

# The bbc

Business



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British foreign policy relies heavily on the BBC. Diversification of ownership will not ensure diversity of news, views, and programming. The BBC is not privately owned.

It proclaims impartiality and neutrality and claims that apart from World War II, BBC's task was to maintain neutrality and non-partisan position. Yet, the BBC itself cannot be absolutely impartial, when dealing with the British foreign policy, as denoted in Iraqi crisis. The BBC repeated the British Prime Minister's assertion and Foreign Secretary's declaration that Iraq had supplies of WMD on the eve of the US-UK attack on Iraq. As such, the BBC took the issue seriously, but that is no consolation to thousands of Iraqis who lost their lives and property. In addition, BBC took exception to the British Prime Minister's declaration in April 2003 and highlighted his prevarication.

Although the scenario needs to be credited to BBC's endeavor—that the PM was challenged in the House Commons—its rush to air the media's support of the British foreign policy that articulated to the threat, underlying the non-existence of WMD was evidential. Reports of the UN weapon inspectors and the CIA's own revelations in 2003 established the non-existence of WMD in Iraq. This is what usually happens on the international scene. The media of a country more often than not support its official foreign policy. The BBC matters a great deal in the formulation of the British foreign policy. The major reason the BBC continues to be funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is that it is an integral part in the formulation and projection of the British foreign policy.

Though the charter of the BBC ensures its editorial independence from direct British government control, the charter expressly explains that the BBC was formed to propagate the national interest. Therefore, as much as its independence is worldly renowned, it still has an obligation to the British people to serve the national interest. However, how it serves the national interest is what has been left as its prerogative. It is an important source of accurate information, gathered by the numerous correspondents spread all over the world. The in-house experts that work with the BBC can also undertake the analysis of the information. Due to its perceived independence and, thus, influence, the British government uses the BBC to shape the opinions of a targeted audience.

Although the promotion of the British culture is largely undertaken by another FCO funded institution, the British Council, the BBC provides invaluable assistance. It transmits programs that inform the global audience on the various people, living in Britain, and their cultures, the geography of the country, socio-political situation in that country and generally, the life as lived there. This helps in creating a favorable attitude of the world towards Britain. British foreign policy is hugely assisted by the use of the English language around the globe as the international language of transactions. The use of the language leaves a positive impression in the mind of people of other nations.

As foreign policy is based on influencing others to someone's way of thinking, the adoption of English makes the work of foreign affairs bureaucrats easier. The BBC broadcasts educative programs, whose aim is to spread the wide knowledge of the English language; hence, this serves

British foreign policy. The BBC broadcasts in different local and regional languages throughout the world. It has varied language stations such as Arabic, Urdu, Hausa, Swahili, and many others. This increases its reach to a wider audience and promotes its acceptance regionally and locally.

Convincing someone and gaining the trust is easier, when people use their own language than using their own motives and language.

This is useful in the propagation of the British foreign policy as it would be easier to put across their agenda. One of the functions of the media, highlighted earlier, is that of mobilization, through which the media creates a joint-government environment component. This role can be seen in the activities of the BBC during times of war. For instance, the propaganda role it played during the Second World War had a huge impact on the morale of the British allies and their Nazi opponents. By projecting the war as a battle of evil against goodness, the British allies were portrayed as the saviors of the western civilization against the evil of the Nazis. Though this was a wide practice of using the national broadcaster for propaganda practices, it further proves the role of the BBC in foreign policy, its proclamation of independence notwithstanding.

The Prime Minister during the war, Churchill, used BBC to address his soldiers and the British Commonwealth. He also used the broadcaster in taunting the enemy, underlining the role of BBC in foreign policy. The BBC has been further used to broadcast in countries under dictatorship with no free press. This has been done in the promotion of the idea of democracy. Pro-democracy activists and partisans in countries such as the former Yugoslavia, Iran and others have been afforded an opportunity to engage <https://assignbuster.com/the-bbc/>

with others back in their home country through the BBC. This has been possible through the intervention of the foreign office in pursuit of its goals.

