

What's so great about Peace Journalism?

By Jake Lynch

Abstract

This paper uses the Peace Journalism model, devised by Johan Galtung and developed by Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick, and others, to carry out an empirical content analysis on coverage by UK newspapers of the 'Iran nuclear crisis' over five months from August, 2005. The survey of 211 articles concentrates on one aspect of Peace Journalism: namely, where they present the causes and 'exits' or 'outcomes' of the conflict as being located – in Iran, the conflict arena, in the present and immediate future; or across a broader conflict formation, open in time and space. The former, it is argued, is characteristic of propaganda likely to provide justification for a violent response, and, therefore, a staple of War Journalism. The latter approach reinstates some of the elements omitted from propagandistic representations, and is likely to redress the balance of incentive towards non-violent responses. It is also, the paper argues, more accurate, when measured against what is known and has been observed about conflict by researchers who have studied it, in the overlapping fields of Conflict Analysis and Peace Research. Content analyses of UK press have often sought evidence to confirm the general left/right political orientation of individual publications. Mapping their representations of this story on to Peace Journalism criteria produces quite different results. The left-of-centre Guardian, for instance, comes out as markedly more War Journalistic - more likely to reproduce dominant readings of war propaganda - than some of its rivals. The right-wing Spectator shows a far higher proportion of Peace Journalism than its left-wing counterpart, the New Statesman. Peace Journalism, it is argued, produces findings of material relevance to both the operation of conflict reporting and its likely influence on source behaviour, in a feedback loop of cause and effect, as well as highlighting appropriate steps editors and reporters could take to ensure accuracy and balance in their coverage.

Critical realism

Peace Journalism is a critical realist theory about the reporting of conflict. Critical realism has been described by Wright (1996) as:

A way of describing the process of 'knowing' that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence 'realism'), while fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiraling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known* (hence 'critical') (pp. 35-36).

On a critical realist view, therefore, news should still be seen as a representation of something other than itself - a 'report of the facts', even though those facts are, in nearly every case, ready-mediated by the time any journalist, let alone readers and audiences, comes into contact with them.

There are, it is argued (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005), inevitably more facts than can be fitted into the reports, even in media that have expanded rapidly in range, scope and size over recent years. So, in considering the nature of dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known, it is the criteria on which choices, or 'gate keeping decisions' are made – as to which facts to include, and which to leave out - that are the salient issues.

This salience arises, in turn, from time-honored expectations of journalism as a civic tool in democracy, providing "a reliable account of what is really going on" (p. xv) to enable informed participation and consent, legitimizing the exercise of political and other forms of authority in the public sphere. These expectations are built in to many formulations around the world of public service principles, for instance. Their aim, according to the most influential of these - the BBC *Producer Guidelines* – is to equip audiences with "an intelligent and informed account of issues that enables them to form their own views" (p. 223).

When dealing with international conflict, access to things known by the public at large – the processes by which they form their own views – are perhaps more clearly textual, or intertextual, than in many other cases.

Shadowy international menaces, familiar only to specialists and the intelligence community, lie, by definition, outside most people's direct personal or social experience. So media representations of conflict grow in relative importance. They now form a key site for the exercise of power." (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005, p. xvi)

The question is, therefore, how is power being exercised over and within these representations? Propaganda, according to a classic definition, is "the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett and O'Donnell, 1999, p. 6) to map out in advance a particular path along which the knower, in critical realist terms, may apprehend the thing known.

From the definition given here, it follows that war propaganda is a facet of military power – propaganda calculated to gain public backing for war, or violent responses to conflict. War Journalism, according to the Galtung model, is 'propaganda-orientated'. Peace Journalism, by contrast, is 'truth-orientated'.¹

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) do not use the word 'truth' but they do claim that reports of conflict can be assessed for their accuracy against evidence gathered about conflict by researchers in the overlapping fields of Conflict Analysis and Peace Research. Their findings and interpretations have a strong claim to delineate things known, as distinct from the knower, at least by virtue of the twin safeguards – peer review and critical self-analysis – under which they have been gathered and compiled. They are therefore, it is suggested, bound to be an improvement on the generally unexamined criteria inscribed in journalistic conventions – conventions which incline reports of conflict towards dominant readings of war propaganda and a preponderance of War Journalism.

