that its parliament refused to allow this.

Those are negative examples in which the absence of soft power had pretty demonstrable effects. The exchange programme with the Soviet Union would be an example of a long-term positive effect. Positive effects are harder to demonstrate than negative effects because they are more likely to have multiple causes, but that does not mean they are less important.

In a world in which propaganda is quickly discounted, but in which objective news can help frame the way issues are perceived, the BBC's overseas services are likely to have positive effects not just for Britain but for the West as a whole. As conspiracy theories, rumours and all sorts of misinformation twist people's minds, the idea of a widely trusted source from which people can get accurate information, even if it is sometimes critical, is worth a great deal in helping us to deal with those issues.

The value of such resources can go beyond mere national advantage. I think there are such things as global public goods, which are of benefit everyone. Science is such a global public good, and so is impartial knowledge. Impartial news can be viewed in the same way. It is good not just for Britain, but for everybody else as well.

JEAN SEATON

PROFESSOR OF MEDIA HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

Jean has written about the media and wars, politics, women and childhood, broadcasting history and national and international media policy issues. She was awarded a British Academy 'Thank Offering to Britain' prize fellowship for her work on the BBC and the Holocaust. She has recently published, *Carnage and the Media: the Making and Breaking of News about Violence* (Penguin, 2005), and *What Can be Done? Making the Media and Politics Better* (Blackwell, 2006), which she edited with John Lloyd. She is an editor of *Political Quarterly* and Chair of the Orwell Prize for political writing and journalism. She is working on the Official History of the BBC 1974-87, for Oxford University Press, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board.

2.2 BEING OBJECTIVE: CHANGING THE WORLD

Jean Seaton argues that good, accurate, impartial reporting is essential to hold governments, businesses and international organisations to account. The BBC, as an exemplary institution, can have an impact in shaping a better world, particularly in poor places like Africa.

The BBC is possibly more famous than Britain (though probably less famous than British football). In the shanty suburbs of Addis Ababa and out in Ethiopia's rural villages, where there is a generator there is a café, and where there is a café there is a television which people pay small sums to watch. Standing in the smoky haze of freshly roasting coffee one journalist friend recently saw the locals watching the war in Lebanon on the BBC. In another café, an anthropologist friend saw the Ethiopians enthusiastically and knowledgeably absorbed in an Arsenal game. Surreally, in the middle of a refugee camp in the horror of war in Southern Sudan there was a television and an audience for the BBC. Such standing cannot be taken for granted and celebrity has to be husbanded; in a world of turbo-charged media empire shifts reputations and power are dynamic. Restless change overturns established audience tastes and how they exercise them, political authority and media economics all the time. Nevertheless, can the BBC as an exemplary institution over which we have power still have an impact in shaping a better world, particularly in poor places like Africa – where it has an extraordinarily resonant historical legacy and a remarkable reach? On the evolving world stage the BBC needs resources, imagination, the steady pursuit of hard-to-achieve but peerless principles such as objectivity, radical purposes and innovative market-making if it is going to go on being useful. But to miss these new audiences is to miss the future. Ours, as is increasingly clear, as well as theirs.

The BBC is not the only objectivity-trader in the world market for knowledge. There are news agencies, there are also other

international news makers and channels, and there are still some quality papers – yet few are as formidable as the Corporation's news machine. It is in reporting and finding out what we do not yet know that such organisations specialise. There need to be, above all, reliable local media everywhere, but the issue is how to develop them. The attempt to hold on to accuracy in the broader as well as the limited sense, the ambition to stretch the stories to meet difficult reality, not just a matter of the precision of detail, are more challenging to bring off successfully to the satisfaction of contemporary, complexly polarised, world audiences. It is also more difficult to bring off at home for different reasons – as news and current events are under pressure as audience habits and commercial forces threaten them. In addition, 'objectivity' has been under a casual intellectual attack for decades and has, at times, been used as an ideological smokescreen for particular interests – in which case, of course, it was not objectivity at all but something quite different. However, the reality of the hard-to-achieve attempt to listen to all of the contending voices, give them an arena and to judge, reveal and articulate the causes of events, is the foundation of the news that everyone, everywhere, needs.

'Objectivity' – like democracy – is an ideal continually to be sought after, measurable only by the rigour with which it is pursued. The truth is always campaigning. Yet many of those news organisations most dedicated to such a model of news as research-based information, a public good and a political necessity, have been under severe economic pressure. The BBC remains, if we are careful with it, a precious world resource. However, even the Corporation is in danger of losing out to far less intelligent news organisations because of financial cuts: it is a mad to lose reporting at this moment in time. For the media which foster exploration and display for public scrutiny how things work are indispensable to making societies and indeed the world order more civilised

At home the BBC has repeatedly metabolised Britishness. The Corporation, in competition with other public service programme-makers has reflected the mutating condition of the nation. This is the bedrock of everything it has achieved. Yet it has also added something to the reflection. The spectacle of being British that public service broadcasting has provided has, at its best, added careful thoughtfulness to the image, and an empathy with the audience that is like the responsiveness of a market, yet driven by other values. The BBC has done this as an institution, with principals and habits of working and things it fears to get wrong, standards that it applies to British life, ambitions and a worrying away at problems, not just as a 'broadcaster'. It is part of the pragmatic, flexible, unwritten British

constitution. At the heart of what it does, if it does it well (and it does not always succeed), is an over-arching hostility to ideological capture, whether political or market-led. It has also situated the nation in the world, exploring the place we occupy and our obligations to others

The first condition of a decent society is some kind of common discussion, in public, of the realities of that society. Comedy, drama, the rules and mores of reality shows, radio chat programmes, programmes about animals, children's programmes, anything really, play a huge role in elaborating these truths and often do the vital work of amusing and informing audiences as well as the imperative of delivering their attention and interest. Such programmes have to be developed locally, even if there are huge international markets for some formula. They have to address audiences through their own mores and in the tone of voice they accept and welcome. It requires research and careful respect for audiences: and the BBC has a long tradition of sensitively transporting programme formats internationally. Versions of *The Archers* (combining the emotional excitements of soap opera with useful bits of farming information) have worked in 19 countries, including Afghanistan. *Farming Today*, local-style, is a big hit in Somalia, and a local version of *Question Time* has had an extraordinary effect in Bangladesh: putting politicians, officials and businesses into a public arena for the first time.[i]

> *"The first condition of a decent society is some kind of common discussion, in public, of the realities of that society."*

Nevertheless it is news, or perhaps more accurately reporting, which is the heart of apprehending reality, even if the information gets used in things that do not look like conventional news (let us not get hung up on formats). What we have called news is merely a style of presentation – what matters is news as an entrepreneurial venture, growing knowledge. If we are shown verities we recognise, although it is a messy, awkward business capturing the *Zeitgeist* and yet moving it on, such realism engages us in a mobile dialogue about who we are, what is happening and what we wish to be. And, at its best, the BBC brings to the process of engaging with the reality of our contemporary life, public service values of objectivity, curiosity and experience; in short, a regard for the truth, and an attempt to reach it, that is the basis of its capacity to hold politicians, governments, businesses and institutions responsible for what they attempt to do and what they achieve. Added to this there needs to be wit and creativity. Most important, however, is the nagging moral anxiety that produces a continual questioning of the clichés and fashions in explanation.

Actually, at times, the BBC can also help us, the citizenry, to hold ourselves to account. In all of the discussions about the media and politics this is the aspect which is almost entirely ignored; yet it can be a powerful force. Even if it is not always a comfortable picture (indeed, perhaps particularly if it is disturbing), showing us what we are like is valuable. What we can occasionally grimly observe that we take for granted, our casual contempt for things that matter, what we collectively enjoy and approve of, what we aspire to, what we fret about – all show us ourselves. Moreover, they are not givens; they mutate and can be led. But seeing ourselves is the first step to change. Getting all of this work done is not a question of a shopping list of values, but a practice which adds something to the process of reflecting on our collective circumstances that has been, over time, a sanitising scrutiny. You could call it a process of creating a shared and relatively realistic understanding of the world we occupy – and make. We need it, yet it is threatened by commercial forces, by complacency, by political pressures, by inaccurately gauged evolving markets. But it is also only what anybody, anywhere, in more testing political and economic circumstances also needs. It is a universal condition of greater decency.

"At its best, the BBC brings to the process of engaging with the reality of our contemporary life, public service values of objectivity, curiosity and experience."

Can the BBC help to metabolise a new international world order in the same way as it has at home, adding a reflective impartiality and hungry curiosity to issues and understanding? BBC World Service radio brought a respected voice to world affairs during the Cold War by being accurate and reliable and by telling truths that audiences needed. Nevertheless, the narrative of events then, if unpleasant, was at least somewhat clearer than the messy contemporary world. How best can the BBC, online and television, the new(ish) mélange of text and images, transported on phones and websites with words and video streams, that characterises modern media, go on taking the DNA of the attempt to find reliable truth into our complicated global world? In what ways can such international reporting inform and assist (perhaps a rather presumptuous ambition but not an ignoble one) other places to understand their own condition more fully? The trick, in any case, is that if they can understand what is happening to 'them' then that simultaneously grows 'our' knowledge: nurturing intelligence is the project.

Indeed, we need more reporting of distant foreign places for practical issues of self-interested survival, not because it would be

nice of us. The first problem is what we understand about our own situation in an interconnected world. Even the most insular must have noticed that what happens in Britain, downtown Manhattan, or Mumbai is hardly a domestic matter anymore. Of course there is trade, but there are also bombs. Comprehending what happens in Luton, Walthamstow or Brixton already depends on some kind of understanding of what is happening in Pakistan. The failure to understand foreign places, from their ground up, not out of our pre-conceived, comfortable stereotypes or out of sheer ignorant blindness, has already had dire consequences in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as in London and Madrid. Nevertheless, that particular story is now one we are at least beginning to regret that we have not understood more wisely. But what about the stories we *will* need to know about, as well as those we ought to consider? These are the stories that we will have needed to be alerted to, of which we understand and know little. Future stories are as, or even more, important than present ones and surely poverty, and development code words for dealing with it, arguments about it, and attempts to deal with it, are the domicile of many of these future situations.

Indeed, who 'we' are is also intriguingly exciting and provides an unrivalled opportunity for news to flourish and grow. Our populations of migrant origin are central to the argument. They provide a valuable hoard of understanding it is stupid to ignore. As part of the official history of the Corporation, Suzanne Franks has argued that, in the 1970s and 1980s, BBC reporting of Indian affairs was avidly scrutinised by the huge, local to Britain, Indian population who in turn related directly back to India. Meanwhile this produced a vigorous argument in India itself. Together, this produced an intense (and often quite fissile) dialogue both with India and the BBC about reporting and Indian affairs: it made for more informed populations everywhere.[ii] Indeed, in its way it was a model before its time that we need to re-discover. As Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, a British West African put it, 'We can hardly talk of a clear distinction between domestic and foreign output these days. Thus a UK domestic audience, (we, Africans) have a voracious appetite for the BBC's foreign news. Indeed, one could argue,' he continued, 'that people originally from those other countries have even more need of objectivity than others.'[iii] Indeed, the failure to engage British-born populations of immigrants in a more realistic view of their countries of origin has already had consequences. Yet, for example, the huge Somali population in Britain, ought to be both the source of a more nuanced knowledge of Somalia and an audience for it – a recent BBC experiment in re-broadcasting the Somali language output to local Somalis living in Liverpool was a tremendous success. But such developments must not to be seen as ghettoising immigrants: on

the contrary the aim must be to grow knowledge and understanding across the whole population.

Then secondly there is the really urgent need, the product of a national and an international democratic deficit, to scrutinise the practices of NGOs and international organisations, as well as different governments in developing countries, and to argue about it. After all they act in our name, with our money, and what they do influences everyone's future. The world is developing world institutions and they cannot thrive without an international public to address and mould them. Since the 1980s NGOs have boomed. They have become part of a kind of fifth estate of the new world order, partly as governments have often preferred to out-source tricky interventions, partly as some international organisations have developed to provide a critical commentary on international policy. Indeed, NGOs have so far often been seen as virtuous by publics in the developed world who have become otherwise suspicious of politics. But, unless we begin to have a greater and more searching discussion about them, public confidence in all of them may collapse: for NGOs are not all the same.

NGOs are certainly an industry, and many argue that they are unaccountable; while some critics are increasingly sceptical about the value of what is called 'aid'. We need to distinguish more knowledgeably those NGOs that are shady and corrupt agents of 'donor' nations' business interests, as well as those pursuing wrong and damaging models of 'development'. Thus there is a growing concern in the two new 'problem' countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, where all too often the title of 'NGO' is little more than a cloak for tax dodges. There are 12,000 'NGOs' in all claiming some kind of international privilege. In reality most are foreign building firms. The Afghan government is trying to crack down on this fraud. Afghanistan certainly needs aid for its ruined infrastructure and social and economic development. Yet we are in danger of losing the aid war there (as a recent BBC report pointedly showed),[iv] as much that is done is of poor quality, does little to enhance the powers of the local government (and so diminishes the interests that a fragile new democracy depends on), and fails to use local knowledge, expertise or even contractors. Similarly, in Bangladesh, a recent survey showed that although the local police were the least trusted institution, with only 9 per cent of the population trusting them, NGOs were doing nearly as badly with 11 per cent of trust.[v] But then there are NGOs that have become self-serving bureaucracies and the ones that, although pursuing benign ends, nevertheless have bad effects: for example fuelling the power of war-lords by permitting them to control access to food-aid.

We need the media to ignite the public debate about what lies behind these scandals. Yet there is also another hidden distortion – the way in which too much of the media now depends on NGOs for its information. It was NGO misunderstanding compounded with a lack of independent media scrutiny that produced the conditions that made the genocide in Rwanda possible. NGO-dependent media are a new threat to an informed discussion.

Yet there are also other NGOs who have transformed national and international understanding and practice, and whose work is a vital part of assisting locally based improvement and change. In Iraq and Afghanistan some aid agencies are doing excellent and sensitive locally led work. However, good and bad, we really do need to subject them all to the kind of scrutiny that tests them. Not least because we need to learn what actually works. In a different way the British public might be cheered to know that what is done in its name sometimes seems sensitive and appropriate and that Scandinavian aid intelligence is often good. We need a media discussion on all of this because it is not simply 'charity' that is going on but future world building. NGOs are not going to open the Pandora's Box because they are scared of the damage such a discussion might have; they are wrong – publicity and analysis will help make the virtuous and effective smarter, distinguish them from the fraudulent and spread intelligence about dangerously needy places. But the programme-making agenda needs to be pulled in this direction – development is a key modern project that it is in the interests of a world citizenry to understand and have views about.

