



YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media

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16 Highlight(s) | 0 Note(s)

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massmedia performance. In fact, our treatment is much closer to a “free market” analysis, with the results largely an outcome of the workings of market forces. Most biased choices in the media

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There are important actors who do take positive initiatives to define and shape the news and to keep the media in line. It is a “guided market system” that we describe here, with the guidance provided by the government, the leaders of the corporate community, the top media owners and executives, and the assorted individuals and groups who are assigned or allowed to take constructive initiatives.⁶ These initiators are

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sufficiently small in number to be able to act jointly on occasion, as do sellers in markets with few rivals. In most cases, however, media leaders do similar things because they see the world through the same lenses, are subject to similar constraints and incentives, and thus feature stories or maintain silence together in tacit collective action and leader-follower behavior.

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Human-rights monitoring and protective agencies have had a very difficult time organizing and surviving in the “death-squad

democracies" of El Salvador and Guatemala. Between October 1980 and March 1983, five officials of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador were seized and murdered by the security forces. In accord with a propaganda model, these murders should have been of little interest to the U.S. mass media, and this expectation is borne out by evidence. As an illustrative comparison, the New York Times had a grand total of four back-page articles on these five murders,⁹⁶ whereas, during the same period, the Times had thirty-five articles on the Soviet human-rights activist Natan Sharansky, not all of them on the back pages. The proportionality of attention fits well our general propagandamodel analysis of the media's treatment of worthy and unworthy victims.

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This incident is revealing. It is unlikely that Sharansky or Walesa would be so treated by the INS, but if by some chance they were, the press outcry would be great.¹¹¹ When a press conference was held in Chicago by supporters of GAM to protest this outrage, the major media did not attend, and neither the press releases nor the follow-up letter from a congressional group signed by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan could break the silence. The convergence between Reagan administration policy toward Guatemala and media priorities was complete. (According to two organizers of the Chicago press conference, full information on this event was given Steve Greenhouse, the New York Times's reporter in Chicago, but not a word about this incident appeared in the newspaper of record.) A press release by the Guatemalan army on

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In Nicaragua, once again, there have been no reported deaths of journalists by state terrorists, nor even threats of personal violence. In 1984, the majority of the fifty-odd radio stations were privately owned, and some of them provided their own news programs; four other independent producers supplied radio news programs without prior censorship. Foreign radio and television from commercial and U.S. propaganda sources broadcasting from Costa Rica, Honduras, and elsewhere were of growing importance in 1984.³¹ Two of the three newspapers were privately owned, one supportive of the government but critical of specific programs and actions, the other violently

hostile. The latter, La Prensa, which represented the small, ultra-conservative minority and supported the contras and a foreign-sponsored invasion of the country, was allowed to operate throughout the 1984 election, although it was censored. The censorship still allowed the paper to publish manifestos of opposition groups and a pastoral letter critical of the regime. No comparable paper has been allowed to exist above-ground, even briefly, in El Salvador and Guatemala. There is no doubt that the media in Nicaragua

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In the case of Nicaragua, we repeat the central fact that differentiates it from the U.S. client states: in 1984 its government was not murdering civilians.⁵⁹ The main fear of ordinary citizens in Nicaragua was of violence by the contras and the United States. Our conclusion is that the fifth condition for a free election was met in Nicaragua, but not in El Salvador and Guatemala. And our overall finding is that neither El Salvador nor Guatemala met any of the five basic conditions of a free election, whereas Nicaragua met some of them well, others to a lesser extent.

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Two factors allowed a KGB-Bulgarian plot to be developed. The first was that in his travels through Europe in the Gray Wolves underground, which carried him through twelve different countries, Agca had stayed for a period in Bulgaria. Turkish drug dealers, who had connections with the Gray Wolves, also participated in the drug trade in Bulgaria. There were, therefore, some "links" between Agca and Bulgarians, minimal facts that would eventually be put to good use. The second factor was Western elite needs and the closely associated flare-up of a carefully stoked anti-Communist fervor in the West. At the first meeting of the Jonathan Institute, in Jerusalem, in July 1979, at which a large Western political and media contingent were present (including Claire Sterling, George Will, George Bush, and Robert Moss),³ the main theme pressed by Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin in his opening address, and by many others at the conference, was the importance and utility of pressing the terrorism issue and of tying terrorism to the Soviet Union.⁴ Claire Sterling did this in her 1981 volume *The Terror Network*, which became the bible

of the Reagan administration and the international right wing, and elevated Sterling to the status of number one mass-media expert on that subject. Terrorism and Soviet evil were the centerpieces of the Reagan administration's propaganda campaign that began in 1981, designed to support its planned arms increase, placement of new missiles in Europe, and interventionist policies in the Third World. Thus the shooting of the pope by Agca in May 1981 occurred at a time when important Western interests were looking for ways to tie the Soviet Union to "international terrorism."⁵

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During the years that followed, to the end of the trial in March 1986, the mass media, with only minor exceptions, adhered closely and uncritically to the SHK framework.²⁶ They not only failed to press alternative questions, they also refused to examine closely the premises, logic, or evidence supporting the SHK case. Part of the reason for this was the media's extraordinary reliance on Sterling and Henze as sources (and Kalb's position as a news reporter on NBC-TV), and their unwillingness to ask these sources probing questions.

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Sterling and Henze, and to a lesser extent Michael Ledeen, dominated perceptions of the Bulgarian Connection in the U.S. mass media to a remarkable degree.