For these reasons, Peace Journalism can offer a basis for assessing news about conflict for its accuracy, as well as a fund of practical options for editors and reporters to equip readers and audiences to decode propaganda and produce their own *negotiated* readings (Hall, 1980), thereby holding power to account.

The Iran nuclear crises

In 2002, two events served to intensify the long-running conflict between Iran and the United States. In January, President George W Bush categorised the country as part of the 'Axis of Evil', along with Iraq and North Korea. In September, Russian technicians started to build Iran's first nuclear reactor, at Bushehr.

When did it all begin? Perhaps it started in 1979, when revolutionaries overthrew the regime of Shah Reza Pahlavi and took 52 Americans hostage in the US embassy for 444 days. Or perhaps in 1953 when a CIA-backed *coup d'état* ousted the elected government of Mohammed Mossadegh, after it had nationalised the Anglo-Iranian oil company, and installed the Shah in the first place.

To represent the conflict as I have done briefly in these two paragraphs is typical of Peace Journalism: "open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere" (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005, p. 44). It is untypical, however, of news coverage, certainly in the time and place under discussion – in UK print media during the autumn and winter of 2005-6. In the 211 articles analysed for this study, indeed, the name, 'Mossadegh' does not crop up even once.

Most represent the conflict as confined to Iran itself – the ‘conflict arena’. That is where the cause of the problem is to be found, they suggest – namely the country’s ‘nuclear ambitions’, which flout the will of the ‘international community’; a community being brought, reluctantly, to the point of taking collective ‘policing’ action.

Between 2002 and the period of the study, this action took the form of protracted negotiations with the so-called EU 3 – Britain, France and Germany – on a possible agreement whereby Iran would accept certain limits on its nuclear power programme, in exchange for various inducements and guarantees.

By the middle of 2005, this was reaching a critical stage:

- The EU 3 tabled an offer, a draft ‘long-term agreement’ immediately rejected by Iran, at least partly because it did not provide for a resumption of any of the uranium enrichment activities they had voluntarily suspended during the talks.
- Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected President, signalling a change of direction from the previous government of Mohammed Khatami, in turn sharpening fears among EU governments that they were negotiating with a ‘lame duck’ interlocutor, particularly in the period between the election on June 24 and the new leader’s official inauguration on August 4.
- President Bush, on a visit to Israel, announced that ‘all options are on the table’² in ‘dealing with Iran’s nuclear ambitions’, sharpening Iranian fears that *their* interlocutors were, in turn, not ones to whom they could turn for security guarantees.

For options to be ‘on the table’ requires that they remain within the range of politically saleable policy responses. This, in turn, implies war propaganda, to shape perceptions and manipulate cognitions to enable a case to be made, ultimately, for a violent response.

The restriction of time and space in representing the conflict is a key part of such propaganda. Detailed ‘public interest polling’ carried out in the US shows that public approval for the use of force depends on the case being made passing six ‘screens’:³

- Rogue leaders
- Evidence tying them to heinous crimes
- Non-military means exhausted
- Military allies (to share the risk and cost)
- A ‘visionary’ objective (For example, turn an enemy into an ally or bring long term peace to a region)
- Early non-military intervention tried in good faith, but confounded

Underpinning all these factors is a proposition that the prospective target for ultimate military action is where ‘the problem’ is to be found – a country aberrant from acceptable norms of behaviour inscribed in such formulations as ‘the international community’. Targeting this country can therefore be presented as a way to ‘solve the problem’.

To equip readers and audiences to negotiate their own readings of war propaganda, therefore, it is essential to find ways to open up time and space which is a central requirement for Peace Journalism. How could it be done in the case of the Iran nuclear crises?

A full Peace Journalism treatment would include constructing the author of the propaganda – the US – as itself a party to the conflict, pursuing its own interests, as I do above; and considering the shared history of the parties. It would entail exploring further the allusion to oil as an overriding strategic interest, locating the problem at least partly in patterns of oil consumption and the struggle for control over access to remaining supplies.

Analytical criteria

I have already suggested that nothing so radical is to be found in the British press during the period under discussion. That is not to say, however, that there are no useful distinctions.