"There is another hidden distortion – the way in which too much of the media now depends on NGOs for its information."

In addition, a compact that somehow there were complicated purposes that governments pursued, beyond, outside or beside the public will, no longer holds. Governments are no longer able to exercise some of the feints that used to be available. They need to adjust to a different world order in which all kinds of information and views swirl around domestic public opinion which is linked to views of a wider world. Indeed, well-intentioned, effective governments that are attempting to take risks and do the untidy work that politics is, that makes things better (if possible), need intelligent publics more than ever. Well-made news is one of the key sources of an informed and sensitive public; moreover the influence of news is direct and immediate. But governments cannot wash their hands of what happens to reporting – their policies all too often create the conditions under which it flourishes or withers. So governments had better go about willing the conditions

to educate their publics because they need them – and indeed to make them part of a more engaged and informed world citizenry.

"We still need fewer reporters with egos, feelings and hair cuts on display and more with knowledge and a fastidious respect for the stories they carry."

Let us take just one example of our relationship to the world of what we could still call for convenience sake, development. Conditionality has been the new buzz-idea/kid on the development block now for some time. The notion is educative (rather like the military idea of proportionate response), that you pin down the delivery of aid or oil money revenues to requirements that bring benefits to populations. You get the aid if you do the democracy; you get the oil money only if it is spent on helping raise the standard of life in poor places not just on Presidential gold plated taps and natty new military helicopters from the Ukraine. You get punished if you – the aid receiver, oil producer and so on – do not comply with these conditions which bind you slowly into delivering benefits to your populations. For obvious reasons it has been a very popular way of trying to improve the lot of Africans. BP does it in Nigeria, the World Bank has begun to do it in Chad and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) does it in Ethiopia. It is obviously a process – at least that's the idea; you learn, goes the philosophy, over time, how to behave better.[vi] Yet it is more difficult to police than the theory had suggested. A recent BBC World report by David Loyn on Ethiopia (which has not been doing the democracy bit lately) could not have put the problem that has developed more starkly. What threats, he pointed out, can outside agencies in practice deliver to miscreant governments? What pressures are they prepared to inflict? Do aid donors want children to starve if they refuse to give the funds to a badly behaved government? In a similar way, does the World Bank really refuse to give oil revenues in Chad for military equipment when the rebel opposition threatens a coup? This kind of incremental, experienced, clear reporting based on an understanding of the fundamental issues and yet lodged in a firm grasp of the particular, local circumstances is part of the process that educates the public and influences the policy process as well.

Good reporting like this does not so much simplify as *clarify* issues. This is a key distinction, as all too often journalism reduces events to predictable clichés. Good journalism – of this nuanced and authoritative kind – can locate and describe events with a direct simplicity none of the other participants in the process either have an interest in doing (on the contrary) or a capacity to do. It makes things

clearer in all the worlds it reports into. It alerts local populations (in those lively, pungent cafés); it puts aid-donating governments on their mettle; it talks to immigrants; it puts domestic publics in aid-inclined nations in the picture and makes them ask searching questions; and it puts the problems on the agenda everywhere. It is part of the critical apparatus that helps the world to think more intelligently about difficult problems.

Experienced understanding of this kind depends on knowledge and local wisdom. In order to understand the world, and not simply interpret it through ideological or info-tainment spectacles, people need to have a historical context in which to place events. What are the sources of such nuanced, local, deep, long historical, experienced knowledge of the world in Britain (and indeed in the world)? They are in some government departments, the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development and so on; they are in the aid agencies that work on the ground. But none of these are particularly good at also educating the public – which they have to learn how to do. To an extent, sadly perhaps more limited than before, there are such sources in the universities (after all more people go to university but fewer of them read, for example, African languages than in the 1980s). Then there is journalism. Good journalism joins up the thinking and the publics, both as we have seen on the ground in Ethiopia and on the ground back in donor-land, and it also lays the problems out for policy-makers. Indeed, there have also been achievements – some contemporary reporting is notably more sensitive: displaying and interrogating local voices, the faces and experience of those in the stories with a respect that was absent before. This is part of a wider attempt to put the voices of those at the hearts of stories at the centre of our attention.[vii] Indeed, we still need fewer reporters with egos, feelings and hair cuts on display and more with knowledge and a fastidious respect for the stories they carry. But while most news organisations spend less on the coverage of foreign affairs and have a fitful, crisis-driven attention to the foreign world, a few (and in Britain the BBC is key along with Reuters, and C4 has a tradition that needs fostering) have the reporters, the stringers and the commitment that produces this kind of knowledge-fostering.

The British public and the international audiences that use British services are better served than in many other places. Most people in Britain get their news from broadcasters and it is a wider, more intelligent agenda than is on offer elsewhere because of the way in which broadcasting has been regulated in the public interest. American blinkeredness to the outside world is at least in part a media failure, but it has certainly had direct consequences.[viii] American blinkeredness to African affairs is even more puzzling,

given the huge population of African-Americans. Public ignorance has damaging effects throughout political systems.

Of course the knowledge is also in the societies themselves. The problem is to get it expressed and put where it matters. In a world of mobile-phone-empowered citizen reporters is there still a role for the big reporting organisations, or indeed such foreign-based knowledge? Mobile phones really do permit the vital home-grown observations to begin to bite; if the regional government is corrupt there is a quick way for local witnesses to make their case. The internet provides a Wild West of argument for many, for example in the Middle East, deprived of a capacity to express their views by repressive governments. Local 'obituary music' radio in Zimbabwe pleases and politically informs a knowing public in a nation otherwise in dire meltdown. The whole tone and content of broadcasting in Africa has been transformed over the last decade by the technological changes that release the energy of a lively, involved, local audience into broadcasting. It is local African audiences who now set the agenda in 'a visceral, immediate way'. When *Africa Today* noticed that one of the Northern Uganda rebel leader's conditions for a ceasefire was the chance to see his mother, whom he had not seen for 15 years, it launched an enormously successful and heartfelt debate about the role of women – and mothers – in African society. Yet, there had to be an informed and attentive institution to pick up and project the audience's views to each other. Local media need development and support, because there has, in the last instance, to be a public place to take the information to. In the developed world there is too much of a kind of reckless and naive academic relativism about that says we only each need to know about ourselves; this is simply not true. The emergence of locally based holding to account still depends on evaluating good judgment and on spaces where the knowledge can be shared. Institutions matter even more in an interactive world – they are just less visible.

In Africa, the BBC is, as one broadcaster commented, 'Viscerally important, it is in the blood of the continent'.[ix] It is certainly the international media 'leader', with an astonishing 61 million African listeners: 19.4 million people tune into broadcasts in Swahili, another 19 million listen to those in Hausa and 20 million listen in English. There are audiences in Arabic, French and Portuguese.[x] In West Africa *Focus on Africa* is the main news event of the day (if you stand in the empty streets in northern Nigeria you can hear the programme coming out of every car and house window) and the print magazine also has a wide readership. Television, or at least images, delivered in many different ways, is now gaining ground all over Africa, and audiences are taking to any vehicle for programmes the new

technology offers. The revolution in the audience's capacity to answer, argue and inform debate with their local knowledge has transformed the service. 'It is something that Africa has built as well as the BBC', commented Jerry Timmins, Head of Africa and the Middle East at BBC World Service. This is an invaluable contribution which ought to be grown in new ways – and which it would be criminal to squander.

Yet in turn, the judgement the world needs requires immersion and local intelligence. So there is no contradiction between the emergence of information providers and commentators from the heart of events and the growth of everyone's knowledge, as long as there remain thinking institutions. We need to lay the seeds of our future intelligent knowledge of places now, and we need reporters out reporting, out smelling the smoke in the cafes, not hunkered down in the stygian caves of internet editing. Such reporting is expensive, it is riskier, it takes time and it is also under tremendous financial threat. Just as we need to know more we are in danger of making ourselves more stupid. Of course, the cost of ignorance is often catastrophic.

"The BBC's massive reporting energies are not directed sufficiently at the outside world and the impressive achievements of a decade's intelligent reporting of development are financially threatened."

Let us face some uncomfortable facts. Reporting of African affairs in Africa by the African media has, many experts believe, got worse over the last 20 years. Intimidation, politics and the lack of an independent market for the news are problems. Although aid agencies have supported some media, they have been inexperienced and uneasy with thinking about business models which might give local media in Africa the absolutely vital economic independence they need to flourish. It is not a good thing that the 'good' guys in the African media world are dependent on aid. Some investment in journalism training has merely produced slicker propagandists for unpleasant governments. Reporters need places to work for that require and support proper reporting. It is not enough to train the individuals; you have to grow the outlets. Even the heroic reporting of a Zimbabwean journalist like Walter Marwizi needed an outlet prepared to carry his story.[xi] Bravery is a vital component of decency but it needs institutions as well.

Meanwhile, the world's coverage of developing nations and Africa has declined.[xii] More generally, audiences for news are in decline and believed to be likely to fall further. In digital homes, the research seems to show, less news is watched. Yet some of the places we barely bother about have some of the highest economic growth rates and the youngest, most energetic populations and the most difficult economic and political circumstances. Africa for example. But

like any moment in time this is just a snapshot of now, not necessarily the future. Indeed, this measured decline in the reporting of poor places – and Africa in particular – has not been inevitable. Markets have changed, but policy, unfashionable although it may be to say so, has also been to blame for why we are not now in a more intelligent world. It has been, at least in part, the chillingly predictable consequence of broadcasting de-regulation (as we miserably vindicated Cassandras might point out, just a tad peevishly). Thus it is no accident that the BBC has emerged as the major and almost uniquely serious vehicle of these issues in a whole flurry of recent reports – it has still been driven by other public purposes that have been stripped out of many other reporting organisations. In the UK, Ofcom is apparently going to make the regulation of news and current events even lighter. This is a wilful choice driven by a hugely powerful commercial lobby, balanced against far less well-resourced or indeed professional pressure from the development side. Thus, beyond the BBC, we are in danger of losing even more knowledge and interpretive engagement. Getting the right media policies here matters, and it is government responsibility to ensure that the institutions that grow public understanding flourish – in the interests of Britain.

"It is always easier for aid donors to spend money on nice uncomplicated goods like water boreholes, rather than on tricky, inevitably politically implicated, media."

Nevertheless, the BBC's massive reporting energies are not directed sufficiently at the outside world and the impressive achievements of a decade's intelligent reporting of development are financially threatened. The BBC reported the only real innovation in GM foods outside Britain and America – in Uganda, and was telling the story of Darfur months before anybody else. It covered the WTO summits in 2003 and 2005 which were not addressed by any other channel. It broke the scandal of UN food-aid corruption in Liberia. But without support this could easily wither. Moreover it is simply a waste of a huge machine. Indeed, in a moment when the editorial intelligence of the press is threatened (as commercial models evolve rapidly), we need, more than ever, what we will call broadcasters for convenience (but this is simply a familiar and no longer accurate term). And, of course, we need intelligently contextualised pictures. Images do drive political reaction, but they need situating and explaining authoritatively: pictures do not simply tell their own story although audiences believe them. Indeed, paradoxically, in an age when taking pictures and transmitting them is becoming a universal skill we need to know

where images are coming from and what they mean more than ever. This is a matter of reporters who understand what they are seeing. What we need is thought, experience, knowledge, scruple and care.

Many point out that the problem with the Western attitude towards Africa is that it recurrently and arrogantly has a view that it can 'do' something, when what it needs to do is leave Africans with all of their energy and enterprise to take charge of their own futures. But as the Africa Commission argued, free, independent and developing media are vital partners to every aspect of the process of creating decency. The media are the myriad ropes that tie down civility: they cause anxiety and shame; they promote public indignation; they share understanding; they can inspire hope that the pursuit of justice is not doomed; they help create publics that keep a vigilant and formative eye on what is happening in a society. Paddy Coulter, of the Reuters Institute, described how when he was working for Oxfam in the late 1980s South Africans would sit up all night just to watch British news coverage on video of events in their own country that they had not been able to see – and how influential it was.[xiii] Yet it is always easier for aid donors to spend money on nice uncomplicated goods like water bore-holes, rather than on tricky, inevitably politically implicated, media. However, without the shared knowledge that proper media attention can bring, the simple, practical things do not work. Yet, this process of developing media knowledge and understanding is not separate from 'our' need and capacity to grow intelligence rather than lose it. Thus, getting our media policies right, creating the conditions for our media to become more subtle and developing the sources of expert local knowledge are all part of the same process – one that we have been too ignorant and complacent about.

The real issue is the news agenda – but this is dependent on resources, markets and institutions. Niall Fitzgerald, the Chairman of Reuters, has argued a powerful commercial and political case for the establishment of local African news agencies. Partly because they would provide the stable foundation for developing media there, but also because Africa has news with commercial value we are missing out on. Such agencies would hold governments to account within and outside their societies. It will also begin to put some competitive commercial cash (not aid cash) into the media systems.[xiv] It would also pull the news agenda everywhere wider. There is already reporting of issues that goes beyond our fitful disaster addiction but we need to support the kind of reflection on the world. Widening the agenda (and not missing the story) is also a people issue. The capacity of local audiences to bring information, views and knowledge to programmes through mobile phones and the internet has changed the whole style and tone of programmes, bending them to a new

responsive intimacy with audiences. Yet such interactivity is not really quite as 'new' as most of the rather shallow consideration of it has suggested, and it depends, as it always has, on the intelligence of the listening and response.

Actually a quality broadcasting presence – based on objective news gathering – does enhance development. All of the BBC's senior editors in Africa are African and they know and apply BBC standards of journalism. The Corporation manages the only considerable cohort of stringers across Africa, the source of the far more nuanced knowledge that we – and they – need. This produces in the mind and life of African media and discussion a model but one which is already woven into African life. Training, already being done in the BBC World Trust, and support for local journalism is vital – but it is no good without attention to the institutions. Which is where partnerships with the BBC (carefully researched, boldly and sensitively managed), are an important way forward. We could insinuate local reporters from distant places into the national heart. Nevertheless, the BBC needs to be careful to maintain the essential propriety of its impartiality – sometimes there is a clash between the BBC's role as citizen's voice and its precious neutrality, and the World Service Trust needs to be clear and scrupulous about its role. Yet one of the most valuable things the BBC can do is be a model and a standard of integrity – but used all the time in novel and ambitious and wise ways – because it also has to engineer new markets and new audiences. The point is to attract audiences and grow intelligence.

