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Fighting for “Hearts and Minds”: Towards a

In September 11, when fuel-laden airliners exploded into 20th-century icons, when massive buildings disintegrated and the world seemed suddenly to change, the first casualty identified on television was our graduate, the author, CNN commentator and so much more, Barbara Olson. Barbara was to be specially remembered, nationally and internationally, because of her last communication before the violent descent into the Pentagon, a cell-phone call to her husband, Ted, as he sat in his Justice Department office.

But her iconic role was more significant: she had, in the years before her death, been personally effective in changing public opinion, in battling for hearts and minds through a highly effective use of the US media. Without much assistance, she had created an entity, the Independent Women’s Forum, and developed a brilliant persona as its effective spokesperson for a conservative ideology. And, finally, she developed a platform for herself using the many apertures for persuasion afforded by the new technologies that had transformed the global communications landscape.

She was an exemplar of intense participation in a marketplace of ideas in which individuals and groups could deploy electronic soap boxes and turn them into powerful megaphones. She showed by example how to manage imagery and ideas within national borders and beyond. Olson had propounded her views to support a political movement within the United States, to affect voter behavior, to help, dramatically, in the impact on elections and to convince many to adopt her perspectives as a mainstream movement.

Ironically, the notion of powerful, effective, shaping uses of the media, just where Barbara excelled, moved to the foreground with the events of September 11. Until then there was precious little public attention to its place in the armament of external influence. Scholarly treat-

ment of international broadcasting had lagged and, as a subject, it had not been central to international relations academic work.* All of a sudden, “hearts and minds,” the mental and emotional kilns in which hatreds are stoked, emerged as a meaningful and urgent battleground for large-scale state concern. After the attack on the World Trade Center, the significance of a “clash of civilizations” was no longer only a question for debate in academic institutions. It became clear that military responses were insufficient to counter reservoirs of incultation and belief that nourished future terrorists or aggressors against the West. In an explicit, broadly demanded strat-

mastering, the global market for speech. September 11 was an extraordinary wake-up call about the movement of ideas in the world, and the way in which some ideas—ideas deeply and treacherously held—can have enormous consequences for global stability, peace of mind, and the conduct of ordinary life.

In the war against terrorism (and in many previous wars) public opinion is a significant front for engagement. New examples of the vital importance of information policy to war emerge daily, often amplifying a sense of frustration about negative global attitudes toward the United States.

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egy, there existed concern about the entire context in which such attitudes were formed.

Now, political figures were paying closer attention to the mix and content of voices in other countries, concentrating on the power of media, to be sure, but also to such previously off-limits areas as the nature of religious education, the policy of leadership in tolerating or quietly reinforcing harshly anti-Western speech. The discovery that individuals were being shaped over years in ways unseen and unanticipated, and that as a result they could become instruments of violent destruction, forced a response. The United States and others are re-examining the role of public diplomacy—including international broadcasting—as a tool in a long process of counter-education, counter-programming.

An international communications landscape that had been seen previously as capable of developing pluralism, diversity, and democracy was now seen to harbor the weeds and thorns of conflict, danger, and instability. At the end of the old century, there was, in the post-Soviet period, a celebration of the breaking out, seemingly everywhere, of the right to receive and impart information. The dream was, and still is, for a world where information moves without various forms of restriction, for transparent government and educated citizenry. To achieve such a world, the power of states to control the images that permeate their terrain is in question everywhere.

All this remains true in the post-September 11 era. But there is something added: preoccupation with national and global security means a frenzied testing of new and modified techniques aimed at regulating, if not

In a moment of exasperation, Congressman Henry Hyde summarized the feeling of many: “How is it that the country that invented Hollywood and Madison Avenue has such trouble promoting a positive image of itself overseas?” In February 2002, *The New York Times* reported the establishment of an Office of Strategic Influence in the Pentagon, designed to deploy information as a coordinated weapon of US national defense. But under the pressure of public opinion, the idea of the office was abandoned.

The Office of Strategic Influence should be seen in context. With the end of the Cold War, long-standing United States government efforts to help shape global public opinion on matters significant to national security were essentially privatized. The morale of the United States Information Agency (USIA), the prime instrument for this function and descendant of the World War II Office of War Information, declined. USIA was finally disembodied and merged into the State Department. In fact, in contrast to the USIA, Hollywood and Madison Avenue, CNN, and the Motion Picture Association of America were celebrated as extremely effective carriers and projectors of American values. Gaining so fabulous a global reach, so pervasive a presence, America had fostered mass overseas markets and created exuberantly receptive audiences. Who needed the Voice of America and other elements of a tired and somewhat bloated information apparatus?

I have spent much of the last few years exploring these questions with students at Cardozo and at the Programme in Comparative Media Law and Policy at the University of Oxford. I have tried to analyze and describe

why one society has an interest in the media space of another and how it goes about trying to affect it. In the process, a world emerges in which decisions about speech and culture are made multilaterally, among or between governments and with great transnational corporations. These arrangements reflect a marketplace of ideas, which I often call a marketplace for loyalties. This is the market in which Barbara Olson was so effective.

Information Intervention

As can be seen in Afghanistan, a media-related foreign policy becomes more tangible and more immediately necessary in moments of conflict. At such a time, the geopolitical stakes in the patterns of distribution of information are too high to be left solely to some fictive market in which governments do not actively participate. Information intervention—an affirmative effort to engage media realities—has a long tradition in its relationship to the run-up, avoidance, or resolving of war.

International Public Information Group

In April 1999, there was a concrete precedent for the later Office of Strategic Influence. The White House issued Presidential Decision Directive 68, which sought to develop and consolidate approaches to international information space. The International Public Information Group (IPIG) had members from the State Department, United States Agency for International Development, the National Intelligence Council, the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The composition of this group, particularly the inclusion of members of the intelligence and military community, was designed to reflect the importance of media to foreign policy and national security.

