

George Mason University
Spring Semester 2011

CONF 695
News Media and International Conflict

Mondays, 7:20 p.m.

Founder's Hall, Room 207

Dr. Gareth Porter*

*see last page for contact information and bio

Course Overview:

This course will examine critically the role of the news media in shaping attitudes toward war and analyze how and why the system of corporate news media has been a central part of the war problem in one war after another over the past five decades. We will examine the way in which news media have covered a series of major wars during this period, and identify the failures and the reasons for them.

The course will focus on wars in which the United States has been involved directly or indirectly – including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and on U.S.-based news media. Particular emphasis will be given to the ways in which the news media have reflected the dominant assumptions of the political elite about the war and how the lines dividing acceptable and unacceptable interpretations have shifted and blurred over time.

In the second half of the course we will explore an alternative approach to covering wars or potential wars: “peace journalism”. The instructor will draw on his own experience as a journalist and historian to illuminate the possibilities for using investigative journalism as a tool for critiquing existing interpretations of reality and promoting narratives that support non-military alternatives to militarized policies.

Class requirements:

You will be required to attend all classes and to participate in class discussion in a way that indicates that you have been absorbing the readings as well as previous class discussions.

There will be no examinations for this course. Instead students will be required to write two relatively short papers for the course. The first paper will be an analysis of coverage of a war or potential war by a specific news outlet – print or television – over a six month period. You may choose any war, past or present, provided that it generated several substantive stories in the news media outlet you choose over a four-month period. (The easiest way to identify the

stories for a given topic and time period is to use indexes for the New York Times, Washington Post or Wall Street Journal.

The paper must track each story carried by the media on the war and analyze how the coverage you have chosen to study illustrates the concept of spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and dissent, which we will discuss in the second class meeting and will return to in weeks 3, 4 and 5.

You should clear your paper topic with the instructor as early in the semester as possible.

The first paper should be 7 to 10 pages in length and will be due on March 7.

The second class paper will be a proposal for a peace journalism project connected with any current war of conflict that could become a war that you may choose. In the proposal, you must critique the coverage of the war or a specific aspect of the war by one or more news media in terms of its conforming to the model of “war journalism” covered in class discussions. You should break down the critique according to various criteria for identification “war” and “peace” journalism.

Then you must discuss in specific terms how you would go about covering the war using a “peace journalism” approach. The proposal should explain clearly how you would about go about covering the same conflict with such an approach. Would you cover different issues or use a different frame for the same issues – or both? What means or methods would you choose to pursue a peace journalism approach?

Again, you should clear your proposed paper topic with the instructor as early in the semester as possible.

The second paper should be 14 to 20 pages in length and should identify clearly the universe of articles you are analyzing in terms of source, number and time period). The paper should cite specific articles in order to document your critique of the coverage in question. You should and provide sufficient detail of your proposal to show that you have delved into the issues, institutions and political forces involved in the war.

A first draft of the second paper will be due on April 18. I will return half the papers (by alphabetical order) by e-mail during the week of April 11, and the remaining papers during the following week. Those papers which have been returned during the week of April 18 will be presented by the authors on April 25. The other papers will be presented on May 2. The final version of the paper will be due May 15.

Grading: Your final grade for the course will be based on the following formula: first paper=25 percent; second paper=50 percent; class discussion=25 percent.

Required book: Only one book will be required for the course: Daniel C. Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam* (University of California Press, 1989).

Other readings for which URLs are not provided in the syllabus will be available on the GMU Library E-Reserve.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week One: January 24

Introduction to the News Media

Questions for Discussion:

1. How do the news media shape politics and policy in this country? How has that role changed?
2. What are the boundaries of the term “news media”. Does it encompass talk radio? The blogosphere? The Colbert Report?
3. Who controls the news media and how has its structure changed?
4. How do people get their news? Are traditional media being replaced by internet – based news? What are the implications of this shift?
5. Are news media more or less “objective” and “professional” than in previous decades?

