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

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

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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.

Just as innuendo induction can damage a target, regardless of the story's truth, impeding information can strengthen the impeder--both in an absolute sense and relative to seemingly more ethical and moral competitors. It would seem that in matters of political perception management, murder allows one to get away with murder. (See Arndt, J., Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., et al. Suppression, accessibility of death-related thoughts and cultural worldview defense: Exploring the psychodynamics of terror management. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 5-18; Choi, I., Nisbett, R.E., & Smith, E.E. (1997). Culture, category, salience, and inductive reasoning. *Cognition*, 65, 15-32; Krueger, J., & Clement, R.W. (1996). Inferring category characteristics from sample characteristics: Inductive reasoning and social projection. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 125, 52-68; Rosenthal, A. (April 17, 1998). The execution report. *The New York Times*, p. A25.)(Keywords: Information Warfare, Murder, Perception Management.)