

APOCALYPTIC TELEVISION

Leslie Harris

ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the decade the world has shrunk through the growth of global mass communication and information highways. Greater access to information makes the consumer more susceptible to propaganda, disguised by information providers as objective information.

A prime example of this manipulation occurred during the Gulf War of 1991. Through effective use of propaganda techniques the Bush administration created a situation forcing the western world to involve itself in a domestic dispute in the Middle East. Prime beneficiaries were the Bush Administration, and George Bush himself, who at the time was seeking re-election as president of the United States.

Analysis of media coverage of the war, particularly the coverage on CNN, will show how the mass media assisted the administration in creating and sustaining the climate for war.

Two of the world's current "hot-spots" will be considered briefly against the framework of the Gulf



Leslie Harris works as a journalist and is currently completing his Masters degree at RAU.

War - the military intervention in Haiti for its similarities and change in South Africa for the perspective it provides on television coverage of world events.

INTRODUCTION

The mass-media have become the prime source of information for most people in the western world - or certainly in those countries where the necessary infrastructures have developed. In terms of news, the speed and convenience of the electronic media make these the preferred source of information for many people.

It is far easier (and some would say

more productive) to watch a TV news bulletin, or listen to a radio newscast, than to read a newspaper, as the latter is more time-consuming.

But this creates difficulties, increasing the distortion intrinsic in all mass-communication. Mass-media thus acquire an ability to manipulate the unsuspecting public. It is when the mass-media are manipulated that the situation becomes really exciting. Television is particularly susceptible and "in its lust for instant information is often a source of disinformation, easily manipulated by officials with specific agendas to promote" (Kellner, 1992:5).

It is for this reason that the Gulf War at the beginning of the decade is such an exciting field of study. A number of wars were being fought simultaneously: the actual fighting in the Gulf, the public relations battle to muster support for the war effort and the journalists' war - the ongoing battle between the media and the Pentagon to inform the public of what was really happening.

Both the PR war and the journalists' war are aspects of the propaganda war fought by the Bush Administration prior to, and during, the Gulf War. The success of the propaganda war cannot be disputed. The American public believes war was essential to protect a democratic western ally in the Gulf - despite the fact that Kuwait was and is an Islamic dictatorship hostile to western culture and influence.

Although the Gulf War was not the first

war covered by television - opinion is divided as to whether that honour belongs to Korea or Vietnam - it was the first war fought specifically with the TV audience in mind. Discussion in the following pages will consider briefly the propaganda campaign which led to the war. The role of the media and the nature of the coverage will be considered in some detail.

Attention will be paid to the meteoric rise of the Cable News Network (CNN) and some of the ramifications thereof on the other networks. The implications of CNN's dominance as regards propaganda will also be considered.

Attention will also be given to censorship, by both the Americans and the Iraqis. The Iraqi censors realised that transmission of some information would bolster their cause. In these instances western journalists in Baghdad were allowed free reign - only to run foul of the American military.

The discussion will conclude with a look at television coverage of some current hotspots, compared to the Gulf War. The analysis is of necessity brief, as the situation in each hotspot is still developing, with constantly changing variables.

MARCHING AS TO WAR

Throughout history the Middle East has dominated world affairs. Like the central squares on a chessboard, this region controls the invisible lines of power which traverse the globe. A prime factor contributing to the importance of the

region is the oil buried beneath the desert sand. It has led to conflict between the nations of the region and accounts for the west's involvement there. But there are also national and religious rivalries in the region which further complicate matters.

The unholy ally

In 1980 Iraq went to war with Iran in what Saddam Hussein described as a fight against Iranian Muslim fundamentalism. The war would last eight years and Saddam Hussein would shoulder the burden of slaughtering in excess of 150 000 people, including approximately 13 000 of his own citizens. Prior to the war Iraq took a strong pro-Soviet stance and gave refuge to the most vicious of Arab terror groups.

During the Iran-Iraq war the US stance changed from neutral to active support for Iraq. The support was not unqualified and there was some unease at this alliance. Nevertheless the relationship continued, probably because the American government had found someone else to do the dirty work and protect their supply of cheap oil. By the end of the war in 1988 the Iraqi economy had closer ties with the west than the East, and western weapons featured in the Iraqi arsenal.

During 1990 Hussein met a number of Arab leaders, and made numerous public statements which indicated that his courtship of the west was ending. While many of the remarks could be discounted as the expected rantings of

a Middle East despot, some could be seen as definite warning signs of approaching conflict.