Readings:

Pew Research Center for People and the News, “Americans Spending More Time Following the News”. <http://people-press.org/report/652/>

“Zogby Poll: “67% View Traditional Journalism as ‘Out of Touch’”.
<http://www.zogby.com/news/readnews.cfm?ID=1454>

Daniel C. Hallin, “The Passing of the 'High Modernism' of American Journalism Revisited” (2006). http://frank.mtsu.edu/~pcr/1601_2005_winter/commentary_hallin.htm

Richard Morin, “The Fox News Effect”, Washington Post, May 4, 2006.
<http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~sdellavi/wp/foxxvote06-03-30.pdf>

Eli M. Noam, “Media Concentration in the United States”,
<http://www.vii.org/papers/medconc.htm>

“The Structural Imbalance of Political Talk Radio”, Joint Report by the Center for American Progress and Free Press, June 21, 2007.
http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/06/talk_radio.html

Mark Glaser, “Distinction between Bloggers, Journalists, Blurring More than Ever”, Mediashift, February 28, 2009. <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2008/02/distinction-between-bloggers-journalists-blurring-more-than-ever059.html>

Week Two: January 31

How the News is Produced

Questions for discussion:

1. Do the news media cover issues with a conscious bias or unconscious bias? What is the dominant political bias of the news media? How does that bias work?
2. How do spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and dissent shape media coverage of politically sensitive stories?
3. How does Corporate ownership influence news?
4. How does the news media's relationship to official sources shape the news?
5. How does government pressure the news media, and what are the effects in terms of news coverage?
6. What is the relationship between print media and television in coverage of most major politically salient stories?

Readings:

Jay Rosen, "Audience Atomization Overcome: Why the Internet Weakens the Authority of the Press", *Pressthink*, January 12, 2009.

<http://archive.pressthink.org/2009/01/12/atomization.html>

Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News*, chapter pp. 119-130, 144-145, 182-192 and 260-278

Steve Lohr, "Study Measures Chatter of the News Cycle," *New York Times*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/13/technology/internet/13influence.html>

Week Three: February 7

The News Media and War Crimes

Questions for discussion:

1. How has the issue of war crimes by U.S. forces been dealt with in war coverage in Vietnam, the Gulf War and Iraq?
2. Do you think journalists are unaware that U.S. forces are guilty of atrocities and violations of the laws of war? How do you think they would explain such instances?
3. What factors do you think inhibit the coverage of war crimes issues?
4. How does the news media's handling of war crimes issues in American wars reflect the model of spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and dissent?

Readings:

Compilation of various news items, *In the Name of America*, pp. 173-210

Gareth Porter, "Who Was Responsible for My Lai? The American Way of War Crimes", unpublished manuscript.

Alisa Rubin, "2 Iraqi Journalists Killed as US Forces Clash with Militias", *New York Times*, July 13, 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/13/world/middleeast/13iraq.html?_r=2

Dan Froomkin, "WikiLeaks Video Exposes 2007 'Collateral Murder' in Iraq", *Huffington Post*, April 5, 2010. [includes WikiLeaks video]
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/05/wikileaks-exposes-video-on-525569.html>

Robert Dreyfuss, "War Crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan", *The Nation*, April 13, 2010.
<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/04/13-3>

Week Four: February 14

Television and War:

Guest speaker: Joel Swerdlow, adjunct professor at the University of Texas and co-author, with Frank Mankiewicz, of *Remote Control: Television and the Manipulation of American Life*.

Questions for discussion:

1. What characteristics of television coverage of war differentiate it from that of newspapers and magazines? How does it reframe and shift the context of news about war?
2. Does television coverage have a different way of navigating the spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and dissent than print news media?
3. What have been the major impacts of television coverage on the politics and popular attitudes toward U.S. wars?

Readings:

Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*, pp. 105-158

Clarence R. Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, pp. 144-149.

Michelle Kendrick, "Kicking the Vietnam Syndrome: CNN's and CBS's Video Narratives of the Persian Gulf War," in *Seeing through the Media: The Persian Gulf War*, (Susan Jeffords and Lauren Raminowitz, eds.), pp. 59-76

Victor Caldarola, "Time and Television War," in *Seeing through the Media*, pp. 97-105

Ella Shohat, "The Media's War," in *Seeing through the Media*, pp. 147-154.

Week Five: February 21

How the Press Covers America Going to War: Vietnam, the Persian Gulf and Iraq

Guest Speaker: Robert Parry, independent investigative journalist and editor of Consortium News, formerly an award-winning Washington journalist for Associated Press and Newsweek.

Questions for discussion:

1. Based on the case studies covered in the readings, why do you think the U.S. news media so strongly support the U.S. government's policy in the run-up and early stages of a war? Is the process driven by fear? Ideology? Patriotism? Desire for a big story? Other factors?
2. How does news coverage of the run up to each of these wars relate to the spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy and dissent? Do the relative spheres differ among the three cases?
3. What role do you think ownership plays in the shaping of this coverage? Editors?
4. What is the relationship between print and television in establishing the main lines of the coverage of specific issues in the run-up to war?

