



The Global Media Project

at The Watson Institute for International Studies

Introduction

As a result of technological innovation and worldwide expansion, multiple forms of media have become powerful agents of international affairs. In response, the Watson Institute has launched a cross-cutting initiative, the Global Media Project (GMP), to explore the significance of the new media landscape for major international issues. The principal co-investigators of the GMP are James Der Derian and John Phillip Santos.

On theater, television, computer, and even cell phone screens, we are witnessing new global media effects in international politics. Many of the most powerful and lasting have been the result of global conflicts. After the 'CNN-effect' of the first Gulf War (cable news), the 'Al-Jazeera-effect' of the Iraq war, (satellite phones and broadband networks), and the 'Nokia-effect' of the London 7/7 bomb attacks (cell phones and instant messaging), it is only a matter of time before the 'iPod-effect' enters the vernacular of international conflict.

The goal of the Global Media Project is to see what lies behind and beyond the screen, to study the expanding role of media in war and peace, and to produce new documentary media for human rights, cultural understanding, sustainable development, and global security. It will do so by bringing under one roof academic researchers, policy practitioners, and media producers, who together can provide critical analytical tools for international media makers as well as create challenging *global-interest media*.

Rationale

The Global Media Project is built upon three core assertions. The first is that the media – from print and online journalism to cable and satellite news to cinematic film and video documentaries – have become increasingly interconnected and all the more powerful as global actors. Second, since 9/11 the media are a critical component of global terrorism and the war against it. Third, in critical matters of war and peace there is an increased need not only to understand media *in* but also to create public media *for* international affairs. In an age defined by networks of information and terror, getting the message right is no longer sufficient; understanding, producing and rapidly distributing global-interest media is also required.

The GMP at the Watson Institute is positioned to act on these assertions. As one of the world's leading centers for research and teaching on international affairs, the Watson Institute can provide the kind of historical knowledge, regional expertise, and conceptual tools that one is unlikely to find in schools of film and journalism. Moreover, through the GMP, the Institute is building on an established track record of using multiple media to disseminate policy-relevant knowledge. The approach of the GMP is both to increase the media fluency of international studies scholars, who have considerable expertise on critical global issues; and to deepen the analysis and historical content available to journalists, broadcasters, and bloggers, who possess important technical, informational, political, and creative skills. The goal of this dual approach is to understand as well as to produce seamless multiple media that can transform the white noise of global information into meaningful global knowledge. By staging the convergence of these approaches, the Global Media Project is seeking to produce media with historical depth and political complexity that not only informs but engages the public in a global dialogue on critical issues of war and peace.

Global Media and International Affairs

In print and in the cinema, on television, radio and the web, the power of global media is on display as it tackles a variety of critical issues in international affairs. What makes media global is a combination of topicality and technology. Within a single news cycle a local incident can be transformed into a global event, as we saw when the ripple of digital photographs taken in Abu Ghraib prison produced a political tsunami of global proportions. A small-scale documentary like *Bought and Sold*, produced by an NGO (the Global Survival Network), promoted by a web-based human rights organization (Witness.org), and picked up by national broadcast news (BBC, CNN, ABC and others) helped put the issue of the international trafficking of women on the global agenda (with passing of new protocol in the UN as well as new law in the US Congress). A more recent example is the start-up last August of 'Current TV' by Al Gore and like-minded colleagues to air 'viewer created content' (VC2) as well as alternative news, music and video, which was followed this spring by the release of *An Inconvenient Truth*, a documentary that seeks to unblinker America's preoccupation with 9/11 so that graver global environmental dangers might be addressed.

The most visible impact of the global media continues to be in the global war on terror. The impact of the July 7 London terrorist bomb attacks was force-multiplied by instant messaging and photos from cell phones. In October the British police arrested Younis Tsouli, 22-years old and living in London, for conspiring in a bomb plot. Using the web to distribute everything from beheading videos and recruitment tapes to weapons manuals and computer hacking information, Tsouli, a.k.a. 'Irhabi ('Terrorist' in Arabic) 007', was providing a virtual training camp for would-be *jihadists*. He was just one node in a growing global network that relies on the Internet for information, communication, and organization. In the early 1990s there was one Al Qaeda website (www.alneda.com); today they are in the hundreds, as demonstrated in June by the number that carried Bin Laden's tribute to the slain Iraqi terrorist, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

Consider several other recent examples:

- Before he was killed by a U.S. bomb strike, the most wanted terrorist in Iraq, al-Zarqawi, released a videotape exhorting Iraqis to jihad, prompting the DOD to respond with video outtakes showing him clumsily attempting to un-jam his machine gun.
- *The War Tapes* was released, a video vérité documentary created through Deborah Scranton's instant messaging direction of soldiers from a New Hampshire National Guard unit in Iraq who were equipped with camcorders fixed to helmets, humvees and gun mounts.
- The Heritage Foundation think tank held a well-attended conference, "'24" and America's Image in Fighting Terrorism: Fact, Fiction or Does it Matter?', moderated by radio host Rush Limbaugh, and featuring Secretary of Homeland Defense Michael Chertoff with the cast members of the popular television show.
- A new Palestinian group, claiming ties to Al Qaeda and responsibility for the capture of a young Israeli soldier, posted a dramatic video on the Internet, with final credits going to the 'The Army of Islam: The Media Department.'

David Carr, writing in *The New York Times*, sees the new hybrid of media having the potential to produce a radical shift in conventional balances of power and truth:

Those interested in advancing specific points of view these days are picking up the 800-pound pencil of filmmaking, in part because digital technology has made it easier to deliver complicated political messages in a visual narrative. But the cluster of serious, point-of-view documentaries may also represent something else, a coup d'état on the status quo.