But the administration gave Hussein the benefit of the doubt on many occasions, and even enlisted its PR machinery to promote a better image of Iraq to the American public. The fact that international human rights groups expressed concern at Hussein's disregard for human life, and allegations of atrocities in Iraq, were of no account:

As recently as May 1990 he (Saddam Hussein) had been portrayed by the Pentagon as a rather ordinary Middle Eastern dictator who happened to kill political opponents with poison gas (Macarthur, 1992:41).

The unlikely friend

The invasion of Kuwait, however, overstepped the boundaries of what the US was willing to accept and saw Iraq transformed, in American eyes, from friend to foe.

But Kuwait, though relatively free when compared with her neighbours in the Middle East, was no bastion of democracy. The country is an Emirate, with the Emir always drawn by and from the ruling al-Sabah family. Despite a population of approximately two million, voting rights were restricted to 65 000 males who could show that their antecedents were Kuwaiti before 1920. Women were entirely excluded from all formal political processes.

Kuwait did not have a strong reputation

as an ally of the United States either. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who served as US ambassador to the United Nations during the 1970s, described Kuwait as “a particularly poisonous enemy of the United States” (Macarthur, 1992:44).

Like Iraq, Kuwait also didn't take kindly to her own citizens stepping out of line. Pro-democracy rallies were dispersed forcefully, with many beaten and gassed. And if Kuwait treated her own citizens badly, her treatment of non-citizens was considerably worse (Macarthur, 1992:44-45).

In order to construct the motivation for war, however, these facts were conveniently overlooked. Kuwait was referred to by President Bush as a “friend” in the Persian Gulf (Bush, 1991a:199), creating resonance in the American public.

Kuwait was referred to as “small and helpless”, with the Iraqi aggressor “brutalising” the people and committing “unspeakable atrocities” (Bush, 1991c:311-312). Ignoring the human rights violations by the Kuwaiti government is a clear example of card-stacking.

Choreographing war

Kellner (1992:13) contends that the Bush Administration played a conspiracy game with the two main protagonists which culminated in the war. Kuwait was led to believe that America would support her if she withstood Iraq, while Saddam Hussein was told the

Americans had no strong opinion regarding his border dispute with Kuwait. An invasion of Kuwait would allow the US to involve herself militarily in the region, with obvious benefits:

Such an action against Iraq would enable the United States to become a permanent military presence in the Gulf and to assert itself as the number one military superpower. A triumph would help protect the military from budgetary cutbacks and fuel another cycle of arms spending to pick up the falling economy. A successful Gulf intervention and war would also promote the interests of George Bush...(Kellner, 1992:13).

It is worth noting that at the time of the Gulf War George Bush's term as President of the United States was drawing to a close. Faced with escalating domestic problems he did not enjoy wide-spread support among the people and knew that his chances for re-election were slim.

A shrewd politician, Bush knew that involving America in a war would whip up nationalistic fervour and divert attention from the domestic crises. He thus grasped the opportunity presented by the invasion of Kuwait to reposition himself as a powerful leader and bolster his chances of re-election (Katz, 1992:7).

There can be little doubt that the administration played a major role in orchestrating the PR campaign which mobilised support for American in-

involvement in the war. To mobilise the necessary support for the war required, in part at least, the demonisation of the enemy. Once again the PR firms went to work, this time to produce a different perspective on a despot who used poison gas (using the technique of transfer in the process):

Just four months later he was cast by the Administration as the uniquely evil equivalent of Adolf Hitler; suddenly the Iraqi President relished the use of gas on ethnic minorities, particularly Kurds and - if he could get away with it - Israeli Jews (Macarthur, 1992:41).

Kellner (1992:64) says the United States is perpetually in search of enemies ... and constructs enemies with propaganda campaigns that paint some leaders, or countries, as absolute villains while painting other leaders, who may be just as bad, or worse, as "allies."

He sums up pithily the process by which the war in the Gulf was constructed:

... constructing Saddam Hussein as an absolute villain, as a demon who is so threatening and violent that he must be destroyed and eradicated, precluded negotiations and a diplomatic settlement. One could not sensibly talk with such a villain or seek common ground or a diplomatic solution. Instead, one must exterminate such evil to restore stability and order in the universe (Kellner, 1992:64).

This vision appears in Hollywood mov-

ies and popular television entertainment and structures the political discourses and dominant media frames of the U.S. intervention into the complex politics of the Middle East.

