

Foreign Policy, the Media,  
and Western Perception of the Middle East

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„It is the mightiest power in the Levant and North Africa. Governments tremble before it. Arabs everywhere turn to it for salvation from their various miseries. This power is not Egypt, Iraq or indeed any nation, but the humble mosque. Over the past year or so, for the first time in a decade, Islamic fundamentalism has become the principal threat to the survival of regimes throughout the Arab world. Because this is an argument about how people think and live, not merely about lines on maps, its outcome may do much more than either the old conflict with Israel or the new one between Iraq and its neighbours to shape the Arab future.

Like most big social movements, the expanding power of the mosque is a complicated affair. It takes different forms in different countries and its consequences are graver in some places than in others. But the threat is real enough. ” (*Economist* 1993, p. 25)

This description of the political situation in the Middle East is illustrative of the view many foreign policy analysts, politicians and journalists hold in Europe and North America. It has been formulated by *The Economist* magazine, which on most topics of international relations expresses positions of an enlightened mainstream of thought. The *Economist* generally is not into alarmism, but takes its pride from being sober and analytical. Others have been using much stronger terminology when discussing the same topic:

“The Gulf War was just one paragraph in the long conflict between the West and radical Islam; the World Trade Center bombing, just a sentence. We are in for a long struggle not amenable to reasoned dialogue. We will need to nurture our own faith and resolution.” (*US News and World Report* 1993)

Not just journalists, but also researchers and academics have recently emphasized dangers coming out of the Middle East. One of the best-known examples has been Samuel Huntington of Harvard University, who postulated an “Islamic-Confucian connection” threatening the West, its power and its identity. Others agree with Huntington’s statement that “Islam has bloody borders” by making a strong connection between regional conflicts in the Middle East (and beyond) and “Islam”. One of them is the German Member of Parliament and Vice President of OSCE, Willy Wimmer:

„Between Algeria, the Balkans, the Chinese province of Singhiang and Indian Kashmir there currently is no trouble spot in which the conflict potential of the Muslim World is not fanning the flames of conflict and war.” (Wimmer, 1998, S. 3)

This article will analyze to what degree and how the Western perception of Islam is influencing Western foreign polity towards the Middle East. It will try to assess the link between foreign policy and media reporting, as far as the Middle East is concerned and discuss the structure of mutual influencing each other. Is the political sector more successful in “managing” the media, or is it

basically driven by newspapers and TV in this “era of information”? Do the foreign policy elites share the same perceptions about the region and Islam with the general public, and how do they deal with the more emotional side of viewing Islam in Europe and North America?

### *Foreign Policy and the Cold War Tradition*

Foreign policy tends to be based on two pillars: interests and perceptions. “Interests” does include obvious factors like economic resources or strategic location, but it also entails domestic considerations. Diverting attention from social problems at home to some foreign conflict has been tried time and again and may illustrate this point. The problem with “interests” is, that they are far less clear a concept than often assumed: political parties, “interest groups” or companies may very well have quite different views about their countries foreign policy interests. “What is good for General Motors is good for America!” - this definition may sound plausible for GM executives, but perhaps not for Chrysler, AmTrack, MacDonaldis or even the UAW. “Interests” are not a clear-cut concept, to be defined with mathematical precision. It always includes judgement of preference over alternatives. And it includes judgement on values and priorities.

This brings up the second starting point of any foreign policy: “perceptions”. Foreign policy deals with “foreign” people, foreign governments and political actors. It implies dealing with other cultures, traditions, religions and values. Our perception of “the other” necessarily is being shaped by our perception of ourselves, of our own identity. Feelings of inferiority or superiority, of cultural distinctiveness, or of insecurity do shape the way foreign policy is conducted. The United States will deal with the British government differently than with the Egyptian, Saudi or Kenyan Governments. And nobody in Managua, Islamabad or Harare would seriously expect to be treated on equal footing with Washington. Obviously, there is a link between culture and power involved here: different cultures can hardly treat each other in a balanced way, as long as their (economic, military, political and ideological) power is extremely unbalanced. Foreign relations involve interaction between players with very differing power and weakness. They happen in the context of history, with its traditions and experiences of war, domination, colonialism, slavery, and the struggles against them. And these experiences of unequal relationships have undercut any ability to perceive “the other” as equal. Perception is colored by a sense of ones own superiority, by suspicion, paternalism, ethnocentrism, arrogance, mental blockades, aggressiveness or a feeling of frustration and inferiority. Equality is rare, either in the reality of power relations (and “interests”), or in the mutual perception.

Therefore, dealing with foreign policy includes the paradoxical situation that in theory (and international law) all States and Governments are equal, while in

reality both their material and ideological power are not. Ignoring this fact of life cannot produce a sound base for foreign policy analyses. At the same time, foreign policy processes are not something “objective”, like mechanical transformations from “interests” into “policies”. They are based on judgements and perceptions, coloring both ones own “interests”, and the view of the opponent. Foreign policy (and foreign policy analyses) have to both take into account the realities and their perceptions. The obvious problem is that human beings can never see realities without at the same time interpreting them.

This may seem obvious, but it is not. During the Cold War, for instance, the “Soviet Threat” had been consistently overestimated. The quantity of military hardware was consciously and unconsciously exaggerated, and the quality and fighting power of Soviet weapons overrated. A nearly bankrupt Soviet Union was perceived as an overwhelming enemy, and often portrayed as militarily superior to the Western forces. Also, political intentions of Moscow have been misperceived quite impressively: long after the Soviet Union had turned into a conservative power struggling to survive, Western analysts and politicians still pretended to be frightened by Soviet designs of World conquest.

One example of many is a statement of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. He expressed this viewpoint quite clearly at a conference he arranged on the subject of low-intensity conflict in early 1986: "Today's world is in a state of war. It is not a world war, although it is taking place throughout the world. It is not a war between fully mobilized armies, although it is not less destructive... Today one in every four countries in the world is at war. In practically every case, the face of these wars is hidden behind a mask. And in practically every case, the Soviet Union and those who do the work for it are hiding behind this mask." (Weinberger 1986, p. 1, 2)

### *Overstating Threats*

It is difficult to decide to which degree these misperceptions were real, or just political statements to achieve specific goals – like boosting the defense budget, or use anti-communism as a disciplinary factor in domestic politics. But it seems evident that over time the overrated expression of the Soviet Threat became the common wisdom, and was taken seriously without going through the pain of checking the facts. In this case the perception – or the pretense of perception – of reality was more important than reality itself. Policies were for decades based on fiction, on an assumption that Moscow was about to conquer the World and just waited for the West letting down its guard. (This argument does not imply to view the Soviet Union or its policies in a positive light. It is quite sufficient to assume that the “threat” was unrealistically exaggerated.) The result of this misperception was an incredible waste of tax money for excessive and useless military spending, and a higher level of tension in international relations. There have been countless other cases of perceptions

misrepresenting realities and thereby distorting policy formulation. Often the question is not whether these distortions happen, but whether they take place by mistake or by design.