Global Media and the Mission of the Watson Institute

Early on, the Watson Institute recognized the increasing need in the information age to be able to disseminate knowledge to the public and policy-makers with alacrity *and* celerity. For without the right mix of media to bracket the widening spread and increasing speed of the information spectrum – including print, radio, television, cinema, web, iPod – the message will have little, if any, impact. Where and when productive criticisms and alternative policies have appeared, they have often fallen on deaf ears or failed to get a public hearing. Watson researchers use film, radio, and the Internet to complement more traditional means of distributing academic research. Numerous strands of research now take on the question of how media shapes international affairs. Media is both a subject of study in the classroom and a vital tool for teaching, and the Institute relies on multiple media to carry out its wide range of programmatic activities as well as to reach the widest possible public community.

The Global Media Project's aim to understand and critique as well as to influence and produce media for international affairs arises out of the already significant media involvements of the Watson Institute. The Information Technology, War, and Peace Project at the Institute laid the groundwork with its early development of videoconferencing, web-based information interventions, discussion forums, MP3 file-sharing, and videostreaming of events (see www.infopeace.org). In collaboration with Amedia Productions, InfoTechWarPeace produced two documentaries, *VirtualY2K* (distributed through the Media Education Foundation) and *After 9/11* (broadcast on LinkTV), that have been screened internationally and gained global audiences.

Also in the area of film documentary, the Oscar-winning *The Fog of War*, directed by Errol Morris, was advised by Institute scholars Jim Blight and Janet Lang, and was based on previous Watson research and critical oral history projects involving Robert McNamara. Seeing the provocative educational potential of the documentary, the Institute's nationally known Choices for the 21st Century Education Program partnered with Sony Picture Classics to produce a study guide for *The Fog of War* that was distributed free with the documentary to over 100,000 teachers in U.S. high schools.

The GMP is now building a critical mass for studying, producing, and distributing public-interest media through multiple platforms. First, three prominent figures in the field have been appointed as visiting fellows to the Watson Institute:

- **Christopher Lydon.** A well-known public radio personality, Lydon has launched a new nationally syndicated program, *Open Source Radio*, the first radio program truly fused to the Internet through blogging. Lydon has tapped Institute faculty, students and the Global Media Project as resources for the show's international themes and as on-air guests who have brought new voices and methods to international issues.
- **John Phillip Santos.** A producer, writer, and journalist, Santos has produced over 40 broadcast documentaries at CBS and PBS and was a program officer for the Media, Education and Culture program at the Ford Foundation. He also is a National Book Award finalist for his memoir, *Places Left Unfinished at the Creation of Time*.
- **Eugene Jarecki.** An acclaimed documentary filmmaker, Jarecki won the 2005 Sundance Grand Jury documentary prize for his film *Why We Fight* and is the founder of the educational program, the Eisenhower Project. The Global Media Project has produced a study guide for *Why We Fight*, and Sony Picture Classics will distribute the study guide with the DVD release in July 2006 to 100,000 high school teachers.

Second, the GMP is developing a critical media pedagogy for the field of international studies by engaging the media directly through productions; facilitating dialogues and learning exchanges with media makers and broadcasters in international studies courses; and organizing a series of workshops and conferences held at the Watson Institute. At the June 2005 launch of the Global Media Project, some of the best producers, directors, organizers, and story-tellers of independent public media were brought together for a workshop at the Watson

Institute. The event featured a Master Documentary class given by Jarecki to a mix of faculty and students. Video clips and podcasts of this event are posted on the Watson website.

Third, this spring the GMP developed a new course at Brown, "Global Media in War and Peace: History, Theory and Production" (see www.watsonblogs.org/globalmedia), that was co-taught by James Der Derian, Eugene Jarecki, and John Santos (to be taught again next year). Exploring the historical and contemporary roles of media in international affairs, both as a source of information and, increasingly, as an important medium of war and diplomacy, the course pioneers a new approach for teaching the connections between international studies and media analysis and production.

Fourth, research has begun and funding is being sought to create high-quality documentaries on critical global issues, beginning with terrorist use of media, the changing nature of warfare, and women's health in developing countries. Our goal is to open up the categories of peace and security beyond state interests, and to include competing concerns of individuals, gender, and cultural groups.

Supporting Activities and Dissemination

Research and production of documentaries will be supported by other Global Media Project events that will be organized to provide a robust intellectual and creative environment as well as to establish partnerships for joint productions and wider dissemination. Over the next three years GMP activities will include:

- **Annual workshops** to bring together producers, scholars, media reporters/critics, and practitioners from around the world
- **Creative collaborations** for multiple media production and distribution
- **Website development** to provide an Internet platform for the distribution of podcasts, video streaming, and documentaries on international affairs
- **Educational outreach** by producing teaching guides and companion texts for distribution with documentary DVDs to high schools nationwide
- **Course development** to bring students into the research and production sides of global media

Conclusion

The goal of the Global Media Project is to study as well as to create global-interest media that influences international affairs. Watson's large constituency of multidisciplinary scholars and international policymakers will be tapped, and the synergy of multiple media will be applied to the most pressing international issues. In our investigation and production of documentaries on human rights, modern warfare, and global terrorism, we are seeking the most innovative and influential thinkers, media experts, and policymakers. The goal of the Global Media Project is to be the difference (a unique site of international *and* media studies) that makes a difference (in policy formation *and* media production).