

# Events reported by the media since 9 11

[Business](#)



To what extent has the media ‘ independently reported events since 9/11 ‘. This essay critically explores the independence of the media in reporting events in the post 9/11 period. It particularly focuses on independence from the government and the military.

The essay begins by exploring the claims of critics who suggest that professional journalistic practices such as over reliance on official sources and fear of lawsuits from powerful interests contribute to the manufacture of consent. For these reasons the mass media has become little more than propaganda instruments for a dominant elite. Herman and Chomsky 1994, p19-23]. It then reviews recent conflicts to explore the extent to which this theory is based. In exploring these issues the essay endorses the view that the media post 9/11 became weapons of mass hysteria used by the State to create fear in the population rendering the population liable to manipulation. It also seeks to highlight a number of potential limitations to this position particularly in regard to unilateral reporting during conflicts and discussion around the Gilligan interview on the BBC broadcast.

Herman and Chomsky’s position is that the mass media are drawn into a relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest. Drawing on the work of Mark Fishman [1986 p. 143] entitled *Manufacturing the News*, which claims ‘ In particular a news worker will recognize an official’s claim to knowledge , not merely as a claim , but as a credible, competent piece of knowledge. This amounts to a moral division of labour; officials have and give the facts, reporters merely get them ‘.

Herman and Chomsky go on to say that the media may feel obligated to carry dubious stories and mute stories so as not to offend their sources and disturb close relationships with the military or the government. The information given by the media tends to be selected and shaped in ways that support the world-views and interests of the people and organizations making the media text.

This does not say that they are fiction but more to suggest what is often authoritatively presented as real and factual is constructed through a process of selection. [ Banks 2009]

The notion of media independence can be analysed in the context of how governments and the military can influence the ways in which news agendas are made. In his press article based on an interview with a female Captain in the army who is also a member of the media operations, Smith gives an insight into her partisan views with ‘ The British army needs the media on side ‘. She also states ‘ It is our voice to the people at home ‘ [ Smith 2005, personal conversation with author]. This is an example of how, in some instances, the government or military can influence or determine the ways in which news agendas are made.

The lack of apparent media independence is continued by Kellner.

‘ The lack of debate in the U. S. corporate broadcasting media points to an intensifying crisis of democracy in the United States. While the media are supposed to discuss issues of public importance and present a wide range of views, during the epoch of the War on Terror they have largely privileged Bush administration and Pentagon positions. ‘ [ Kellner 2007 p.

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12]. When examining the war on Iraq Kull et al also question media independence ' It also appears that the media cannot be necessarily be counted on to play the critical role of doggedly challenging the administration.

The fact that viewers of some media outlets had far lower levels of misperception than did others suggests that not all were making the maximal effort to counter the potential for misperception. [ Kull et al 2004. p597]. This general argument informs the views of Mythen and Walklate when discussing the culture of fear that has been created within British society as a result of the terrorist threat.

They argue that democracy depends on unbiased information, and accepting security considerations associated with terrorism there is a suspicion this has given the UK government to pick and choose information given to the public via the media. Mythen and Walklate 2004 p. 138] There are however limitations to the view that the media has lost it's independence from the government or the military when reporting on conflicts. The Gilligan interview and debate is arguably an example of the media challenging and not collaborating with government. In his interview with John Humphrys on a ' Today' broadcast on the BBC , Gilligan suggested the Prime minister knowingly lied about the strength of the intelligence which suggested that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.

It could be argued that Gilligan felt confident in criticizing the government due to the political lack of consent for the war at the time.

While the BBC depends on the UK state for funding it is required to demonstrate its independence and opposing Government is one such way. The Gilligan incident suggests that journalists are in a difficult, conflicted situation. Lloyd concludes ' If the BBC could put out a report like that and defend it, and remain convinced it had been unfairly treated by Hutton and traduced by government, then we have produced a media culture which in many ways contradicts the ideals to which we pay homage '. Lloyd, 2004. p.

2-4 , 136-40]. Limitations to the view the media may have lost its independence, can also be found when comparing embedded reporters to unilateral reporters. Being able to challenge official versions of the truth is an important role of the media in democratic societies, and one which the unilateral reporter may be in a stronger position to do. This is because their reporting is not subject to the same levels of scrutiny or censorship as that of embedded reporters. Unilateral reporters can become more involved in revelatory reporting.

Recent critics of media independence make a systematic case in support of the proposition that media reporting lacks independence.

It argues that practices illustrate the manufacturing of consent in favour of the government and military. In particular, following Hersh, the uncovering of the lack of substance to intelligence reports regarding Iraq's ability to produce Weapons of Mass Destruction provoked only a few news stories in America, and little sustained questioning about how the White House could endorse such an obvious fake.