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**Philip M. Taylor.** *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media Since 1945*. New International History Series. New York and London: Routledge, 1997. x + 202 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 0-415-11678-3; $22.99 (paper), ISBN 0-415-1167-9.

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*Global Communications* is well written. It is not, however, always easy to read. At first glance, Taylor seems guilty of that for which he indicts the media: dealing more with image than context, more with procedure than substance. But that, it turns out, is his intent.

Taylor opens by describing the world of mass media: "the bland are leading the blind...sleaze and sophistry have triumphed over sophistication and subtlety" and the over-simplification of foreign news coverage has led to "serious distortion and misunderstanding" (p. 1). Most of us who remember being "glued to the tube" during the 1991 Gulf War share his alarm "at both the lack of historical context in much news reporting and with the extent to which journalists were so easily being manipulated" (p. xi). The current profusion of information can give the impression of disorder, even of chaos. But is "the world really...more chaotic and less meaningful, or does it simply appear so because the version we are getting...is so much more varied and therefore more confusing" (p. 3)? The flood of information is a function both of technology and democracy; the confusion and oversimplifications are functions of democracy and the corporate (or free enterprise) nature of media. For example, reality is often measurably different from the perception projected through the media. But the speed of that projection, and thus of that perception and of the public's response thereto, is such that policy must now be made in response not to the reality but to the perception. Thus the media have the power (consciously or not) to create a perception that can force a response which objectively becomes "reality" but which may have nothing to do with the original "real" reality. This contributes "not only to the appearance of chaos but also to the making of crises" (p. 13). Taylor does not assign blame. He would argue simply that we need to understand the "reality" of global communications.

Having made his viewpoint clear, Taylor spends the rest of the book explaining how these things could come about in the midst of a communications revolution which has made accessible information on a scale never before imagined, how governments have responded, and how it has all affected international relations.

In setting a theoretical framework, Taylor cites Alvin Toffler's developmental *waves* : agricultural, industrial, and "post-modern" (or Third Wave) knowledge-based (p. 11). If conflict arises, the Third Wave uses communicational weaponry. First and Second Wave societies will fight back and thus the introduction of communications into international relations. On one level, this leads governments to more proactive roles in originating, manipulating and disseminating information. On another level, technology complicates any ability to "manage" either the mass media or individuals with access to informational technology.

The four core chapters of *Global Communications* sketch the historical role of media in various contexts. While each chapter does basically flow chronologically, it is sometimes difficult to pin down what themes separate each from the others.

"International Communications and International Politics since 1945" provides an overview of the changing nature and technology of global communications and national responses thereto. The Cold War, nuclear weapons and ideologically antithetical regimes "prompted new rules...in which the control, manipulation and dissemination of information" (p. 28) (the "fourth dimension of international relations") became increasingly important. Taylor concentrates on how the United States' (and its western allies') commitment to freedom of information played out in their dealings with the nations whose hearts and minds they wished to win. Over time,

technological advances moved from radio thru television to faxes, satellites and e-mail, altering the playing field and even changing the rules of the game. Governmental sophistication in communication skills also evolved. While the ever expanding variety of global communications may indeed promote democracy, it also expands options and thus the need to make choices. Governments use the media to ensure "that ordered presentation of official interests is represented alongside the apparently disordered reporting of them" (p. 57).

Hungary illustrated what Taylor finds an ongoing problem in such efforts: an inability or unwillingness to integrate the latest agency of international relations into the traditional forms. In 1956, the Voice of America actively encouraged Hungary's rebels but the State Department failed to provide material support. The result was a drop in the credibility of America's "fourth dimension" among its targeted third party audiences.

By the 1970s and the arrival of satellite communication links, the disparity between technological have and have-not nations both transcended and complicated the Cold War. "Haves" seemed able to control other nations' access to information, to reduce nations' informational independence, and perhaps even to dictate political developments inside those nations. However free the access thereto might be, global communications in the hands of a few could mean dependency for the many.

The end of the Cold War was itself a media event: "It is impossible to attribute the changes of the period 1989-91 purely to live satellite television or to increased international communications. But it is equally difficult to see how such changes could have taken place without them" (p. 53). While the west might see the end of the Cold War and global communications' role therein as a positive, many technological "have-nots" could read it as verification of exactly what they had feared.

In "Brushfires and Firefighters," Taylor chronicles the media's role first in covering international crises and more recently in determining what actually becomes a crisis. Through both world wars and well into the Cold War, "the relationship between those responsible for conducting policy...and those reporting on it...tended...more towards cooperation than conflict" (p. 60). Even then, observers noted the quixotic nature of both the depth and the duration of media's attention to developments which, within the traditional corridors of diplomacy, had much more complex and much longer "shelf-lives." The more recent shift from a cooperative to an antagonistic relationship between journalists and "the Establishment" and the changing nature of mass media has complicated things. The search for attention-grabbing sound and image 'bytes' has created a kind of journalistic feeding frenzy. Governments try to 'manage' media attention and thus themselves become part of that frenzy. Further complicating any search for informational "reality," is the public's general disinterest in international developments writ large merged with its short-term fascination with the immediate and the emotional.