As if in preparation to clear the public opinion screens listed above, should military force move further up the agenda, propaganda at this stage commonly presented the 'crisis' as multi-lateral, with Iran, the rogue state, 'in breach' of its international obligations. So what are they?

Iran, in common with the US and the EU 3, is a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or NPT. This does actually provide for non-nuclear armed countries to benefit from civil nuclear power. A fact, a 'thing known', but commonly, in the coverage, presented as a 'claim', an opinion, or something Iran 'insists' upon – as if this constitutes further evidence of aberrance.

Indeed, in 211 articles, formulations to the effect that 'Iran insists on the right to develop civil nuclear power' crop up in no fewer than 28 – more than one in eight.

So the first two analytical factors, in measuring the extent of Peace Journalism, are:

1. Does the article mention the Non-Proliferation Treaty?
2. Does it report, as a fact – as distinct from something Iran 'claims' or 'insists' upon – that this gives Iran the right to develop civil nuclear power?

The NPT was a 'grand bargain' of world diplomacy. In exchange for being assured that no more countries would acquire nuclear weapons, the declared nuclear-armed states of the time – the US, UK, China, France and Soviet Union – agreed to "pursue good-faith negotiations on effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament".⁴

After the NPT entered into force, in 1970, a succession of arms control agreements followed between the superpowers – the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, or SALT, in 1972; SALT II in 1979 and three rounds of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, with negotiations continuing into the 1990s.

More recently, though, the US in particular has been increasingly criticized for reversing this progress, both through the development of new nuclear weapons as a 'fortuitous' consequence of care and maintenance programs,⁵ and for changes in its nuclear doctrine which widen the range of circumstances in which a first strike would be contemplated.⁶ In the UK, the government of Tony Blair was thinking aloud, by this stage, of commissioning a like-for-like replacement for its own fleet of Trident nuclear submarines.

If the conflict is represented as open in time and space, therefore, the NPT should be seen as imposing mutual obligations, and some consideration should be given as to whether 'we' are keeping 'our' side of the bargain. So, the third analytical criterion:

3. Does the article mention our nuclear weapons and/or failure to engage in disarmament negotiations, as a factor to be taken into consideration when assessing Iran's behavior under the NPT?

The fourth and fifth directly concern the allegation against Iran, that its civil nuclear program, and in particular its uranium enrichment activities, are a front for its real aim to acquire a nuclear weapon.

Early in the period under discussion, results were announced of a two-year investigation by an international team of scientists into what was, on the face of it, the most incriminating evidence – traces of highly enriched uranium, found on centrifuges seized from an Iranian laboratory by IAEA

inspectors in 2003. Iran said at the time these must have been on the centrifuges when they bought them from nuclear-armed Pakistan – an explanation supported by the scientists' conclusions. Iran had, on this charge at least, been found 'not guilty'.⁷

Shortly afterwards, The US National Intelligence Assessment concluded that the country was ten years away from acquiring the bomb – putting it in the same category as any other state with a nuclear power plant, certainly including South Korea and Brazil, for instance, if they were so minded. There was, in other words, in the consensus view of all the American intelligence agencies, no *specific* evidence against Iran. Later, there were regular reports by the IAEA themselves, of the intrusive snap inspections allowed for under a special protocol to which Iran had signed up – all pronouncing satisfaction at the access and cooperation they were receiving.⁸ The fourth criterion, then:

4. Does the article mention any of the evidence that Iran is not, in fact, engaged in a process of developing nuclear weapons?

This criterion was counted only from the time – August 23, about two-and-a-half weeks in – when the scientists' report was unveiled (the other pieces of evidence mentioned here came later). Only after this point, therefore, would it become reasonable to expect this to be reported as a fact, rather than treated as a matter of competing claims.

The fifth directly addresses, once again, the need to conceptualize, or construct the conflict in open time and space. If Iran were to attempt to acquire a nuclear weapon, or if that were to be considered a risk, how far would responsibility spread?

By mid-2005, US or US-allied forces were present in nearly all neighboring countries – Iraq, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Of Iran's fellow members of the 'Axis of Evil', the one likely to possess nuclear missiles, North Korea, had been met with multi-lateral negotiations. The one with no such capability, Iraq, was invaded to bring about 'regime change'.

