

ON THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA
FOR WORLD-WIDE SECURITY AND PEACE

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1. On Data, Theories and Values

What the media do and what researchers do are not that different. Both of them relate to empirical reality and are interested in getting data - only that the media are particularly concerned with highly contemporary data, data from today, new data called news; researchers may also be satisfied with "olds". Both are concerned with theories, efforts to understand the data, to interpret them - usually put into the commentary in the newspapers, such as editorials and in the theory section of a scientific article or book. And both of them are actually concerned with values, only that the media are usually more honest, making the values very explicit - researchers have a tendency to hide their values even to themselves, pretending that they are "value-free", objective - uninfluenced by anything but data and the effort to interpret them.

Being so similar they should understand each other. We all have our tastes, and I myself, as a researcher, think I prefer research very rich in theory with new interpretation, even if the data are "olds". I definitely prefer the researcher to be value explicit and even to try to relate his theories to his values posing such questions as "how could this be changed", "what could be done in order to come closer to a reality where these values are realised". But I am not so sure I would use the same criteria for newspapers. Newspapers that are long on theory and value and short on data tend to engage very much in ideological commentary, and have very little news to offer. Since the world changes more quickly than the commentary, such newspapers tend to become copies of themselves from one day to the other. It is not that easy to write anything new and interesting every day, based on theories and values only; one more reason why real news is needed to make a newspaper worth reading. Hence I would prefer the news to be prominent and theories and values to be more in the background, in editorials and commentaries.

But I would also demand of a newspaper an ability to put question marks, not only to question theories and values in the light of new data, but also to question the data in the light of their own theories and values, asking the basic question: "Is that really so?" I would not necessarily accept as news everything reported as such, even if the misunderstandings should be positive from the point of view of some values, even values I myself might hold. The editor of the Japan Times, Mr Kiyooki Murata, gives some interesting examples of such misunderstandings in an article "Problems in international communication".* One of his examples refers to President Kennedy's famous speech, July 1963 in West Berlin (four months before he was murdered in Dallas, Texas 22/11 1963) where Kennedy was reported to have said "Ich bin ein Berliner". However, what Kennedy actually said, according to Murata, was "Today in the world of freedom the proudest boast is Ich bin ein Berliner". In other words, he was not saying that he himself was one, only that it was a proud person who was able to boast that he was one. However, the audience understood the four words spoken in German, ignored the rest, and Kennedy and his advisers very quickly understood how successful the semantic misunderstanding had been and did not go out of their way to clarify. By not doing so, they certainly improved German-American relations!

Another of Murata's examples is the famous statement attributed to Nikita Khrushchev to a group of American businessmen in Moscow in the 1960's where he was quoted as having said: "We'll bury you". What Khrushchev said in Russian Muy pokholonim vas which means "We shall bury you". But here there obviously may be two interpretations: "bury" in the sense of first killing and then having a ceremony, and in the sense of being present at the ceremony "when you are dead, we will be at your funeral" (meaning that socialism will outlive capitalism). Needless to say the first interpretation was picked up and I do not think any effort on the Soviet side to insist on the second interpretation helped very much. I still find the statement quoted in the aggressive sense of "We shall destroy you". Great harm to

* Speech given at International House of Japan, October 27, 1981, reported in the House Bulletin.

American-Soviet relations!

I use the two examples to illustrate one simple point: data alone, reported with great accuracy in the tradition of the best newspapers, do not necessarily contribute to better or worse relations. The context decides, not only the way data are presented in the context of theories and values but also the whole world context. If relations are really bad, almost any statement or fact will be seen in a negative light; if there is a desire for good relations the opposite will be the case. It is against that background that the following, should be understood.

