Managing the Mass Media Through Murder: Primary Prevention in Perception Management

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Managing the Mass Media Through Murder: Primary Prevention in Perception Management
Author: Editor
Volume: 4
Issue: 16
Date: 1998-04-24
Keywords: Information Warfare, Murder, Perception Management

Abstract. This article describes a common and simple approach to managing a political entity's international image.

An oft-repeated observation in an era of globalization is that the world is becoming smaller. Through development and employment of telecommunications inventions, an individual may learn more and more about more and more all over the globe.

While the infrastructure may be improving for global learning, what is learned depends on what is transmitted as much as or even more than how quickly transmission occurs and with fidelity and accessibility. One consequence of this dependence is "garbage in, garbage out." Another consequence is more complex and involves the absence of information--garbage or otherwise.

Through the use of murder or its threat against journalists and their sources, political leaders can impede obtaining information, to some degree regardless of communications infrastructure. This approach has a number of adherents worldwide. Virtually all political entities practice a variant through regulating information--attempting to kill stories if not people.

Why is murder and its threat as impediment to obtaining information successful? More people than might be expected react to absence of information with the construction of perceptions that what does not surface (is being impeded) does not exist. Even if these people can rationally and logically understand that information may be impeded through murder and its threat, their overall psychological stance suggests that impediments work. No information--what is happening is not happening.

But there seems to be an additional psychological consequence as well. Political entities that practice murder and its threat less often as information management--as well as those that merely kill stories selectively--often seem "worse" than would be merited if these entities could be more fairly compared with others that practice impeding information with extreme prejudice. For the former there are smoking guns of misbehavior, even if smoking guns of the latter are effectively preventing the latter's own smoking guns of misbehavior from being known.