Understanding poor places is not a luxury. Not for them and not for us and not for the world. Good reporting, however it develops in a brilliant moment of technological innovation, keeps local and international publics acute and holds local governments and businesses, international agencies and international governments to account. But it is also one of the ways we nurture intelligence. The world is too dangerous a place – and the opportunities too exciting – for us to continue to censor thoughtfulness.

i Stephen King, BBC World Service Trust.

ii Suzanne Franks, forthcoming PhD, and work for the Official History of the BBC, 1974-87.

iii Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, Executive Director of African Foundation for Development, (www.afford-uk.org) September 2006.

iv See BBC News 24, 04.06.2006 'Losing the Aid Game in Afghanistan'.

v BBC World Service Trust, Survey of Institutions and Trust in Bangladesh, 2005.

vi I am grateful for discussions with Dr David Styan, and Charles Leigh-Pemberton, for this point.

vii This is very clear in the best television.

viii See Tom Fenton, *Bad News: the Decline of Reporting; the Business of News and the Danger to Us All*, New York, Harper Collins, 2005.

ix Jerry Timmins, Head of Africa and Middle East, BBC World Service.

x BBC, African Audiences Survey, 2006.

xi Walter Marwizi, Reuters Memorial Fellow, Oxford 2005.

xii See Caroline Dover and Steven Barnett, *The World on the Box; International Issues in Factual Programmes on UK Television, 1975-2003*, London, Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project, 2005.

xiii Paddy Coulter, Reuters Institute, Oxford.

xiv See Niall Fitzgerald, Reuters Memorial Lecture, 2005.

MARY KALDOR

PROFESSOR OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Mary has researched and written extensively about security and civil society. She previously worked at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the Science Policy Research Unit and the Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex. Her books include *The Baroque Arsenal* (1982), *The Imaginary War* (1990), *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era* (1999), *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (2003). She was a founder member of European Nuclear Disarmament, founder and Co-Chair of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, and a member of the International Independent Commission to investigate the Kosovo Crisis, which published *The Kosovo Report* (Oxford: OUP) in 2000. She was convenor of the study group on European Security Capabilities, which produced the Barcelona Report, 'A Human Security Doctrine for Europe'.

2.3 THE BEACONS OF BABEL

Professor Mary Kaldor identifies how communication will be central to an emerging 'global civil society' where the character of the world community will be shaped by the way its members confer. In this essay, written by Richard Jones, based on an interview, Professor Kaldor suggests that experts should not set too much store by efforts to shape the architecture of communication, but instead look at those who are creating their own forms of interaction.

Politics no longer takes place only within and among nation-states, or between the blocs into which they combine. New forces have been unleashed that acknowledge no frontiers, as political interaction, like capitalism, goes global. This process has its dark side, as every news bulletin reminds us, yet it also holds out great promise. If we rise to the challenge it presents, we could end up with a world that is not just more democratic, but also a less dangerous place.

Al-Qaeda may be the most striking of the new global political players, but it is just one of a growing throng of transnational actors, most of whom rely on dialogue rather than violence. Across the world, social movements, single-issue groups, students', workers', women's and peasants' associations, non-governmental organisations, churches, foundations and internet-based communities are mobilising in pursuit of objectives that no single state can deliver. Governments, globalised corporations and international institutions are responding to pressure from such quarters on an ever more transnational basis.

When, in August 2006, the American and British governments refused to demand an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon, many of their citizens were outraged. National political structures offered those concerned little meaningful recourse. They were, however, able to join with hundreds of thousands of people from over 100 other countries to sign an internet-based petition to the UN Security Council, which then arranged a ceasefire. The petition was organised by an

international civic advocacy group called Res Publica. Few will have heard of it, but such bodies are springing up every day, spawning new kinds of global initiative.

International political activity of this kind is bound to grow in importance. Not only is frustration with national politics increasing, but people's horizons are widening, as issues such as African poverty, migration and climate change garner more of their attention. In the past, governments and fanatics alike have relied on the ultimate sanction of force. In future, transnational dialogue could enable negotiation to supersede violence as humanity's default instrument for resolving differences.

"Now, new forms of broadcasting, mobile telephones and the internet are creating wider forms of community. As global contact becomes cheaper and easier, people are reaching out to each other ever more energetically. The resulting torrent of transnational communication will provide unprecedented opportunities for participation in public discourse."

Communication will be central to this emerging 'global civil society'. The character of the world community will be shaped by the way its members confer, as that of previous communities has been. In the Middle Ages, most people engaged only in face-to-face contact, even if books hand-written in Latin, Persian or Sanskrit enabled scholars and clerics to participate in early forms of transnational association. It was the printing press that created national communities, by enabling people to read newspapers, poems and novels in their own languages. Then, radio and television extended national consciousness to those unable to read.

Now, new forms of broadcasting, mobile telephones and the internet are creating wider forms of community. As global contact becomes cheaper and easier, people are reaching out to each other ever more energetically. The resulting torrent of transnational communication will provide unprecedented opportunities for participation in public discourse. Already, more people are taking an interest in politics than have ever done before. Increasingly, they will wrest control of political debate from the small elite that has monopolised it up till now.

Nonetheless, this very profusion of new voices brings with it dangers as well as benefits. One huge problem will be trying to determine which among an avalanche of competing information streams should be considered authoritative. Already, people think their governments are no more likely to be truthful than other

sources that have become available to them. Chat-room and video communication offer less opportunity to detect deception than face-to-face contact. So it will become easier for those so minded to mobilise people around extremist points of view by exploiting prejudice, dogma, rumour and conspiracy theories.

In this ever more fluid environment, the radio and television services of traditional international broadcasters will find it hard to hold their place. Yet, they will acquire new importance, since it will fall to them to provide coherent, reliable tidings amidst the growing Babel. In future, we shall rely increasingly on them to foster global understanding, just as they have helped lay its foundations in the past.

For decades, broadcasting has prevented any of us from pretending ignorance when human rights are violated in faraway places. It has turned events like the Holocaust or Hiroshima into global, rather than merely regional, phenomena. That unforgettable TV image of the earth as seen from the Apollo 17 spacecraft, looking like a child's blue marble floating precariously in a black void, has made our shared human destiny seem inescapable.

Radio and television have also raised expectations about what that destiny might be. Though broadcasting has been used to buttress authoritarian regimes, it has in turn become their nemesis. In the 1970s and 1980s, international broadcasting both informed and inspired the people of eastern Europe. On one occasion, I was supposed to be attending a meeting in Poland, but I could not get a visa. This was reported by the BBC's Polish service, and consequently the meeting was packed out. My non-appearance had become a highly effective advertisement. In 1989, television pictures of revolutions in neighbouring countries provoked action of historic proportions.

During the run-up to war in Yugoslavia, Serbian television broadcast incessant footage of the Holocaust (in which Serbs were killed as well as Jews), together with dramatic pictures of the Turks' victory over the Serbs in 1389. This helped the government instil a war psychosis before conflict actually broke out. Nonetheless, Serbs could also listen to overseas broadcasters such as the BBC and a dissident student radio station called B92. When this station was shut down, it switched its service to the internet and sent material by satellite to like-minded Serbian stations. The informal radio network thus created helped bring down the Milosevic regime.

However, none of this means that broadcasting can now be viewed as an automatic force for good in a globalising political environment. Today, in places like North Korea and Iran, governments still use broadcasting to mobilise nationalist militancy. State broadcasters will always transmit propaganda, much of it inevitably rooted in nation-based ways of thinking.

Because of this, non-governmental output will take on an ever more important role as national frontiers become less important to the world's peoples. Yet, such output brings with it problems of its own. Commercially owned broadcasters cannot be expected to put wisdom, enlightenment and moderation at the top of their agenda. They are, after all, trying to make money, and that means providing audiences with what they appear to want.

Given human weaknesses, this may mean dumbing down, appealing to the lowest common denominator and pandering to prejudice. International broadcasters used to rely heavily on the export of Western consumerist, materialist and violent entertainment. Today, they tend to find homogenised and debased versions of local culture more effective, such as the Bollywood-based programming provided by foreign-owned satellite systems in India. Commercial news services may fuel nationalist fervour as eagerly as their state-run counterparts, if that is the way to win ratings. Both Fox and Al Jazeera reflect and amplify the opinions of their viewers.

The limitations of commercial and state broadcasting highlight the importance to a globalising polity of those 'public' broadcasters who treat viewers and listeners as citizens. Among the most successful of these are America's National Public Radio and the BBC, the institution of which we in Britain should probably be most proud. Though some of the corporation's overseas radio services have recently been axed, it is essential that neither its overseas radio, its television or its internet operations are squeezed further in the future. The world may need public service broadcasting even more than any individual country.

"This very profusion of new voices brings with it dangers as well as benefits. One huge problem will be trying to determine which among an avalanche of competing information streams should be considered authoritative. Already, people think their governments are no more likely to be truthful than other sources that have become available to them."

The challenge of serving global civil society will place new demands on all international broadcasters, yet at present certain weaknesses afflict them all. Television depends on spectacle, news requires incident and violence fascinates. These considerations make generating carnage the most effective way to get on the air. Alarmist stories may be broadcast before they are shown to be unfounded, since newsdesks trade off accuracy against speed to keep up with the competition. Such factors can turn all broadcasters into unwitting allies of those seeking to promote conflict.

Moreover, few broadcasters of any kind appreciate the extent to which politics has moved away from the orbit of state governments and into new, less familiar, areas. The news bulletins are still full of the same 'world leaders', making speeches, shaking hands with each other and emerging from large black cars. Even where other voices are sought out, these are more likely to be those of large, Western-based non-governmental organisations like Oxfam or Save the Children than those of the informal groupings now making the running in so many parts of the world.

"The challenge of serving global civil society will place new demands on all international broadcasters, yet at present certain weaknesses afflict them all. Television depends on spectacle, news requires incident and violence fascinates. These considerations make generating carnage the most effective way to get on the air."

This is understandable. Editorial headquarters are usually based in the big cities, and those operating from them are used to rubbing shoulders with the elites that surround them. It is easier to tell stories peopled by well-known characters. Nonetheless, as political activity burgeons away from established centres of power, the top-down view of the world with which we are usually presented is becoming increasingly inadequate.

During the conflict in Lebanon in 2006, the American and Israeli governments saw Hezbollah largely as the tool of other governments in Damascus and Tehran, and the international media reflected their perceptions. There was therefore much surprise when the complexity of Hezbollah's relationship with the society in which it was based eventually became apparent. We always need to know what people are thinking and doing on the ground, yet this is often mentioned only at the end of stories and then not treated particularly seriously.

We are told plenty about the way that governments are prosecuting the 'War on Terror'. Meanwhile, however, there is a huge debate raging within Islam about whether Jihad was meant to be military, what has happened to Muslim notions such as civility and the rule of law, and whether it can ever be permissible to kill other Muslims. Websites such as IslamOnline are awash with these arguments, but the mainstream media rarely pick them up.

All of these failings will matter more as political activity bursts national borders. If international broadcasters are to become its moderators, they will need to address their deficiencies. There is no point in asking them to manufacture a news agenda that their

audiences will not accept. Nonetheless, the news that does appear should be accompanied by more analysis, history and discussion, so that incidents can be seen within the context that has given rise to them.

Perhaps broadcasters' most challenging task will be finding out how to understand, analyse and report the grass-roots political activity that will increasingly shape events. I notice that the BBC has attracted derision for setting up a college of journalism, but other organisations' reporters may also need to learn new skills. Getting more women on the air is the single most productive step that news broadcasters could take in adapting to our changing world. These days we have plenty of female war correspondents, but they are often the only women who get to speak in their reports. Clearly, journalists must talk to military spokespeople, diplomats and the like. Yet, in much of the world, such people are nearly always male, and notions such as territory, conflict and prestige tend to dominate their thinking. Women, even if involved in a story in other capacities, might bring to bear entirely different and perhaps more productive perspectives.

"At the very least, we should consider setting up some kind of oversight of the global broadcasters that already exist. If we can create an International Criminal Court, global civil society ought to be able to embrace some kind of global broadcasting standards council, to which people could bring complaints about bias, incitement, unfairness or inaccuracy."

It remains to be seen how far incumbent broadcasters will change to meet the needs of global civil society. Yet however much they do so, we may still need new broadcasters, committed to airing a wider range of voices. At the United Nations World Television Forum in 1999, it was suggested that the UN should set up its own worldwide satellite television service. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, was understandably concerned about the financial implications of such a step, but other proposals have also been put forward.

Broadcasters in the developing world have called for a wholly independent 'Global News Television' service, to be funded from a mixture of sources. Clearly, enormous obstacles lie in the path of such a scheme. There will never be one consensual view of what is happening in the world. Such governments as might be prepared to support a new public broadcaster would probably be based in the rich North, and it might therefore be considered suspect in other parts of the world. Well-intentioned public programming sponsored by multilateral bodies is not always very watchable. Nonetheless, a new

player would be welcome, now that media ownership has become so concentrated.

At the very least, we should consider setting up some kind of oversight of the global broadcasters that already exist. If we can create an International Criminal Court, global civil society ought to be able to embrace some kind of global broadcasting standards council, to which people could bring complaints about bias, incitement, unfairness or inaccuracy. No such referee's decisions would ever be universally accepted, but the debate they might stimulate could prove highly fruitful.

Perhaps, however, we should not set too much store by efforts to shape the architecture of communication. Increasingly, people are creating their own forms of interaction. It is their efforts that will in the end determine how the world is going talk to itself. The myriad local community radio stations now springing up may soon command far more collective attention than any grand global institution, however proud its past.

Communicating ideas, aspirations and demands to those in a position to act on them is going to become harder. As national structures become less useful, fresh pathways will have to be found. International broadcasters can help ensure that the world's fragile institutional fabric is not overwhelmed in the process. They may need to become beacons of truth and reason amidst an information ferment. The rest of us should wish them well in their difficult but vital mission.

NICHOLAS J. CULL

DIRECTOR, MASTER'S IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY PROGRAM

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (USC)

Professor Cull came to USC from the University of Leicester, where he was Professor of American Studies and Director of the Centre for American Studies. His research and teaching interests are inter-disciplinary, growing from interest in US foreign policy, Anglo-American relations, the history of propaganda and the politics of popular culture. He earned his Ph.D.at the University of Leeds. He studied at Princeton University as a Harkness Fellow. He was lecturer in American History at the University of Birmingham 1992–7. He has published on the theme of propaganda and politics/foreign policy, spoken widely at conferences and contributed to BBC and Voice of America broadcasts. His latest book, *Selling America: US Information Overseas, 1945–2001*, was published in 2006.

2.1 THE PARALLEL EXPERIENCE: US GOVERNMENT INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING SINCE 1942

In a detailed analysis of the history of American broadcasting Nicholas Cull argues that as Americans and their broadcasters once lobbied to preserve British international broadcasting so British voices should now be calling for the protection of Voice of America in English and the full breadth of America's international broadcasting. Just as the achievement of international broadcasting has been shared, so the hurt from its diminishing will be shared.

