

# Global Media Journal, Indian Edition

Volume 11, Issue 2, December 2019

Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal

**Global Communications In The Satellite Era: A New Information Order**

Kalinga Seneviratne

# Global Communications In The Satellite Era: A New Information Order

Kalinga Seneviratne

**Abstract:** When the campaign for a NWICO was initiated in the 1960s it was fuelled by a worry by developing country leaders that looming satellite technology will allow the West to control the minds and political affairs of their newly independent countries. Today such invasions of their living rooms is a reality, yet, cheaper digital technology and transmission costs have opened the doors for the developing countries to counter it. This paper looks at the expansion of satellite driven news channels such as Al Jazeera, RT and CCTV that are countering western hegemony in global news flows, and the West – Americans in particular – are beginning to get worried. Paper also questions why India is unable to mount a counter attack against this western hegemony.

---

*In this electronic era of the satellite, the computer, optic fibre and the laser beam, the entire concept of freedom of information is undergoing a radical change, and as Jawaharlal Nehru once put it: "Events move so fast that men's minds tend to lag behind events". The new electronic communication devices are threatening men and nations with an "overload" of information, which could influence them and is capable of invading, recording and computerizing the deepest privacy. .... But, it can also provide the base for a new communication colonialism and cultural imperialism, if one-way communication traffic is the rule – D.R Mankekar, (1979:2)*

The above observation made by Indian communication expert D.R Mankekar in the 1970s is reflective of the reasons that drove the NWICO (New World Information and Communication Order) debate. Two-Third World<sup>1</sup> leaders began to worry about this prospect in the 1960s, when a popular science fiction book written by British science fiction writer Arthur Clarke in 1945 became a reality with the launch of Intelsat I – the world's first commercial geo-stationary communication satellite<sup>2</sup>. They feared that the West, with its financial clout and technological monopoly will be able to invade the living rooms of the Two-Thirds World with its bias news and information, without having to go through the checks and controls of local governments. While this became a reality by mid-1980s, yet, as this paper argues, things did not work the way the West wanted it to be – thanks to the advent of cheap digital technology which most of the Two-Thirds World has mastered today.

## The Dawn of the Satellite Era and Change in News Values

It was the Soviet Union that started the satellite age, when they launched the first Sputnik satellite on 4 October 1957. The space age was born there and it spurred

---

<sup>1</sup> I prefer to call what is called the 'Third World' as the 'Two-Thirds World' as it represents more than 2.3<sup>rd</sup> of human race.

<sup>2</sup> <http://lakdiva.org/clarke/1945ww/>

the United States to increase funding for its space program by ten-fold. What we see on our television, especially live events as the fall of the Berlin Wall or Gulf War or various sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics have changed the way we communicate with each other. It is not only, what we see on TV is driven by satellites, much of our Internet communications, which many of us take for granted today, are also largely driven by satellites.

The dawn of the satellite era has eroded the power governments had in controlling the broadcast of sensitive news, be it to protect its power or to safeguard the citizens from frenzied social chaos. As was argued during NWICO debates by Two-Thirds World ministers, satellites could be used by powerful countries to wage wars against less powerful countries. This was amply demonstrated during the lead up to Gulf Wars in 1991 and 2003, as well as Arab Spring uprisings that toppled leaders in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and in the war against the Assad regime in Syria beginning in 2011. It could be argued that wars are fought today both in the battle field and in the airwaves where satellites are a major weapon.

Ever since the bloodbath of partition in 1947, the Indian government and the media have played down religious passions by transmitting official statements that never say whether Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians are involved in a riot, it only refers to a "religious community" in the reports. They never say whether a mosque or a temple was attacked, only a "place of worship". But, in December 1992 satellite television gave India the first taste of live coverage of communally sensitive events in the country without these filters, that led to religious passions being whipped up easily.