Readings:

Daniel C. Hallin, *The "Uncensored War": The Media and Vietnam*, chapter 3, pp. 59-101

Knut Royce, "Secret Offer: Iraq Sent Pullout Deal to U.S.," *Newsday*, August 29, 1990

Rick Ellis, "The Surrender of MSNBC," AllYourTV, February 25, 2003.

http://www.allyourtv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=259:surrendermsnbc&catid=78:featurescoveringmedia

Glenn Greenwald, "CNN/MSNBC reporter: Corporate executives forced pro-Bush, pro-war narrative," *Salon*, May 29, 2008.

http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2008/05/29/yellin/print.html

Eric Boehlert, *Lapdogs*, pp. 205-231.

Howard Kurtz, "The Post on WMDs: An Inside Story".

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A58127-2004Aug11?language=printer>

Jack Shafer, "Reassessing Miller," Slate, May 23, 2003.
<http://www.slate.com/id/2083736/>

Gary Kamiya, "Iraq: Why the Media Failed", Salon, April 10, 2007.
http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/kamiya/2007/04//media_failure

Week Six: February 28

Case Study: Covering the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the major narratives about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that emerge from media coverage?
2. Do these narratives connect with those from other conflicts in which U.S. forces have participated?
3. What are the major causes of these distortions?
4. How does media coverage reflect the three spheres of consensus, legitimate debate and dissent? How are those spheres changing in the case of this issue area?
5. What implications does this shift have for the future of the conflict itself?

Readings:

Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church, "Media Bias in Coverage of Israel-Palestine,"
<http://www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org/resources/factsheets/factsheet11.pdf>

If Americans Knew, "Accuracy in Reporting Israel/Palestine: The New York Times."
<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/media/nyt-report.html>

Glenn Greenwald, "How Israeli Propaganda Shaped Media Coverage of the Flotilla Attack," Salon, June 4, 2010.
http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/index.html

Marina Litvinsky, "Gaza Coverage Echoed Government Support of Israel," Inter Press Service, January 31, 2009, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=45624>

Chris McGreal, "Why Israel Went to War in Gaza," The Guardian, January 4, 2009
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/04/israel-gaza-hamas-hidden-agenda>

Gareth Porter, "Israel Rejected Hamas Ceasefire Offer in December," Inter Press Service, January 9, 2009. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=45350>

Neil A. Lewis, "At Annual Meeting, Pro-Israel Group Reasserts Clout", New York Times, May 4, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/05/us/politics/05aipac.html>

Week Seven: March 7

Case Study: Covering Afghanistan

Questions for Discussion:

1. What key issues surrounding the war in Afghanistan need to be monitored closely to identify coverage that is distorted or misleading? What narrative(s) emerging from Afghanistan coverage are parallel to those from the Iraq War?
2. Do you think the news media have covered Afghanistan during the first two years of the Obama administration's war in Afghanistan any differently because of the experience of the coverage of Iraq in 2002-2003?
3. After a decade of U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, there has not been a single study of news coverage of the war there? Why do you think that is the case?
4. How do the three spheres apply to coverage of the war in Afghanistan?

Readings:

Carlotta Gall, "Taliban Rebels Still Menacing Afghan South," *New York Times*, March 2, 2006.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/02/international/02taliban.html?ref=karlweikenberry&page=wanted=print>

Jonathan S. Landay, John Walcott and Nancy A. Youssef, "Are Obama Advisers downplaying Afghanistan dangers?" *McClatchy Newspapers*, October 11, 2009.

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2009/10/11/76920/are-obama-advisers-downplaying.html>

Gareth Porter, "Pro-War Officials Play up Taliban-al Qaeda Ties", *Inter Press Service*, October 13, 2009. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=48843>

Gareth Porter, "Taliban Pressed bin Laden on anti-U.S. Terror," *Inter Press Service*, February 17, 2010. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=50300>

"Afghanistan Media Coverage", *AlJazeera Listening Post*, October 23, 2010
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRtZHmPbUYk>

David V. Johnson, "The Way of the Warrior: Media Coverage of Gen. McChrystal," *WhoWhatWhy?* May 20, 2009 <http://whowhatwhy.com/2009/05/20/questions-about-gen-stanley-mcchrystal/>

Gareth Porter, "McChrystal's Support for Raids Belies New Image", *Inter Press Service*, March 31, 2010. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=50868>