It is natural for Britain to be proud of its international broadcasting arm, but this has tended to bring a certain neglect of the experience and achievement of other international broadcasters. Audiences have a much more complete picture. The radio listeners of late 1980s Eastern Europe on the cusp of change spoke of Western broadcasters collectively and, while any list of favourite stations included the BBC, many also spoke of Radio France International, Deutsche Welle and Voice of America, and the most influential seems to have been Radio Free Europe. The latter two stations speak of a parallel experience in international broadcasting: that of the United States. Since the Second World War the USA has stood alongside Britain in the project to broadcast democracy to the world. The BBC served as midwife to American international broadcasting, provided an enduring model, and participated in significant moments of symbiosis – with the radios sharing their experience in counter-jamming and pooling the research from institutions like the BBC listening post at Caversham Park or Radio Free Europe's incomparable research operation. Yet significant differences remain and it is worth asking whether there are any lessons in the American experience for the future of British broadcasting.

Despite early experiments transmitting Woodrow Wilson's peace proposals to the world during the First World War, the USA was slow to commence sustained international broadcasting. The radio corporations that controlled America's airwaves saw no profit in short-

wave broadcasting and the few hardy independents who ventured into the business did so for religious reasons. The change came in the run-up to US entry into the Second World War. In exactly the same way as the British Secret Intelligence Service helped the USA to ready a wartime intelligence and covert operations capability, so the BBC – or more specifically BBC advisers serving in the Political Warfare Executive mission in New York – worked to nurture American international broadcasting. The station they helped plan – eventually known as Voice of America (VOA) – began broadcasting from New York in French and German in February 1942, borrowing BBC transmitters to relay the signal into enemy and enemy-occupied Europe. Further languages followed. Key content decisions also reflected British influence and experience including the policy of telling all the news, whether good or bad, and the decision to include cultural programming alongside the news. Located within the Office of War Information, the wartime VOA attracted a good deal of domestic political controversy largely because of its willingness to report editorial opinion hostile to American foreign policy, and its reputation as a hotbed of liberalism.

"Since the Second World War the USA has stood alongside Britain in the project to broadcast democracy to the world."

VOA narrowly survived post-war budget cuts and found a new home initially within the State Department structure; then, in 1953, following a mauling by Senator McCarthy, the station became part of the newly created United States Information Agency (USIA). It relocated from New York to Washington to facilitate agency oversight. The State Department via USIA demanded an input into VOA's output and especially news commentaries. But during these same years a second strand of American international broadcasting had begun, which had a rather different purpose and a much more substantial political input. In the later 1940s a group of citizens, many of whom were veterans of the wartime Office of Strategic Services and some of whom worked for its successor, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), formed the notion of employing refugees from the Communist bloc to broadcast hardball propaganda back into their homelands. The network of stations was known collectively as Radio Free Europe (RFE). It purported to be supported by private donations to the Free Europe Committee – which also founded the Free University of Berlin and floated messages into the East by balloon – but in reality the bulk of the funding came from the CIA. RFE went on the air in 1950. A sister station aimed at Russia, eventually known as Radio Liberty, followed in 1953.

The existence of the two systems – VOA and RFE/RL – allowed the United States to develop a two-track approach to international broadcasting along the lines of the 'Good Cop/Bad Cop' interrogation technique. RFE/RL hit hard with reports of abuse in Eastern European factories and denounced local commissars by name, serving as a substitute – or in the jargon of US international broadcasting a *surrogate* – for a free press in each nation, while VOA wooed the East with world news, visions of American life and its famous jazz hour, hosted by Willis Conover. They weathered the storm of 1956 when both VOA and RFE came under attack for encouraging false hopes in Hungary during that country's anti-communist rising. The existence of the surrogates RFE and RL permitted the journalists at VOA far more of a free hand to maintain and develop a culture of balance than would have been possible had the Voice needed to please both the USIA and the CIA. In 1960 this culture was enshrined in a VOA charter. Ironically, while the charter was based on the perceived practices of the BBC, there is abundant evidence of the BBC's external services working with the equivalent of the CIA's psychological warriors – the Foreign Office Information Research Department – with some services turning to IRD for not just some but nearly all scripts. That the BBC consistently ranked ahead of VOA in the perception of credibility may be testimony to the discretion in IRD's output rather than its absence.

Like the BBC, RFE/RL and VOA struggled against Soviet jamming in all but their English language broadcasts. The existence of multiple channels placed an increased strain on Communist countermeasures, the very existence of which served to undermine the credibility of the Eastern regimes.

"The existence of multiple channels placed an increased strain on Communist countermeasures, the very existence of which served to undermine the credibility of the Eastern regimes."

The 1960s saw a number of key developments. In 1965 the USA hit on an organising concept for its global information work. Embracing the term 'public diplomacy' the leadership of USIA looked to co-ordinate its international advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange and broadcasting work. The concept did not prevent VOA from continuing to buck against attempts to shape its output. As in the UK, where the BBC re-branded its World Service, VOA increased its emphasis on the developing nations. Meanwhile RFE/RL was shaken by the public revelation of its true revenue source. For a season the future of these stations hung in the balance, though in 1972 the Nixon administration successfully established a parent Board for International Broadcasting to administer the stations. VOA strained against its parent agency USIA's

attempts to shape its reporting of Watergate and the last days of the Vietnam War and, winning support on Capitol Hill, was rewarded in 1976 by having the VOA charter written into US law. Although unable to break free from USIA and the bureaucracy of 'public diplomacy' altogether, the station's internal news culture was strong enough to rebuff the long arm of political pressure. Soon after the charter became law VOA began to carry editorials giving an explicit statement of American foreign policy on a particular theme. These were clearly labelled and buffered from regular programmes, but marked VOA as a different animal from the increasingly independent BBC. Staff reluctantly accepted the editorials as the price of congressional support.

"Official interest in public diplomacy… meant that the USA was prepared to lobby at the highest level in support of fellow international broadcasters. In 1970 and again in 1979 plans to cut the BBC World Service received a diplomatic shot across the bows from the USA."

America's integrated concept of public diplomacy meant that the foreign policy bureaucracy had rather more appreciation of the relevance of international broadcasting than their counterparts overseas. Perversely the periodic attempts to shape the output of the radios by the National Security Council, State Department and certain embassies were a testament to their perceived significance. The same could be said of the sustained Soviet jamming and the 1981 bomb attack on RFE's headquarters in Munich. While the official interest in public diplomacy was not always reflected in generous budgets it meant that the USA was prepared to lobby at the highest level in support of fellow international broadcasters. In 1970 and again in 1979 plans to cut the BBC World Service received a diplomatic shot across the bows from the USA.

The Reagan years saw something of a Golden Age in American international broadcasting as budgets swelled and the radios begun upgrading their outdated technology. The early days of the administration had brought clashes between the politically appointed VOA administration and its corps of journalists, but an uneasy truce emerged as the leadership of the Voice passed to a succession of directors such as Gene Pell, Ken Tomlinson and Richard Carlson whose commitment to news outweighed their political affiliation. Probably the key moment for the radios came in April 1986 when the stations transmitted news of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster at a time when the Soviet Union sought to repress the news. The decade saw new ventures in US international broadcasting including the launch of

a satellite television service – WORLDNET – a youth-oriented television channel in Berlin (RIAS TV) and most controversially of all first radio and then television aimed at Castro's Cuba: Radio and TV Martí. The problem with TV Martí was that Castro had no difficulty jamming the transmission. This did not deter Congress from pumping vast sums into the station. The Cuban American lobby had considerable leverage, more especially as pundits began to predict that the vote in Florida might someday swing an entire election.

Despite the acclaimed role of the radios as a catalyst in the changes of 1989, a parallel role in covering the crisis in China, and distinguished service in the Gulf War of 1991, the 1990s proved a difficult decade for US international broadcasting. The collapse of communism raised the possibility that RFE/RL and its 'surrogate mission' might be redundant. 'Why', it was asked, 'have Radio Free Europe when Europe is free?' RFE/RL fought tooth and nail to survive. Largely because of the strength of their lobby and the support of Senator Joe Biden who hailed from Delaware, the state in which the radios were incorporated, the International Broadcasting Act of 1994 preserved RFE/RL under a common roof with VOA and Martí. VOA also had to fight for its life and convince committees of sceptical Republicans that the rise of the Cable News Network did not remove the need for a global radio funded by the US government. 'CNN is great', VOA director Geoff Cowan was fond of saying, 'if you speak English and live in a hotel.' The final act of America's post-Cold War rationalisation of its foreign policy machine was to fold the United States Information Agency into the State Department. At this stage Voice of America achieved its final independence, being grouped alongside RFE/RL, the Martís and newcomers, Radio Free Asia and Radio Free Iraq, under a Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). The BBG was designed to shut out unwanted political influence and hence State Department input was limited to an *ex officio* seat for the Secretary of State on the board, but the experience of Voice staff during the post 9/11 period would be rather that it has been shut in: with politically appointed board members attempting to exercise an unprecedented influence on their output.

"The post 9/11 period has seen the usual struggles over US broadcasting, with the cause of balanced reporting generally winning out."

The post 9/11 period has seen the usual struggles over US broadcasting, with the cause of balanced reporting generally winning out. In the weeks following the attacks VOA journalists hit the headlines by insisting on airing an interview with Taliban leader Mullah Omar. The most significant new development has been the creation of a range of

niche broadcasters, beginning with a new family of music and talk stations aimed at the youth of the Arab world under the title Radio Sawa (from the Arabic for 'together'). The architect of this initiative was board member and domestic broadcasting magnate Norman Pattiz who, even before the attacks of 11 September 2001, saw a need to reach out to the rising generation of young Arabs. Sawa premiered in 2002 developing six feeds for local audiences in Egypt, the Gulf, Iraq, Morocco, Sudan and the Levant. Resources came from the closure of VOA's Arabic Service, which Pattiz argued had too small an audience share to justify its retention as a parallel service. In 2004 the BBG added an Arabic language satellite television station, Alhurra ('the free one'). Opinion has been sharply divided over the effectiveness of these stations. The BBG has been able to point to evidence of considerable audiences for Sawa and a modest beginning for Alhurra, while their detractors have variously questioned the validity of the research, the ability of either slick news programmes or a lively audio mix of American and Arab music to make a difference in the war on terror. While Sawa and Alhurra have challenged the ideologically charged language of local reporting of the Middle East by referring to terrorists and suicide bombers rather than freedom fighters (*fedayin*) and martyrs (*shahidim*), critics have questioned whether this is worth the cost of the service. Although Sawa and Alhurra took shape outside the VOA, other new services have been formed within the VOA structure. RFE/RL and VOA have collaborated on a service to Iran called Radio Farda (from the Farsi for 'future'). VOA to Pakistan and portions of Afghanistan has re-branded as Aap ki Dunya (meaning 'Your World'). Unfortunately for VOA and RFE/RL the increased pressure to expand strategic priority services has prompted budget cuts elsewhere. Services to Eastern Europe have been eliminated or transformed into internet feeds, and, more than this, Turkish, Thai and other services are in jeopardy; indeed, at the time of writing VOA's worldwide English service is facing elimination.

*"While Sawa and Alhurra [VOA radio stations] have challenged the ideologically charged language of local reporting of the Middle East by referring to terrorists and suicide bombers rather than freedom fighters (*fedayin*) and martyrs (*shahidim*), critics have questioned whether this is worth the cost of the service."*

What, then, are the lessons of the American experience in international broadcasting? The first is to underline the value of state international broadcasting even in the era of CNN and Sky News. Why should Rupert Murdoch broadcast stories that will hurt his commercial interest

in China? The West needs VOA or Radio Free Asia to complete its perspective on the news. The second is a testament to the importance of journalistic ethics and the ability of committed professionals to counterbalance political pressures and maintain credibility. Political pressure does not mean political compliance and the American broadcasters have worked hard to hold the line since 9/11. The third is the value of supplementing global material, and material projecting the values and culture of home with locally specific material in the surrogate tradition. The achievement of Radio Free Europe is known to all Eastern Europeans but seldom acknowledged within the United States. Of the negative lessons, perhaps the most obvious is the extent to which the goal of an integrated public diplomacy can provide a logic for political intrusions in a realm in which objectivity and credibility are fragile prerequisites.

"International broadcasting does not occur in hermetically sealed units binding one listener to a speaker overseas; rather, audiences benefit from multiple perspectives."

The final and most complex lesson is to remember that international broadcasting does not occur in hermetically sealed units binding one listener to a speaker overseas; rather, audiences benefit from multiple perspectives. Democracy is more appealing if it is available in European *and* American *and* Asian versions; the news is better if it can be accessed from global state-funded *and* global commercial and regional sources, to listeners who are thereby empowered to triangulate on a story and find their truth amid a plurality of voices. The logical extension of this argument is that audiences are hurt by the disappearance of international voices from their media market. As Americans and their broadcasters once lobbied to preserve British international broadcasting so British voices should now be calling for the protection of Voice of America in English and the full breadth of America's international broadcasting. Just as the achievement of international broadcasting has been shared, so the hurt from its diminishing will be shared.

British politicians across the political spectrum give their views on the value of impartial and truthful information to a global audience. They also assess the importance of the BBC presenting the character of the United Kingdom to the world.

POLITICIANS

HILARY BENN MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

After Labour's 1997 General Election victory, Hilary was appointed as special adviser to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. In June 1999, he was elected as Member of Parliament for Leeds Central. From 1999 to 2001 he was a member of the Environment, Transport and the Regions Select Committee and Vice-Chair of the Backbench Education Committee of Labour MPs. In 2001 he was appointed as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development. Between May 2002 and May 2003, he was Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Community and Custodial provision at the Home Office. In May 2003 he was appointed as Minister of State for International Development and in October that year was made Secretary of State for International Development. In May 2005 he was re-elected and re-appointed.

3.1 POLITICS, DEVELOPMENT AND MEDIA

Hilary Benn believes that the real potential of new global media lies in development – in changing people's aspirations and the demands they make of their fellow citizens and their governments. The view of the British Government is that the best way to work towards the Millennium Development Goals is to help countries to help themselves, and the role of the media in this is crucial.

Nearly a thousand years ago, Bi Sheng invented the first rudimentary printing presses in China. It took another four centuries before a middle-aged German goldsmith called Johannes Gutenberg came up with a similar innovation in Europe and changed the way we communicate forever. Although a print run of the Gutenberg Bible, first issued in 1455,[i] took thousands of hours and a single copy cost more than three times the annual wage of an average clerk, Gutenberg's invention was a radical step forward in Europe and is widely credited with spurring the Renaissance – which led to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, political liberalism and modern democracy.