As the propaganda campaign intensified the media personalised the impending conflict, reducing the war to a clash between George Bush and Saddam Hussein. Bush was portrayed as a brilliant, masterly and decisive man of action, whereas Hussein was portrayed in purely negative terms.

The PR campaign, launched by a political lobby known as Citizens for a Free Kuwait (CFK) did not come cheap. From August 20 to November 10 the cost was \$5.6 million, with the total bill running to \$11 million (Kellner, 1992:68).

CFK retained the services of an influential PR firm, Hill & Knowlton (HK). Known as a Republican firm, HK had close ties with the White House and actually helped arrange the congressional hearings, both in preparing testimony and lobbying congressmen, which eventually authorised Operation Desert Storm.

A major factor was testimony from 15 year old "Nayirah" of Iraqi soldiers bursting into hospital wards, throwing babies out of incubators and leaving them to die on the floor. A major theme in speeches by President Bush and Vice President Dan Quayle, it was the most powerful deciding factor in favour of military intervention in the region.

In 1992 Nayirah's identity was revealed

- she was the daughter of the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States. Her testimony has subsequently been discredited as a classic propaganda ploy (Kellner, 1992:71). Nevertheless, at the time of the congressional hearings it served its purpose admirably.

THE MUZZLED MEDIA

In any military intervention the protagonists try to restrict media access for various reasons, some honest and justifiable, others less so. While it is seldom possible to support censorship, in certain abnormal situations it can be said to play a role. War is undoubtedly an abnormal situation and it is understandable that media access is rigidly controlled and reports subject to censorship. Katz (1992:11) makes the point that a certain amount of censorship is necessary during war:

Israeli radio and television did not provide live coverage of the missile attacks for fear that such information would improve the aim of the missiles... Ironically, such information was provided by CNN, sometimes in violation of the [Israeli] censorship.[own parentheses]

Another result of that coverage by CNN was that Israelis sheltering in sealed rooms were contacted telephonically by relatives abroad and told of the damage outside their doors.

By controlling information the military censors can retain any strategic advantage they may have and, more impor-

tantly, prevent a civilian population from wholesale panic. It is self evident that censorship can further the propagandist's aims. During the Gulf War this was certainly the case, as the censors were the military and the Bush Administration. Through carefully controlling the information available they were able to shape the western world's perceptions of the war.

Two factors exacerbated the censorship problem confronting journalists in the Gulf War. One was the immediacy of the TV coverage, carried on some channels 24 hours per day. The other was the so-called "Vietnam Syndrome", where the Pentagon believed that unrestricted access to information in Vietnam contributed to America losing the war.

The Vietnam Syndrome

Operation Desert Storm took place a mere fifteen years after America pulled out of Indochina, having suffered an ignominious defeat. The pain of defeat was made that much worse by recurrent accusations that the government was not doing everything it could to trace soldiers listed as missing in action. Furthermore, during the latter stages of Vietnam there was strong antiwar sentiment, which the Pentagon believed was created and then fueled by the media. It was anxious to prevent a recurrence of those events.

Macarthur (1992:112) says the American military believed that an uncensored press had lost the Vietnam War

by "demoralising the American public with unpleasant news." He points out that while this is nonsense ("it is armies which win and lose wars ... it is politicians who start and end them" - Macarthur, 1992:112), it is a notion taken seriously by military officials to the extent that freedom of the press is eroded.

Macarthur (1992:132) also believes the theory that "violent televised images swung public opinion against the war" has been proven false. But the message apparently did not reach the military authorities:

Certainly the Pentagon of Desert Storm feared a recurrence of weak-kneed irresolution if Americans witnessed body bags and wounded soldiers on their screens at dinner time.

During Operation Desert Storm the press was placed under severe restrictions, refined from the British experience in the Falklands and the invasions of Grenada and Panama.

The Pentagon established a media pool, in which small groups of tightly controlled correspondents reported back to their colleagues. The system caused despair among serious journalists, as Jonathan Alter wrote in *Newsweek* (Feb 4, 1991):

As it is the journalists have been reduced to interviewing one another... On TV anyway, the war is strangely bloodless. With Iraq sealed off and Israel under heavy censor-

ship, reporters have employed the wonders of live satellite technology mostly just to fill time.

Of course the casualty of these rigid controls was truth and the public's right to know.