Two US intelligence experts have recently discussed this problem, publishing an article in the *US Naval Institute Proceedings*. They start from the assumption that US policy and its armed forces need a realistic assessment of current and future threats. In their view a wrong analysis of possible adversaries cannot be useful to foreign policy and military policy makers.

They “suggest more nuanced political assessments of hostile states, especially when looking at long-range trends. Good analysis means moving beyond the simplistic characterizations of the Cold War. It is no longer enough to count the number of rockets in the Moscow May Day parade, and thereby initiate calculations toward some figure that explains our own requirements. The sheer size of the Soviet forces may have justified such methods in the past. There is little to justify confining our analysis to such methods today.” (Hirschfeld, Thomas / W. Seth Carus 1997, p 66)

One of their main arguments is dealing with the general level of foreign policy dangers after the end of the Cold War. Many analysts and politicians have stated that after the Soviet Union’s demise the World has become even more dangerous to the United States and the West. Hirschfeld and Carus strongly criticize this view:

“Repeated claims that the post-Cold War world has become more dangerous for the United States are hard to justify. It is absurd to compare the remaining dangers to threats we faced during the Cold War. Today, no country is capable of posing a threat comparable to that of the former Soviet Union. Major threats that might require application of significant military force are hard to find now. (S. 65) ... Claims about the growing numbers of internal conflicts and more ethnic strife are almost as hard to sustain. Internal wars and ethnic conflicts are not increasing in number or intensity; they just have become more visible, now that our anxieties about the danger of global war have receded.” (S. 66)

The end of the Cold War has been a watershed of international relations. Its main characteristic was the breakdown of the Soviet Union, which had led to triumphalist tendencies in Western foreign policy circles. The famous phrase of a “New World Order” proclaimed by President Bush in 1990, Fukuyama’s funny idea of an “End of History”, or Anthony Lake’s foreign policy concept of “Enlargement” have been expressions of this feeling. Since the author has dealt with these ideological phenomena already in a different context (e.g.: Hippler 1994, pp. 87-92, Hippler 1995, 12-15), we may skip them here. But two aspects should not be overlooked in this context:

One, politically the feelings about a New World Order - no matter who

expressed them – have strongly been connected to the Middle East. The Second Gulf War of 1990/91 had been the opening shot of the postwar order: it brought the US and the still existing USSR into an alliance against Iraq, and it demonstrated US hegemony in the Gulf area and beyond.

Two, the feeling of triumph and control soon gave way to a sense of insecurity. Often, analysts or politicians began to talk about a “New World Disorder”, emphasizing instability, and a lack of orientation about the future development of global politics. (e.g.: Kaplan 1994; Crozier 1994; Anderson 1992)

Both trends were based on reality: the West had in fact won the Cold War and could feel as its victor; but it also discovered very soon, that this did not translate into being in control of the whole world. The disaster in Somalia, the political stability of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq and the stubborn sabotage of the Middle Eastern peace process by Prime Minister Netanyahu were illustrative.

With the end of the Cold War the foreign policy orientation of the West was open to discussion. The dissolution of the Soviet Union had taken away its one overwhelming adversary, and made obsolete the overall foreign policy strategy and the legitimacy of most of the foreign policy, intelligence, and military apparatuses. Foreign and military policy had lost its ideological foundation. This fact was made more complex because the huge bureaucratic and logistic infrastructures did still exist: all the defense ministries, intelligence agencies, armed forces and foreign offices with their respective budgets are still in place. Well-funded bureaucracies hardly ever consider themselves useless. They tend to either pretend that nothing fundamental has changed, or that some new reason for its existence has taken the place of the old one. The second approach will also produce a measure of internal “reform”, to demonstrate its flexibility and willingness to adjust to new realities. But the general approach will be to interpret the changes of circumstances in the light and context of “old thinking”. Bureaucracies do not reform easily. But even if they are changing, the tendency very often is to preserve as much as possible from old times, and from the previous bureaucratic mentality.

### *New Threats*

Therefore it is not surprising that even after the end of the Cold War foreign policy thinking has not started from scratch, but is still heavily influenced by its former assumptions. Obviously, the Soviet Union today cannot figure as a dangerous threat to the West, since it does not exist any longer. But instead of feeling secure, many foreign policy analysts even today manage to feel threatened as badly as they felt before. The difference is that today not one overwhelming enemy creates this professed feeling of insecurity, but instability itself, and some minor powers that at best play a third rate role on the global

stage. “Rogue” or “outlaw states” now have to pose as enemies, connected to specific topics of concern. “The Middle Eastern “rogue” states threaten us by maintaining programs for weapons of mass destruction, sponsoring terrorism, often targeted specifically at Americans, and by their hostility toward and active opposition to our political and social systems and those of our friends and allies.” (Gati 1997) Gati, Tobi T.; Assessing Current and Projected Threats To U.S. National Security; Statement by Ass. Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, Toby T. Gati, Before the Senete Sele

This category of countries includes Iraq, Iran, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, and Cuba, four out of seven located in the Middle East or with Muslim background. The concerns include migration, drugs, terrorism, and instability. Both lists are not of cast iron character, but quite flexible, with additional countries and concerns to be added as political need requires. (Hippler 1994, 98-105, Clinton 1996)

It should not be forgotten, that both the lists of enemy countries and threats had been quite similar in the final phase of the Cold War: formerly, the countries involved had been perceived mostly as “Soviet surrogates” or allies of Moscow. Today they are interpreted as threats in their own right. Also the topical threats are less than new: the emphases of terrorism and drugs (“drug war”) as foreign policy dangers for instance has been quite lively during the 1980s already. Also “instability” as a foreign policy threat is anything but new, just that it has been promoted in importance. Having said that, it should also be emphasized that some of these concerns actually do matter in reality, and not only ideologically. Terrorism is real, not fiction. And it is a danger, which should not be ignored. The same thing applies to some of the countries named above (and quite a few not kept on the list of bad guys): North Korea is not exactly a pleasant place to live in or to deal with. And the same very much applies to the Iraqi regime. But the conceptual question here is not, whether the World has turned into paradise after the collapse of the Soviet Union, or whether it still has many unpleasant or undesirable aspects. It is, whether these problems or trouble threats constitute a serious danger to the West and should be put center stage in its foreign policy analysis – or whether they (and others) may pose problems and difficulties, that can be dealt with on a case by case base. The basic distinction is between a realistic threat assessment and an obsession.

At this juncture we are dealing with several aspects of conceptual importance. One, the need of pragmatically dealing with foreign policy problems when and if they arise. Two, the possibility and desirability of formulating an integrated foreign policy concept for the West. And three, the utilization and instrumentalization of these two points for other purposes, like providing ideological hegemony, fat defense budgets, or justification for specific policies.