2. What I would like to see in a peace-oriented newspaper:

First, whenever there is a conflict, one of the basic tasks of the media is to give a voice to both or all parties in the conflict. This presupposes that one knows who the parties are, which is not always so easy. But in the East-West conflict, this is relatively easy: it should be an obvious duty of any good newspaper, East or West or in the middle, to report how either side looks at, for instance, a disarmament proposal or some move along the armament spiral, or some other draw in the big and dangerous chess game of the Cold War. If only one side is given a voice, it is certainly likely to be the side with which one sympathises - in doing so the media will themselves contribute in a major way to the conflict. Of course, to read in extenso what the other side says, might drive the temperature up rather than down; but it may also have a sobering impact. Thus, it becomes clear that the other side is also an actor who acts and reacts, giving a more realistic image of the situation than the image of the other side as a thing, as some kind of natural phenomenon like an earthquake or a hurricane.

Second, I would demand from the media that they try to make explicit the intellectual frame of reference, or "paradigm" for a more serious word, within which the conflict is to be

understood. How did the conflict start? Is it obvious that it started with one spectacular event or could it have deeper roots, historically and structurally? Is it obvious that it is a question of somebody's fault, usually (of course) "the other side" - or could the conflict be more like a congenital defect, something that is carried by the system and has been with the system a long time (like the Korea conflict 1950-53 might be seen as the result^{of} the division of a country that had been fighting for its liberation for generations, rather than a question of one side attacking the other). In other words, a conflict begs the question of theory, of understanding - not only value, on whose side you are on, how bad the conflict is or may be in its consequences, and so on. If the media feels incapable of providing an intellectual frame of reference (and they usually are), there may be experts around - and since they usually have at least one different opinion each, ^{one} might ask for more than one view of the matter. Good newspapers do this, it is only the bad ones that immediately engage in solid value judgement with no effort to explore the theoretical foundations at all.

Third, and this is a difficult one, the two foregoing demands should be directed also to media that are owned by big governmental or corporate interests. In Europe, Asia and Africa (but curiously not in the Western hemisphere), major TV channels and radio stations are governmental. They will be subject to some of the same pressure as public schools to be the carriers of governmental messages and the protectors of "national interests", meaning the interests of the nation as interpreted by the powers that be. In the Western hemisphere, but also in the rest of the world, strong commercial interests may have a hold on TV channels and radio stations, and all over the world, on newspapers and news magazines. These commercial interests are usually capitalist, many of the conflicts in the world today are centered around capitalism, hence the demand is even more important that they should develop a sufficient level of understanding, even self-criticism to be able to reflect these conflicts adequately. We know perfectly well that governmental/party and corporate interests may prevail and that

truth and deeper understanding are given second priority - nevertheless the public should educate itself to persist in its demand. The most effective way of doing so, is, of course, to make it obvious that such one-sided efforts at conflict understanding are not taken seriously, that what one is looking for are facts understood profoundly enough also to understand where possible solutions to conflict might be located, and if the media do not offer this, so much the worse for the media. Needless to say such pressures can only be exercised in a country where the public has a choice; it becomes almost meaningless in a country where the media are streamlined by governmental and/or corporate monopolies. Of course, in such countries, newspapers and radio stations may have independent editorial staff only that they are trained to perceive and think and profit exactly the same way so that the result is the same regardless of the diversity of the channels.

Fourth, I would like the media to be less victim of the four key tendencies in media reporting: over-emphasis on elite nations, over-emphasis on elite persons, over-emphasis on personification and over-emphasis on negative events.

Reading through the list it becomes evident what the ideal news item would be: the breakdown of a summit meeting between the two top persons **from** the two top powers. Media should become better at reporting what other countries do; what other people **than** top people do; at reporting the slow workings of structures rather than the quick, sometimes spectacular, but also ephemeral events produced by persons; and occasionally also report something positive. Strangely enough, even in countries governed by the "idea of progress", what catches the ear and the eye seems to be negative events, perhaps exactly because they are unexpected from the point of view of the idea of progress. I think it would be useful for journalists and editors just to be more aware of the inclination to report with the four types of bias mentioned and so to speak pin on their walls the admonition to do something about it.

More particularly, it might be useful to lay down a little the view of the world as some kind of sports arena or even court tribunal where people are competing, even fighting, or are accused of some crime with the obvious question, who wins? or loses? is he guilty? what was the verdict? These are factors behind the drama, the drama is the famous tip of the iceberg.