Kellner (1992:82-3) says any information or reporting which questioned Bush Administration policy never reached the public. Those western reporters who remained in Baghdad and continued reporting throughout the war found their loyalty to the US questioned. CNN's Peter Arnett, for example, was harshly criticised for his "pro-Iraqi" reports when he broke the news of an allied bomb landing on a civilian bomb shelter.

The civilian bomb shelter atrocity

Arnett reported that he and other reporters were taken to a building in a suburb of Baghdad which had suffered a direct hit. Iraqi officials said the building was a civilian bomb shelter which had housed one thousand people, and that four hundred had been killed. The visual footage screened by CNN showed:

people waiting anxiously outside the destroyed shelter while firemen were fighting a fire in it. Other images of the area showed houses, a school, a supermarket, and a mosque, with no evidence of military targets (Kellner, 1992:298).

Arnett said for the first time the Iraqi censors were not checking his reports and he was free to say whatever he

liked.

ABC buried the report in the middle of a newscast and added the caveat "Keep in mind that everything that comes out of Iraq now is subject to Iraqi censorship" (Kellner, 1992:298). There were none of the poignant images of Iraqi casualties and President Bush was quoted as saying "talk of civilian casualties is nothing but propaganda cooked up by Saddam Hussein" (Kellner, 1992:298). These are both clear cases of testimonial being used to make the propaganda more believable.

When the Pentagon did respond to questioning, they maintained that the shelter was a military target, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. On the BBC, military commentators openly doubted the Pentagon line that the shelter served a dual purpose - using civilians as human shields over an Iraqi command post.

On CNN, in house analyst retired Maj-Gen Perry Smith took issue with Amett's report. He supported the Pentagon line, claiming that the shelter had:

all the characteristics of a hardened command bunker... The more I watched the Amett coverage ... the more I came to believe that he ... empathizes with the people around him... (quoted in *US News & World Report*, Sept 23, 1991).

Smith also cast doubt on Amett's military knowledge, claiming it was easy for the Iraqis to fool him.

One factor many theorists have identified as playing a role in the acceptance of propaganda is source credibility. Peter Amett was a credible source. He is a veteran journalist who won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the Vietnam war. He is a wily reporter skilled at circumventing censorship:

Parts of the interview were monitored by a "gentleman from the Ministry of Information," as Amett put it. But the CNN reporter was still able to give clear answers to most questions. Asked if he was blindfolded when he was taken to interview Saddam Hussein, Amett replied, "It's clear that he's very concerned about security, and the term you use would sum it up very aptly." (Alter, 1991b:36).

Amett acknowledged the strict controls he worked under, maintaining that question and answer sessions with the CNN anchors saved his credibility (Goodman, 1991:30). Goodman (1991:30) says criticism of Amett's reporting was to be expected:

Applying the tactics that had kept reporters at bay in Grenada and Panama, the military effectively shaped coverage from the beginning to the end of the gulf war. That encouraged the natural wartime disposition to celebrate Our Brave Men and Women and to censure, or even censor, anyone who didn't pitch in heartily enough.

If criticism of Amett was to be expected, so was Perry Smith's response to the

reports. This was a classic case of each side using credible sources for propaganda. The Pentagon probably had the edge - Smith was an authority figure as well and always appeared in uniform, a visual symbol of power.

Despite Smith's efforts it soon became clear that the reports were accurate, and repeated disclaimers from President Bush merely confirmed the fact that civilian casualties was a sensitive issue for the Administration. The Pentagon antagonism is understandable - the report raised questions as to the accuracy of their precision bombers and spoiled the illusion promoted by the propagandists that the war entailed no human suffering.

The TV War

Garrett (1991:32), in describing the Jordanian reaction to footage of the Baghdad atrocity, indirectly illustrates why the Pentagon worked so hard to control the images of war:

What had upset the JTV news staff was their viewing of more than half an hour of videotape, most of which the world's public - including Jordanian viewers - has never seen... they showed scenes of incredible carnage. Nearly all the bodies were charred into blackness; in some cases the heat had been so great that entire limbs were burned off. Among the corpses were those of at least six babies and ten children... Even though Jordanians did not see the worst of the images ... the effect

on the population was profound... For two days, hundreds of enraged Jordanians surrounded the Egyptian and American embassies and the United Nations building in Amman, shouting pro-Saddam slogans, throwing stones and attacking Western journalists... One can only wonder how U.S. viewers would have reacted if they had seen the unedited video, or at least more than the sanitized few moments that were aired.