The problem of analysis is that these three aspects of foreign policy formulation

are difficult to separate, and in many ways are linked to the *intentions* of political players, not hard facts. And intentions in politics often are hidden or kept out of sight.

Also: in the last paragraphs we have discussed foreign policy formulation in the context of a bureaucratic setting. We have tried to emphasize the tendency of big bureaucracies to keep intact as much of its mentality, ideology, procedures and structures as long as possible. But it would not be sufficient to interpret the amount of “old thinking” after the end of the Cold War mainly by pointing to bureaucratic rigidity. It is important to understand that usefulness of foreign policy concepts is not just a function of their realism, intellectual creativity or seriousness. It depends on results, not on coherence. In politics wrong or funny concepts can potentially produce better “results” than intellectually more reasonable alternatives. Success in foreign policy is hardly linked to academic brilliance, to moral integrity or being “reasonable”. Wrong perceptions and shaky analyses can, under specific circumstances, produce success. When the United States invaded the tiny island of Grenada in October 1983, it perceived Grenada as a serious threat to US security. Obviously, this was not just an exaggeration, but baseless. Still, this self-invented threat triggered a military reaction of Washington, which in turn strengthened US dominance in the Caribbean Basin. There are countless similar cases where wrong assumptions have paid off. At this point of discussion it cannot be ruled out, that “old thinking” in foreign policy terms after the end of the Cold War may be illogical, intellectually flawed, even absurd – but still be useful in terms of results. Today the West, and especially the United States, doubtlessly are the dominating global players in World politics. They are not seriously threatened because of a complete lack of political, economic and military counter-powers. But still, *pretending* to feel threatened and behaving accordingly may still be a useful strategy. It could legitimize policies that were illegitimate otherwise. And the most effective way to pretend something is to actually believe in the pretension.

### *The Green Peril*

The end of the Cold War considerably strengthened the foreign policy position of the West in international relations, since its main antagonist had disappeared. But at the same time it had created several problems of ideology and legitimacy:

One, the Cold War had partly defined Western political identity, in the framework of anti-communism. The West could easily perceive itself as democratic, freedom-oriented and liberal, by contrasting itself with the opponent and its Stalinist or repressive practices. The East-West-Conflict was interpreted as a struggle between Freedom and Repression, Democracy and Dictatorship, Capitalism (or market economics) and Command Economy, and



the West could feel confident to be on the right side of history. Being Western meant being democratic, liberal, and all the other things that the West liked to be, and its fighting Communism provided the proof. With the end of Communism, the West lost part of its political identity. Instead of being able to define itself in contrast to the Soviet Union, it now was forced to develop a stronger positive identity.

Two, Western policy at the same time lost part of its legitimacy. When formerly Western powers had supported doubtful governments or dictatorships in the Third World, it could always argue this to be a lesser evil compared to a communist threat. (Jeane Kirkpatrick had presented a prominent example of this rationale. Kirkpatrick 1997) Also its tremendous military expenditures and the build-up of the 1980s could be legitimized similarly. But after the end of Communism, these convenient justifications lost credibility, and support for repressive regimes or human rights abuses became much harder to explain.

It was exactly at this juncture that many foreign policy analysts or politicians discovered the new "Islamic threat". A few months after the second Gulf War a *Newsweek* article remarked matter-of-factly: "The Atlantic Alliance still has not found a threat to replace that of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact." (Sullivan 1991, p. 8) But this was to change very soon. Less than a year later the *Far Eastern Economic Review* wrote:

"Back when the Soviet Union was the "Evil Empire," Islamic forces in Soviet Central Asia and its southern neighbours, notably Afghanistan and Pakistan, were seen by many US policymakers as potentially useful allies against the big communist enemy. This was despite the Western image of Islam as an irrational and unpredictable element in world politics - an image reinforced by the 1970s' oil embargoes and US hostage crisis in Teheran. Now that the Evil Empire is no more, however, the US may adopt a less friendly stance towards Islam at the peripheries of the former Soviet Union." (Awanohara, Susumu / Ali, Salamat, 1992)

This observation was quite accurate. But the change was even stronger: a relevant section of the Western foreign policy community advocated not only a "less friendly stance towards Islam", but outright confrontation. Many observers perceived Islam as "the new Communism", as an officer at *Führungsakademie der Bundeswehr* (the German National War Academy in Hamburg) put it to the author. Others in Europe and North America agree, among them Amos Perlmutter:

"Islamic fundamentalism is an aggressive revolutionary movement as militant and violent as the Bolshevik, Fascist, and Nazi movements of the past," according to him. It is "authoritarian, anti-democratic, anti-secular," and cannot be reconciled with the "Christian-secular universe". Its goal is the establishment of a "totalitarian Islamic state" in the Middle East, he argued, suggesting that

the United States should make sure the movement is "stifled at birth."  
(Perlmutter, 1992)

These kinds of perceptions obviously attempt to keep the basic structure of Cold War thinking alive, by substituting Islam for Communism and often Iran for the Soviet Union. The "totalitarian, anti-Western, militant revolutionary, oppressive, dictatorial, anti-freedom oriented" Islamic culture and religion takes the place of Marxism-Leninism. The lack of a credible organizational or state center of the new threat is interpreted not as a weakness, but strength: this new threat is more difficult to predict, less clear, instead more underneath the level of open state policies.

The former journalist with the *Jerusalem Post*, Leon Hadar, comments on this political tendency in US foreign policy:

"Now that the Cold War is becoming a memory, America's foreign policy establishment has begun searching for new enemies. Possible new villains include "instability" in Europe --ranging from German resurgence to new Russian imperialism-- the "vanishing" ozone layer, nuclear proliferation, and narcoterrorism. Topping the list of potential new global bogeymen, however, are the Yellow Peril, the alleged threat to American economic security emanating from East Asia, and the so-called Green Peril (green is the color of Islam). That peril is symbolized by the Middle Eastern Moslem fundamentalist ... a Khomeini-like creature, armed with a radical ideology, equipped with nuclear weapons, and intent on launching a violent jihad against Western civilization." (Hadar, 1992)

This observation proved to be remarkably precise. It was exactly one year later that Samuel Huntington published his famous article in *Foreign Affairs*, on a "Clash of Civilizations". He declared a "Confucian-Islamic connection that has emerged to challenge Western interests, values, and power" and predicts: "a central focus of conflict for the immediate future will be between the West and several Islamic-Confucian states." (Huntington 1993, p. 45, 48)