Politicians, police and even the local media accused satellite broadcasters of fanning communal passions and helping to trigger Hindu-Muslim riots, which engulfed India after live images were beamed into Indian homes showing Hindu fundamentalists attacking a 16th century mosque in Ayodhya, some 700 kilometers from Delhi. Indian ministers heaped blame for the communal riots at the feet of international satellite news broadcasters Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

"Millions of people saw the mosque being demolished on the BBC and CNN and their anger was uncontrollable," Federal Defence Minister Sharad Pawar reportedly told Indian media. "Foreign news networks, particularly CNN and the BBC, went out of their way to show the gory visuals of outraged people," noted India's Financial Express. (UCA News, 1992).

Today, even in India, such safeguards are gone. Following the 2008 Mumbai terror attack where satellite-driven television stations (both in India and abroad) did live coverage of the 62-hour siege, as well as similar coverage of terror attacks in Europe since then, there has been increasing debate, as well as new laws introduced to limit such coverage. It is argued that such coverage aid the terrorists in many ways – both for propagating their cause and more so in monitoring the movements of government forces.

An year before Ayodhya incident, satellite TV was used for maximum propaganda effect to build up a case to go to war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq and when war began live coverage with its extensive focus on "smart bombs" created the impression of a quick and efficient war to "liberate Kuwait" without any dead bodies or destruction of homes on the ground being shown.

A decade later when US President George W Bush and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair wanted to go to war with Iraq again satellite TV was a major player in the campaign but this time CNN, and BBC had other non-western competitors, especially Al Jazeera owned by Qatar with a strong Arabic perspective. Its Arabic service was already making waves across the Middle East.

### **The CNN "Live News" Revolution**

The launch of CNN from Atlanta in the US by Ted Turner on 1 June 1980 gave a new dimension to television news reporting and it also triggered debate about news gathering, such as whether a camera on the ground with or without a reporter broadcasting an event as it happens gives a local perspective to the story or if it is a form of news voyeurism?

However, CNN revolutionized the nature of news. Until then, news could only be reported at fixed times throughout the day. People used to read the newspaper in the morning and then forgot about the news until the evening television news bulletins reminded them about what was going on in the world. At the time CNN was launched, in the US, television news was dominated by 3 major networks – ABC, CBS and NBC – and their nightly 30-minute news broadcasts. When CNN started broadcasting news on a 24 hour live basis, these networks ridiculed it as the CNN station budget was just a fraction of what the 3 networks spent on producing their nightly news broadcasts. But, CNN smashed this concept of news by bringing news as it happened.

In a statement released on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CNN's launch, Ted Turner said:

*For many of us, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Today, 25 years after CNN was launched on June 1, 1980, there are more than 70 television channels broadcasting 24-hour news coverage around the world – a true testament that CNN changed the world of broadcasting and journalism and opened a window on the most remarkable events of our time<sup>3</sup>.*

Chris Cramer, a former BBC head of news gathering operations, who defected to CNN after the 1991 Gulf War, and became managing director of CNN International said when the station marked its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005, that CNN has broken the mould of television news:

---

<sup>3</sup> [http://edition.cnn.com/services/opk/cnn25/message\\_from.htm](http://edition.cnn.com/services/opk/cnn25/message_from.htm)

*Like many of my journalist colleagues, I had been complacent and thought the news was best served up at fixed points of the day in heavily crafted and refined news broadcasts. Oh, how we laughed at Ted Turner's expense, even when events like the Challenger Space Shuttle explosion in 1986 or the Lockerbie bombing in 1988 forced television networks to go live – usually painfully late and sometimes hours after coverage had been broadcast around the world by CNN. If that was not warning enough, then the Gulf War in 1991 made television news executives hang their heads in shame when CNN's meticulous planning, bravery and 24 hours of extraordinary coverage made CNN the place to work and, for viewers, the network to watch<sup>4</sup>.*

In the eyes of the Two-Thirds World however, the success of CNN was a cause of worry, as they embarked to gain a monopoly on setting the global news agenda. Even news agencies and newspaper offices had a TV screen which they monitored for their world news coverage.