But there were also other reasons for controlling the television coverage. It was known that Saddam Hussein had access to CNN. Thus in any reports or military briefings aired, cognisance had to be taken of the time factors involved, and the fact that the enemy was watching, together with the rest of the world. In fact, during the latter half of 1990 CNN positioned itself as an instant electronic interlocutor between Baghdad and Washington ... with Saddam and Bush frequently exchanging verbal blows via the ten year old television network (Taylor, 1992:7).

Taylor (1992:32) says it appeared to many that the war broke out on television. Among the millions of viewers were George Bush and John Major:

Viewing the outbreak of war on TV was certainly an unusual way for two world leaders to learn of the consequences of their momentous decision to launch Operation Desert Storm... Politicians and government officials were not used to hearing the

news break and develop at the same time as television viewers.

General Norman Schwarzkopf cited this as one of the reasons for restricting media access, claiming that Saddam Hussein watched CNN religiously and received cuttings from the Washington Post:

....and I don't want to give him one damn thing that will help his military analysis if I can prevent it (quoted in Taylor, 1992:41).

It has been widely said that CNN's coverage of the Gulf War has changed the face of TV news. CNN gained its power in the Gulf War from the fact that it is a 24 hour news service. Where other networks regard news as an intrusion into potential advertising revenue and therefore cut back wherever possible, CNN sells itself as an all news service. Advertisers know that they are buying time on a news channel, and CNN is thus able to carry far more footage than other networks.

During the Gulf War CNN's ratings rocketed, reaching from 4.7 million to 10.9 million homes during prime time viewing, compared to 930 000 (Rosen, 1991) before the war. And this is a powerful propaganda weapon - its high-tech feel and glitzy packaging make it a "vehicle for the spread of American values, disguised this time as production values" (Rosen, 1991: 622-623). This is yet another example of glittering generality.

The nature of the coverage on television

during the Gulf War also bears looking at. Two weeks before the war, guidelines were issued by the Pentagon limiting what could and could not be shown. Among the outlawed images were "soldiers in agony or severe shock" and the transmission of "images of patients suffering from severe disfigurements" (Taylor, 1992:35). Although the guidelines were relaxed somewhat after an outcry from the press corps, there were remarkably few images of death, injury and suffering.

The viewer at home got an impression of a sanitary, clinical war, in which the only casualties were machines. Morrison (1992:88) points out that images of death and injury constituted only 3% of the total television output of the Gulf War. He says the lesson of Vietnam is not the effect of pictures on American morale, but the shattering effects of information on an unprepared public.

This highlights yet again why the Pentagon and the authorities were so obsessed with controlling the media during the war. Alter (1991a:61) points out that while journalists became frustrated at these restrictions, the American public supported the military stance. He (1991c:38) also raises serious doubts as to the effect bloody footage has on the audience, concluding:

It is the results of war, not the esthetics (sic), that in the long run sway public opinion... if doubts about this war's purpose, length and human cost come bubbling forth - the explanation will lie a lot deeper than the airing of maudlin, exploitative foot-

age on television.

The debate over the impact of bloody coverage is likely to rage as long as photojournalists and TV crews have access to battlefields. Due to the paucity of carnage depicted the Gulf War provides no clear indication of how much support the war effort would have had had the viewer been exposed to the full human cost.

CNN

In terms of media coverage the undisputed winner must be the Cable News Network. Not only did it provide saturation coverage of the war, it was also the only major TV network to have a reporter in Baghdad for the duration of the war (Alter, 1991b:36). Rosen (1991:622) points out that it was the Gulf War which proved a turning point for the cable network. In terms of the almost incessant coverage of the war, with only minor forays into other news stories, CNN played a major role in constructing the social reality which permitted America to go to war.

During the war it was CNN which broke the stories of allied blunders - the bombing of the baby formula factory and the civilian bomb shelter. Yet it tried to nullify the impact of those reports somewhat by deferring to in-house analyst retired Maj-Gen Perry Smith for comment, and by referring to the Iraqi censors.

But Rosen points out another disturbing

factor in the CNN coverage, and its meteoric rise. TV is a greedy medium. On radio, and to a lesser extent in print, it is possible to repeat items without immediately alienating the audience. This is a luxury the TV networks don't have. Pictures are a powerful form of communication and tend to linger in the memory longer than mere words, which require the recipient to use his/her own imagination to a greater extent.

