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❖ **Freedman, Des, & Thussu, Daya Kishan — *Media and Terrorism: Global Perspectives* — Sage, London, 2012, pp. 336 ISBN: 9781446201589**

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The word 'context' and its variants is used many times in this book. It is no wonder. In the past decade the United States and its largely English-speaking allies occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, stood by as Lebanon (with no air force) was bombed by Israel for a month in 2008, stood by again as the Gaza Strip (with no defences) was bombed by Israel for three weeks in 2008-9 and let Libya tear itself apart (having destroyed its defences) in a tribal war in 2011. Some 3,000 civilians died in the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. Estimates of civilian deaths in Iraq range from a minimum of 100,000 to a maximum of one million. The toll rivals Rwanda, Pol Pot and possibly even Vietnam. While the secular Arab state of Iraq has all but been destroyed, the US has increased its military spending by 81 percent since 2001, accounting for 43 percent of the global total. Politicians in the English-speaking world are at pains to leave Iraq and Afghanistan behind them. The headlines have moved on to the Global Financial Crisis, the future of multiculturalism, climate change and the threat of China, Iran and Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands of dead Iraqis are off the agenda.

This book is about how all this in the last decade has been managed in public terms. It is also about the societal apparatus that maintains mass belief in a system that can construct such a scenario as the war in Iraq, turn it into an unending 'war on terror' and bring the media along for the ride. We could well see it in action again on Iran.

It outlines the structures of this apparatus: the new security industry ready to have military occupation outsourced to it once the 'withdrawals' are formally announced by the politicians; military construction of 'soft power' propaganda narratives alongside 'kinetic' (firepower) action; Hollywood playing its part in defending the essential myths of heroism, espionage and constructing an enemy (usually Muslims); the entertainment industry weaponizing its characters for the "war on terror" in games like *Full Spectrum Warrior*, readily transferable to iPhone apps; universities making room for a whole new (well-funded) discipline of 'anti-terrorism studies'; and, last but not least, journalists accepting the undistinguished Islamic connotation of the 'war on terror' without demur.

And, of course, this results in an overwhelmingly Anglo view of the world – a direct result of the power and influence of American media through its syndications, news agencies, transnational television networks (like CNN), middle class online strength and cultural exports. However you define it, 'terrorism' has also blighted life in Colombia, Peru, El Salvador, India and a host of other countries as well as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, let alone New York. Only Qatar's Al-Jazeera (English) is starting to redress this balance on a global scale.

This book is not the first to address the themes of war and media in a globalized, newly mediated world. Many of its fine contributors – like Philip Seib, Oliver Boyd-Barrett, Greg Philo, Daya Kishan Thussu, Stig Nohrstedt and Rune Ottosen – are pioneers in this field and written and published widely elsewhere. Simon Cottle, Christian Christensen, Sheldon Himelfarb and James Der Derian have also made major contributions but are not in this volume. Indeed, a whole new journal – *Media, War and Conflict* (Sage) – has made its name recently in this branch of media studies, beginning in its first issue (2008) with an extraordinary piece by veteran BBC reporter Martin Bell, entitled 'The Death of News' in which he declares the new platforms have outpaced the traditional foreign correspondent.

Within the war-and-media discussion, lies 'terrorism'. Not all war is terrorism and certainly, not all terrorism is war. Its haziness as a concept stems from its initial conception. George Bush Jr.'s 'war on terrorism' defies language as was often the case. It is so non-specific in target, means or end result as to leave a feeling, not a meaning. There is a very good discussion early in the book on the varying attempts to give meaning to the term. As Noam Chomsky has averred, the way it is being defined by the military ('irregular warfare') terrorism comes down to meaning "only terrorism against us, not the terrorism we carry out against them." Journalists like Robert Fisk find the word so ambiguous – ANC 'militants' were terrorists one decade, freedom fighters the next – they refuse to use it.

The difficulty of grounding the word leads to an interesting set of chapters taking different sides of what the United States is doing, and should be doing, in its 'soft power' diplomacy. Seib sees it as a valid device to defeat the scourge of terror. (The

Australian military theorist, David Kilcullen, profiled in the *New Yorker* by George Packer in 2006, is the Pentagon's top man on this strategy). David Miller and Rizwan Sabir do not agree. They see this diplomacy as integrally tied to the 'real war'/'kinetic' aims of US, British and other forces to use "information systems (which) will on occasions" as an MoD Information Ops document says, "require an aggressive and manipulative approach (usually through the PSYOPS tool). This is essential in order to attack, undermine and defeat the will, understanding and capability of insurgents." Miller and Sabir accuse Bush and Tony Blair of a systemic propaganda management of their societies and, ultimately, of war crimes. They see no line differentiating propaganda (leading to war) and terrorism. A war correspondent like Patrick Cockburn from *The Independent* in London might well agree. His book, *The Occupation: War and Resistance in Iraq* (2006, Verso, London,) shows how Iraqis quickly turned from seeing the Western forces as liberators to seeing them as occupiers. They became the 'insurgents' (see Chapter 6). Thus MoD's/Kilcullen's "defeating the will ... of insurgents" becomes part of the crimes of Iraq as Miller and Sabir attest.