Huntington's "Confucian-Islamic connection" obviously is a combination of Hadar's Yellow and Green perils. It is well known and it has been demonstrated elsewhere that his theory is historically, analytically and academically shallow (Hippler 1994, pp. 188-192; Hippler 1996, pp. 169-174). Here it is sufficient to just remind us of his political conclusion: "to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states; to moderate the reduction of Western military capabilities and maintain military superiority in East and Southwest Asia; to exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states; to support in other civilizations groups sympathetic to Western values and interests; ..." In a nutshell this means "to maintain the economic and military power necessary to protect its interests in relation to these civilizations." (p. 49)The obvious purpose of Huntington's

contribution was not analytical, but to distinguish friend from foe in the Post-Cold War era. It was to define a new enemy after the Soviet Union and its Communism had disintegrated. In this regard it was quite successful, no matter how weak the intellectual foundation of his approach may have been. And Huntington was not the first or only one to point towards the Middle East for the Next Threat to Western powers and interests. A report already published in May 1990 by the *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS) argues that, with the decline of the Soviet military threat to Europe, the potential for American involvement in the "dangerous form of conventional combat" in mid-intensity conflicts (MICs) in the Middle East and Moslem southwest Asia "will provide a key justification for military budgets during the 1990's and will establish most of the threats against which U.S. forces are sized, trained and equipped." (CSIS 1990)

“To provide a key justification for military budgets” – and for a foreign policy that is required by this goal: this has been and still is one of the major functions of the Islamic Threat. Hadar explains how it has developed:

“The creation of a peril usually starts with mysterious "sources" and unnamed officials who leak information, float trial balloons, and warn about the coming threat. Those sources reflect debates and discussions taking place within government. Their information is then augmented by colorful intelligence reports that finger exotic and conspiratorial terrorists and military advisers. Journalists then search for the named and other villains. The media end up finding corroboration from foreign sources who form an informal coalition with the sources in the U.S. government and help the press uncover further information substantiating the threat coming from the new bad guys.

In addition, think tanks studies and op-ed pieces add momentum to the official spin. Their publication is followed by congressional hearings, policy conferences, and public press briefings. A governmental policy debate ensues, producing studies, working papers, and eventually doctrines and policies that become part of the media's spin. The new villain is now ready to be integrated into the popular culture to help to mobilize public support for a new crusade. In the case of the Green Peril, that process has been under way for several months.” (Hadar, 1992)

It should be noted that Hadar's description is of quite general character. It applies not just to the perception of Islam and the Middle East, but generally describes how big political debates and paradigms are initiated in the United States. Also, this pattern does not apply to most European countries, as far as Islam is concerned. In many parts of Europe, like France, Germany and Spain, a negative perception of Islam has not been engineered by political elites, but has grown from below, with a big sector of the media reinforcing it. We will get back to this later.

Also, Hadar seems to underestimate the divergence of views in the US policy elite: creation of the “green peril” has never been a project of all or most of the foreign policy mainstream, but some of its sectors have tried to resist it.

### *Islam and Government Politics*

Quite a different discourse can be observed in most foreign policy circles. Hadar’s Green Peril is one of the important lines of argument, a more pragmatic assessment of threats and Islam the other. James Phillips, working with the *Heritage Foundation*, a conservative Think-Tank in Washington, is presenting a good illustration of the first viewpoint. He writes specifically about the dangers of “Revolutionary Islam in Algeria”, but what he identifies as “undermining U.S. interest by posing a threat” is quite typical for his school of thought generally. From his perspective, six key points are under attack or dangers developing:

1. Pro-Western Arab Secular Regimes: besides providing all kinds of practical assistance to Islamist all-over the Middle East (like weapons and training), a victorious Islamist movement in Algeria “will embolden other Islamic revolutionaries, providing a psychological boost to those who will see it as a vindication of Islamism and a harbinger of things to come in their own countries.” (Phillips 1995) Mostly threatened are Algeria’s neighbors Morocco and Tunisia.

2. International Terrorism: “Islamic Algeria, like Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan before it, is likely to become a haven and base for Islamist terrorist groups.”

3. Arab-Israeli Peace Negotiations: “Algeria’s Islamists vehemently reject any compromise with Israel and would cooperate with Iran, Sudan, and Palestinian Islamists to block a permanent settlement.”

4. Nonproliferation: “A nuclear- armed revolutionary Islamic Algeria, just 200 miles from Europe’s southern shores, is a chilling possibility that would pose a critical threat to NATO allies, regional friends, and American forces in the Mediterranean basin. Moreover, an Islamist regime in Algiers might consider sharing nuclear technology or materials with Iran, Sudan, or radical Islamic terrorist groups.”

5. Western Access to Energy: “Islamic revolutionaries will be prone to subversive and terrorist activities that are likely to disrupt the operations of the pipeline through Morocco or the Transmed pipeline bringing Algerian gas to Italy via Tunisia. Support for international terrorism also could trigger international economic sanctions that would disrupt the flow of Algerian gas to Western markets. Algerian support for Saudi Islamists, who provided FIS with considerable financial support, would increase the risk of destabilization in

Saudi Arabia, which in turn could disrupt the flow of Saudi oil exports and push up world oil prices.”

6. Human Rights: “If the Islamists seize power, Algeria's human rights situation is sure to worsen as they seek vengeance on the supporters of the current regime and struggle for power among themselves.” (all quotations from: Phillips 1995, quoted from the internet version of the paper)

Phillips summarizes his own arguments in a few lines:

“The triumph of Muslim militance in Algeria, at a minimum, would embolden Islamists elsewhere in the Islamic world to redouble their revolutionary efforts, increase subversive pressures on pro-Western secular regimes, and encourage further opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. In the worst case scenario, a radical Islamic Algeria could become another Iran -- a base for actively exporting anti-Western revolution, terrorism, and anarchy.”

This is an interesting set of arguments. His more specific six points of danger have relatively little to do with religion. They almost completely deal with Western political and economic interests, like losing political allies in the Arab world and energy resources. Most of these points can be questioned: the Arab-Israeli peace process is not mostly threatened by religious opposition, but by Prime Minister Netanyahu's intransigence. Or, they ignore that any regime in Algeria or any other oil-producing country in the Middle East will be forced to keep selling oil to the West, as a matter of economic and political survival. Or, the quite secular reasons for internal instability in most Middle Eastern countries are ignored, like incompetence, corruption of and repression by the respective governments, and mass poverty. It is very convenient to put all the blame just on somebody else's doorstep. But still, this criticism apart, his main points of threats are of a secular character. His intellectual and political achievement is, to focus them all into one, more general enemy: Islamism. The structure of the argument implies that there are no questions to raise in regard to Western interests or former Western policies, there is hardly anything to analyse in regard to reasons of instability in the Middle East. For Phillips it is a plain matter of us against them, of our – unquestioned legitimate – interests being under attack by some bad guys.