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The only opinion piece on the Bulgarian Connection that appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer during that same period was by Michael Ledeen. Sterling, Henze, and Ledeen together accounted for 76 percent of the time in three shows on the subject on the "McNeil-Lehrer News Hour." No tough questions were asked of them on these shows, and no dissident voices were heard, perhaps because Sterling and Henze refused to appear on television shows (or in college debates) with people who opposed their views, and Henze insisted on approving in advance any questions to be asked. Thus their initial dominance was further enhanced by coercive tactics.²⁹ If we ask the deeper question of why these

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Michael Ledeen, as we saw in chapter 1, contends that the mass media believe Qaddafi more readily than the U.S. government, and focus more heavily on the victims of state terror in U.S. client states (Indonesia in East Timor, and Guatemala?) than in enemy and radical states (Cambodia and Poland?). Again, such absurdities do not reduce Ledeen's access to the mass media as an expert on the Bulgarian Connection, or on anything else.⁴⁰ The mass media not only allowed these

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That Henze was a longtime CIA official was almost never mentioned in the press (never, to our knowledge, on television), and his consistent apologetics for the Turkish military regime and frequent lies were never disclosed. In Sterling's case, her numerous errors of fact, foolish arguments, and wilder political opinions were not disclosed to readers of the New York Times, Time, or Newsweek, or watchers of CBS News or the "McNeil-Lehrer News Hour," and even "newsworthy" matters bearing on her qualifications were ignored. For example, Sterling's numerous attacks on the murdered French activist-radical Henry Curiel resulted in suits for slander brought against her in Paris. The New York Times has never mentioned these slander suits, which would put Sterling in a bad light not only because she lost them in whole or part, but also because of the insight they provide concerning her sources and methods. Sterling had gotten much of her information from a French journalist, George Suffert, who was a conduit for French and South African intelligence, and who had obligingly placed the African National Congress at the top of his list of "terrorist" organizations. In her Terror Network, Sterling strongly intimates that Curiel was a KGB agent, but the French court, on the basis of documents provided by French intelligence, found no support for this claim. Sterling retreated to the defense that her insinuation of Curiel's KGB connection was merely a "hypothesis" rather than an assertion of fact. The case, in short, showed that she was a conduit of disinformation, quite prepared to slander a murdered radical on the basis of claims by extreme right-wing disinformation sources. Michael Ledeen, a neoconservative activist and disinformationist, with ready access to the Times, has also

received its close protection. His book *Grave New World* was reviewed in the Times by William Griffith, a Reader's Digest "roving editor" and right-wing MIT political scientist who found Ledeen's version of the Bulgarian Connection entirely convincing.⁴¹ Ledeen was deeply involved with Francesco Pazienza in the "Billygate" affair and had numerous contacts with Italian intelligence and the Italian extreme right. The Italian Fascist and head of P-2, Licio Gelli, hiding in Uruguay, instructed one of his accomplices to convey a manuscript to Ledeen. Pazienza claimed (and SISMI head Santovito confirmed) that Ledeen was a member of the Italian intelligence agency SISMI, with code number Z-3. Ledeen received over \$100,000 from SISMI for services rendered, including the supplying of stale U.S. intelligence reports that SISMI then passed off as its own. Ledeen funneled this money into a Bermuda bank account. His manipulative activities in Italy were on such a scale that in the summer of 1984 a newly appointed head of SISMI told the Italian parliament that Ledeen was a "meddler" and persona non grata in Italy.⁴² None of these points was ever disclosed in the Times.⁴³

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We will not document here the flood of rage and anger directed against the Khmer Rouge from the outset and the evidence on which it was based, having done so elsewhere in detail.⁷⁵ Several facts documented there bear emphasis: (1) the outrage, which was instant and overwhelming, peaked in early 1977 and, until the overthrow of

Pol Pot, was based almost exclusively on evidence through 1977, primarily 1975–76;⁷⁶ (2) apart from a few knowledgeable journalists, the State Department's Cambodia experts, and probably the majority of the small group of Cambodia scholars—that is, most of those with a basis for judgment—the most extreme accusations were adopted and proclaimed with a great show of indignation over Communist atrocities, the integrity of which can be measured by comparison to the reaction to phase I of the genocide and U.S. responsibility for it; (3) these skeptical assessments, almost entirely suppressed in the media, proved fairly accurate for the period in question; (4) the evidence that provided the crucial basis for the denunciations of Communist genocide was of a kind that would have been dismissed with derision had something of the sort been offered with regard to phase I of the genocide or other U.S. atrocities, including faked interviews and photographs and fabricated statements attributed to Khmer Rouge officials, constantly repeated even after they had been conceded to be frauds; fabricated casualty estimates based on misquoted studies that became unquestionable doctrine even after they were publicly withdrawn as inventions; and highly selective refugee reports that ignored much refugee testimony, including detailed studies by Cambodia scholars, that could not be exploited for what soon became a propaganda campaign at a level of deceit of astonishing proportions.⁷⁷ As we also noted from the first paragraph of

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Not everyone joined in the chorus. The most striking exceptions were those who had the best access to information from Cambodia, notably, the State Department Cambodia specialists. Their view, based on what evidence was then available (primarily from northwestern Cambodia), was that deaths from all causes might have been in the “tens if not hundreds of thousands,” largely from disease, malnutrition, and “brutal, rapid change,” not “mass genocide.” These tentative conclusions were almost entirely ignored by the media—we found one important exception in our review—because they were simply not useful for the purpose at the time, just as refugee testimony that did not conform to the STV was ignored. Overseas, journalists who had special knowledge of Indochina also gave rather nuanced accounts, notably, Nayan Chanda.⁸²

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