In America, where there are a multitude of channels and numerous different news programmes, each with their own superstars - Dan Rather and Connie Chung on CBS and ABC's Ted Koppel to name just a few - there is tremendous competition among the television networks. Competing with the news are the entertainment shows. All the time, the viewer is interested only in the most exciting pictures. In the Gulf War this affected the military propagandists:

This frenzy of the visual ... has political consequences, but no politics per se. In the gulf war, for example, it worked to the advantage of the U.S. military in favouring repeated showings of laser-guided missiles hitting their targets squarely and spectacularly. But it also dictated that CNN would show scenes of what Iraq said was a civilian shelter destroyed by allied bombs (Rosen, 1991:623).

That excitement, according to Rosen (1991:623), will frame what becomes news in the future and anything important but without strong visuals will tend to be ignored. This appears to be a valid

concern, especially when considered against the background of the world today and coverage of current hotspots. Another factor that emerges is the power of CNN to focus the attention of the world and its leaders on specific events. Rosen credits CNN with the power to "create global distractions." He (1991: 623) also warns of some of the ramifications thereof:

As CNN begins to constitute - rather than merely inform - the global public sphere, its limitations will become global as well. Political deeds that lack a visual dimension may tend to escape world notice because they bore the image-hungry producers at CNN (or its competitors).

It would thus appear that the social learning theories and the agenda setting function of the media are as powerful as ever.

Katz (1991:29) also alerts to the dangers of allowing CNN to dominate the news networks. He points out that due to economic factors the established networks can no longer afford to "be in the breaking news business." So it was left to CNN to cover the breaking story. And in a scathing analysis of CNN's coverage of the opening moments of the war he shows how their coverage fell dismally short of real reporting, with implications for the propagandist.

Technologically the CNN presentation was superb and indeed innovative. It would appear, however, that the network did not make adequate use of the

information available. Where the viewer needed answers to real issues, s/he got descriptions of what the correspondent could see from his hotel. There was none of the analysis which characterised coverage of the Second World War, and no sense of fear or dread at witnessing the opening moments of a deadly conflict. This helped shape the perception that this was a war in which nobody would get hurt, one of the key elements of the Bush Administration's propagandist campaign.

The entertainment factor

Although there is no direct link between entertainment and propagandist, one of the functions of the mass media is to entertain. The mass media and the entertainment they carry help shape our perceptions of the world - consider for example the predominance of American productions on our television screens and in our cinemas.

The very fact that the Gulf War is regarded as a television war makes the entertainment aspect worth considering, albeit briefly. Even in South Africa, where round the clock TV was unheard of, the war dominated the screen. The coverage we received came from CNN - complete with logo and theme music.

The viewing public reacted as if this was another soap opera. During the early days of television in this country schedules were planned around each episode of Dallas. With the novelty having worn off the effect was not as pronounced during the Gulf War; but almost every

family interrupted their activities at some time to watch the war.

Americans reacted similarly, as Scheer (1991:492) shows:

What a wonderful war... Most Americans loved it. Why not? The TV was good, the body count low and the enemy bad...

Engelhardt (1992:613) takes matters further, describing the Gulf War as a "twenty-four-hours-a-day, eye-burning, blood-pumping, high-tech, all-channel media event." He develops his theme to show how the Pentagon sold the war to the networks as an entertainment package:

With its million or more uniformed extras, its vast sets and its six-month preproduction schedule filled with logistical miracles (and a few fiasco's, too) the Gulf War production involved intense military/media planning on a global scale. It had its own built-in "coming attractions" - the many variations on "Showdown in the Gulf" that teased viewers with a possible January opening on all screens in domestic multiplexes across the nation. It had its dazzling Star Wars-style graphics, theme music and logos, as well as stunningly prime-timed first moments (Disneyesque fireworks over Baghdad).

Kellner (1992:135) says the initial reports from pilots who bombed Baghdad aestheticised the war, without questioning its effects on the Iraqi people. One pilot referred to anti-aircraft fire as

"looking like Christmas lights" when the bombs explode. Kellner (1992:135) refers to the militarisation of American culture:

This coding of the air war as an exciting war movie points to the complicity between technowar culture and Hollywood movies. Indeed Hollywood films like *Top Gun* ... produced extremely positive images of air warrior heroes, while films like *Iron Eagle I* and *II* created Arab enemies who were destroyed by U.S. airpower.

While none of the films referred to were made specifically to further the propaganda campaign during the Gulf War, it is clear that the entertainment industry also plays an important role in shaping our realities.

Macarthur (1992:79) refers to antiwar critics protesting the sanitary nature of the war as depicted on television:

But this missed the point of good television design, which is meant to attract viewers as well as hide ugliness.