In his conclusion, which are quoted above, things get another interesting twist: Islamist are being portrayed as “militant”, “revolutionary”, “subversive”, “radical” and “terrorist” – all terms that were used time and again in regard to former Soviet policies and Third World liberation movements allied (or not allied) to it. The history of the Soviet Union and Communism should have told us that even an “evil empire” is not just evil, but many more things. By reducing the complexities of dealing with Moscow or with Islamism to a simplistic Us-versus-Them antagonism, we lose the ability to even understand our real relationship to our adversaries. In many cases the protagonists of an

Islamic Threat try to keep their polar worldview of a struggle between Good and Evil, between Us and them intact, and only switch enemies. In its final form the result is to interpret the World in Huntington's terminology: "The West against the Rest" (Huntington 1993, p. 41)

Many foreign policy makers and more sober analysts consider much of this alarmist thinking as of little use. Blowing Middle Eastern dangers out of all proportions would provide a shallow base for Western foreign policy, if taken seriously. Hirschfeld and Carus are examples of this skepticism.

"Uncertainty dominates the current environment, in sharp contrast to the clearer challenges of yesterday. We do not know whom we may fight years from now, and there are few unambiguous threats of any magnitude. As a result, we frequently generate inadequate and unconvincing evidence in an attempt to find threats, or to assert that enemies, adversaries, or competitors exist, or will exist." (Hirschfeld and Carus 1997, p. 65)

Speaking as intelligence experts, they have more criticism, which is not put forward from a "liberal", but from a purely professional military perspective.

"Exaggerating today's threats to U.S. national security, by creatively highlighting ways the forces of other states pose dangers for U.S. forces, does the nation and the military services a profound disservice. ... By exaggerating today's threats ... we distract attention from what truly matters, and delay and ultimately short-change the allocation of resources needed to develop the future capabilities that we really will need. Over the longer term, we also undermine the credibility of the intelligence product, the intelligence community, and ultimately the justification for the defense program. Finally, there is no long-range benefit in conforming today's forces into the comforting outlines of some formerly familiar threat pattern, simply because we can imagine no other. Growing ever larger and heavier, in anticipation of fighting forces like those of yesterday's enemies, foreshadows the fate of Goliath of Gath." (S. 68)

To a big degree the Foreign Ministries in the major Western capitals agree with the need of realism. Key government officials, including foreign ministers or the Presidents of the United States and Germany, have criticized the Green Peril and the Clash of Civilizations. These confrontational approaches are often seen as too ideological, and quite unpractical. Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who seems to be not altogether free from anti-Muslim prejudices, still stresses the commonality with Islam when a proper opportunity arises:

"If we are to secure a good future for our continent, it is also important that the three major monotheistic world religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - reflect on their common roots and values and allow themselves to be led by the spirit of charity and brotherly love." (Kohl 1997)

Such statements might present a somewhat narrow view by reducing Islam to religion, but still they do not work well with positions which prefer an anti-Islamic campaign. Peter Hartmann, Ass. Secretary (“Staatssekretär”) in the German Foreign Office would agree with his chancellor. In December 1997 he opined that it would be wrong “to present new enemy perceptions or even a ‘war of civilizations’”, and that instead “a dialogue between the big cultures should be supported – a task which may not be new, but perhaps is more urgent than many others.” (Hartmann 1997)

The problem with these kinds of statements is not to support a confrontational “The West Against the Rest”-scenario, which they clearly are not. Instead it is, that precious little has been actually done to organize such a dialogue, instead of only proposing it. And exercises like the “critical dialogue” with Iran of Mr. Kinkel have been hardly more than a legitimizing cover for business-as-usual economic relations.

Officials in the European Union or the German Foreign Office, often may not like Iran and Iraq. But they very well remember that Iraq’s Saddam Hussein has never fit the bill of an Islamic Fundamentalist, while many more religious regimes (like Saudi Arabia or Morocco, along with many more secular Arab or non-Arab Muslim countries, like the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) joined the anti-Iraqi alliance that Washington had put together in 1990/91.

It cannot be denied that some of the anti-Islamic sentiment has crept into Western government circles. Two examples: when President Bush passed on his office to President Clinton, anti-fundamentalist rhetoric increased. The background was the very close relationship the first Clinton-Administration kept with Israel, while Israel played the fundamentalist card to drum up support when after the Gulf War and after Oslo the PLO did not work as a credible threat any longer. Another case has been the German Chancellor Kohl characterizing the European Union as a “Christian Club” as a justification to keep Turkey out. In both and other cases it cannot be decided whether Kohl or the Clinton-Administration actually believed in their own rhetoric, or whether they just used it as a political tool. Also discussions with several German Foreign Office officials confirm that there is a minority position quietly sympathizing with the Green Peril perspective, but the majority of officials object to it. Generally speaking, there even exists a broad “pro-Arab” sentiment, which again is balanced by a “pro-Israeli” one (especially at the very top), which draws its main strength from its moral base resulting from the Holocaust.

Western foreign policy towards the Middle East is shaped by down to earth considerations like economic interests and migration, and much less by cultural or religious considerations. An important recent example of defining Western – in this case US – interests in the Middle East was the statement of Lieutenant General Patrick M. Hughes, as Director of the *Defense Intelligence Agency*

(DIA) presented to the *Senate Armed Services Committee* in February 1997. He enumerated what he perceives as key threats for the future: population growth, humanitarian needs, resource scarcity, weapons proliferation, rejection of Western culture, terrorism, drug trade, and “critical uncertainties”.

The one aspect that might include notions of an Islamic Threat obviously is the “rejection of Western culture”. But when Hughes explains his point, he is quite secular and Islam is not even mentioned.

“The abrupt end of the Cold War, the rapid spread of western values, ideals, and institutions, and the dramatic personal, societal, and global changes underway as a result of the global village phenomenon and broad technology proliferation, are changing fundamental concepts, beliefs, and allegiances in many areas of the world. Those peoples, groups, and governments who are unable to cope with or unwilling to embrace these changes frequently resent the dominant role played by the United States in the international security environment, and attempt to undermine US and western influence and interests. Two aspects of this condition are particularly noteworthy. First, although there is not at present an ideology that is both inimical to our interests and widely appealing, one could conceivably arise under the rhetoric of providing a counterpoint to western culture. Second, the perception of western political, economic, and especially military "dominance" means that many of our enemies will choose asymmetric means to attack our interests -- that is, pursuing courses of action that attempt to take advantage of their perceived strengths while exploiting our perceived weaknesses. At the "strategic" level, this probably means seeking to avoid direct military confrontation with US forces; at the operational and tactical levels it means seeking ways of "leveling the playing field" if forced to engage the US military.” (Hughes 1997)

From this it is quite obvious that Hughes, as DIA-Director, is afraid of any ideology that might argue against US dominance. Therefore, Islam would not be of concern because it is Islamic, but only if and when it is questioning US foreign and military policy by criticizing its dominating strength. Also when presenting his summary, Islam does not figure at all:

“On one hand, for at least the next decade, the threats facing the United States will be of a decreased order of magnitude and we will not likely see a global "peer competitor" within 20 years. On the other hand, the world remains a very dangerous and complex place and there is every reason to expect US military requirements at about the same level of the past several years:

- the explosive mix of social, demographic, and economic conditions -- extant and through the foreseeable future -- will mean a continued high demand for peace and humanitarian operations. Consequently, there is likely to be a continuing requirement for US forces to engage in these demanding activities.