### **Al Jazeera – Challenging Western Hegemony**

The concept of hegemony, which was first put forward by Antonio Gramsci (1971), refers to the moral, philosophical, and political leadership of a social group, which is not gained by force but by an active consent of other social groups through taking control of culture and ideology. During this process, the leading social group exerts its impact and gain its legitimacy, mainly through social mechanisms such as education, religion, family and the mass media. Based on the definition of hegemony, media hegemony means the dominance of a certain aspects of life and thoughts by penetrating dominant culture and values in social life. In other words, media hegemony served as a crucial shaper of culture, values and ideology of society (Altheide, 1984)<sup>5</sup>.

As Egyptian journalist and communication scholar Ibrahim Saleh<sup>6</sup> of Nile University argues, we are still living under the domination of the Anglo-American viewpoint when it comes to international news and the local perspective (from the Two Thirds World) is lacking. “Arab media always said that (Anglo-American) narrative was wrong and we had discrepancies in the Arab world, but, those who had visionary views was not incorporated into the international media (narrative)” he notes.

Thus, when Al Jazeera English started and expanded outside the Arab world it was hoped that this different Arab narrative would get the necessary international exposure.

Clement Mesenas, is a Singaporean journalist, who worked in Kuwait for over a decade. “I was there in the 80s ... concept of journalism was like in the old days

---

<sup>4</sup> [http://edition.cnn.com/services/opk/cnn25/cnns\\_impact.htm](http://edition.cnn.com/services/opk/cnn25/cnns_impact.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media\\_Hegemony](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_Hegemony)

<sup>6</sup> Interview with author November 2016.

people sit around a fire in the evening and exchange stories what happened in town during the day. That is how journalism was done in the Middle East” he recalled<sup>7</sup>. “People go to the city during day find out what’s happening come back to the newspaper sat down wrote a story and it went to print next day”.

Mesenas, who worked in the Middle East until 2000 says that when Al Jazeera came, it brought a “breath of fresh air to otherwise straight forward boring journalism in the Middle East”. He explained that the Lebanese did try to be forward looking and they were daring journalists who asked questions. But, Al Jazeera “had massive funding from Qatar” and their initial batch of journalists were well trained and came from BBC Arabic. “They reported so many issues in Gulf never touched but Emir of Qatar was never touched” he recalls.

Al Jazeera (AJ) Satellite Channel was launched on 1 November 1996 following the closure of the BBC's Arabic language television station, after only 18 months of operations, when the Saudi government attempted to suppress information, including a graphic report on executions and prominent dissident views. AJ was started with a loan of QAR 500 million (USD 137 million) provided by The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa to sustain the network through its first five years, as Hugh Miles detailed in his book *Al Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel That Is Challenging the West*<sup>8</sup>. It has since become perhaps the most investigated TV channel in the world as it became the first real challenge to the Western dominated global news flows, especially with its strong Arab and Islamic perspectives. There have been numerous articles and books written on it, as well as documentaries and academic papers, including many Phd thesis. Doha based Al Jazeera Centre for Studies lists over 60 Phd thesis, another 60 masters thesis and over 40 books and 30 research papers on the subject<sup>9</sup>.

Writing on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Al Jazeera’s founding, Al Jazeera Network’s director-general Wadah Khanfar wrote in its website<sup>10</sup>:

*No other media channel has triggered the same amount of debate and excited researchers' scrutiny as Al Jazeera has done during the last decade. A considerable number of writers and researchers devoted themselves to study the Al Jazeera phenomenon in depth, coming to a range of conclusions from different academic, cultural and political backgrounds. These debates have contributed to strengthening the ties that bind Al Jazeera to its viewers. The channel has now become of critical importance for understanding and interacting with the realities of the Arab world*

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview done with the author in Singapore on 8 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1731/3131>

<sup>9</sup> <http://studies.aljazeera.net/mritems/Documents/2013/8/5/20138582257502580EN%20-%20Academic%20Research.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2006/10/200849133024266711.html>

In the introduction to the book “The Al Jazeera Effect: How the new Global Media are reshaping global politics”(2008) the author Philipi Seib<sup>11</sup> said:

*The battle for hearts and minds in the Middle East is being fought not on the streets of Baghdad, but on the newscasts and talk shows of Al Jazeera. The future of China is being shaped not by Communist Party bureaucrats, but by bloggers working quietly in cyber cafes. The next attacks by al Qaeda will emerge not from Osama bin Laden's cave, but from cells around the world connected by the Internet. In these and many other instances, traditional ways of reshaping global politics have been superseded by the influence of new media-satellite television, the Internet, and other high-tech tools.*

After invading Iraq with the misguided hope that the people of Iraq will welcome the American troops with flowers and relief, when that did not happen the Americans began to blame Al Jazeera in particular for inflaming Arab minds against the West. This was ironic because many Arabs have been critical of Qatar for providing the US with an airbase to mount bombing raids on Iraq.

When the 2003 Iraq War began, at least the Arab viewers had an alternative to the Pentagon-controlled American and British ‘embedded’ newscasts. Al Jazeera had a presence in Iraq since 1997 and the network's facilities and footage were highly sought by international networks that did not want to depend on the Anglo-American sources. While the American networks showed ‘smart bombs’ hitting their targets (footage beamed by cameras fixed to these bombs), they did not show the human casualties of war. Al Jazeera cameramen on the ground showed the grim realities of war – bombed out buildings, the dead bodies and ambulances rushing victims to hospitals. These images obviously angered Arabs and swayed hatred towards the Americans and their allies.

The channel and its web site also saw unprecedented attention from viewers looking for alternatives to embedded reporting and military press conferences. Perhaps in a bid to silence a detractor, on 1 April 2003, a United States air force fired a missile on Al Jazeera's Baghdad bureau, killing reporter Tareq Ayyoub. Though the Pentagon claimed that it was a mistake, Qatar said that they had supplied the US with a precise map of the location of the bureau in order to spare it from attack.

### **RT Channel – Putin’s Unconventional Missile**

Before we discuss the Russia Today (RT) satellite television channel, in the context of the international “news perspectives” battle, it is interesting to take note of a presentation the then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made to a congressional hearing in 2011. At a time the Republicans were trying to slash her State Department budget by half, she was trying to build a case for more funding for what she called the US government’s “propaganda war” with international

---

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.amazon.in/Al-Jazeera-Effect-Reshaping-Politics/dp/1597972002/ref=pd\\_sim\\_14\\_4?\\_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=VZNTEB2V5GQE1E70D83B](https://www.amazon.in/Al-Jazeera-Effect-Reshaping-Politics/dp/1597972002/ref=pd_sim_14_4?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=VZNTEB2V5GQE1E70D83B)

broadcasters, particularly Qatar's Al Jazeera, Russia's RT and China's CCTV channels. She told the congressional hearing:

*We are in an information war and we are losing that war, I will be very blunt in my assessment. Al Jazeera is winning, the Chinese have opened up a global English language and multi-language television network, the Russians have opened up an English language network and I have seen it in a few countries and its quite instructive. We are cutting back, the BBC is cutting back, some five years ago Western media outlets including the BBC and CNN had a news monopoly in the coverage of world news, things have changed since then. More and more viewers across the world are tuning to various foreign media to get a first take on events<sup>12</sup>.*

Well one would think this is a good thing. We have more diversity of viewpoints and more media to watchdog what governments are doing around the world. This is exactly what the Libertarian Model of the "free media" prescribes.

RT gleefully reported on Clinton's comments to the Congress hearing where she said that RT is "quite instructive". The RT presenter said in introducing the report: "War declared. The US is now officially in an international information battle with foreign media, which provides alternative views on world news. Views that often runs in contrast to the coverage of events by the US mainstream media"<sup>13</sup>.