This is where journalists too are dragged into the mire. In the new mediated environment they are all too easily identified with one side or the other (as Bush might have said). Decked out in flak jackets and 'embedded' in an SAS helicopter, it is difficult to blame 'the insurgents' for seeing them as part of the problem. Increasingly, they are targets. Some 860 journalists have been killed in war zones in the last 20 years. Of those, 149 have died in Iraq. A whole back section of the book debates the role of journalists and how they do, or do not, give a rounded picture of the whole story.

The most egregious examples of this of course, are to do with reporting Palestine. When the Israelis are not locking all journalists out of the action – as in Gaza when 1,400 died under the bombing in 2008-9 – or Mark Regev, Israel's master of spin, is churning out his perfect American-accented twang, several essays in this book show how the Palestinian narrative is not allowed to make it through the media gatekeepers. This should concern journalists who care about presenting both sides. It is one thing to back away from independent reporting (like the brave Cockburn) in a war like Iraq, it is another not to cross the Qalandia checkpoint and find out for yourself what's happening in Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nablus. Palestine is disappearing by every passing day as illegal settlements eat away at the 22 percent of the country left in 1948 for Palestinians. This 'big picture' ('sociocide' as Lena Jayyusi calls it), is not being reported in the Western media, though it is in the Arab and Muslim (Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Turkey) one. This disjunct itself is also a cause for concern.

There are some omissions from the book that are slightly surprising. For a text that speaks so often of context, there is little sense of history here. Without resorting to Phillip Knightley's best-selling *The First Casualty: the war correspondent as hero and myth-maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (2003, 3rd ed, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore,), it should be obvious that so many of the problems raised in the book are deeply rooted in a sustained campaign by the US armed services to ensure media are never again able to torpedo a war the generals are sure they are winning. Despite the changes in technology, the spectre of Vietnam hangs heavily over current media management techniques by Western defence forces. Breaking the link between reporters' in-field perceptions and readers, listeners and viewers back home remains a top priority. 'Embedding' (and occasional killings of those who break the unwritten rules, as in the attack on Al-Jazeera journalists), is the technique of choice. Only YouTube videos have subverted this censorship strategy, famously showing on one occasion a US helicopter mowing down citizens in an Iraqi town square.

The other major omission is drones. In a book on terrorism, unseen, unheard, anonymous killing machines, controlled by guys back in Texas who kill foreigners as a 9-to-5 job, surely demands discussion. Their use has poisoned US-Pakistani relations, their sale across the globe has become ubiquitous, their various sizes (there's even a hand-held version now) are about to make them a consumer item and yet there has been so little 'blowback'. Quite apart from the moral issues, or the psychological consequences on their users, they surely represent a new stage in terrorizing civilian populations.

This book underlines how far we have gone in one decade to a new relationship between media and war (and within it, media and terrorism). All 'sides' use social media, sometimes to terrorize, sometimes to transmit a picture or gain an image. A journalist friend of mine told me of seeking an interview from a Taliban fighter in Afghanistan only to be asked to wait while he was Googled and his profile checked before the request was accepted. The incident is remarkable not only because of the use of technology by the Taliban. It also shows a journalist trying to resist the propaganda system of the West and get "the other side" on tape. Such bravery is all too rare.

This book is an extremely useful discussion of a variety of perspectives on how the media relates to an era when 'terrorism' in all its imaginings is the common currency. It reveals much about the working of governments behind the scenes to manufacture our consent to wars and to construct demonologies to rationalize them. And, finally, it challenges media workers at all levels to re-think their work practices and reclaim their independence on behalf of their publics.

#### **About the reviewer**

Peter Manning is a doctoral candidate at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). He is a former Senior Lecturer in Journalism at Monash University (2009-2011) and at UTS (2000-2008). He is also a former head of TV News and Current Affairs at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the author of *Us and Them: Media, Muslims and the Middle East* (2006, Random House: Sydney).