Indeed, its Persian Service has admitted its role in the overthrow of Iranian government in the 1953 coup. This could only be possible if it was perceived that a coup would better serve the foreign interest of the British government. As explained above, the media plays a role, both as an input or output tool for foreign policy decisions. As a result, political leaders join foreign policy decisions with the media in mind. To achieve a favorable attitude from the media, governments employ “ media management” as a tool to realize their goals in both domestic and foreign policies.

According to Jenks “ journalist can be restricted in their movements, accredited selectively, or favored by leaders, according to their “ positive-supportive” coverage”. The British government is no exception, when it comes to such strategies. The BBC is such an important institution to British foreign policy that employees are vetted by M15, which is charged with gathering security intelligence within Britain. This extra precaution shows the BBC handles sensitive matters that would hurt the foreign policy of Britain were it to fall in the wrong hands. The British intelligence in the past has used BBC reporters as spies or conduits of information.

Nevertheless, this was discouraged, as it could compromise the perceived independence of the BBC. This independence is the most important asset of the BBC and it has seen its audience grow, even when it faces stiff competition across the globe. This security check up was strictly enforced during the cold war. The BBC during this period was openly biased against

the communist bloc. It served the British foreign policy by broadcasting propaganda in its affiliation stations that were established to broadcast to Eastern Europe that was dominated by the Soviet Union.

The BBC by highlighting the problems in these countries served the British foreign policy of showing these countries in a bad light. This was meant to contrast with democracy and high standard of living that supposedly existed in the West. The BBC opinion shaping abilities has proved invaluable in foreign policy. This has seen it being accused of collaboration with the government to 'sex up' evidence that eventually led to the invasion of Iraq. It said the BBC, on the advice of the British government, blew out the proportion of the threat from Iraq to convince the British people and the world that war or invasion was the only option to deal with the threat. After the invasion, the threat turned out to be less than what the public had been led to believe.

This resulted in heavy criticism from the Hutton inquiry that was denied by the BBC. Due to the importance of BBC to foreign policy, there is close interaction between the head or director of the corporation and the government of the day. Issues that can impact negatively on British foreign policy are discussed before decisions are made. Though the government cannot expressly dictate on the broadcast or any other material, the consultation affords the government the benefit of being forewarned and, thus, steps to counter the damage can be implemented. It is a fact that the British government pays close attention to BBC news, especially foreign broadcast. In some cases, pressure is brought in the name of national

security to preclude anything that would be too damaging to the British foreign interest.

The BBC through its BBC Media Action and BBC World Service Trust organizations, though it does not directly participate in diplomatic or foreign policy, participates in development issues, influence opinions of developing countries. Through development participation in such activities as health, there is the creation of goodwill towards Britain, which is one of the goals of foreign policy. Finally, BBC influence on foreign policy derives from its impact on the psyche of the public. Through concentration on particular foreign stories, it galvanizes the public attention and concern and the government has no alternative but to implement what the public wants in its foreign policy. Conclusion In conclusion, the media plays a key role in all the stages of foreign formulation of policy as foreign policy decision-making process takes place in an environment, partly influenced by the mass media.

Indeed, political players consider the media to be a key input, when making decision that have internal as well as external effect. From this discussion, it is clear that the media plays an important role in the formulation of foreign policy. It is true that political players take much interest in the information that comes from the media as a good starting point in making decisions. However, although past studies ignored the value of the media, considering it as a channel of providing information, the reality of the past few years shows that this view minimizes the actual value of the media in formulating foreign policy. The BBC has been used as a vital tool for surveillance of international environment, correlation of different parts of the society in order to respond positively to the changing environment, and a tool for the <https://assignbuster.com/the-bbc/>

transmission of social heritage. Though the BBC may be perceived to be politically endowed, most of the foreign policies are prompted by the media.

The BBC is also useful as an entertainment and mobilization of individuals across the society.