Featured on the same RT program Clinton's presentation to Congress was shown, US investigative journalist and film director Danny Schechter gave this response:

*Clearly the United States feels on the defensive, partly because it can no longer monopolize not only the terms of the authority in those countries but also the terms of the debate. There are other information out there, there are other points of view and those points of view are profoundly damaging to a country that believes that its point of view is the only point of view or should be the only point of view.*

If you watch the RT channel you will find that regularly they make this point that the US point of view is not the only way to look at news - be it in reporting the war in Syria, analysis on the overthrow of Gaddafi in Libya, the chaos created by the Arab Spring, the hypocrisy involved in war crimes allegations against non-Western countries or the legality and fairness of economic sanctions on various parties. Interestingly these viewpoints are presented to the world by anchors and presenters that are predominantly American or British, some of CNN fame such as Larry King and ex- BBC staff such as Afshin Rattansi.

---

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyjnEm8DZkI>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyjnEm8DZkI>

Though CNN may be more visible on TV screens around the world, RT claims that their You Tube channel has over 300 million hits as compared to CNN's roughly 3 million hits.

The Columbia Journalism Review (Ioffe, 2010) argues that RT was conceived as a soft-power tool to improve Russia's image abroad, to counter the anti-Russian bias the Kremlin saw in the Western media. Since its founding in 2005, the broadcast outlet has become an extension of Vladimir Putin's confrontational foreign policy and often "it seemed that Russia Today was just a way to stick it to the U.S. from behind the façade of legitimate newsgathering".

Funded by the Russian government, RT was launched on 10 December<sup>14</sup> 2005 presenting from its base in Moscow round the clock news, documentaries, panel discussions, debates, commentaries, sports and cultural programs. It does not claim to represent the "international community", but unashamedly says that it is "providing a Russian viewpoint on major global events". Russian news agency RIA Novosti helped establish ANO TV-Novosti (Autonomous Non-profit Organization TV-News) to serve as the parent company of RT channel. Today it broadcasts in English, Arabic and Spanish.

This penetration of RT into the living rooms of US and UK provided what the advocates of the Libertarian Free Media model always prescribed – offering a diversity of viewpoints and letting the people (not governments) figure out what to accept and what not to. But, that was not to be.

In 2017 after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, there was much hype created by the American media, that his election win was aided by the Russian propaganda machine, that had access to US audiences. Russia's RT channel and the Russian Internet news service Sputnik were particularly singled out. RT in particular have been gaining increasing audiences via their English language broadcasts in the UK and US, where people were looking for alternative sources of information to supplement what they were getting from local sources. This could be compared to how BBC World Service, Radio Liberty or Voice of America got audiences overseas during the short-wave (SW) radio era.

In September 2017, RT announced that its American arm had been asked by the Justice Department to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). A U.S. intelligence report published just after the Trump inauguration had concluded that Russia conducted an influence campaign of hacking and other measures aimed at swinging the 2016 presidential vote to Donald Trump. The report said Sputnik and RT are part of "Russia's state-run propaganda machine" that contributed to that campaign. Reston Translator that transmits Radio Sputnik on FM frequency was also asked to register under the act.

"The war the US establishment wages with our journalists is dedicated to all the starry-eyed idealists who still believe in freedom of speech," RT's Moscow-based

---

<sup>14</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> December is the UN designated Human Rights Day. It commemorates the day in 1948 when the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

editor-in-chief, Margarita Simonyan, said in a statement. “Those who invented it, have buried it”(Bertrand, 2017).

In a Russian language interview with the "Standard" correspondent Danila Shepoválnikova in September 2012, the general manager of ANO TV-Novosti, Aleksey Nikolov<sup>15</sup> denied the widespread opinion about the propaganda tasks of the RT and explained their positioning in the international broadcasting industry thus:

*The largest international newsmakers - CNN and BBC - these are two different TV companies, with different cultures and traditions, but when you look at their news story of the day, it seems that they are making content in one newsroom. The same can be said about Euronews, Sky News, Fox News and other foreign TV companies. At some point, we realized that with a huge choice of news sources, including the Internet, there is virtually no alternative. At the same time, there are many educated, active and traveling people in the world with independent thinking, who need other news. Therefore, starting from 2008, we began to change the content to the news in accordance with what seems to us the most important and relevant in the world. After that, our slogan appeared: Question more, which can be translated from English to "ask more questions", and how "more often doubt what you see and hear." That is, how we offer an alternative view of the whole world, and this view is in demand.*