For the first time, information could be mass produced without rooms full of scribes, copying errors could be almost entirely avoided and exciting new ideas could spread around the world more quickly, unchanged by hearsay and oral repetition. This had huge implications for political and scientific progress; in 1999, a New York arts and entertainment TV station was named Gutenberg after – in their view – the most important person of the last millennium.

Fast forward to 2006 and commentators are drawing parallels between the 1450s and the contemporary world. Once again, technical wizardry – this time in the form of the internet, computers, mobile phones and satellite television – is making information much easier to reproduce and share, fostering more open and frequent communication. It is clearer than ever that we share a small and fragile planet. And in

parallel with these technological innovations, the way people use and interact with media is also changing.

In the spirit of Salam Pax, the 'Baghdad Blogger' whose internet diary from inside Iraq was read around the world, 'citizen journalists' everywhere now routinely report on events as they happen, uploading footage recorded on camcorders or mobile phones and having their say online in thousands of instant and globally accessible fora. These developments may be familiar. But it is easy to forget how quickly things have changed: just a decade ago, when journalists like Kate Adie were first covering the Balkans crisis, one of the most important journalistic skills was the ability to actually get footage back to the studio in one piece.[ii]

"Comment has become a more central part of news reporting – as people become used to following events almost as they happen, they expect detailed analysis of the implications to come ever faster."

Subsequent shifts in communications technology have changed the nature of politics around the world. In Britain, the advent of 24-hour, on-demand news has meant that politicians have to be able to respond to events as they happen. And, crucially, comment has become a more central part of news reporting – as people become used to following events almost as they happen, they expect detailed analysis of the implications to come ever faster. At a superficial level, this has meant that Government departments have had to become much more professional in the way they respond – planning for unexpected contingencies far in advance, and placing press offices under much more pressure than ever before. But at a deeper level these changes have also shaped the way political decisions are taken.

Government runs on information. First thing almost every morning I sit down to a briefing on the day's news with officials from the Department for International Development (DFID). The briefing relies on a range of sources – many of which are in the public domain. The days of the man in Whitehall having privileged access to all the world's news are long gone. I think this is something we should welcome: in theory, the better the information and the more diverse and comprehensive the sources, the better the decisions and the easier the scrutiny. Technological advances over the last decade have made it far easier for Government departments to gather and marshal information, and to undertake consultation. I think that this – along with the Freedom of Information Act – has made the decisions politicians take more transparent and open, extending the potential for informed and constructive debate. The potential for new media to help narrow the gap between politics and people is one we should embrace.

These changes have been felt profoundly in Britain. But they also have huge implications for the way we approach international development. New communication technologies are spreading rapidly, particularly in the developing world: Africa has been the fastest-growing mobile phone market in the world during the past five years, with more than 82 million users in 2005[iii] and has experienced faster growth in internet connections than any other continent.[iv]

The number of Africans with internet access increased six-fold between 2000 and 2006, with some countries experiencing even more rapid uptake: for example in the Democratic Republic of Congo there are 140,000 internet users today, compared to just 500 in 2000. And similar trends can be seen in other developing countries, particularly in Asia: in Vietnam the number of internet users has increased from 200,000 to 10 million over the last six years.

These technologies have made a huge difference, partly through their impact on economic growth: a recent London Business School study shows that in developing countries an increase of 10 mobile phones per 100 people boosts the economy's growth rate by 0.6 percentage points. At its simplest, a mobile phone allows farmers and fishermen to find out the prices in various markets, and allows a handyman to travel to nearby villages only when he is told by phone that there is a job available. In Kenya and Tanzania mobile phones are improving healthcare, where doctors use them to diagnose patients living in remote communities.[v] And a substantial proportion of African small businesses use mobile phones as their only means of communication: over 85 per cent of small businesses run by black individuals in South Africa rely solely on a mobile phone for telecommunications.[vi] The internet confers similar benefits, for example in providing both better access to overseas markets for local businesses or an easier way to find out about new healthcare treatments. DFID's work, providing start-up capital to local business and mobile phone companies in Africa, helps make this happen.

"The potential for new media to help narrow the gap between politics and people is one we should embrace."

In the three years that I have been International Development Secretary, I have seen first hand how much difference these technological changes have made to people's economic livelihood. But this is not the whole picture: perhaps more fundamentally, I have also seen how the communication revolution of the last decade has changed people's expectations and aspirations.

Earlier this year I was in Vietnam, talking to a group of women in a mountain hamlet that had only recently been connected to the electricity grid. For the first time, these women could watch television

in their homes. Seeing a surprisingly large set balanced on a cupboard in the corner of the room, I asked them what their favourite programme was. The instant and universal reply? The news. What these women really wanted was to find out about events both elsewhere in Vietnam and in the rest of the world – because they see themselves as global citizens, with strong connections to other people wherever they live. These women are fundamentally aware of the growing interdependence of the modern world. And there are millions like them: television, through the news, through soap operas and even through the World Cup, has fundamentally changed people's viewpoint.

I also asked them about the practical differences that television had made to life in the village. Again, the reply was instant and collective: the position of women had started to shift. These women and their husbands, brothers and friends had seen that in other countries, and other parts of their country, women and men played more equal roles. And so they had pushed for change in their own homes.

I think this is where the real potential of a new global media lies for development – in changing people's aspirations and the demands they make of their fellow citizens and, crucially, their governments. Comparisons with the developed world fuel demand for change. And a more open media can help people hold their governments to account – one of the most important factors in successful development. Our own history shows us this clearly.

In the 19th century, it was the people who got on their horses and then on the trains (when they were invented) and who travelled the length and breadth of the land to report back to society on the conditions in which so many people lived, who helped to change the face of Britain. From William Cobbett with the *Political Register* and *Rural Rides*; to the novels of Charles Dickens; to Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* – a book that exemplifies the power of words and images to inspire people to act. This was great social reform born of great reporting.

Looking back over the last few decades, there is a striking difference between the countries that have reduced poverty successfully and those that have not.[vii] It is increasingly apparent that the all-important difference is the quality of governance: the capability to deliver goods and services to citizens; the responsiveness of governments to the needs of especially the poorest groups in society; and the ability of citizens to hold their governments to account. Where governance is bad, sustained economic growth will be impossible, foreign investment withers, the threat of conflict is ever present and the poorest suffer most. Where governments are capable, responsive and accountable, countries can work, trade and develop their way out of poverty, aided by support from donors. In the long term this is the only solution to global poverty: even a small increase in the standard of governance leads to a threefold increase in living standards and a two-thirds decline in infant mortality in the long run.[viii]

> *"The kind of good governance needed depends to a great extent on transparency and the free availability of information – both of which depend in turn on the media and civil society asking difficult questions of their governments."*

This is why Britain has put good governance at the heart of our approach to international development. Our view is that the best way to work towards the Millennium Development Goals is to help countries to help themselves. This means reducing and altering the conditions we put on aid, focusing on better financial management, steps which will reduce poverty, improved governance, tackling corruption and respect for human rights rather than detailed economic prescriptions. And the role of the media in all this is crucial.[ix]

The kind of good governance needed depends to a great extent on transparency and the free availability of information – both of which depend in turn on the media and civil society asking difficult questions of their governments.

It is indeed right and proper for the media to ask tough questions and encourage debate. Business associations can point out how to improve conditions for investment and remove red tape. Civil society groups such as trade unions, co-operatives and faith groups can press for better public services. And in many countries, civil society is helping to improve the quality of public spending by identifying whether the poor – including women and the disabled – will benefit.[x] In Bolivia, they monitor oil revenues. In Bangladesh, grassroots organisations are helping members get land rights. All of this depends on a free media and the freedom to make your voice heard.

But these are also freedoms we should value for their own sake. Development and reducing poverty – in any society – are not only about what Amartya Sen calls the 'freedoms from': the things we fought hard for in our own history and the process by which Beveridge's five giants of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness were slain by social security, healthcare, education, housing and employment. Rather, if development is to mean anything – whether here in the UK or internationally – it has also to be about what Sen calls the 'freedoms to': the freedom to choose – to choose people to represent your views; the freedom to make your views heard; to associate freely with others; to join a political party or a trade union; and the freedom to worship and practise your own religion.

If you ask the world's poorest people, they will tell you how much these things mean to them. Interviews done by the World Bank with 60,000 poor men and women from scores of countries showed that for them poverty is above all about having no power and no voice, and about shame and humiliation. Our best defence against inhumane conditions is a belief in our own humanity. But this can only be fully realised if our rights to be human are also realised.

We should be optimistic about the future. Although there will of course be setbacks and difficulties along the way, enormous progress has been and continues to be made. British aid helps 5,000 more people get out of poverty every single day. The proportion of people in developing countries who can read and write has risen from under half to nearly three-quarters over the last 40 years. Average life expectancy has risen by 15 years. All enormous achievements.

Over the next decade, as part of our wide-ranging work in tackling poverty, we will continue to promote a thriving and responsible media in developing countries. Our new Governance and Transparency Fund will help develop civil society and media organisations around the world. We will continue to train journalists, editors, producers and managers. And we will support initiatives to bring freedom of information to those who do not currently have it. Our support for the BBC World Service's new Arabic television news channel will help ensure that a different impartial perspective is available to millions who previously had fewer options.

"Country by country, we will continue to support innovative media projects that help tackle the problems the world's poorest people face every day."

Country by country, we will continue to support innovative media projects that help tackle the problems the world's poorest people face every day. And although new technology is making new ways of reaching people possible almost everyday, we will also remember that old technologies are sometimes still the best.

An example that I often think about, which demonstrates the power of the media to make a difference in even the most difficult circumstances, is Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Radio Okapi, funded by DFID, is the country's most popular station, with tens of millions of listeners. It broadcasts good programmes. And it offers objective reporting and a forum to open up discussion against a background of conflict.

The station played a major role in restoring peace after years of conflict had ravaged the country through the mid-1990s. And when the inter-Congolese dialogue began, Radio Okapi broadcast regular unbiased news reports as well as the DRC's first political magazine programme, *Dialogue among Congolese*, which gave opposing factions their first opportunity to discuss their ideas in a forum people could trust.

This example shows how important media can be to creating the conditions for successful development. And as we look to the future, we need to look outwards. The success of Make Poverty History was in no small part due to innovative use of all forms of media, particularly online, to forge a coalition with enormous political weight and influence. The commitments made at Gleneagles were only possible because politicians from across the world knew the strength of global public support. People came together in a common cause and campaigned for change. In the end, it will be politics – at home and in developing countries – that will make the difference.

i There are two copies of the 1455 edition in the British Library today which can be compared online at: http://prodigi.bl.uk/treasures/gutenberg/search.asp

ii Adie, K. (2003) *The Kindness of Strangers*.

iii Eldis (2005). Available at http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC18516.htm

iv Internet World Statistics (2006). Available at http://www.internetworldstats.com/index.html

v DFID (2005) Development Works. Available at http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/development-works.pdf

vi Eldis (2005). Available at http://www.eldis.org/ static/DOC18516.htm

vii DFID (2006) *Eliminating World Poverty: making governance work for the poor*.

viii World Bank (2006) Governance Matters 2006.

ix World Bank (2006) *Global Monitoring Report*.

x DFID (2006) *Eliminating World Poverty: making governance work for the poor*.

JOHN WHITTINGDALE, OBE MP

CONSERVATIVE MEMBER FOR MALDON AND EAST CHELMSFORD, AND CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEE FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

John was educated at Winchester College and University College, London. From 1988, he was Political Secretary to Margaret Thatcher until she left office in 1990. He entered Parliament in 1992 and joined the Shadow Cabinet in 2001, covering variously Trade and Industry, Agriculture, and Culture, Media and Sport. He has chaired the House of Commons Select Committee covering the last of these fields since July 2005.

3.2 SHOWING THE WAY

The provision of impartial and truthful information is immensely valuable in its own right. The UK should be prepared to contribute to this cause because it is in a position to do so more effectively than anybody else. The BBC must make sure it remains the most trusted of all the world's broadcasters so that it can stay as prominent among the international broadcasters of the 21st century as it was among those of the 20th.

It is easy to imagine that the heyday of international broadcasting lies in the past. Nowadays, many people doubtless associate it with King George VI's messages to the colonies, Lord Haw-Haw's vain efforts to demoralise wartime Britain, or the ideological battle of the air-waves that characterised the dark days of the Cold War. I believe that this view is mistaken. Today, the issues may be different, but the transmission of ideas and information across national frontiers remains as important as it has ever been.

Unfortunately, authoritarian governments determined to isolate their peoples from the global conversation are still very much with us. The Chinese government decides which web pages its citizens are allowed to look at. In Iran, satellite TV dishes are still technically illegal. While in North Korea, every effort is made to prevent its people finding out about life outside. In too many countries, people who depend solely on state broadcasters for their news continue to find themselves subject to a diet of at best partial, at worst fanatically extremist, misinformation.

Nor is it only governments who are polluting the wellsprings of enlightenment. Recently, I attended a presentation organised by the think-tank Policy Exchange. The New York Police Department intelligence analyst Madeleine Gruen outlined some of the ways in which Islamist extremists use music and games on the internet to radicalise young people. She described, for example, the popularity of the music of an American group called 'Soldiers of Allah', and how the lyrics used by such performers could encourage a youngster to

become a jihadi. Such propaganda is both insidious and powerful. Overall, her message was alarming, particularly since it is not obvious how the dissemination of such material can be prevented.

In a world in which potentially dangerous material of this kind bombards people from ever more sources, we depend on international broadcasters to provide an alternative stream of truth and moderation. Of course, some of these broadcasters are providing propaganda of their own. Fortunately, however, several of them can be relied upon nowadays to do their best give a reasonably fair and accurate account of events.

Although not all would agree, I include in this category the controversial Qatar-based television service Al Jazeera, which has recently opened an English-language channel. Following 9/11, Al Jazeera has been condemned in the United States as a tool of terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda. It has even been reported that the Bush administration talked of bombing its headquarters, jokingly or otherwise. I believe that the fears behind such reactions are almost entirely misplaced.

Not long ago I visited Al Jazeera headquarters in Doha, and was struck by the fact that that many of the staff had come straight from the BBC Arabic TV service following its closure in April 1996, just before Al Jazeera launched. Their approach to their jobs did not seem to me that different from what would have been expected of them at their previous place of work. Clearly, the standpoint from which they view the world differs from that of the BBC, but their output cannot be considered propaganda.

"The more diverse the cacophony on the air-waves becomes, the more important it is that its many voices are accompanied by one transmitting our own idea of what constitutes a fair and accurate portrait of events."