Although technology can now "show" viewers/listeners "real-time" images, those images may neither reflect reality nor clarify understanding. "The kind of foreign policy issues which the media seize upon--wars, crises, famine, disasters and the like--are invariably infinitely more complex than the media can ever possibly convey in the time and space available to them" (p. 75). "But when the mass media do decide...that a given crisis is worth covering, its potential to disrupt the routine priorities of diplomacy comes into sharp focus" (p. 76). The tail wags the dog, creating crises where perhaps none exist and ignoring less accessible, or more obscure, or less photogenic events. According to Taylor, "this is a recipe for disaster" (p. 93).

Since most governments are no longer able actually to control the media, many have become their own public relations agents. "Cultural and public diplomacy" may take the form of exchange programs, reading rooms, or government sponsored radio broadcasts. Television, even in its privatized form, plays a larger and larger perceptual role even though its actual impact remains both unclear and unstudied. As Taylor notes, the still unproven but very real perception that media coverage of and after the Tet Offensive helped lose the war in Vietnam has led to "the enormous efforts now being expended by military establishments...to shape, via the media, the outside public perception of what they do" (p. 91).

In "Illusions of Reality: The media and the reporting of warfare," Taylor explains why he is convinced that, at best, media coverage provides a very "rough" draft of history but a draft which is difficult to "modify or revise" (p. 101). Today's

mass media reliance on only a few international news agencies means that "monopoly masquerades as plurality" and "snapshots masquerade as panoramas" (p. 103). Additionally, and contrary to some interpretations, "the media tend to be every bit as patriotic (and thus uncritical) as the public they are serving" (p. 105). Those facts notwithstanding, however, the U.S. (and other nation's) military "learned its lesson" in Vietnam and now assumes that the media does, or at least may, have the power to affect public opinion. This has led both to more importance assigned to liaising between military and media and to manipulation of media coverage. In the Gulf War, Taylor argues, "the military's version was the only one to be permitted" (p. 129). Much of what we watched so intently was "all largely irrelevant to the 'real war,' and much of it...was nonsense" (p. 129).

Even without military manipulation and censorship, the conditions under which reporters now work mean that "the reality of war evades media war" (p. 135). "It is inherent in the process of war-reporting that (journalists) simply cannot tell the whole truth" (p. 124). This, of course, also makes it impossible for audiences to grasp complexities the media itself is incapable of covering.

In "Mind Games: Information warfare and psychological operations," Taylor discusses "the role of communications *within* crisis situations and combat theatres" (p. 145), first at the tactical level, and more recently as a strategy. Where once things were limited to Command and Control Warfare, the military must now deal with Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence and Computer Warfare. I found the many acronyms (PSYOPS, MOOTWs, etc.) and "military-speak" a little confusing, but the description of leaflet "bombings" in the Gulf War clearly illustrate the use of communications as productive "'munitions of the mind'" (p. 171). Experiences with the Kurds in that same war and in Somalia shortly thereafter make equally clear, however, that we have a way to go in guaranteeing the success of such "psychological operations." "PSYOPS is increasingly being seen as an additional, and perhaps even indispensable, informational tool to aid not just the old-fashioned concept of war-making and peacekeeping but also newer, more proactive policies of peacemaking, peace-building and peace enforcement--all at a strategic level" (p. 191). The more "strategic" such operations become, of course, the more likely they are to involve non-military, commercial mass media, with consequences that are still unknown.

In his preface, Professor Taylor expresses hope that his book will "prompt some heartfelt re-thinking about the responsibilities of journalists in a free society" (p. xv). By the conclusion, he has given up on that as something we can realistically expect from journalists themselves or from the commercial, entertainment-based companies for whom they work. Mass media may have absolutely no conscious desire to arouse fear, or inflame emotion, or fan the flames of war. But it can and does do so because of its profit-driven nature and the receptivity of its audiences. That same media most probably will become more pervasive than ever. The bottom line in *Global Communications* would seem to be that, in a democratic age of virtually unlimited access to information and media "bytes" about anything anywhere in the world, someone needs to be in charge, to provide "guidance," to have "plans" for "educating" audiences. Freedom needs a keeper. And whom, dear reader, would you trust with that task? I am back to my original concern: procedure versus substance. In spite of his own anecdotal evidence to the contrary, Professor Taylor has more faith than I in the viability and reliability of some universalist force (the UN, the US government, the BBC, CNN?) that could "manage" both the procedure and the substance of communications in mankind's best interests. One has to assume that there will be individuals, groups, ethnicities, nations, races, religions, genders, and possibly entire generations which might disagree.

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