Nuclear-armed Israel acquired, in 1998, a variant of the American F15 aircraft, and then, in 2001, an F16 variant, both of which have the range to fly a bombing mission as far as Iran and return to base without refueling, giving it this capability for the first time. In light of this security situation, the fifth criterion is:

5. Does the article mention Iran's possible reasons for seeking a nuclear arsenal, if it were to do so, in terms of deterrence against threats from outside?

The point of this in Peace Journalism terms is that, if the proliferation of nuclear weapons is considered a problem – a view highly likely to command broad consensus support, at least in the UK – then what is at stake is who is to blame for it. If perceptions are shaped in such a way as to hold Iran solely responsible, it becomes more likely that a policy based on punishing Iran will prove saleable. The alternative perception is of a shared problem, requiring a shared solution to reduce risk, involving changes in behavior on all sides. The five criteria are designated, in the table reproduced below (see Appendix), by the following three-letter short forms:

1. NPT
2. CIV
3. OUR
4. EVI
5. DET

Where the article includes one of these factors, it is marked with a 'Y' for yes; where it does not, with an 'N' for no. A 'B', for the fourth criterion, denotes an article that appeared before the date of the earliest firm evidence.

The publications in the study are those listed in the UK newspapers section of the Lexis-Nexis professional search tool - the *Financial Times* (FT), *Times*, *Scotsman* (SCOT), *Guardian* (GDN), *Economist* (ECON), *Sunday Times* (SUN TIM), *Sun*, *London Evening Standard* (EVE STD), *Daily Mail* (D MAIL), *Spectator* (SPEC), *New Statesman* (NS) and *Observer* (OBS).

These cover all significant sections of the UK print media market – quality, mid-market and popular daily newspapers; Sunday newspapers of differing traditions and editorial stances; weekly magazines and two major regional newspapers. (The most obvious omissions are perhaps the *Independent* and *Telegraph* titles, a daily and a Sunday in each case). In the case of the *Economist* and *Financial Times*, only articles from the London editions were counted.

This last proviso, along with the elimination of duplications from other papers, partly accounts for the disparity between the number of articles studied and the total number – 605 – found by Lexis-Nexis for the period as including both the words, 'Iran' and 'nuclear'. The other editing principle was content-related. The articles selected for the study were only those *about* the 'nuclear crisis'. Others about Iran, its new President, his remarks about Israel, and - for a short but intense burst - allegations of Iranian complicity in attacks on British troops stationed in Iraq, often contained glancing references to the issue, but they were excluded.

The study begins with articles on August 5, 2005, when the new government of President Ahmadinejad took over. It ends on January 4, 2006, with the publication, in the *Guardian*, of a British intelligence 'dossier', setting out the evidence the UK government purported to have gathered, to support the view that Iran was indeed secretly trying to acquire a nuclear weapon.

The results

Key findings:

- The Peace Journalism quotient, in the UK press over these five months, was 15.4%.
- The *Financial Times* had most articles on the story (60), closely followed by the *Guardian* with 52, and followed by the *Times* with only 27.
- Against general expectations, the left-of-centre *Guardian* was notably propagandistic in its coverage, with a Peace Journalism score of just 10.6% - well below the average.
- The *Financial Times* more than doubled this with 22.2%, with the same score for the *Economist* – the *Times* and *Scotsman* also comfortably 'beat' the *Guardian*.
- The *Spectator*, traditionally regarded as right-wing, scored the highest with 89.0% of Peace Journalism, albeit on just two articles – full-length, of well over 1,000 words, in each case.
- The coverage overall became more propagandistic, with more War Journalism and less Peace Journalism, towards the end of the period under discussion. Taking the articles from the four most prominent publications, and dividing them into four 'quartiles', there was 13.7% of peace journalism in the first, 25.4% in the second, 17.4% in the third and just 11.0% in the fourth.

Of all the publications surveyed, the *Sun* enjoys the highest readership, at least in paper form, with the *Daily Mail* a not-too-distant second. Most of their articles were brief – too brief, it could be argued, to expect them to include much by way of context. The *Mail* scored 4.5% of Peace Journalism, on these criteria; the *Sun*, just 1.3%.