The journalists to whom I talked made it clear that they think carefully about how to handle videos provided by al-Qaeda and footage from terrorists showing the execution of captives. Like their counterparts elsewhere, they weigh carefully their responsibility to transmit the news against the danger of being exploited for propaganda purposes. Sometimes they may have made a wrong call, as have others, but they recognise the dilemmas confronting their trade. They are also willing to criticise Middle Eastern governments, particularly those in the Gulf, although whether such boldness extends to the government of Qatar, which provides the station's funding, is perhaps a little more doubtful.

In addition to Al Jazeera, we are currently seeing new international broadcasting channels launched in France, Russia, Brazil and other countries. Some of these may also have much of value to

offer. Nonetheless, the arrival of such services in no way diminishes the need for Britain to maintain its own activities in this area. On the contrary, the more diverse the cacophony on the air-waves becomes, the more important it is that its many voices are accompanied by one transmitting our own idea of what constitutes a fair and accurate portrait of events.

"It remains important to provide audiences with a British view of the arts, sport and science as well as news. Exposure to the culture of other countries breaks down barriers and leads ultimately to an improvement in relations."

Britain invented international broadcasting 70 years ago, and can claim to have led the world in this field ever since. The BBC's overseas services certainly play an important part in my own life. Like many, I take comfort when abroad from hearing the announcer say 'This is London' and I keep in touch with news from home and around the world by tuning in or by keeping an eye on their web output. Almost all to whom I have spoken about them, in whatever country I have visited, has held them in high regard, and this reflects an unmatched reputation for objectivity, impartiality and truth.

It is sometimes questioned why Britain's taxpayers should be expected to fund services aimed at foreigners, and they are often told in reply that overseas broadcasting brings economic and other benefits to our country. The importance of such benefits should not be underestimated. Overseas broadcasting is an essential element of British foreign policy. It enhances our influence in the world, promotes British skills and expertise and helps to combat extremism that might damage us. Nonetheless, I do not believe that self-interest provides the main justification for our having a World Service.

The provision of impartial and truthful information is immensely valuable in its own right. We should be prepared to contribute to this cause simply because we are in a position to do so more effectively than anybody else. In so far as we can play a part in building an open, free and democratic world, we should do so, and international broadcasting provides us with one tool for advancing this ambition.

If BBC World Service became a channel for state propaganda, it would lose the capacity to play this role. It therefore remains vital that the BBC should continue to be as independent from government as it has always been. At the same time, its view of the world should be a British one, just as Al Jazeera is legitimately an Arab one. That means it must speak of the Falkland Islands, not the Malvinas, although it should of course give a full and fair account of Argentina's claim to the territory.

When it comes to Iraq and Afghanistan, it is the BBC's job to provide full coverage of the views of the many different participants in events. At the same time, it must also explain clearly why British troops are involved in these countries, and how the British Government wants to see matters develop. By fulfilling both of these functions, it can provide a balanced view of the kind that may not always be available from other broadcasters.

There is no doubt that there are sensitivities attached to the performance of this dual function. There are often complaints about the BBC's conduct. It has been accused of favouring the Arabs rather than the Israelis. Both Pakistan and India have criticised its coverage of the Kashmir dispute. Its treatment of the European Union has been challenged. Nonetheless, my own view is that in an increasingly complicated and fractious world, most of the time BBC World Service gets it just about right.

"Despite the speed of take-up of new media, radio is likely to remain an enormously important medium, particularly in reaching closed societies, and I should hate to see the BBC's short-wave services suffer any more than they have done already."

There has been some dissatisfaction about the deployment of what must inevitably be limited resources. Personally, I am sad at the passing of the Eastern European services. Nonetheless, I appreciate that, if priorities have to be set, then broadcasting to what are now free, democratic countries must give way to more urgent needs. It is not easy to argue with the current emphasis on the Middle East and the rest of the Moslem world.

Some have suggested that BBC World Service should reorder its priorities by axing all output other than news, and using the savings to extend its coverage. My own view, however, is that it remains important to provide audiences with a British view of the arts, sport and science as well as news. Exposure to the culture of other countries breaks down barriers and leads ultimately to an improvement in relations. BBC programmes like *Charlie Gillett's World of Music* and *Culture Shock* therefore have their part to play alongside the news, *Analysis* and *Assignment*. Initiatives like the corporation's recent attempt to find the best young band in the world are only to be encouraged.

I am also convinced that the BBC is right to embrace the new distribution platforms that are becoming available. There is no point in providing material only in forms which, increasingly, viewers and listeners no longer wish to access. Nevertheless, despite the speed of take-up of new media, radio is likely to remain an enormously important medium, particularly in reaching closed societies, and I should hate to see the BBC's short-wave services suffer any more than they have done already. Relaying programming via local stations is all very well, but it leaves output vulnerable to forces beyond the corporation's control.

When I find myself in a distant hotel room, I make a point of watching BBC World, the commercially funded global television service established in 1995, if it is available. I believe it was reasonable for the corporation to branch out into television, once the American media mogul Ted Turner had thrown down the gauntlet by launching the rolling news service Cable News Network. All the same, BBC World has some way to go before it will match the effectiveness of its radio equivalent. It is right that this service should carry cultural material, like its radio counterpart, but I believe it could do more to justify its slogan, 'Putting news first'.

I also welcome the BBC's plan, in response to a Foreign Office request, to launch an Arabic-language TV station in 2007. This will provide a 24-hour service to challenge the one provided by Al Jazeera, thereby reinstating the operation that the Qatar broadcaster so successfully plundered a decade ago. I am pleased to see that the BBC has had the courage to choose an editor for the new service from Dubai's Middle East Broadcasting Corporation, rather than automatically appointing someone from within its own ranks.

However, it is not television that is likely to prove the most important of the BBC's moves to extend its output beyond the confines of radio. Already, the internet is becoming a far more hotly contested battleground for the dissemination of both news and ideas. Of course, the BBC's website is already a leading player in global news provision, but there is scope for a considerable expansion of the overseas services' activities in this field.

"The World Service is subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office. Compared with the domestic services, it appears to give remarkably good value for money."

Every now and again, the status of the World Service is called into question. It is sometimes suggested that there might be gains in both efficiency and perceived independence if the operation were taken away from the BBC and put out to tender. In principle, I see no reason why a private sector operator could not run an overseas broadcasting system. However, there is a danger that it could be perceived to put at risk the service's objectivity and integrity. I believe it is more sensible to take a pragmatic approach. The fact is that the current set-up works well. As it ain't broke, I don't think it needs to be fixed.

Unlike the BBC's domestic services, the World Service is subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office. Compared with the domestic services, it appears to give remarkably good value for money. There have occasionally been suggestions that responsibility for it should be switched from the Foreign Office to the Department of Culture or the Department of Education. However, there seems little to be gained from such a step, since Foreign Office control does not seem to have led to serious questioning of the service's impartiality.

There is room for argument about whether there is sufficient oversight of the World Service. At present, the House of Commons Select Committee for Foreign Affairs interrogates World Service chiefs once a year. Foreign Office ministers can be questioned about the service in the Commons, even though no minister can be questioned about the BBC's domestic services. The BBC Trustees have a supervisory role as well. However, I am unpersuaded that the new Trust system will prove any more effective or independent than the old Board of Governors, and I believe that the BBC as a whole needs to be much more accountable. If relevant concerns emerged, it might well be appropriate for the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, which I chair, to get involved alongside the Foreign Affairs Committee.

The world of broadcasting is changing incredibly fast. The way in which people access information is changing as well, and the pace of that change is accelerating. These developments pose challenges for all broadcasters, BBC World Service as much as any. Yet, they offer opportunities as well.

In this new environment, people will increasingly wish to cut through the clamour to find a voice they can trust. The task for the BBC is to make sure it remains the most trusted of all the world's broadcasters. If it can achieve that, it can expect to stay as prominent among the international broadcasters of the 21st century as it was among those of the 20th. I am confident that it will continue to show its rivals the way, as it has so successfully in the past.

SIR MENZIES CAMPBELL MP

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MP FOR FIFE NORTH EAST, LEADER OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

As a successful university level athlete Ming ran the 200m for the GB team at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and became captain of the UK Athletics Team 1965-6. He held the British 100m record from 1967 to 1974. He was called to the Scottish Bar as an Advocate in 1968, but continued an association with the Scottish Liberal Party that he had held since university. In 1975 he became Chairman of the Scottish Liberal Party, and in 1982 a QC. In Parliament he has served primarily as a defence and foreign affairs spokesman, becoming Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in 1997 and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats in 2003.
He has been Leader of the Liberal Democrats since March 2006.

3.3 A TRANSFER OF UNDERSTANDING

Sir Menzies Campbell argues that there is a limit to how long you can suppress the thirst for information when citizens want it. He particularly values the BBC for presenting the character of our country to the peoples of the world.

For me, the role of international broadcasting has to be seen within the context of the internationalism to which my party and I are committed. Our internationalism is rooted in the idea that there must be rules governing relations between nations, and that the system for achieving this created after the Second World War has to be protected and enhanced.

In view of recent events, it may seem paradoxical that it was two great American Presidents, Truman and Eisenhower, who were instrumental in creating the international organisations on which we have relied for so long. Even Republicans like Reagan and Ford, and particularly George Bush Senior, subscribed to that international order. Then along came the second President Bush saying he was going to award himself the right of pre-emption, which is of course illegal under the United Nations Charter.

The British Prime Minister's closeness to Bush has to some extent involved us in subscribing to the same idea. Tony Blair has not gone as far as the neo-cons in the United States, but he has certainly given Bush cover. My Democratic friends in the United States tell me that without Blair standing beside him, Bush would not have been able to go to war against Iraq. What I want to see now is the restoration of the rules-based system which I firmly believe has served us so well in the past.

Without such a system, it is impossible, for example, to take Iran to task for its nuclear weapons aspirations, because our ability to do such a thing depends on the existence of internationally recognised rules – in this case, the non-proliferation arrangements. Without a rules-based system, it is hard to enforce universal standards of human

rights, because to do this you need to argue that the United Nations Convention on Human Rights should be treated as authoritative. I would like to see Britain rowing back from the position into which it appears to have found itself, that of seeming to support action outside the international legal framework.

The BBC's overseas services have a vital role to play in this. I am a bit of an old BBC hand: I used to be a member of the BBC's Broadcasting Council for Scotland, which had responsibility under the Governors' direction for BBC broadcasting in Scotland. As a result, I come to this subject with quite a lot of favourable BBC baggage. I am an enormous supporter of the World Service, and in my time I have fought its corner with the Foreign Office. There is a cadre of people in the service with an enormous commitment to providing objective news.

"News keeps politicians honest because it shows them up, and it conditions politicians to think more clearly by forcing them to talk more clearly."

To see why the objectivity of news is so important, you need only look at what happens when a news organisation effectively takes up a political position. Those who depend on the kind of news coverage that Fox News gives in America will end up with a view of Iraq which is not justified by the facts.

Of course, changing circumstances require different approaches. The BBC has recently closed down some of its European language services to provide funds for a new Arabic television service. I support that, so long as the new television service adheres to the independence and editorial integrity for which the BBC's radio overseas services have been justly admired. The Voice of America used to pump propaganda across the Iron Curtain. Understandably, therefore, it was the BBC World Service which the people of Eastern Europe used to believe, even though the Warsaw Pact countries spent a great deal of money trying to jam it. A regime's determination to block your output is one test of how good that output is.

Who do they believe in China? The BBC World Service. Why? It is not 100 per cent perfect, but the BBC has a reputation, by and large, for telling it as it is and for being objective. In the Middle East, up till now, Al Jazeera has almost had a free run but the way people are queuing up to work for this service, even Sir David Frost, is fascinating. Having established itself with its target audience, Al Jazeera is now trying to increase its objectivity. That is a good thing. If you want to be seen as authoritative you have to broaden your approach. You have to demonstrate that you are not partial.

In spite of Britain's assertive foreign policy, it is quite possible for a British broadcasting service to demonstrate impartiality. If a British defence minister insists that everything in the garden in Iraq is lovely, someone like me simply has to be allowed to come on afterwards to point out why this is not so. The key is access, debate, challenge and counter-challenge.

News keeps politicians honest because it shows them up, and it conditions politicians to think more clearly by forcing them to talk more clearly. I think 24-hour-a-day news is a mixed blessing. Its voracious appetite swallows you up as the whale swallowed Jonah. If you do not keep up, you do not get on it, or your party is not represented and your point of view is not heard. All the same, I think 24-hour-a-day news can make an editor sometimes go for effect. They concentrate on finding a different slant on a particular story, rather than adopting a more analytical approach which might take up more time.

The immediacy that is now available is an enormous boon for listeners and viewers. I remember when Britain won the Ryder Cup after BBC Radio Five Live had just been created. The new station covered the event, and did it so well, even without pictures, that it was the making of the network. Rolling news, both aurally and visually, can give listeners and viewers an enormous sense of being actually present at events. In the case of current affairs, however, it can suck up contributions without sufficient analysis of their content.

"To see why the objectivity of news is so important, you need only look at what happens when a news organisation effectively takes up a political position. Those who depend on the kind of news coverage that Fox News gives in America will end up with a view of Iraq which is not justified by the facts."

One of the things a British overseas television service can do is provide a window into Britain for the outside world. It has become the equivalent of the old Pathé Pictorial in some respects, with the advantage that you can pick up Sky in your hotel room without having to go to the cinema. Such services certainly have the capacity for spreading understanding of Britain's culture and of the kind of country that we are, even if the vision they project is rather more London-centred than it ought to be. So long as they maintain journalistic integrity, credibility and editorial independence they can also help our country punch above its weight in world affairs.

If you think the values of liberal democracies like ours are worthwhile in themselves, and have the capacity to bring stability and economic advantage to people in other countries, the more we

disseminate those values the better it must be. You can look at this simply in a chauvinistic way, but there is a more altruistic position. Let me illustrate this by an experience of my own.

At the instigation of the World Service, I went to Hungary after the collapse of communism with a group of people including the news presenter Anna Ford. Our job was to run a two-day seminar with Hungarian politicians and journalists. The seminar opened with a showing of Jeremy Paxman's memorable attempt to get Michael Howard, the then Home Secretary, to answer the same question 13 times on *Newsnight* in 1997. The Hungarians could not believe what they saw. When the tape stopped they just sat there, their jaws dropping. When they had recovered their breath enough to speak, both journalists and government officials revealed themselves unable to comprehend that a journalist would have the temerity to behave that way to a government minister.

That interview was perhaps not typical, but showing political leaders on the rack displays a kind of integrity in broadcasting that can be very powerful. I do not think Hungarian broadcasting produced its own version of *Newsnight* overnight, but towards the end of the seminar the Hungarian journalists were starting to ask questions much more directly. The politicians too were beginning to appreciate the advantages of the British approach. They saw that the more they were able to deal with this kind of challenge, the more their credibility would be enhanced.