This tied in well with the Bush administration and the Pentagon, which also wanted to conceal the reality and ugliness of war.

Referring to the graphic design challenges posed by the war, Macarthur spoke to numerous graphic designers, all of whom professed reluctance to show disturbing images. For example, he (1992:81-82) quotes Judi Decker,

graphics director of KCRA-TV in Sacramento:

The audience is inviting you into their living room, so what we do has to be in good taste and get the message across simply... In the news business you don't show bodies being taken away, you don't show a lot of blood...

A mere three years later these sensitivities appear to have been forgotten or deliberately discarded in favour of graphic and gruesome images of suffering around the globe.

THE WORLD TODAY

The world is once again in a state of turmoil, with conflict in almost every corner of the globe. It appears to be a more volatile and violent place today than it was at the time of the Gulf War. However, this is difficult to quantify, since the nature of the media coverage has changed.

As during the Gulf War, television viewers around the world have an opportunity to watch events unfold and gain the illusion of involvement in the action. Two of these hot spots bear closer scrutiny - one for its similarities to the Gulf War, and one for the perspective it offers on how TV shapes the news. The effect on the public, and the reaction of the viewer, is interesting in each of these cases.

In the case of Haiti the US revels in its role as globocop, while it fails dismally in Yugoslavia. Coverage of change in

South Africa raises interesting questions concerning the portrayal of world events on TV news.

Haiti

There are remarkable similarities between the US military intervention in Haiti and the Gulf War. Prime among them is the domestic crisis confronting the President.

With the Clinton Administration not yet two years old it has already seen two Secretaries of Defense and one Attorney General resign. The President himself has been implicated in cases of sexual shenanigans and commercial misconduct during his term as Governor of Arkansas.

Congress rejected his Health Bill and he faces growing hostility from industry over the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Clinton desperately needed to divert attention from the domestic crises, and Haiti provided the perfect solution. The country's leader, Jean Bertrand Aristide, lives in exile in the US. He was overthrown by the military seven months after his election and Lt-Gen Raoul Cedras became the country's new leader.

As the US planned to invade Haiti, they took a harsher view of the military leader:

The US once considered him (Cedras) a model professional soldier...

He is now seen as a liar and dictator **South Africa** (WTN, 1994).

One propaganda mainstay, used to good effect during the Gulf War, is allegations of atrocities against civilians and children. Announcing America's intention to invade Haiti, President Clinton said during a television broadcast (WTN, 1994) "Recent news reports have documented the slaying of Haitian orphans by the nation's deadly police thugs".

The TV imagery was also similar. Viewers were treated to endless shots of military hardware and soldiers on maneuvers. As the propaganda campaign intensified the viewer saw battleships sailing in the Caribbean. Even the fiasco's gave the impression that America could not lose - when a battleship ran aground off the Haitian coast, the only vessels which approached it were small rowboats and rafts.

During the Gulf War CNN carried the story round the clock. It was always introduced with theme music and a logo, escalating from "Crisis in the Gulf" to "Showdown in the Gulf," culminating with "War in the Gulf." As the invasion of Haiti drew near CNN carried the story round the clock. It was introduced, with logo and theme music, as "Showdown in Haiti."

The nature of the coverage and the language used in continuity links seems calculated to muster support for the invasion of Haiti and a continued military presence in the region.

Coverage of the transition to democracy in South Africa, particularly the period prior to April 27, also bears consideration, albeit briefly.

For years the media in South Africa was rigidly controlled by the State and citizens gained certain impressions of the country which in all probability did not accurately reflect the situation. Simultaneously, inhabitants of the western democracies were told of oppression and repression within our borders and international pressure mounted. The media in those western countries played an important role in furthering the liberation struggle.

Slowly the pressure took its toll and changes in government policy started to take place. Restrictions on the media were relaxed to a certain extent. The State-run media, which had hitherto demonised and vilified the enemy, began to paint him as human and prepare the country for major change.

It was inevitable that the country would undergo major change. Despite their role in encouraging it, it appears that neither the political leaders nor the media were prepared for the turbulence of that change.

It is the international coverage, however, which is most interesting, especially the reportage on CNN. As has been illustrated, television is an avaricious medium eager for strong visual images. Peaceful change or protest

does not provide exciting TV footage. Violence does.

Those who view CNN and get their information about South Africa only from that source gained an impression of a war torn country where normal life had ceased completely. The only images shown were those of major conflict and violence.