### **CCTV – Can China Use Its Billions To Influence the World?**

On 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016 Singapore’s Straits Times ran a story with a bold headline at the top of its world news pages that said “China’s deal with Aussie media ‘a propaganda coup’” (Pearlman, 2016). It was referring to a deal signed on May 27<sup>th</sup> between the head of the Chinese Communist Party’s Central Public Relations Bureau, Liu Qibao and Fairfax Media, publishers of 3 of Australia’s leading newspapers - ‘The Age’, ‘Sydney Morning Herald’ and ‘Australian Financial Review’. Under the agreement, the newspapers would carry a monthly 8-page lift-out provided by the state-owned ‘China Daily’ from Beijing.

The article noted that the deal marked a “propaganda coup” for Beijing, as the Australian newspapers were struggling financially and this is an example of how their independence is under threat. Upon reading this, I thought, would the Straits Times carry a similar headline if the Voice of America or BBC sign a deal to buy airtime on local TV or when Radio Australia got a frequency in Cambodia? Do you really believe that those broadcasters do not carry some form of propaganda to promote foreign or trade policies of their home governments?

Hillary Clinton’s request to Congress for more money to fund American overseas broadcasting clearly reflected this role. She was honest enough to argue that America had to fight a “propaganda war”. And in February 1993 when Australia

---

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.comnews.ru/node/67949#ixzz4qworD9Xt>

launched a satellite television service targeted at Asian homes, then Prime Minister Paul Keating said at the launching ceremony: "From now on the people of our region will be able to know us better, and that will make all our other efforts (trade and diplomacy) that much easier"<sup>16</sup>.

In January 2012, writing in the Communist Party magazine 'Seeking the Truth' China's President Hu Jintao warned that "hostile" powers are seeking to "westernize" China and called for greater efforts from the Chinese media to enhance China's cultural influence abroad. He added that ideological and cultural fields are their main targets. "The overall strength of Chinese culture and its international influences are not commensurate with China's international status," he noted. "The international culture of the West is strong while we are weak" (Simpson, 2012).

Since then China has embarked on an aggressive campaign with multi-million dollar funding to expand Chinese media overseas particularly the state-owned Central China Television (CCTV) and China's national news agency Xinhua.

In fact, China's international satellite television expansion started in the early 1990s when CCTV-4 was launched in 1992 as China's first Mandarin language international broadcaster. The first 24-hour English language news channel CCTV-9 was launched in 2000, followed by a Spanish and French channel E & F in 2004, CCTV-Arabic in 2008 and CCTV-Russian in 2009.

From the beginning of 2017 China also launched the China Global Television Network that will pool the resources of Xinhua and CCTV. The new multilingual media cluster will have six TV channels, a video newsletter agency and a new media agency. It is designed to counter Western media's hold on setting the international news agenda and enhancing China's own influence in shaping global opinion.

CCTV's Arabic channel is fronted by Arabic speaking Chinese presenters and when it was launched in 2009, Zhang Changming, vice-president of CCTV told BBC<sup>17</sup> that it is part of the Chinese government's plan to promote its own viewpoints by encouraging state-controlled media organisations to go global. He made it clear that the aim was to counter some of the "distorted" views about China that are put out by a number of foreign broadcasters.

For example why is China's Belt and Road Initiative seen as a "debt-trap" and a Chinese attempt to dominate and control trading relations in Asia? Or why is Chinese companies buying up vast tracks of agricultural land in Australia be seen as "an invasion"? Or when China invests in Caribbean nations why is it not seen as foreign direct investments helping economic activity there, rather than China "buying loyalty" on US's doorstep? Or when China invests in Africa, why is it

---

<sup>16</sup> <http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-8818>

<sup>17</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/8166486.stm>

reported as propping up dictatorial regimes in return for exploiting their resources?