All this is a long way of saying that if we are able to communicate our political and cultural values at the same time as providing a good news service, then we can not only have considerable influence, but can also further acceptance of these values. This means that the countries to which we broadcast will be less likely to be unstable, less likely to go to war and less likely to succumb to corruption.

"If you think the values of liberal democracies like ours are worthwhile in themselves, and have the capacity to bring stability and economic advantage to people in other countries, the more we disseminate those values the better it must be."

The money which the Foreign Office spends on the BBC's overseas services is therefore money well spent. When you go to the Middle East, people tell you that they listen to those services. Before the Berlin Wall fell, people in Eastern Europe told you that they listened as well. Today, Chinese people will tell you discreetly that they listen too.

The BBC correspondent Mark Tully managed to maintain a reputation throughout India while at the same time being the voice of India in Britain. There was thus a kind of transfer of understanding.

Accountants may not be able to pin down the value of this sort of thing in a balance sheet, but there is no doubt that it is enormously important in helping countries understand each other. This is particularly true of countries like Britain and India where a complex former colonial relationship is shot through with both affection and aggravation.

"The BBC correspondent Mark Tully managed to maintain a reputation throughout India while at the same time being the voice of India in Britain. There was thus a kind of transfer of understanding. Accountants may not be able to pin down the value of this sort of thing in a balance sheet, but there is no doubt that it is enormously important in helping countries understand each other."

Countries like China, where governments still try to block the free flow of ideas, present a rather greater challenge. However, I think there is a limit to how long you can suppress the thirst for information. At the time of the Tiananmen Square uprising in 1989, there were about 350 fax machines in China and not much else in the way of communications, apart from the post. Yet by simply getting control of some of those fax machines, students were able to communicate with their peers across the country. However hard you try to suppress information, if the citizens are in any way inquiring, then the information will leak out. Information is like the bubbles in champagne: eventually they come to the top.

Overseas broadcasting ought to be considered an important part of Britain's foreign policy. If you go back to 9/11 and look at what *Newsnight* has done on issues such as terrorism and Iraq, you would have to acknowledge that there has been robust and independent editorial scrutiny. The government might not agree, but when governments have big majorities and go in for casual, sofa-based decision-making, it is particularly important that our broadcasters do the kind of job they have done. In some respects, and at certain periods, the BBC and the quality newspapers have provided more opposition to the government than Parliament has been able to.

If we can manage to convey the same approach overseas, we shall imprint on the minds of the peoples of the world the character of our country. And to those who have yet to enjoy our advantages, we shall hold out the prospect that they too can aspire to embrace democracy, freedom and human decency.

The emergence and impact of the arrival of new technology and methods of broadcasting change the economics broadcasting. The economists and business experts capture the broader policy consequences world wide.

BUSINESS

WILL HUTTON

CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
THE WORK FOUNDATION

The Work Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit research-based consultancy on work, workplace and employment issues.
Will began his career as a stockbroker and investment analyst, before working in BBC TV and radio as a producer and reporter. Before joining The Work Foundation, Will spent four years as editor-in-chief of the *Observer* and he continues to write a weekly column for the paper.
Will has written several economics books including *The World We're In*, *The State We're In*, *The State to Come*, *The Stakeholding Society* and *On The Edge* (with Anthony Giddens).
He won the Political Journalist of the Year award in 1993.
His other roles include: governor of the London School of Economics; honorary fellow, Mansfield College, Oxford; visiting professor, Manchester University Business School and Bristol University.
Will's latest book *The Writing on the Wall* has just been published by Little, Brown price £20.

4.1 THE CHINA SYNDROME

In assessing the position of broadcasting in China Will Hutton points out that the BBC faces an obvious temptation to play down its commitment to truth to make itself more acceptable to the Chinese regime, and thereby increase its penetration of the country. However he argues that there can be no compromise with the BBC's mission and predicts changes to the way China is governed.

I believe that the success of civilisations depends on the interplay between hard disciplines, whether these are economic or social, and softer ones. Thus, the rise of the West, as it began to take on China in the early part of the 19th century, was closely related to the interaction between the enlightenment spirit and the European institutions of the time.

Immanuel Kant captured the essence of that spirit when he called it 'daring to know'. I see the enlightenment as the sum of those institutions and processes that together mounted the period's great challenge to bureaucracy and monarchy. In this I include independent courts, ideas of justice and justification, decision-making through the consideration of evidence, science, accountability, democracy and government. Yet, as important as any of these are the roles of the media and freedom of expression. It seems to me that the West has taken these institutions and processes too much for granted, and today accords them too little protection and respect. This has been particularly true during the War on Terror, but, long before that war was declared, the tradition of the kind of journalism that can buttress citizenship was already growing weaker.

Thus, our struggle in the West ought now to be to rediscover the values of the enlightenment, and to reinvigorate the institutions it spawned. We somehow have to find a way of integrating both these values and institutions with our own more primitive instincts and with the intrinsic barbarism of our economic system. All of that then has to

be reconciled with the faith and religion which also go to make up the complex web that is Western civilisation.

The BBC, like the American Constitution, is a quintessentially enlightening institution. Its role is not properly understood even in Britain. It is not a government broadcaster; it is a public broadcaster. It has constitutional independence, and this constitutional independence spills over into its overseas services, even though these are primarily financed by the Foreign Office. The BBC's quest for objectivity constitutes 'daring to know' in the best sense of that expression.

It worries me that the corporation has allowed itself to become polluted by letting its journalism become infected with the kind of ethics that prevail in other parts of the media. Unfortunately, it sometimes gets wobbly about pursuing its vocation. Nonetheless, its overseas services do better than their domestic counterparts in staying true to what should be the ideal.

"In many countries in the Middle East… the BBC is trusted more than local news services. People know that the corporation is prepared to give the bad news as well as the good news about Britain; because of this, they trust it to tell the truth about their own societies."

What goes on in the minds of the BBC's overseas services' listeners and viewers is highly complex. To the casual observer it appears that they are being presented with a Western, and indeed specifically British, view of the world. In a sense this is true, but over a period they come to appreciate that this is a view which is also both consistent and honest. As a result, in many countries in the Middle East, for example, the BBC is trusted more than local news services. People know that the corporation is prepared to give the bad news as well as the good news about Britain; because of this, they trust it to tell the truth about their own societies.

To appreciate the value of trustworthy sources of information we need only look at the position in China today. Elite elements of Chinese society, like the educated middle class, together with the country's urban workers and rural peasants all understand that China cannot go on as it has done. They know that trying to manufacture a view of truth that corresponds to what the Communist Party is thinking is cruelly disabling. It leads to corruption, it leads to waste and it leads to environmental degradation.

All around you in China you can see the day-to-day impact of the absence of truthful communication. It manifests itself in drinking water that you cannot drink, and desertification so severe that sandstorms blow through the centre of Beijing. When you walk around Shanghai, you cannot escape the smell from big chemical plants that are actually

miles away. Four thousand people a year die of cancers induced by environmental degradation.

"All around you in China you can see the day-to-day impact of the absence of truthful communication."

All this is because there is not only no truth, but no capacity to hold authority to account either. Everybody in China knows that this disables the country both politically and economically. If China is to carry on growing at 10 per cent a year, it will have to reach levels of productivity comparable to those of Europe and America. Yet at present its productivity is only a fraction of theirs; it is lower today than it was under Mao. China's social scientists know this, China's state authorities know it and everyone running for power there knows it too.

The only way China has managed to grow in the way it has is by diverting savings on a colossal scale through state-owned banks into infrastructure spending, and by supporting state enterprises in a sustained way that has not hitherto been possible. On top of this, there have been market reforms allowing prices to be decontrolled. The economy's alchemy thus depends on a combination of price freedom and state control of investment.

The Chinese appreciate that they need to match the element of freedom they have introduced into their economy with an element of political freedom. Unfortunately, while the Communist Party recognises the demand for a more plural society and greater diversity of information sources, it also knows that these things would involve a challenge to its political predominance. It does not want to lose power, and hence it continues to rely on devices like its internet firewall to block the free flow of information.

"Standing by its enlightenment principles is more important [for the BBC] than getting into China quickly by compromising them."

In the face of such obstacles, what should be the stance of an international broadcaster like the BBC? It faces an obvious temptation to play down its commitment to truth to make itself more acceptable to the Chinese regime, and thereby increase its penetration of the country. This would be absolutely the wrong course. There can be no compromise with the BBC's mission. The BBC must stand by its standards and wait for the convulsion which I believe to be on its way in China.

I cannot tell you when that convulsion will come, but it will be an inevitable consequence of the contradictions currently besetting the country. Till it comes, the BBC must hold the line and be prepared to say it will take a 10-year view or perhaps a 20-year view, and that

standing by its enlightenment principles is more important than getting into China quickly by compromising them.

Already, there are signs that global media are having an impact in China in spite of all the regime's attempts to obstruct them. The increase in consumerism, the growing interest in Western lifestyles and the burgeoning demand for personal autonomy are all evidence of this. The grip of communism has never been total. It used to be a joke in post-revolutionary China that under their Mao suits women would wear gorgeous silk, and the same attitude is even more evident today.

"Already, there are signs that global media are having an impact in China in spite of all the regime's attempts to obstruct them."

Western influence spills out through Hong Kong and Taiwan, and the internet is very widely used. Thus, when the Chinese were campaigning to stop Japan becoming a member of the UN Security Council, they managed to collect 46 million signatures in support of their position. Although this was an instance of the government using the web for its own purposes, the ability of so many people to surf the web is bound to undermine top-down rule by the Party.

The BBC can help this process, not by giving its support to particular groups that are seen as progressive, but by promising to broadcast both news and comment straight. It should offer unbiased and impartial coverage through involved human beings and invite its listeners and viewers to make up their own minds. The mere process of reporting works as a brake on abuses of human rights. There are more and more expressions of protest in China, and, in dealing with them, the authorities have to make sure they do not kill people when the world is watching.

"The West will not win this battle by transferring lots of money to the Islamic world, or by shocking it, or by denying it, or by trying to humiliate it or to segregate it. The only way it will win is by demonstrating that it has a better idea about how to live a good life."

During the uprising of 1989, officials were desperate to ensure that no one was killed in Tiananmen Square, where the cameras were placed. It was people in the streets around the square who were killed, not people in the square itself. The Chinese government knows that it is being held to account, and that the accountability mechanism is not under its control.

In autumn 2005, for example, there were two terrible chemical spills, one in the north-eastern city of Harbin and one in the southern city of Guangzhou. State enterprises poured pollutants into local rivers,

making their water undrinkable. In both cases, the media were on the spot, to the discomfiture of the Chinese government. The international media also played an important role in the SARS crisis. It was reporters for *The Times* based in Hong Kong making contact with a dissident doctor who discovered that the outbreak in Beijing was far more serious than was being admitted. This disclosure forced the government to get rid of the Minister of Health and to change its line completely within a fortnight. Something similar has been occurring in the case of avian flu.

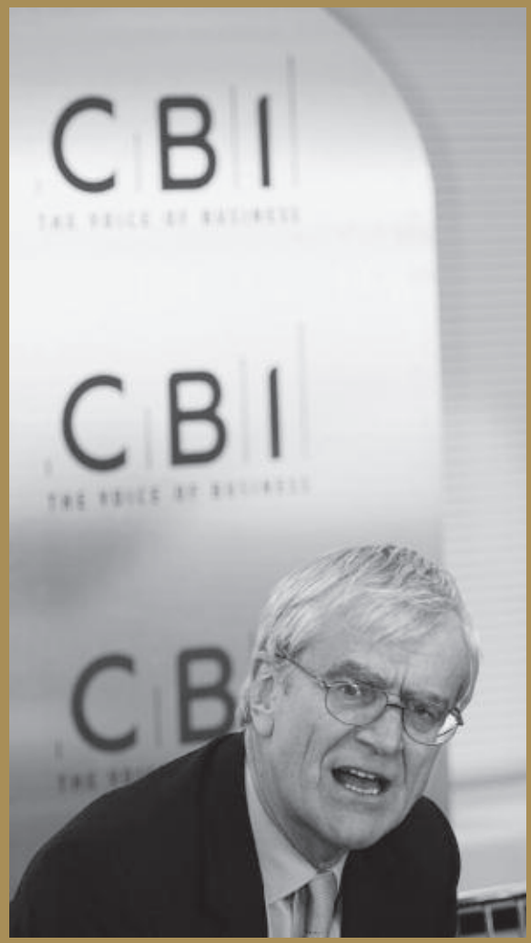
At the same time as the overseas media have been able to claim these achievements, China's own media are facing a serious clamp-down. The editors of China's youth daily newspaper and of the *Daily News* have both lost their jobs recently. Good journalism is becoming confined to the business press and a few outlets like a weekly magazine in Beijing which is allowed the opportunity to expose corruption because this is now in line with official policy. For the most part, the position of China's media today is not that different from what it was under Mao.

"One of the best advertisements for Britain and what Britain stands for is the institution which perhaps more than any other enshrines enlightenment values. Building up the BBC, investing in it and supporting it will prove the best contribution our country can make to the preservation and enhancement of the global commons."

In the face of such realities, the BBC has to stick to its guns. I have always thought that the pen is more powerful than the sword, and I think this is truer now than it has ever been. The challenge of Islamic fundamentalism ought to bring this home to us. The West will not win this battle by transferring lots of money to the Islamic world, or by shocking it, or by denying it, or by trying to humiliate it or to segregate it. The only way it will win is by demonstrating that it has a better idea about how to live a good life. Unless it does that, it is lost.

One way of going about this is by deploying the media. This is not just a matter of the news and current affairs output that lies at the heart of the BBC's overseas services, it is also about everything from telling stories to poetry. For some parts of the world, the issue of gender is also important. One billion people live in the greater Middle East, from Algeria to central Asia, and I think one of the reasons why they are essentially backward is the way they treat women. Media which explain what equality can mean can subtly demonstrate to half of this population that it is not inevitable that they should have to spend their time covered up. For them, demonstrations of gender equality by the Western media can be a very important source of inspiration.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the argument is between those of us in all parts of the globe who are children of the enlightenment and those who are in one way or another believers in fundamentalism, whether this is fundamentalism in religion, in the environment or even in the free market. And enlightenment is under siege everywhere. Against this background, one of the best advertisements for Britain and what Britain stands for is the institution which perhaps more than any other enshrines enlightenment values. Building up the BBC, investing in it and supporting it will prove the best contribution our country can make to the preservation and enhancement of the global commons.