Even when these papers found space for a fuller treatment, however, the same pattern supervened. Veteran *Sun* political editor Trevor Kavanagh, a legend in the trade, contributed 524 words – a *magnum opus*, in the popular press – opening with the bald statement: ‘We are now to all intents and purposes at war with Iran’.⁹

Prime Minister Tony Blair, source of many a Kavanagh exclusive over recent years, faced a ‘nightmare’, according to this article, “fuelled by certain knowledge that nothing – apart from unimaginable military action – can now stop the mullahs acquiring nuclear power and then nuclear weapons. Worse, there is every prospect they will use them”.

For the mid-market *Mail*, Ann Leslie, like Kavanagh the paper’s most widely respected journalist, reflected on her own travels in Iran as an undercover reporter, to conclude, in a contribution just short of 2,000 words: “Iran is the most dangerous nation in the world”.¹⁰

A more surprising aspect of the findings is the bellicosity of the *Guardian*. It confutes a traditional staple of empirical content analysis of the British press, that ‘editorial policy, in association with long-term political alignment, is clearly a determinant of the balance’ – in the case quoted, the balance between ‘positive and negative mentions’ of US policy vis-à-vis Iraq, before, during and immediately after the invasion of 2003 (Tumber and Palmer, 2004, p. 78).

Indeed, most of the ‘yesses’ accrued by the paper in the table are accounted for by the op-ed pages, either in comment pieces – commissioned separately by section editor Seumas Milne, known as a particularly trenchant critic of US global military strategy – or the occasional editorial. The news reporting, by contrast, was almost entirely dominated by War Journalism, so the two aspects of *Guardian* coverage were effectively working against each other. How come?

One possible answer is to be found in a trickle of suggestions emanating from the paper, before and during the period under discussion, that it had looked into a journalistic abyss, after the invasion of Iraq, and decided to pull back. Ed Pilkington, until mid-2003 the *Guardian*’s foreign news editor (since then the home news editor), reflected, at a London conference, on the pre-invasion phase of the news coverage in UK media as a whole:

The weird thing about this war, and uniquely in my experience, is that the war itself is becoming increasingly a sideshow. The talk about embedding and talk about Basra, talk about Umm Qasr and all that, is becoming increasingly marginal to the main question of how did we allow Tony Blair to get away with telling us that he had his own special intelligence and we must trust him? And he knew the truth? And we now know that he didn’t have his own special intelligence and in fact virtually the entire lot of it was at least four years old and pre-1998, and we let him get away with that.¹¹

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) consider the blanket coverage given to the UK Government’s dossier, *Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction*, released in September 2002 – and pronouncements by Prime Minister Tony Blair, ramming home its message - and contrast that with the virtual media silence that greeted the publication of a rival assessment, at about the same time, by a backbench Labour MP, Alan Simpson, and Glen Rangwala, a Cambridge academic. “There is no case for a war on Iraq”, this said. “It has not threatened to attack the US or Europe. It is not connected to al Qaeda. There is no evidence that it has new weapons of mass destruction, or that it possesses the means of delivering them.” (p. 207).

Lynch and McGoldrick comment:

The Simpson/Rangwala assessment of the “threat” posed by Iraq and its weapons was much more accurate than that of Tony Blair. The “games” the Prime Minister spoke of referred to Iraq’s denials that it still had any operative chemical or biological weapons – denials which were, in fact, fully justified. Reporting by the British media at this time was greeted as more Objective, by virtue of concentrating on the Prime Minister, than it would have been, had it accorded more space and more airtime to a backbench MP and an academic. Only a newspaper which had already declared itself against the war [the *Mirror*] took any notice. But readers and viewers would have received a much more accurate impression of the situation, had the respective proportions of news resources, given over to these two versions, been reversed. (pp. 208-200)

This is the journalistic abyss – that responding to the situation Pilkington described would, if pushed through to its logical conclusion, entail a radical departure from newsgathering norms, especially the privileging and foregrounding of ‘official sources’, which many UK journalists think of as a hallmark of ‘objective’ reporting. The period of the study coincided with the *Guardian*’s re-launch in a new ‘Berliner’ format – sized between tabloid and broadsheet. Editor Alan Rusbridger told a trade press interviewer:

If I had to choose between occupying a niche on the left or being nearer the centre, whether you display that through your news reporting or your comment or both, I’m more comfortable saying this an upmarket, serious mainstream newspaper. There’s more potential for growth there than taking comfort in political positioning. . . . Wherever you are on the political spectrum I think you ought to be able to pick up the *Guardian* and say its comment is in the comment section but the news is by and large fair and accurate.¹²

The *Guardian*’s news about the ‘Iran nuclear crisis’ over this period was, indeed, heavily skewed in favor of official sources. Several times, the paper’s main reporter on the story, Ian Traynor, filed copy based on ‘leaks’ from officials, culminating in another dossier – a ‘report from a leading EU intelligence service’,¹³ described as ‘a 55-page confidential “early warning” assessment’. This represented, according to the article,

the pooled knowledge of at least four major EU member-states on how countries such as Iran, Syria and North Korea orchestrate a vast network of traders, phoney companies, state institutions and diplomatic missions internationally to procure the means to develop chemical, biological, nuclear and conventional weapons. (*Guardian*, January 4, 2006)

On January 6th, 2006, the *Guardian* published a reader’s letter, from Professor John Sloboda, director of the Oxford Research Group, a security sector NGO, chiding it for

. . . fail[ing] to learn the important lessons from Iraq. After recent intelligence failures over WMD, editors should be doubly wary of ‘leaked intelligence’, its timing and the motives of those who provided the information.... Your publication of this material helps those who seek to demonize Iran, makes peaceful resolution of the dispute even more difficult, and means that proper scrutiny of the failure of EU and US policy has once again been avoided.¹⁴

As Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) point out – in the context of propaganda before the invasion of Iraq – the conventions of ‘objective’ reporting, likely to satisfy a test of ‘fair and accurate’, in the context of Rusbridger’s remarks, preclude consideration of source motivation and a critical awareness of the part played by journalism and journalists in mediating ‘the facts’ even before they occur:

[Officials’] messages to reporters may not *express* a “real”, privately formulated position, but may, instead, be devised in order to *construct* something. They may represent an intervention in the “system” of debate about the war; an attempt to shape the issues under discussion and alter the climate of expectations . . . In short, [reporters tend to] treat their sources as *passive* – revealing a reality that already exists. In a media-savvy world, what sources say and do cannot be fully

understood, or accurately reported, without conceptualising them as *active* – trying to create a reality that does not yet exist, and willing and able to use the media in order to do so. (p. 183)

The *Guardian's* preparedness to use its news pages as a conduit for representations by EU and UK officialdom may have influenced source behavior via a Feedback Loop of cause and effect (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). Molotch and Lester (1997) document the tendency of conflict actors to calibrate not only their message but also their actions, to be readily packaged, in the case of those - like governments - who enjoy "habitual access" to journalists or to "promote events", for those – like "terrorists" – who do not. The journalist's lack of critical self-awareness may, indeed, be an integral component of this process:

The media are subject to massive propaganda from the parties involved, and are often without their own knowledge representing the necessary link between the propaganda machinery and the audience. If they are not aware of this potential role themselves, the danger of playing the role as a catalyst for propaganda will be even bigger. (Hoiijer, Nohrstedt, and Ottosen, 2002, p. 4)

Dualism

Lynch and McGoldrick argue that "war propaganda works because it fits or articulates with the established conventions of War Journalism" (p. 99). Another of these conventions, indeed the first entry in the original Galtung table, is to represent a conflict as a dualistic tug-of-war, a zero-sum game of two parties.

It satisfies what we may call, in this context, Rusbridgian objectivity requirements, in that it helps to avoid putting off potential consumers of an upmarket, serious, mainstream newspaper, wherever they are on the political spectrum. If, in your report, you 'hear both sides', it serves to insulate you against suspicions of bias. Furthermore:

Any narrative organised around two poles may appear to us as "common sense". A decision to tell a story in that way can slip past, unnoticed, without drawing attention to itself, because of its close resemblance, in shape and structure, to so much of the story-telling we already take for granted. (p. 210)

The *Guardian's* news reports contain a number of key repeat formulae, painstakingly re-inscribing this dualistic sense of 'balance', notably: "...The US, EU and Israel suspect that Iran is covertly engaged in pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability. Tehran denies this".¹⁵

There are two problems with this. One, we have already met – mapping the issue of the nature of Iran's nuclear ambitions onto a template of 'balance', as a matter of claim and counter-claim, precludes any contextualising material to enable readers to assess for themselves the nature of the evidence or the likelihood that the 'suspicions' are genuine or well-founded. It therefore cannot help but re-encode war propaganda on the basis of a dominant reading.