- Several key regional states -- particularly North Korea and Iraq -- retain the capability to threaten US interests with conventional offensives. This condition demands constant US vigilance and the retention of demonstrable warfighting capabilities.
- A number of transnational threats -- terrorism, weapons proliferation, drug trafficking -- continue to plague the international environment and threaten US citizens, forces, property, and interests.
- Russia and China retain strategic nuclear forces capable of threatening the US homeland. Moreover, these pivotal states are both undergoing what are likely to be protracted, fundamental changes with uncertain outcomes and consequences. Both have the potential to emerge as large-scale regional threats to US interests beyond the next decade.
- The changing nature of future warfare -- the application of new technologies and innovative doctrinal concepts to "conventional" military operations, and the development of new forms of asymmetric warfare -- poses a constant challenge to US forces." (Hughes 1997)

All of this already applies without any government or powerful interest groups trying to create the perception of an Islamic Threat for political reasons. The character of reporting in the international media on our topic has been described before, and other chapters in this book will discuss it again in more detail (*Beispiele angeben?*). Therefore we can concentrate on some of the resulting questions: why, for instance, is an important part of the media and public perception of Islam so highly emotional? And why are phenomena of religious fanaticism in the Christian or Jewish context so often being seen with less alarmism, compared to the same in an Islamic environment?

One of the reasons is that Islam is foreign, something alien. Perceiving "The Other" as threatening reassures "Us" to be someone better. And criticizing foreign fanaticism and irrationality relieves us from frightening symptoms of the same diseases in our own societies. Burning down of abortion clinics or the Oklahoma Bombing like violence against immigrants in Germany therefore can be perceived as simple crimes or aberrations, while similar acts of terrorism in a Middle Eastern context will often be interpreted as somehow inherent in Islamic culture and politics. Or, to take another example, it is quite striking how the same people who want to keep women out of the labor market in Europe suddenly enjoy protesting women's discrimination in the Middle East. These kinds of double standards are definitely not a result of political campaigns or of media reporting, but of a psychological need of individuals and societies. That biased reporting regularly reinforces them is obvious. It can be concluded that a big part of negative perception of Islam has precious little to do with anything Islamic. Andrea Lueg has given an important example how more general sentiments feed into the perception of a Green Peril:

"The anti-Islamic image of the enemy is part of a more extensive fear of the

Third World. Dangers and threats which are more often of a social, political or cultural nature rather than a military one, also seem to come from the poor South. The Third World as a whole, not just the Islamic Middle East, is seen as a place of instability, insecurity, of tribal and civil wars, incomprehensible violence, disease and countless other evils. These regions of misery and unrest stand in contrast to the apparently well- and clearly-ordered West. The affluence in the West stands out against the reality of need in the developing countries, and is to be psychologically (and if need be materially) defended. The fear of the Third World is in a certain sense a fear of poverty, a fear of being infected again by its evils. This is another reason why migration from Islamic countries is perceived to be so threatening: the Third World is coming to us, forming bridgeheads in our cities. Perhaps these islands will also bring their misery to us?" (Lueg 1995, p. 25)

It is difficult to ignore that any Red Menace or Green Peril has not just to do with the opposing side, but often even more with an insecure self-definition. Lueg continues:

"One of the preconditions of this fear lies in the fact that the West is no longer as sure of its achievements as it would like to be. This does not only apply to the rational, enlightened and secular character of Western societies, which is constantly being called into question by racism, fundamentalist bishops or 'tribal' and religious wars as in former Yugoslavia or Northern Ireland. It is also applicable to the really important civilising value of the West: material wealth. Today, even this is, at least, unsure: even the middle classes could soon face financial ruin.

The Western standard of living - our wealth - is being threatened, and this is another reason why fear of poverty is an important factor. This poverty is represented by the Third World, whose religion, as the West perceives it, is Islam. Other religions such as Hinduism are perhaps culturally and geographically too distant. Fear of Islam is also an ideological-religious version of the fear of the future. This is then associated with and highlighted by truly destabilising, threatening or costly developments, such as environmental catastrophes, large scale migration and the influx of refugees, as well as by the increase and radicalization of political or politico-religious movements." (Lueg 1995, p. 25)

### *The Media and Foreign Policy*

In regard to the perception of Islam and the Middle East there is an obvious gap between many of the mass media and the foreign policy elite's thinking. It varies over time and from country to country, for instance in Europe the gap seems to be deeper than in the United States, but it exists everywhere. Two questions arise from here: is this fact relevant or just a coincidence, and how do

the media and politics influence each other? The importance of the

*Selected mechanisms of biased perceptions*

1. comparing un-comparable categories	The „West“ often is compared to „Islam“, that is a geographic (or political) area to a religion. Instead Europe and the Middle East, or Islam and Christianity should be compared.
2. presenting fundamentalist argumentation and definitions as “Islam”	Often western observers take fundamentalist positions and present them as defining „Islam“. They quote fundamentalist leaders to point to a „true“ Islam, ignoring that most Muslims take quite different viewpoints.
3. religious interpretation of secular policies	Declarations of Middle Eastern politicians and religious leaders are being taken at face value. Religious terminology is automatically perceived as an expression of religion, the instrumentalisation of religious terms for political and other purposes are being ignored.
4. Assuming what should be proven	Instead of analyzing the importance of religion in the Middle Eastern discourse, it is being assumed as crucial. From this assumption it is concluded that politics is being of a religious character.
5. Confusing Islam as a religion with Islamic culture and tradition	Middle Eastern societies are often culturally influenced by Islam. Islam has become an important part of popular culture. Many seemingly religious manifestations have more to do with culture and tradition, than with religion.
6. non-historic interpretation of Islam	Recent events are not being analyzed in their historic context, since they supposedly are of „religious“ character and therefore can be explained from the Koran and the Sunnah. The historical conditions and developments of current phenomena are being substituted by referring to holy texts. .
7. neglecting analyses of political and economic interests	Problems and conflicts in the current Middle East will often be reduced to „religion“, instead of analyzing political and economic interests behind them. Again, this is being done by reducing „Islam“ to the Koran and statements of religious experts.
8. cultural arrogance	From Western dominance in regard to economic and military power often a cultural superiority of the West is concluded.