Fifth, the media should not underestimate the public.

Many investigations show that the media sometimes use words the public do not understand. This may be true, yet I am struck by the depth of understanding so-called common people have of what goes on in the world. My own feeling is that people would like more interpretation, deeper understanding and are not at all afraid of conflicting types of understanding. People are not only depositories of an endless stream of news, they process themselves, they have their frames of reference, more or less explicit. They would like to have these frames of reference not only deepened, but also challenged. If words are not understood, it may be because they are meaningless for lack of context. The problem may actually be with the journalists who are so busy as gate-keepers of the flow of news that they have low level understanding, and for that reason

attribute a similar shallowness

to a public from whom they get increasingly alienated - essentially meeting colleagues in the bars or other places where news items are exchanged at the current market prices. Somehow we have not been very good at creating media which are popular like secondrate newspapers yet with intellectual depth like firstrate newspapers. If they are popular they tend to be shallow, and if they have depth the media tend to be boring. There may be obvious reasons for this, having something to do with the way people are trained at universities to equate depth with being boring and being popular with being shallow. Something should be done about it, hopefully not ending up with media that combine the two negative aspects, the boring with the shallow.

Sixth, when conflicts are not solved there is a tendency to seek recourse to armament, as we all know. Armament in one party tends to induce armament in the other, and the result is an arms race legitimised by both parties as a struggle to obtain balance of power. At this point I think it is simply the duty of media to make some major distinctions. The first distinction is between defensive and offensive arms, not according to the intentions of those who profess them but according to what the arms are capable of doing. If the Swiss build one more tunnel or gallery in their Alps and put some heavy guns inside, they may add appreciably to their own military expenditure per capita, but do not threaten anybody's security. Alps do not move, the guns may be effective in case of an attack, but do not provoke anybody. In short, there are arms and arms - like most other things in the world.

Another distinction that should be made is between deterrence by retaliation and deterrence by defence. Arms are said to deter an attack and certainly do so in some cases, in other cases not. But deterrence by means of retaliation can only be done with offensive arms, arms with a long range and considerable destructive impact. The trouble about such arms is that they can also be used to attack - and how does the other side know that "these arms are only for retaliation in case I do something wrong, not for any attack on me?" In the inability to find a clear answer to that rather important question lies the whole crux of the matter, the key to the dynamism of arms races as well as espionage races - one simply has to find out what the intention is and what the capabilities are. Quite the opposite with arms intended to deter by putting up an effective defense, making the country indigestible like a porcupine! And that is a question of military doctrine of the country concerned - a matter that belongs to the intellectual frame of reference, the paradigm within which to understand what goes on in this important field. In general such matters are totally neglected by the media.

Seventh, when it comes to the arms races that seem to accompany any effort to acquire offensive arms, and to base security

on deterrence through retaliatory capability, maybe the media should pay even more attention to the inner dynamism of the arms races. It is not only a question of what corporations get, what kind of contracts and profits, be they private or state corporations, West or East. It is also a question of workers and trade unions securing their employment, of ministries getting control over a larger share of the public expenses, of researchers and other intellectuals engaged in the research and development of armament hardware and software becoming more important. In short, there is a complicated complex of factors involved, well worth reporting for investigative journalism. But at no point should one be led to believe that such internal factors, necessary as they are in understanding what goes on, are sufficient to come to grips with the arms races. The arms race is a product of both internal and external factors, and both aspects should be paid attention to.

Eighth, when it comes to disarmament in general and disarmament negotiations in particular, I think media should pay much more attention to their own weaknesses when reporting on disarmament. In a sense these are ideal media events: elite nations, elite people, persons - and lurking behind the big negative possibility, the breakdown of the conference, even wars for that matter. Consequently media have a tendency to over-report any opening or ending of such conferences, and to under-report all the small facts on the sidelines, even some progress.

