

REVIEW ESSAYS

Alexander, Yonah and Richard Latter, eds. *Terrorism & The Media: Dilemmas for Government, Journalists & The Public*. Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1990.

Alexander, Yonah and Robert G. Picard, eds. *In the Camera's Eye: News Coverage of Terrorist Events*. Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1991.

Because terrorism is a communicative strategy designed to propagate specific messages to a variety of different audiences, and because our knowledge of these messages is for the most part mediated by the production of news in the mass media, the relationship between terrorism and the media has become a major concern of policy makers responsible for combating terrorism, researchers who study terrorism, and the media personnel who cover terrorism as part of their job. One consequence of this concern has been a steady proliferation of conferences, symposia, colloquia and workshops that address from a variety of perspectives the "problem" of terrorism and the media. Two such conferences — both taking place in 1988 — constitute the "breeding ground," so to speak, for the two volumes reviewed here.

The first volume derives from the Wilton Park Conference on Terrorism and the Media held in January 1988. As such, it was one conference in a continuing series of conferences that deal with security issues, of which terrorism is but one of many. The second volume derives from a specialized conference, "Communication in Terrorist Events," that was held in Boston in March 1988 by the Terrorism and the News Media Research Project. Established in 1984 by the Mass Communication and Society Division of the US Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and lasting until 1989, the Project drew researchers from a wide variety of disciplines, both within and outside the Association, to study different aspects of the relationship between terrorism and the mass media. Over three dozen papers were presented at the conference and the volume, *In the Camera's Eye*, represents a much smaller, edited selection of ten of these papers.¹

Both volumes appear in the Monograph Series of Brassey's "Terrorism Library." In an identical Publisher's Note that precedes the Table of Contents of both volumes, the reader is informed that "By disseminating these valuable monographs of terrorism-related collections, documents, papers, and studies, we hope to play some small part in the understanding of and response to terrorism." Unfortunately, the value of these monographs lies less in their contribution to understanding terrorism, its relationship to the mass media and the policy implications that derive from this relationship, than in highlighting how policy discourse in this area is completely divorced from the realities revealed by scholarly research.

The first book — a scant 147 pages — comprises six “parts” and three “appendices.” Each of the six parts consists of what appears to be a transcript of one speech given at the conference, except for Part IV, where two speeches are included. These papers are each preceded by an introduction that basically repeats the contents of the contributions to follow, mistakes and all. For example, in Part IV, the editors tell us that a number of US news organizations created guidelines in the wake of the 1985 TWA hijacking (p. 43), and include several organizations that actually created their guidelines earlier, in the wake of the 1977 Hanafi Muslim hostage sieges in Washington, DC. On page 58, we find that contributor, Barry Rosen, makes the same mistake in almost identical words: clearly, the editors merely repeated the error when “introducing” the papers in Part IV.

The passage of time also bears heavily on the papers presented: the opening paper, by The Right Honourable Lord Chalfont, OBE, MC, is preceded by an editors’ note pointing out the recent changes in the Soviet Union and in PLO activities. There is a good reason for this. Lord Chalfont’s paper is little more than an ideological diatribe about Soviet-sponsored terrorism in which he concludes by citing with approval another speaker at another conference on terrorism to the effect that “terrorism is the greatest evil of our age, a more serious threat to our culture and survival than the possibility of nuclear war, or even the rapid depletion of the planet’s resources.” (p. 21) Such rhetoric seems particularly unconnected to the post-Cold War reality of today; hence the editors’ note. Yet it is Lord Chalfont’s admonition to the media to “concentrate a little less on the faults of the established order and a little more on the forces that threaten to destroy our society” (ibid.) that underscores the chasm that separates this kind of discourse from the facts revealed by scholarship. The paper’s lead position suggests that the volume’s real purpose is to disseminate political rhetoric dressed up as scholarship — a prevalent weakness in the literature on this subject.

Out of the seven papers presented, only two have any endnotes: those by Paul Wilkinson and John Finn. Finn’s paper is the only serious work of scholarship and reasoned policy discourse. All in all, these six parts (seven papers) take up a mere 80 pages. While the editors tell us in their introduction to the volume that “the conference culminated in a simulation exercise in incident management that offered a vivid insight into the problems the media and others encounter” (p. 2), the volume includes no report of this exercise or the insights that derived from it. Nor does it provide an index that might help any serious scholar ferret out insights of their own from the volume’s contents.