The West has been doing all the above things for ages and the Western media has largely reported these as an altruistic activity naming these as “development aid”.

Xiaoling (2009) argues that with China’s growing confidence, the target audiences have also changed. Although overseas Chinese remain important, the focus is now on mainstream society in the US, Europe and neighbouring Asian countries. Therefore, China’s soft power channels have taken a foreign language focus with CCTV English and other language channels becoming important.

“The advantages of centrally managed and coordinated public diplomacy activities in China are obvious,” argues Xiaoling. “Chinese TV stations at all levels can work together for the expansion of activities abroad. CCTV, which has always been at the center of shaping the domestic political environment, takes up the leading role again for the construction of a positive image of China while TV stations at all other levels are required to supply it with programs.”

### **India – The Sleeping Giant Yet To Wake Up**

In 1993, just after Rupert Murdoch had bought the Star TV network from a Hong Kong tycoon and launched satellite television to India, I visited the Indian Institute of Mass Communications in New Delhi and met its director Prof Y.S Yadav. I asked him whether he is worried about this latest development and if the Indian masses will be overwhelmed by Western cultural imperialism? Would India have to launch another liberation struggle? He said, “No, I’m delighted”. Taken aback by the reply, I asked why? He argued that Indian government will be forced to liberalize the broadcasting sector and Indians will be able to establish their own satellite networks. “We have the film industry that has been booming for years, the contents are already there and our journalism fraternity is well prepared for the era of independent journalism”, he added.

Well looking back today, he was right. India has hundreds of satellite television channels and many of them are news channels, some 24 hours. But, why is it that India has not yet been able to launch an English language satellite television news channel like Al Jazeera, RT or CCTV? There is no dearth of Indian journalists that are masters of the English language.

Veteran journalist Mahesh Vijapurka<sup>18</sup> argues that media liberalization of the late 1990s and 2000s have not helped the Indian television news industry. “It has not improved journalism,” he says. “TV stations have no interest in quality, mainly because no TV station makes profits (except Times Now) and none of them invest in staff. You don’t see reporters on TV.”

He explained that for politicians it is a good business and good politics to own a TV station and they have no interest in good journalism. “They are worse than

---

<sup>18</sup> Interview with author recorded in Mumbai, 7 December 2016.

Murdoch,” argues Vijapurka. “They don’t know what journalism is. Murdoch knows what is Journalism but he wants to scramble it for power.” For Indian news television, he laments that how they produce news is to “invite guests to talk in studios (and) instead of investing in manpower and contents, they have a coordinator who keeps calling up in the morning to get guests on program ... they will grab anybody they can.”

In the past few years, one person Arnab Goswani, has been credited with having revolutionized television news journalism, be it for the good or bad. His brand of aggressive, nationalistic and opinionated current affairs panel discussions have captivated Indian audiences and helped his television channel to lead audience rankings. Goswani began it with the ‘Times Now’ channel and now has launched his own ‘Republic TV’ channel. Over a decade he reformed the way journalism is practiced in India. He did this not through reporting but anchoring.

Before he launched the Republic channel, in an interview given to Hindustan Times (Uttam, 2016), Goswani said that he “will redefine global TV”. He hinted that it would be done through digital media because there are 462 million internet users in India and the “new wave of dissent will give power to the fingertips”.

Speaking on Russia Today (RT) channel’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary special panel discussion on international media in December 2015, Goswani made a passionate case for India to lead a global movement to dismantle Western hegemony in the international news media, especially on global television. This is part of what he said<sup>19</sup>:

*The hegemony of the Western media has to end. Western media had it too good for too long and it has ruined the balance of power required (referring to statistics given by fellow panelist) he says 95 percent of Indians follow cross-border news. So Indians are most interested about the world. The least interested in the world are the Americans and the British. Only 44 to 46 percent of people follow cross-border news, but US and UK together contribute 74 percent of the source of global news, whereas all of Asia contributes just 3 percent. If I summarise that in one line, it basically says that the Indians are the least insular people and most open-minded, Americans are the most insular people, but they have complete dominance over the global narrative in terms of news. I have said recently that India will be the next media capital of the world. I want to share with the audience why I think so. We have 99,000 publications in India, 13,761 registered newspapers in India, we have 404 news channels in India, which broadcast 24/7 and we don’t have one single global news network. ..(so) there is a problem with balance. But it is countries like India, which speaks English, which is a democracy, and the challenge to global news networks is about to happen. I think it is very important from a balancing of power*

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2nUAljtkMA>

*perspective, .. so the time has come to provide a serious counter to global media sources like BBC and CNN which have been hegemonistic for far too long.*

## **Conclusion**

It has been pointed out in this chapter, the premise of the NWICO debate of a balance international information flow may be finally taking shape, but, it is left to be seen if this could happen via satellite television (which is expensive) or through Internet networking. While the technology to produce and transmit television and other news services have decreased drastically, and with the mushrooming of media training institutes across Asia, young people are getting the skills to produce good engaging contents. Yet, Asia has a serious problem, and it is to do with psychology.

Asian media training institutes are too dependent on textbooks written by westerners (mainly Americans) which Asians use without much critical analysis. Thus, we are peddling a western mythology of a “free libertarian” media, and as discussed in this paper, when it comes to news balance, the Americans are the first people to rebel against it. By not looking for alternative, you may even call it “Asian” perspectives, Asian media and its consumers continue to buy and consume Anglo-American media products with all its biases. We may resent it, we may criticize it, but, very few are taking the initiative to counter it with your own contents and networking. It is not a lack of money that hinders such initiatives, we need to de-colonize our minds.

## **References**

- Bertrand, N (2017), ‘Sunlight’ is ‘what neutralizes them’: The DOJ is homing in on Russia Today, 12 September, Business Insider, USA. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.sg/doj-asks-rt-to-register-as-foreign-agent-under-fara-2017-9/?r=US&IR=T>
- Gramsci, Antonio (1971). "Introduction". In Hoare, Quentin; Smith, Geoffrey Nowell (eds.). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers, New York.
- Ioffe, J (2010), What is Russia Today?, Sept/Oct, Columbia Journalism Review, USA – retrievable from [http://archives.cjr.org/feature/what\\_is\\_russia\\_today.php?page=all](http://archives.cjr.org/feature/what_is_russia_today.php?page=all)
- Mankekar, D.R (1979), Media and the Third World, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, New Delhi, India
- Pearlman, J (2016), China’s deal with Aussie media ‘a propaganda coup’, 10 June, Straits Times, Singapore.
- Simpson, P (2012), Chinese President Hu Jintao warns of cultural warfare from the West, 2 Jan, The Telegraph, UK. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8988195/Chinese-President-Hu-Jintao-warns-of-cultural-warfare-from-West.html>
- UCA News (1992), Ayodhya violence confirms worst fears of unregulated satellite TV, 31 Dec, UCANews.com – retrieve from [http://www.ucanews.com/story-archive/?post\\_name=/1992/12/31/ayodh...ce-confirms-worst-fears-of-unregulated-satellite-tv&post\\_id=42560](http://www.ucanews.com/story-archive/?post_name=/1992/12/31/ayodh...ce-confirms-worst-fears-of-unregulated-satellite-tv&post_id=42560)

- Uttam, K (2016), Arnab Goswani wants to be a 'dissenter', says he will redefine global Tv, 5 Nov, Hindustan Times, India.
- Xiaoling, Zhang (2009), Chinese State Media Going global, East Asia Policy, vol 2, no.1 – retrievable from [http://www.eai.nus.edu.sg/publications/files/Vol2No1\\_ZhangXiaoling.pdf](http://www.eai.nus.edu.sg/publications/files/Vol2No1_ZhangXiaoling.pdf)

\* Dr Kalinga Seneviratne is a Singapore based Journalist, Media Analysts, International Communications Specialist and Author.