Julian E. Barnes and Matthew Rosenberg, "Petraeus Expects Sustained Violence," *Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2010.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703720004575477912859821160.htm>

Week Eight: March 21

Peace Journalism

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is meant by the term "Peace Journalism"?
2. Does it merely mean that the journalist is pro-peace or does it include journalism that illuminates the essential aspects of the war being fought by the militarily stronger side that is being obscured by those who manage and carry the war? How is it related to investigative journalism?
3. Can objective standards that can be established for "Peace Journalism" as a clear discipline within journalism? Are they same standards that should be urged on all journalists covering conflict or is that unrealistic or unreasonable?
4. What role do human rights and social justice play in Peace Journalism?

Readings:

"The Peace Journalism Option"

<http://www.globalissues.org/article/534/the-peace-journalism-option#ThePeaceJournalismOption>

Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, "A Global Standard for Reporting Conflict and Peace," in *Peace Journalism: War and Conflict Resolution* (Richard Lance Keeble, Florian Zollmann and John Tulloch, eds.), pp. 139-156

Florian Zollman, "Iraq and Dahr Jamail," in *Peace Journalism: War and Conflict Resolution*,

Jake Lynch, "Active and Passive Peace Journalism in Reporting of the "War on Terrorism in the Philippines", *Peace Journalism in Times of War* (Susan Denten Ross and Majid Tehranian, eds.), pp. 129-147.

Gareth Porter, *The Politics of Counterinsurgency in the Philippines*, pp. 56-109

Week Nine: March 28

Peace Journalism: Covering Peace Negotiations

Questions for Discussion:

1. How do news media normally cover the issue of peace negotiations in the absence of any official move toward real negotiations?
2. What common features of U.S. policy surrounding the cases of Vietnam, the Philippines, Iraq and Korea in the 1970s?
3. What can an independent peace journalist do to fill the gap regarding negotiations?
4. What pitfalls must an independent journalist be aware of in seeking to cover the story of possible peace negotiations?
5. Are the lessons of Vietnam, Iraq and Korea relevant to understanding the case of Afghanistan?

Readings:

Gareth Porter, *A Peace Denied: The United States, Vietnam and the Paris Agreement*, pp. 136-173

Gareth Porter, *The Politics of Counterinsurgency*, pp. 108-148.

Gareth Porter, "A Responsible Exit Strategy", *Middle East Policy*, Fall 2005

Gareth Porter, "US Still Taking Hard Line on Peace Talks with Taliban", Inter Press Service, October 1, 2010. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=53031>

Week Ten: April 4

Peace Journalism: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Guest speaker: Dr. Neta Oren, Visiting Scholar at ICAR, winner of Israeli Political Science Association's Best Ph.D. Dissertation award for 2005.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do the specific characteristics of the conflict – especially in its present stage – imply a different approach to peace journalism from an ethnic civil war or a war of external military occupation, such as Vietnam or Iraq?
2. Given the narratives that have been created by coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the internal politics of the United States and Israel, what narratives does an effort at peace journalism need to create most urgently?
3. Is Bob Simon's report an example of "peace journalism" or not? If so, what are the implications for understanding the nature of peace journalism?

4. Should the application of peace journalism to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict be based on conflict-resolving principles, such as the need for both sides to understand the grievances of the other? If not, why not?
5. What is the most important audience for peace journalism in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? The Israeli public? Both sides? The U.S. public? Others?

Readings:

Bob Simon, "Is Peace Out of Reach?", CBS News, January 25, 2009,
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7XtT91yO6g>

Zaki Shalom, "Two States for Two Peoples: A Vision Rapidly Eroding," *Strategic Assessment [The Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv]*, November 2008, pp. 61-77.

Amnesty International, "Under the Rubble: Demolition and Destruction of Land and Property," May 16, 2004.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/033/2004/en/2193fae2-d5f6-11dd-bb24-1fb85fe8fa05/mde150332004en.pdf>

Breaking the Silence: Occupying the Territories: Israeli Soldier Testimonies, 2000-2010.
http://www.shovrimshatika.org/media_item_e.asp?id=11

Week Eleven: April 11

Peace Journalism and the "War on Terrorism"

Questions for Discussion:

1. How have the news media framed the issue of "war on terrorism"? What narratives emerge from the coverage?
2. How does the "terrorism" narrative link up with other war issues and how are those links likely to lead to distortion?
3. What special characteristics of the "war on terrorism" issue pose problems for news media – and peace journalism?
4. What alternative narratives need to be created through peace journalism on the issue?
5. How can investigative journalism be used to debunk a major element of the official and news media narrative on the "war on terrorism" issue