Indeed, there are times when form triumphs over content with examples of *false* balance, occasioned by the omission of one of the five factors in the study, such as this classic from the BBC: "Iran insists it has the right to develop civil nuclear power, but the international community suspects it's secretly developing a bomb."¹⁶

Iran, as I have averred, *does* have the right to develop civil nuclear power, so this will not really do. Iran should be entitled, even in these terms, to some other line by way of balance – perhaps a reference to the US National Intelligence Assessment that there is no specific evidence.

The second problem with such formulations is that conceptualising a conflict as based on a binary opposition, or a series of binary oppositions that ultimately range, in this case, Iran on the one hand, against the 'international community' on the other, is inherently escalatory.

Any movement – any change in relations between the parties – can only take place along this single axis, so anything that is not, unequivocally, 'winning', can only be 'losing'; and risks being interpreted, indeed reported, as such. Consider this from the *Financial Times*, about six weeks into the survey:

The European Union has 48 hours to decide one of the biggest foreign policy issues confronting it: whether to report Iran to the United Nations over its nuclear programme and risk an increase in Tehran's nuclear activities; or delay and face charges of a climb-down on nuclear proliferation.¹⁷

This may also enter the calculations of parties to conflict via a feedback loop of cause and effect. One of the *Guardian* comment pieces offering a more negotiated reading of propaganda was by a semi-regular contributor, David Clark. This article scored at least one 'yes' for its juxtaposition of the Iran issue with the politics, for the New Labour government, of the looming decision on a replacement for Britain's Trident nuclear missiles – politics on which Clark, as a former Special Adviser in the UK Foreign Office, could be expected to offer considerable expertise.

Clear-sighted strategic considerations were being overshadowed, he suggested, by the party's fear of being portrayed as 'regressing' to the 1980s, when it languished in opposition; its failure attributable in no small measure, the orthodox explanation runs, to its espousal of unilateral nuclear disarmament: "Fearing the 'I told you so' scorn of the opposition benches and Wapping editorialists, New Labour will spend billions of pounds of public money to prove yet again that it is not old Labour in disguise."¹⁸

Wapping, for the uninitiated, is the east London compound housing the headquarters of Rupert Murdoch's UK newspapers, the *Times*, *Sunday Times*, *Sun* and the *News of the World*.

Trevor Kavanagh's piece for the *Sun*, mentioned earlier, is titled, "Why the West is paying for going soft on Iran."¹⁹ "The inexorable rise of Iran as a threat to world peace is a bitter lesson in appeasement", he continued – triggering memories, perhaps, of the infamous policy of British governments towards Germany under the Nazis, in the 1930s. Another of the Wapping editorialists, *Times* foreign editor Bronwen Maddox, wrote:

Tomorrow's meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, will not now be a showdown at which the board of governors will refer Iran to the UN Security Council. That long-imagined climax, shuffled on from one quarterly meeting to the next over three years, will be postponed yet again. European officials are unsurprisingly keen that this is seen as progress, not a climb-down. Up to a point. Britain, France and Germany, the "EU3", who have taken on the burden of trying to negotiate a solution, have more countries on their side than ever - and more important ones.²⁰

To see their initiative portrayed, at least in the Murdoch press, as 'progress', the EU 3 apparently have to be seen to get more and more countries to gang up with them against Iran. The only alternative, in a tug-of-war, is to see those countries lining up on the other side, risking reports that diplomacy by Britain, France and Germany is, in truth, 'climbing down', 'going soft', or – worse – repeating the historical mistake of 'appeasement' in the face of an authentic threat.

So – what *is* so great about Peace Journalism?