Among those small facts I would count whether the emphasis is on highly offensive weaponry or on weaponry in general - in the latter case I would say that the conference is uninteresting, not trying to come to grips with the real problems. I would try to find out whether there is any discussion of military doctrine, or only of the outcomes of such doctrines, the concrete hardware - in that case I would also be highly sceptical. Does the conference only focus on deployment, or does it include manoeuvres, production and stocking, testing, research and development? Does it try to touch the military-bureaucratic-corporate-intelligentsia complex at all, or are they left

untouched, sacred? What are the chances of non-superpowers not only observing, but even talking? What are the chances of non-aligned countries to participate actively, including being presidents of the conference? What are the chances of non-governmental forces to be heard, taken seriously? In no way guaranteeing that things will be better if the answers to such questions are yes, the question should at least be put by media trying to probe more deeply into the matters. In no sense should this mean an uncritical attitude to the peace movement. Like government the peace movements also have their dogmas, their single-minded beliefs that they do not change come what may. But they may also be the carriers of deep-seated emotions, theories and even highly practical ideas, such as transarmament (from offensive towards defensive weapons) rather than disarmament (doing away with all weapons) - the former being a more realistic position, the latter highly idealistic.

Ninth, in this connection one should certainly also look at the North-South problem, the problems of development and not only the East-West problems, the problems of peace and war - as we all know they are very interrelated particularly with hunger being the name for war in the southern hemisphere. But from this it does not necessarily follow that one can kill two birds with one stone, disarm, release resources and put them all into a gigantic development effort through a "massive transfer". First, it may very well be that with less capital available, the military sector will become more research-intensive and equally dangerous, only less expensive. Actually, it may also well be that the highly blown up military sectors in the budgets of particularly very conservative governments is their way of exercising state control over the economy in an almost Keynesian manner, even when this strictly speaking is against their ideology. In short, the budgets may very well be considerably trimmed without endangering the offensive capability.

And second, more money for development will not necessarily produce satisfaction of basic human needs because there will be more money available to buy expensive things and these things

are generally for the non-basic needs of the elites rather than the basic needs of the non-elites. Structural change within and between countries is what is needed, at least in the first run. While reporting the opportunity costs for the military budgets (one fighter-bomber being the equivalent of so and so many poly-clinics in the countryside in a poor country), one should not lead the readers to believe that the question is simply one of money transfer.

Tenth, I think it should be the task of the media to portray more clearly the benefits of peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war, or threat of war - the latter should be included, we do not have peace even with no belligerent action in the world as long as the terrible threat of nuclear annihilation is hanging over us all. Peace is the opportunity for everybody to unfold themselves more than ever before, unhampered by destruction and the fear of massive destruction. Everybody means exactly that, common men and women, and "unfolding" means all the nice things that people can do to each other in love and friendship and work together, in solidarity. Since the media have a tendency to under-report such small but indeed so important things, the image of peace also tends to become bland and hence less compelling. Actually, the way the media portray the world, people might be led to believe that peace is a rather dull state of affairs, a kind of non-existence, similar to paradise in the Christian metaphor. War undoubtedly seems more exciting, and the period prior to a war more promising than a dull period of non-events. The media have to move away from this. They may even be a negative factor, contributing to worldwide insecurity rather than the opposite, in shaping public opinion that way. And yet I know how difficult it is to portray something positive, when all interest is focused on the opposite !

3. Some words of conclusion

Of course, nobody would assume that the media are the causes of war and peace. The deeper causes are located else-

where, in our structures and cultures. But the media, as that very word indicates, mediate causes. They become interspersed between those deeper causes and people as actors, elite and non-elite. They shape their images, and as people act on the basis of images rather than reality, the media mediate, and the way they mediate becomes a major factor. Consequently they have it in their power to contribute shaping images, and however sceptical people may be of media, they are generally more influenced by them than they themselves would care to admit. This becomes particularly evident when one encounters people from other countries who themselves proclaim their independence of certain newspapers, TV channels and radio stations but are unable to see how the all-over national character of reporting has left an indelible imprint on them. And hence my final point: more pressure on the media so that they can better live up to our demands and expectations.