Readings:

Gareth Porter, "Bush's Iran/Argentina Terror Frame-up," *The Nation*, February 4, 2008.
<http://www.thenation.com/article/bushs-iranargentina-terror-frame?page=0,0>

Gareth Porter, Investigation of the Khobar Towers Bombing, Inter Press Service, June 22-26, 2009,

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47312>

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47324>

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47347>

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47363>

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=47376>

Jane Perlez and Pir Zubair Shah, "Drones Batter al Qaeda and its Allies in Pakistan", *New York Times*, April 4, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/05/world/asia/05drones.html>

Gareth Porter, "Report Shows Drone Strikes Based on Scant Evidence," Inter Press Service, October 18, 2010. <http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2010/10/18-5>

Gareth Porter, "Behind Drone Issue in Yemen, A Struggle to Control Covert Ops," <http://www.truth-out.org/behind-drone-issue-yemen-a-struggle-control-covert-ops65011>

Week Twelve: April 18

Peace Journalism: War with Iran?

Questions for Discussion:

1. How has media coverage of the conflict between the United States and Israel, on one hand, and Iran, on the other, contributed to political acceptability of possible war against Iran?
2. How does this media coverage reflect the three spheres?
3. Is there evidence of a personal agenda in David E. Sanger's coverage of the Iran nuclear issue? What would that agenda be?
4. How can peace journalism counter the structural and other distortions of coverage of the issue?

Readings:

Gareth Porter, "Official Version of Naval Incident Starts to Unravel," Inter Press Service, January 11, 2008. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=40747>

Gareth Porter, "How the Pentagon Planted a False Hormuz Story," Inter Press Service, January 15, 2008. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=40801>

David E. Sanger, "Imagining an Israeli Strike on Iran," *New York Times*, March 27, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/28/weekinreview/28sangerintro.html>

David E. Sanger and William J. Broad, "US and Allies Warn Iran over Nuclear 'Deception'", *New York Times*, September 25, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/middleeast/26nuke.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>

David E. Sanger, "U.S. Presses Its Case against Iran ahead of Sanctions", *New York Times*, September 6, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/09/world/middleeast/09nuke.html?scp=1&sq=david+sanger&st=nyt>

Gareth Porter, "NIE Reveals Qom Facility Followed 2007 Bush Threats," *Inter Press Service*, October 23, 2009. <http://ipsnorthamerica.net/news.php?idnews=2623>

Gareth Porter, "Iran Began Preparing for U.S. Bombing in 2002", *Inter Press Service*, November 17, 2009. <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=49296>

Gareth Porter, "Exclusive Report: Evidence of Iran Nuclear Weapons Program May be Fraudulent," *Truthout*, November 18, 2010. <http://www.truth-out.org/the-iaea-and-fraudulent-iranian-nuclear-documents65241>

Week Thirteen: April 25

Presentation of Student Papers

Week Fourteen: May 2

Presentation of Student Papers and Semester Review

Gareth Porter

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Biography

Gareth Porter is a visiting scholar at the George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution for the 2010-2011 academic year, while working on a book on the U.S.-Iran conflict over Iran's nuclear program.

Dr. Porter is an independent investigative journalist and historian specializing in U.S. national security policy. He has written regularly for Inter Press Service since early 2005 on U.S. policy toward Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and his articles have been republished on a number of websites, including Asia Times, Common Dreams, Counterpunch, Antwar.com and Truthout.

He has also published investigative articles on Salon.com, The Nation, The American Prospect and The Raw Story. His opinion pieces have been published on Huffington Post, Firedoglake, and other websites.

Dr. Porter was Saigon bureau chief of Dispatch New Service International in 1971 and later reported on trips to Southeast Asia for The Guardian, Asian Wall Street Journal and Pacific News Service. He also undertook research for his PhD dissertation in Saigon during that year. He received his PhD in Southeast Asian studies and international politics from Cornell University. From 1974 through 1976, he was Co-Director of the Indochina Resource Center, an anti-war educational and lobbying organization.

He is the author of four books on the Vietnam War and the political system of Vietnam. Historian Andrew Bacevich called his latest book, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War*, published by University of California Press in 2005, "without a doubt, the most important contribution to the history of U.S. national security policy to appear in the past decade."

Dr. Porter has taught at American University, City College of New York and the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.