After the 1999 NATO military intervention in Kosovo and with the prodding of IPIG, the United States took the lead in establishing a “Ring around Serbia.” This ad hoc and creatively assembled group of peripheral transmit-

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In the 1990s, proposals began to be made for concerted action by the international community to forestall use of broadcast media that promoted or accentuated devastating, often genocidal, conflict. It became common to point to the explosive mobilizing role Radio-Television Libre des Milles Collines (RTL) played in Rwanda, with its repetitious and explicit incitement for Hutu to slaughter Tutsi. That became the textbook example where preventive intervention by the international community should have been deemed suitable and necessary.

Before the genocide, NGOs sought, unsuccessfully, United States assistance in jamming violent broadcasts. What emerged, fitfully, after Rwanda, was a growing interest in information intervention as a way to broaden the range of intermediary opportunities available to the UN, NATO, or the United States as it engaged in peacekeeping measures in ethnic and other conflicts. Elements of information intervention would—at the outside—include the kind of jamming sought in Rwanda. There were also more traditional approaches such as monitoring local transmissions and so-called peace broadcasting (a channel of information that was “objective” and had as its goal defusing conflict). In extreme cases offending broadcasts were jammed.

ters broadcast non-Milosevic voices into parts of the former Yugoslavia. This aspect of “information intervention” provided an effective mode of distribution, too, for reinforced Serbo-Croatian programming of the Voice of America, the BBC, the United States surrogate, RFE/RL, and Deutsche Welle. The US government persuaded the leadership in Republika Srpska to allow transmitters there to be retooled for the Serbian information action. The Ring around Serbia also included transmissions from Romania and Croatia.

Elements of an Information Foreign Policy

The shapelessness of transnational information networks, especially as the Internet significantly affects information flow, compels a new set of responses. If a government uses persuasion through information as part of its foreign policy, then it must find new mechanisms and employ new skills. Any government engaged in these processes must be far more conscious and proactive about the modes of information distribution. It must also allow public debate to ensure the development and use of best practices.

Implementation of a foreign policy of information that focuses on media structures must include the following: better understanding of the role of international broadcasting, the Voice of America, and its counterpart; sustained assistance for favored forms of media abroad; sponsoring the export of legal and policy models regarding media structures (and rewarding those states that adopt the favored model); expanding or altering state-sponsored international broadcasting; using the World Trade Organization and related mechanisms to force changes in media-related trade practices; reinvigorating the international copyright regime to affect domestic

choices concerning the meaning of democracy and the role of media in the political process. In an environment affected more and more by new technologies, the grounding, organization, and implementation of media assistance is in need of more systematic examination, study, and possibly revision.

In the wake of September 11, there is an urgency to address the attitudes, perceptions, longings, and fears of a world concerned about its future. Suddenly during this war against terrorism, public opinion was again a significant front and space for engagement. In the early days of US flights over Afghanistan, bombers destroyed local

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intellectual property regimes; developing regional agreements, treaties, and customary international law as measures to shape or limit state media law enactments; increasing “information intervention” by the international community, especially in postconflict situations; and encouraging an international environment that fosters new technology (including addressing the digital divide).

Since the 1990s, the United States and Europe have mounted many efforts to foster transitions to democracy in an effort to establish a media sector supportive of democracy, one that has a substantial degree of editorial independence, is financially viable, reflects diverse and plural voices, and provides information necessary for citizenship to be meaningful. A foreign policy of technical assistance for media reform is a mix of idealism and realpolitik, of advocacy of principle and extension of national interest. Each element of assistance (financial aid, or organizational assistance, and legal reform) touches

radio transmitters and replaced Radio Shari’ah with US programming. Reflecting a preoccupation with hostile attitudes across the world, President Bush named Charlotte Beers, a veteran of the advertising industry, as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy, hoping to achieve more aggressively favorable US images abroad. She immediately began a process of rebranding America.

There has always been a battle for hearts and minds, but not with the technologies, not with the constellation of nation-states, not with the legal framework that exists today. Our student, Barbara Olson, was a master of the media—as a best-selling author, as a television personality. She had a great deal to teach about the way to hearts and minds, with her combination of conviction, passion, and extraordinary political savvy. For the future, it will be that combination that governments need and seek to employ as they try to shape public opinion at home and abroad. ■

* For treatments of legal questions raised by aspects of international broadcasting, see Leo Gross, “Some International Law Aspects of the Freedom of Information and the Right to Communicate,” in Kaarle Nordenstreng and Herbert I. Schiller, eds., *National Sovereignty and International Communication* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1979), pp. 208–9. See Bhagavatula Satyanarayana Murty, *Propaganda and World Public Order: The Legal Regulation of the Ideological Instrument of Coercion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968, reissued as *The International Law of Propaganda*, 1989); David Marks, “Broadcasting across the Wall: The Free Flow of Information between East and West Germany,” *Journal of Communication* 33 (winter 1983). See also John L.

Martin, *International Propaganda: Its Legal and Diplomatic Control* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958 reissued 1969). Much of this material is cited in Stephen D. Krasner, “Global Communications and National Power: Life on the Pareto Frontier,” *World Politics*, 43, no. 3 (April 1991): 336–466 at 344, to support his argument that the few international agreements that deal with international broadcasting “are filled with the kind of confusing and contradictory language that betrays underlying disagreements about principles and norms.” Legal issues are also canvassed in Jamie Frederic Metzler, “Rwandan Genocide and the International Law of Radio Jamming,” *American Journal of International Law*, 91 (1997): 628.