As if to compensate for the paucity of information provided from the conference itself, the editors offer three appendices that round the volume out to its full 147 pages. Appendix A comprises three papers from the Terrorism and the Media Research Project referred to above, all published elsewhere; Appendix B comprises four extracts from government publications that deal with policy issues surrounding terrorism and the media, all available elsewhere; Appendix

C comprises four examples of media guidelines, all of which have been published elsewhere as early as 1982.² Ironically, the papers in Appendix A provide research data that largely contradicts the discourse of the conference papers that precede them. This is most apparent in the article by George Gerbner, the well-known communications scholar who has devoted decades of scholarly research to the relationship between media and violence. Gerbner's main message is that media coverage of terrorism and violence serves to create a "mean" image of society that promotes public fear and insecurity and leads to public support for strong "law-and-order" policies by government. This view is supported by much of the content analysis research on media coverage of terrorism, which shows that the terrorist is largely criminalized and delegitimized and the official response receives preferential coverage. These findings fly in the face of the concerns of those who accuse the media of taking the side of the terrorist. While the conflict between Lord Chalfont's and Professor Gerbner's articles is most striking, when we turn to the second volume under consideration in this review, the same contradiction between political rhetoric and scholarly research is evident.

In the Camera's Eye contains ten research papers of varying quality, divided into five parts. The organization of the volume is rather eclectic and while all the papers do have endnotes and there is a selected bibliography, there is again no index. The lead paper is by George Gerbner and is almost identical to the one published in Appendix A of *Terrorism and the Media*. As it did in that volume, it clearly sets the tone for the general picture that media coverage of terrorism does not favor the terrorists over the governments they wish to attack. The two companion pieces of Part I clearly show how coverage of terrorism constructs realities that tend to favor official versions of events that are promulgated in the country where coverage occurs. Other papers deal with the perspective of the terrorists, the victims, the journalists themselves — who are often victimized by terrorists because of their coverage — and gatekeepers such as editors and producers. Of special interest are the two papers in Part III dealing with media guidelines. The hard-hitting critique of Robert Terrell and Kristina Ross and the impressive survey of Timothy Gallimore both show that media performance in covering terrorism is far less favorable to terrorists and far more heterogeneous than the simplistic rhetoric of *Terrorism and the Media* suggests. The excellent studies by Jack Lule and Judith Buddenbaum, using dramatic and content analysis, also show that media coverage of terrorism, particularly in the elite Western press, tends to favor the establishment rather than the terrorist.

The relationship between terrorism and the media is a complex one that poses difficult problems for policy makers and challenging puzzles to scholars. Some terrorists do receive favorable coverage, while the majority do not. Most media coverage in time of terrorist crisis tends to sway public opinion against the terrorist through the somewhat ironic means of increasing public anxiety and identification with the terrorist's victims through sensationalization, dramatiza-

tion and personalization. While certain individual chapters in the two books reviewed here contribute some understanding to these processes, anyone seriously interested in the policy implications of these processes would be better served by looking elsewhere. For many of the policy issues addressed in *Terrorism and the Media*, Abraham Miller's edited collection — also based on a conference — is exemplary of what good editing can do.³ For a scholarly volume that provides a more systematic range of perspectives than *In the Camera's Eye*, the recent volume by David Paletz and Alex Schmid — complete with index — might serve the serious scholar better.⁴

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Endnotes

1. The reviewer presented the lead paper of the conference, which was published elsewhere. See Ronald D. Crelinsten, "Images of Terrorism in the Media: 1966-1985", *Terrorism*, 12 (1989), pp. 167-98.
2. See Abraham Miller, *Terrorism, the Media and the Law* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Transnational, 1982), Appendix A, Media Guideline Documents, pp. 153-60. Note that the publication date of 1982 precedes the year of the TWA hijacking in 1985.
3. Miller, *Terrorism, the Media and the Law*.
4. David L. Paletz and Alex P. Schmid, eds. *Terrorism and the Media: How Researchers, Terrorists, Government, Press, Public, Victims View and Use the Media* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1982).

Holsti, Kalevi. *Peace and War: armed conflicts and international order 1648-1989*. Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Kalevi Holsti has established a noteworthy reputation among theorists of international relations as a result of his *Why Nations Realign, The Dividing Discipline: hegemony and diversity in international theory*, and particularly from *International Politics: a framework for analysis*. In this major new work, Holsti has maintained some of the basic tenets presented in his earlier studies — particularly in his assumptions concerning the rationality of the actors in the international system — and extended his range by taking up the "paths of war" approach developed by Mansbach and Vasquez in their *In Search of Theory: A New Paradigm for Global Politics*. But he seeks to go beyond what he regards