Camera crews focused on the IFP massacre, referring to the "warzone in downtown Johannesburg, the financial heartland of the country." During the voting itself there was little reference to the tranquillity and goodwill; instead there were reports of bomb blasts and rabble rousing rallies by extremists on both sides of the political spectrum. Even the Presidential Inauguration was presented in terms of a major battle.

But for those of us living in South Africa, the reality was, and is, vastly different to the TV images. Despite the levels of crime and violence, normal life does continue and many South Africans go about their daily business without paying too much attention to the apparent anarchy and war in their country.

By extrapolation, it becomes possible to question the veracity of TV coverage of other world hot spots. An excellent example here is the former Yugoslavia. The TV coverage shows a complete and irretrievable breakdown of normal life. Yet, despite the horrors and hardships of war, normal life does continue to a certain extent - people marry, school continues and there is even a theater

group in the besieged capital of Sarajevo. Nobody disputes that life is difficult and war has taken its toll; the point is that the total breakdown shown on television has not yet happened, although it may be on its way.

CONCLUSION

Discussion in the preceding pages has shown how the media are manipulated to evoke certain responses in the viewer. It also highlights the sliding moral scales operating in the modern western world, although that is a topic for a separate discussion.

The Gulf War was presented as a technowar, where machines got hurt and not people. The media dehumanised everybody, including the "good guys," and portrayed the conflict as good machine versus bad machine.

The new technology (e.g. satellite feeds) was harnessed to paint a picture of innocent war games. Technology, however, is not always the innocent tool it first appears to be. It tends to dazzle one with its own brilliance. One becomes mesmerised by the flashing lights on a computer console and defers judgement to the great technological god. One loses sight of the fact that technology is the product of human imagination and ingenuity, created by people to serve people. Pandering to the technological god dehumanised all participants in the Gulf War.

As the influence of the media becomes more pervasive, their ability to disseminate

nate propaganda increases as well. The challenge facing all communicators today is how to meet the demands of the technological god without losing their humanity. And if media chiefs do conspire to present government sponsored propaganda, they should at least do so with their eyes open, aware that people are going to get hurt. Then they must ask - Do the ratings warrant it?

p32.

REFERENCES

- Alter, J. 1991.a "Showdown at 'Fact Gap'". *Newsweek*, February 4, pp.61-62.
- Alter, J. 1991.b "Peter Amett, from Baghdad". *Newsweek*, February 11, pp.36-38.
- Alter, J. 1991.c "Does bloody footage lose wars?". *Newsweek*, February 11, p.38.
- Bush, G. 1991.a "In defense of Saudi Arabia" in Sifry, ML and Cerf, C (eds) 1991 *The Gulf War Reader*, 197-199
- Bush, G. 1991.b "The need for an offensive military option" in Sifry, ML and Cerf, C (eds) 1991 *The Gulf War Reader*, 228-229
- Bush, G. 1991.c "The liberation of Kuwait has begun" in Sifry, ML and Cerf, C (eds) 1991 *The Gulf War Reader*, 307-310
- Engelhardt, T. 1992. "The Gulf War as total television". *The Nation*, May 11, p613.
- Garrett, L. 1991. "The Dead". *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June,
- Goodman, W. 1991. "Amett". *Columbia Journalism Review*, (May/June) 29-31
- Katz, J. 1991. "Collateral damage to network news". *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April, p29.
- Katz, E. 1992. "The end of journalism? Notes on watching the war". *Journal of Communication*. 42(3) pp.5-13.
- Kellner, D. 1992. *The Persian Gulf TV War*. Westview Press: Oxford
- Krauthammer, C. 1991. "Nightmare from the thirties" in Sifry, ML and Cerf, C (eds) 1991 *The Gulf War Reader*, 134-136
- Macarthur, J.R. 1992. *Second Front*. Hill and Wang: New York.
- Massing, M. 1991. "Another front". *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June, pp.23-24.
- Morrison, D.E. 1992. *Television and the Gulf War*. John Libbey: London.
- Rosen, J. 1991. "The whole world is watching CNN". *The Nation*, May 13, pp.622-625.
- Scheer, R. 1991. "What a wonderful war" in Sifry, ML and Cerf, C (eds) 1991 *The Gulf War Reader*.
- Sifry, M.L. and Cerf, C. (eds). 1991. *The Gulf War Reader*. Times Books: New York.
- Taylor, P.M. 1992. *War and the Media*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.