9. using double standards	Things the West considers legitimate for itself are being perceived as off-limits to Muslim societies, e.g. weapons of mass destruction, which are supposedly useful for peace and stability when in Western hands, but dangerous otherwise.
10. perceiving politics in purely psychological terms	What in the West might be termed „power-politics“ or „real-politic“ in a Middle Eastern context will be often termed "insanity", "irrationality", "aggressivity". Instead of analyzing conflicts of interests observers will use psychological categories.

media-politics link is easy to establish. The US Army Field Manual “Information Operations” put it plainly in this way:

“As we have come to recognize and depend on air superiority as a key condition for military success, information dominance has taken on a similar importance for military operations”. (US Department of the Army 1996, p. 1-9)

Knowing the overwhelming importance of air power in recent US military doctrine, this statement is quite remarkable. And “information dominance” is a concept closely connected to the mass media.

“The role of the news media will continue to expand. The number of news organizations and their means to gather, process, and disseminate information is increasing exponentially. ... Clearly, the effect of written, and, more importantly, visual information displayed by US and international news organizations directly and rapidly influenced the nature of US and international policy objectives and our use of military force in Rwanda, Somalia, and in the former Yugoslavian republic”. (S. 1-3)

The media do influence “the nature of US and international policy objectives”, that is the political goals of military operations, which implies, they influence foreign policy goals. In some cases of major importance the whole policies have been driven nearly exclusively by media and public opinion considerations, like the intervention in Somalia. In this specific case, the US Department of State, the Pentagon, and the CIA objected to a US military intervention because of hardly any gain to US national interest or security despite high potential risk. President George Bush, because of dramatic TV footage starting in summer of 1991, decided to go ahead anyway, to secure his “place in history”. (Schraeder)

In this case the reporting triggered a complete set of policies, including military intervention. Also even military and political planning today is heavily influenced by the need, to “sell” specific activities: for instance, the air attacks

on Libya in 1986 or the US- troops landing at the beaches of Somalia where planned to happen during US prime time TV hours. The Marines in Mogadishu did not use the harbor to enter the country but the inconvenient beach – because it looked much better on television. Media reporting can also heavily influence the results of policies, like the Field Manual “Public Affairs Operations” concedes.

“Media coverage can be pivotal to the success of the operation and in achieving national strategic goals.” (US Department of the Army 1997 p. 40)

This was first discovered as a result of the Vietnam War: it was not lost in the jungles of Southeast Asia, but at the “home front”. Pictures of stoned or dying US troops or of the victims of the US massacre at My Lai helped ending the war: the US public just got tired with the killing and being killed of nice college kids in the swamps. Other examples were the reporting of the incompetence of the US invasion of the tiny island of Grenada in 1983: the US troops afflicted more damage onto themselves, than the hardly existing “enemy” did. This was perceived as embarrassing for US policy and the military. And one of the latest prominent cases were the TV footage from Somalia, where angry crowds pulled dead US soldiers through the streets of Mogadishu, embarrassing the supposedly “humanitarian” intervention. Despite very minor losses, the US forces had to be withdrawn – the media forced the hands of the politicians: first into sending troops, then to get them out fast.

These quotes and examples show that media reporting – at least in specific cases – can and does exercise political power by influencing decision-makers and policy implementation. They also show that the foreign policy and military apparatus is quite aware of this fact, and tries to instrumentalize the media for its own purposes. From its viewpoint it burns down to the question whether to be driven by media and public opinion, or to manage them. Politicians and military officers obviously prefer the second option. A highly effective example was the way the US military completely controlled the reporting in regard to the second Gulf War, 1990/91. No journalist was allowed close to the battlefield, no journalist had a chance to independent research on the ground. TV reporters were only allowed using material from the famous “media pool”, which was completely managed and controlled be the US Army and to some degree, by the Saudi government. This author was twice denied visas to Saudi Arabia with the argument that the Saudi government was not interested in more media people. Journalists who managed to get in were fed ready made information and tapes, showing a “clean” war, with “video game” footage, high-tech weapons systems, and – no victims. Journalists were kept far away from the frontlines and real fighting, and got a meager diet of what the military wanted to present to the public. To make matters worse: censorship was everywhere, not just in Saddam’s Baghdad but also afflicted on the media by the US-military and the Saudi Government. One major German daily, Frankfurter Rundschau, before, during and shortly after the Gulf War put a

short note on its front-page on a daily base:

“Military Censorship / Reporting from the Gulf is done under conditions of heavy censorship. Correspondents and photographers covering the war are restricted by military censors. The US, Great Britain and France apply censorship, as Iraq does, which has expelled nearly all foreign journalists. Israel and Turkey have introduced censorship, too. Censored because of military considerations are especially all reports about war operations and its victims”

This daily note to readers to please distrust the own paper’s reporting because of the impossibility to do an unbiased, fair and professional job, was at least honest. But the problem was that being aware of the problem did not solve it. The media were completely depending on information provided to them by one of the fighting parties – who handed out pathetic but precious, small pieces of “information”. And the criteria for providing the informational handouts were not truth or realism, nor journalistic considerations, but the desire to support the war effort. No other information was available. No new media catastrophe like Somali was to be allowed, and control and censorship of the media was the instrument to keep this from happening.

A few of European war correspondents after the war brought up the question whether there ever had been a war at all. The frightening answer was, they had no way to prove it. Only the military press officers had told them about this war, but they themselves had never seen it. Being kept in Dakhran/Saudi Arabia, they were hundreds of kilometers from the battlefield and only saw Pentagon propaganda video clips, plus military press briefings. The results were, that military terminology crept into the reporting, that the official line of the US Army dominated it, and that even the very few people close to the shooting (mainly CNN in Baghdad, because it had reached a special deal with the Iraqi government) did more to create sentiment and emotion than factual information. John Holliman, for example, covering an air attack on Baghdad live, excitedly exclaimed:

“It looks like a Fourth of July display at the Washington Monument ... We just heard – whoa! Holy cow! That was a large air burst, that we saw!” (*Time* 1991. P. 37)

It is difficult to call this independent journalism, when the live coverage of a war is being presented as an entertainment show, and is linked to a patriotic symbol, like the Fourth of July. Victims were rarely a matter of reporting. And Iraqi victims hardly figured at all. The propaganda role of the media went to nearly absurd proportions. One important US newsmagazine featured a cover story: “How US (High-Tech) Weapons Save Lives”.

Weapons and war in this context did not any longer symbolize death, but life.

A German newspaper editor observing his eight-year-old son watching TV coverage of the war, was surprised to discover that most of his compassion was concentrated on a dying, oil infested bird stranded on the Gulf beach. (Jürgen Metkemeyer, p. 7) Again, human suffering never appeared “real” on the screen, it was just an abstract possibility. A few exceptions existed: for example Israeli citizens with gas masks in Tel Aviv were a common view (not Iraqis in Baghdad, though), and the Kurdish refugees fleeing Saddam’s troops in Northern Iraq after the war had ended made quite emotional footage. But obviously in both cases it was Saddam who was responsible, not the own side of the war. Suffering afflicted to human beings by the enemy was good reporting, suffering caused by the US and Gulf War Alliance was taboo.