RICHARD LAMBERT

DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE CBI

Richard was educated at Fettes College, Edinburgh, and Balliol College, Oxford. He joined the *Financial Times* in 1966, and in 1991 he took over the editorship. In 1995 he launched a project to challenge the *Wall Street Journal* in the USA and in 1997 moved back to New York for a year to launch a US version of the FT. In spring 2003, Richard became the first non-economist ever to sit as an external member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee. He also chairs the Retail Financial Services Group, is a trustee of the British Museum, a member of the UK-India Roundtable and the Franco-British Colloque, and has worked for the Business in the Community charity, for which he was awarded one of the Prince of Wales' Ambassador awards.

This essay consists of edited highlights from the 2006 Harold Wincott Foundation Lecture. Harold Wincott (1906-69) was a British economist and influential city journalist. He edited the *Investor's Chronicle* for 21 years, and was a columnist for the *Financial Times*.

4.2 THE FUTURE OF THE NEWS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Richard Lambert explores the broader policy consequences arising from the changes in the way that most of us learn about what is happening in the world.

There are two key questions that need to be answered when looking at world communications. First, what if any are the broader political consequences of a radical shift in the way that most of us learn about what's happening? And second, can we rely on market forces to deliver an informed citizenry in the future? Or is there a risk that we will see a growing underclass of people who are totally ignorant of what's going on in the world?

I'm going to focus my remarks mainly on newspapers, because that's what I know best, and mainly on the US. As I'll explain, the structure of the news media is very different on either side of the Atlantic. But as is so often the case, there are better data available in the US. This is in good measure because Americans care a lot more about the role of the media than we do, and are ready to invest in surveys about its impact on public life.

And I'm going to suggest that there are strong messages to be drawn from the changes that are taking place in the US today for what might happen to world tomorrow.

The important question is not about survival. It is about what kind of service newspapers will provide to the public as they adapt their business model – and with it their editorial content – to a digital world and a much more competitive environment.

In the words of one commentator, 'The glory of the newspaper business in the United States used to be its ability to match its success as a business with self-conscious attention to its social service mission'.

With little in the way of national competition, publishers reaped large returns from their domination of big metropolitan areas or regions. And they could afford to share some of those returns with their readers,

by substantial investment in editorial and a sense that their mission was not driven by the need to maximise profits.

Papers like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* remained in family ownership for generations, and had few reasons to worry too much about budgets. When Knight Newspapers finally went public in 1969, chairman John S. Knight told the bankers that 'as long as I have anything to do with it we are going to run the newspapers. We are going to spend money sometimes that the bankers wouldn't understand why, for future gains, and we do not intend to be regulated or directed by them in any way.' The poor man must be spinning in his grave at what's happened to his newspaper chain in recent years.

The result was, at least by UK standards, some very lavish editorial budgets. A dozen years ago, for example, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* had bureaux in Moscow, London, Rome, Jerusalem, South Africa, New Delhi and Berlin. By the time it changed hands in 2005, it was only left with Jerusalem.

Just as the big US newspapers believed that they had a mission that somehow extended beyond their commercial performance, so the same was true of television network news. The classic example was Ed Murrow of CBS, a man who in the words of one historian was more of an educator than a journalist, and whose 'legacy was a tradition of reporting from which the corporate officials, whatever their private feelings, simply could not back down'.

Back in 1980, ABC, CBS and NBC could each claim an audience of 16 to 19 million viewers for their nightly news shows. The network news really was a shared experience for millions of American families: 'a nightly national séance', in the words of one contemporary. By 2005, however, their audiences were down to between 8 and 10 million each, and the median age of these viewers was around 60.

"Viewers today are much more likely to learn about the latest health fad then they are about what's going on inside Putin's Russia."

Part of their problem has been the arrival of a feisty newcomer in the shape of Rupert Murdoch's Fox News. Founded in 1996, it overtook CNN in the ratings in the early 1990s, and it played right into the heart of America in the aftermath of 9/11. Vice President Cheney is said to insist on Fox being the default channel in any hotel he visits: its stars include the likes of Colonel Oliver North, of Iran Contragate fame, and the fearsomely right-wing Bill O'Reilly. Fox's audience share doubled between 2000 and 2004, and although it has slipped back somewhat since then, its average prime-time viewership per week is still within sight of NBC's.

Along with Fox came an explosion of cable networks, together with video games, a host of online offerings and mobile phone services to splinter viewer's attention. The days when the nation gathered round the water cooler to discuss what Murrow or Walter Cronkite had said the night before were gone forever.

"Digital competition is biting into the editorial budgets – and so into the content – of traditional newspapers and broadcasters. But that same competition is providing a whole range of new products and services that have the potential to make us far better informed about the world than we ever were before."

Against this background, the networks have been trimming their budgets consistently over many years. One of the most obvious consequences is that their foreign news bureaux have all but disappeared.

Except in times of great crisis, American viewers are essentially not interested in what's going on outside their country – and foreign coverage is very expensive. In 1970, CBS had 14 major foreign bureaux, 10 mini-bureaux and stringers in 44 countries. Today, it has eight foreign correspondents in just three bureaux. The result is that viewers today are much more likely to learn about the latest health fad then they are about what's going on inside Putin's Russia. Soft stories of this type boost the ratings and are cheap to produce.

In 2006, NBC Universal took the process a significant stage further when it announced cuts that, in the words of the *Wall Street Journal*, marked 'the starkest recognition yet that established TV networks can't keep carrying the high costs they were accustomed to in earlier decades, when they faced less competition for viewers' attention'. The axe is to fall most immediately on the news division. The company itself remains profitable – it expects operating profits of $3 billion on sales of $16.5 billion in 2006. But it has been dragging down on the earnings of its parent, General Electric, in recent quarters and that is not the way to win fame and fortune in today's environment. In the words of the television group's chief executive, NBC has had to recognise that news is 'not an area of high growth'.

Two other developments have also helped to change the American news media.

In 1987, the Federal Communications Commission abolished the so called Fairness Doctrine, which had required TV and radio broadcast to cover controversial issues of interest to their communities and to do so in a bipartisan manner. The effect of this doctrine had largely been to keep political commentary off the air. With that requirement gone, a new kind of voice began to be heard on the airwaves.

In 1988, the world first heard of Rush Limbaugh, a dedicated enemy of what he calls liberalism and a man whose website refers to Guantanamo Bay as Club G'itmo, a plush country residence. Here's a sense of the style:

Club G'itmo 4 Kids: Send your little jihadi to daycare in air-conditioned comfort! The food at Club G'itmo beats the taxpayer-provided lunches in the infidel's schools. Plus, we provide students with all the tools needed to worship the god of their choice, free of charge!

Hundreds of stations now carry his show, which in turn has prompted a whole range of other right-wing talk show hosts to take to the air.

The second big development has been the rise of the blogger. For the uninitiated, these are websites like an online journal, typically including daily postings, an archive of past entries, and a space for reader comment. Most of the tens of millions of blogs now available on line have just one reader: the blogger him – or herself. But some have substantial audiences, and quite a few commentators have switched from old media in a bid to capture their own equity – making themselves independent from the whims of publishers and editors.

"There is an extraordinary cornucopia of ideas and knowledge available on line for those people who want to look for it. But what about those people who are not willing or not able to make the effort?"

Bloggers have certainly left their mark, particularly on what they derisively call the MSM – the mainstream media. They hounded Trent Lott out of his office as Senate Majority Leader over a racist remark that had been glossed over by MSM. They did the same to veteran news anchor Dan Rather, when they exposed that the documents he had used in a story on President Bush's National Guard service had been a fake. They have also become part of mainstream politics. Howard Dean was the first to exploit the new medium properly when he came from nowhere in the 2003 campaign for the Democratic nomination. His 'Blog for America' served as the nerve centre of his entire campaign and helped him both to raise large sums of money and to build real momentum in the early stages.

Bloggers provided vivid on the spot coverage of the Tsunami disaster, well ahead of the mainstream media, and bloggers from Baghdad have told stories that simply weren't available to traditional reporters from their secure base in the Green zone.

So some of them get big audiences. According to one estimate, the four top blogs in the US now have a combined readership to match that of the *New York Times*. Almost by definition, bloggers are partisan: you don't look to them for a balanced view: on the one hand … and on the other. A good number of the most read are strongly right wing; others are in the liberal camp. What most of them share is their rage at the mainstream media. For example, several blogs are devoted solely to rubbishing the *New York Times* on a daily basis.

"The risk as time passes is that we will see a steep decline in that crucial component of a democracy – the well-informed citizen."

At a time when budgets are being slashed and staff laid off, the bloggers' attacks have certainly added to the sense of gloom and crisis in America's newsrooms. But should the rest of us care about what is happening to traditional media?

It's true that digital competition is biting into the editorial budgets – and so into the content – of traditional newspapers and broadcasters. But that same competition is providing a whole range of new products and services that have the potential to make us far better informed about the world than we ever were before.

For example, I'm a subscriber to the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* online: I no longer have to rely only on the editorial judgments of our own national newspapers, and when I choose to read them is a matter for me to decide – not the head printer. I can and do have direct access to the speeches, reports and data which the newspapers are writing about: if you are really interested in a subject, why not disintermediate the journalist altogether?

I'm not really into blogs, or audio and video downloads – but they are there if I feel like them. I can scan the world news headlines at my convenience, without having to wait for the next news broadcast or the evening paper. If I'm really keen, I can get them sent to my mobile phone.

The ability to exchange ideas and information freely around the world – these potentially are enormous benefits to society, of a kind that would have been unthinkable 40 years ago. However, this process of change – like any other – is not without risk. I'd like to mention two in particular.

The first is about the quality of journalism.

We are used to partisan coverage in the UK, where many of our newspapers have never been too concerned about the difference between news and comment, or have bothered to hide their party political bias. But we have had a powerful public news broadcaster with an obligation in its charter to provide the balance.

Not so in the US.

In the digital world, it is possible to rely only on those news sources which confirm your existing prejudices. You don't even have to think that there might be another side to the story.

Thus Republicans are far more likely to watch the Fox News Channel than are Democrats, and Democrats are substantially more likely to watch network news than Republicans. A tenth of Republicans say they regularly listen to Rush Limbaugh: not surprisingly, almost no Democrats are willing to make the same admission.

This can have consequences. In a survey in 2003, four-fifths of Fox viewers believed one or more of the following: Iraq was directly involved in September 11; world opinion favoured the Iraq war; and weapons of mass destruction had already been discovered. Less than a quarter of the listeners and viewers of National Public Radio or PBS made the same mistake.

It's hard to imagine that the venomous and destructive hostility between Republicans and Democrats which has been so visible in the US over the past decade has not been fed to some extent by the increasingly partisan tone of the media.

Moreover, it may be that the flood of round-the-clock news is damaging the cause of judicious journalism. The US media, taken as a whole, have not covered themselves with glory in the past few years. Self-inflicted wounds have played a part, such as the errors of judgment which cost the editor of the *New York Times* his job in 2003. Lack of self-confidence during a period of structural change might be another explanation.

"What commercial interest would a news publisher have in seeking to engage a relatively unsophisticated and uninterested young person into what's happening in the world?"

On top of all this came the aggressive press management of a largely hostile White House, especially at the time of the second Iraq war. As with the Blair administration in the UK, the White House was determined to promote the view that any delay in invading the country could lead to nuclear Armageddon, and it is now clear that some of America's most senior reporters were used either actively or passively to promote the approved plot line. The war was, at least initially, presented on television as a cross between 4 July and Halloween night, with flags fluttering and no unpleasant imaged of mayhem and death. With a few distinguished exceptions, no one seriously challenged the initial premise for the invasion, or drew attention until it was too late to the organisational chaos which followed the initial victory.

Frank Rich is a columnist on the *New York Times* who is deeply hostile to the Bush administration. You have to take account of this bias in reading his new polemic, a book called *The Greatest Story Ever Sold*. Still, I found myself brooding about his concluding paragraphs, where he suggests that worrying changes in the media started to affect US public life in the mid-1990s.

'That's when CNN was joined by even more boisterous rival 24/7 cable networks, when the Internet became a mass medium, and when television news operations, by far the main source of news for Americans, were gobbled up by entertainment giants such as Disney, Viacom and Time Warner. While there has always been a strong entertainment component to TV news, that packaging was now omnipresent, shaping the coverage of stories from Washington scandals to Wall Street bubbles to child abductions to war – and around the clock, not just on evening news, the morning shows and the occasional network news magazine. In this new mediathon environment, drama counted more than judicious journalism; clear cut 'evildoers' and patriots were prized over ambiguous characters who didn't wear either black or white hats. Once-definable distinctions between truth and fiction were blurred more than ever before, as 'reality' was redefined in news and prime-time entertainment alike.'

You don't have to go the whole way with Rich to worry about the character of a changing news media which is not certain of its future and which is absolutely preoccupied with audience figures.

The second of my two big risks is potentially more serious.

It's true that there is an extraordinary cornucopia of ideas and knowledge available on line for those people who want to look for it. But what about those people who are not willing or not able to make the effort? There is already evidence that people with relatively modest educational attainments are simply tuning out of the news altogether. A few decades ago, you could hardly avoid exposure to the networks news or the evening newspaper. Today, you can find a lot of other ways of entertaining yourself. And the risk as time passes is that we will see a steep decline in that crucial component of a democracy – the well-informed citizen.

A survey this summer by the Pew Research Center showed how news often takes a back seat to other daily activities for young Americans. For instance, 40 per cent of those under 30 had watched a movie at home the previous day, far more than read a newspaper, listened to radio news or went online for news.

The most alarming figure was this. A quarter of all Americans with a high school education or less had taken in no news of any kind on the previous day, whether from television, newspapers, radio or

the internet. For college graduates, by contrast, the proportion fell to 11 per cent.

In his book, *Tuned Out: Why Americans under 40 don't follow the news*, David Mindich tracks the way young people have become progressively less informed about their world in recent decades. He starts with a telling anecdote. Only 4 million of those aged 18 to 24 years old cast their vote in the 1998 mid-term elections. By contrast, 24 million votes were cast, mainly by young people, in the 2003 final of *American Idol*, the reality talent show.

It's not at all clear to me how market forces, left to themselves, will help to resolve this digital divide. What commercial interest would a news publisher have in seeking to engage a relatively unsophisticated and uninterested young person into what's happening in the world? And as economic forces increasingly shape editorial judgments, how will we be able to develop a properly informed citizenry?

I think this is an alarming prospect.

There are no signs that US policymakers have any interest in this agenda, or serious concerns about my two big risks. But at least there is a growing debate within the media and academia about the changing role of news organisations and a lot of new research about the policy consequences. Americans worry about this kind of thing, which is at least a start.