The censorship was only one cause of this bias, but many media did not need censorship at all: what they perceived as “patriotism” was at least as effective: self-censorship and jingoism was a moral duty to many journalists and publishers. The media in these cases played two roles that overlapped conveniently: one, they provided a service to Government by distributing and even embellishing their official lines of propaganda; and two, they themselves profited from doing this by increasing their circulation, the number of their viewers and listeners, and their customers booking commercials. The “Tagesschau”, the most prominent evening news show in German TV (which journalistically still was more serious than many competitors) had an huge boost in numbers of viewers and at one point reached some 40 percent of all households in the country. And CNN could afford to quadruple its prices for commercials at prime time, because demand rose sharply. (*Publizistik und Kunst*, März 1991, p. 16) The Gulf war was big business, and in commercial terms it would have been harmful to produce “controversial” – that is critical coverage.

Up to now we have pointed to censorship, opportunism and jingoism, plus commercial self-interest as main causes of biased and unprofessional reporting in the Gulf war. These factors did and do exist in the Western media, and they should not be ignored. But the problem is, that often analysts or observers in the Middle East stop here and integrate them into juicy conspiracy theories. This may be understandable, but it still is wrong. All these factors do exist, but they do not provide the whole picture. First of all, there always are journalists who try to break this habit of reporting what the powers that be want to be reported, or who try to avoid being censored. This may happen out of desire to do an ethical and professional job, or out of self-interest. During the War one CBS TV crew tried to break the strict rules of the official “media pool” and went out on their own to the Saudi desert to research. They somehow got lost for weeks and did not succeed. Also a discussion among journalists after the war about the problems encountered was a strong indication of frustration with the experience of being instrumentalized. (One example: *Publizistik und Kunst*, 1991)

But the conspiracy theories also ignore a crucial factor contributing to shallow, biased and opportunist reporting: the work environment in the media in general, and the lack of knowledge about the Middle East by most reporters and journalists. Two examples may demonstrate the point.

Shortly before Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 this author after his return from Baghdad discussed writing an article about Iraq with a top-weekly. The editor was enthusiastic: Iraq seemed to be an potentially important country, “but we don’t know anything about it.” This was quite remarkable, since during the first Gulf war (1980-88) already some 1.5 million Iraqis and Iranians had been killed, and one would assume a major paper to have done some homework on Iraq over the last decade. It had not. When Iraqi forces occupied Kuwait a short while later, the same editor called to cancel the article. It was too important and too urgent now, and the weekly wanted to put a team of some twenty people on the job (who all “did not know anything about Iraq”, as was explained before) to write a long cover story. The result was pathetic: lots of shallow material, half-truths, hearsay, outdated information. For weeks the standard remained as bad, and then it slowly improved: the people involved had finally educated themselves and learnt quite a few things about Iraq.

A second example: again, the same author was asked by a major Western European TV network to participate in preparing a special show on the beginning of the Gulf war. The meeting included some 15 people, from technicians up to the top foreign department bosses. No matters of substance or politics were discussed, only technicalities, nobody present knew anything about Iraq, Kuwait, or the Middle East – and hardly anybody perceived this as a problem. Only one participant just before the end of the meeting exclaimed: “Oh, we still have not discussed the content of the show!” But there was no time left to do this. Broadcast the next day, this “special report” was a wild mix of newsbites that did not make any sense. Most participants of the meeting recognized the failure - after it had been screened.

The point with these examples is that “conspiracies” or even censorship were not necessary to produce bad journalism. It was quite sufficient to work in an environment where content and substance are secondary and definitely less important than timeliness and speed. The need – and this need is real, not self-invented – to produce a long cover story or special report in just a few hours or days, coupled with little competence in the specific topic of reporting makes serious and professional reporting or analysis impossible. If people are working under heavy pressure to extremely fast provide voluminous information and background on topics they know very little about, it would be unreasonable to expect high quality.

Under this kind of pressure journalists will necessarily tend to stick close to the “common wisdom”, since this will minimize risk. If they confront a common wisdom or Government line observers and journalists will be criticized. They



will only do this, if they are sure about their matter, and about their own position. But since they cannot easily develop a serious understanding of most topics – like Iraq - (since they will have to report on Somalia tomorrow, Rwanda next week, and many other topics waiting in line), it is very difficult to do in-depth or critical, investigative journalism. The easy way is to substitute clichés and emotionalism for facts and information, since they will sell, they are easier and cheaper to produce, and they do not require loots of time and research. Sticking to off-the-shelf judgements, preexisting sentiments and perceiving other cultures as threatening while the own one as benevolent may be bad journalism – but it is very practical. Again: it does not require lots of conspiracies to end up with those results, often the unbearable pressure of the market and one’s own working conditions will be quite sufficient. One of the problems obviously is, that this mechanism plays very well into the hands of people who consciously attempt to “manage” the media for their own political reasons.

The ways the mass media effect policies can be very diverse. The spectrum ranges from disclosing specific single facts and information that might be embarrassing or supportive of one side in a policy debate, to shaping general sentiments or frameworks of reference. Obviously, the mass media are crucial to define the perceptions of foreign countries, foreign governments and cultures. This role on the other hand does not give them complete freedom to shape perceptions of the public (and many politicians) at their own discretion. They themselves are strongly influenced by ideas, viewpoints and interests from the general public of which they are a part; and by many subtle and less subtle attempt to set their agenda and guide their reporting from the political class. And since – at least mainstream oriented - journalists and politicians (plus entertainers, athletes, actors, etc.) are linked in a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence, there is no way to separate them cleanly from political and commercial influences. This link is of importance for how Islam is perceived in the West. It is crucial for Hadar’s model of establishing a Green Peril in public discourse, but also for public prejudices creeping into the policy elite. The relationship between the media and politics is an ongoing battle of mutual influencing each other, of sometimes one side clearly dominating the other, sometimes quietly cooperating, and sometime openly clashing over hegemony. It is far from stable, and analytically it is a moving target.

Generally speaking the Islamic Threat in the West does exist as a sentiment and as a policy tool. But it does hardly ever drive foreign policy decision making, since it is mostly relevant to the domestic policy arena. The Green Peril is useful to produce colorful and entertaining news in TV and print media, and it can be utilized to drum up support for a foreign policy that has been decided for because of quite different reasons. Decision makers sometimes may share a weak version of anti-Muslim ideology, but they are driven by more practical and more specific factors: in Europe by a desire to cut off immigration

from Turkey and the Maghreb to protect the labor market in times of high unemployment; by the strategic consideration to control the Gulf area; by enmity towards specific countries or political actors; by an interest to guarantee stability to friendly regimes; and by similar considerations. These practical interests will make it impossible to deal with the Middle East and Islam in a highly ideological fashion. Muslims and their governments very often are strongly in the Western camp, and it would be quite foolish waging ideological wars against them.

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