This discussion suggests that the words and deeds of parties to conflict are calibrated, at least partly, according to expectations about how they are likely to be reported; expectations that can only arise from previous reporting. Journalists are kidding themselves by continuing to respond to propaganda as if they are gaining unmediated access to ‘things known’.

Are they also kidding readers and audiences? Surely *Guardian* readers, for instance, are well aware that the US is motivated by its own strategic concerns in portraying Iran, through propaganda, as a ‘rogue state’ requiring to be ‘brought back into line’? Maybe, but “propaganda works in the same way as advertising, using the same techniques – association and repetition. Advertisers associate their product, service or brand with certain images, ideas or values – then the message is repeated often enough for the rest of us to make the association for ourselves” (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005, p. 109).

If we all based our purchasing decisions on what we really, really needed, then advertising would not work – indeed, it could be argued, capitalism would not work. Equally, if we all based our opinions about conflict, and the way authority should respond to conflict issues, on what we really, really know, then propaganda would not work. But, just as capitalism is still with us, so too are violent responses which go ahead with public support – support withdrawn, as in Britain over the invasion of Iraq, when perceptions are re-shaped as propaganda is exposed.

So the Feedback Loop model inscribed in Peace Journalism, as an analytical framework, re-connects the critical with the real, at both ‘ends’, as it were. There are reasons why parties to conflict behave as they do; reasons which are, in critical realist terms, ‘causally explicable and causally efficacious’.²¹

In basing the selection of criteria on evidence gathered about conflict dynamics – about relations of cause and effect – by conflict and peace researchers, Peace Journalism, as a form of empirical content analysis, picks up distinctions which are *material* to the course of events in conflict, and the likelihood, respectively, of violent or non-violent responses somewhere down the line. In so doing, it may even go some way towards restoring the original aim of content analysis, namely “connecting a phenomenon with the larger world it represent[s],” which has often been “simply cut out of analysis” in favour of “count[ing] frequencies of appearance of a given phenomenon” (Zelizer, 2004, p. 115).

These distinctions, the survey suggests, could be missed by content analysis based on expectations that a newspaper’s traditional political leanings, as manifest in editorial columns, should be seen as a ‘determinant’ of their response to war propaganda in decisions their journalists make about which facts to include, and which to leave out, in news reports.

Further Peace Journalism options

Editors and reporters wishing to furnish their readers and audiences with the means to negotiate readings of propagandistic representations could begin by finding creative ways to carry on pointing out that:

1. Iran, the US and the EU 3 have all signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
2. This gives Iran the internationally agreed right to develop civil nuclear power
3. It also obliges nuclear-armed states to conduct good-faith negotiations to get rid of their own nuclear arsenals – so where are they?
4. There is a weight of evidence that Iran is not, in fact, developing nuclear weapons

5. Even if they were, it would be, in a sense, understandable, given the hostile and threatening behaviour of the US and its allies

But this is all pretty basic stuff. There would also need to be more along the lines of a comment article in the *Financial Times* which urged greater understanding of exactly why Iran, richly endowed with oil resources, would want to enjoy its national rights, in the shape of an entitlement to nuclear power:

The final pillar of the new regime's approach to the nuclear issue is its sense of aggrieved nationalism. Western demands, that Iran relinquish fuel cycle rights granted by the nuclear non-proliferation treaty as a confidence-building measure, have aroused intense nationalistic hostility. As a country that has historically been subject to foreign intervention and onerous capitulation treaties, Iran is inordinately sensitive to its national prerogatives and sovereign rights.²²

To foreground such considerations may take on a new importance if and when Iran's rejection of the EU 3's proposed 'long-term agreement' starts to be emphasised in propaganda. The recent history of international conflict is littered with instances where the refusal of one party to sign up to certain demands or to make certain concessions, under the guise of a 'peace agreement', is then adduced as justification for violence – as with Rambouillet, for the bombing of Yugoslavia, and Camp David, in 2000, at the Clinton-brokered 'peace talks' between Arafat and Barak (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005).

This radical openness in time must be accompanied by a similar degree of openness in space, allowing for an exploration of US motives based on its own strategic interests. If the conflict is constructed in these terms, it becomes less easy to 'sell' a policy of punishing Iran in response – the way a problem is diagnosed conditions what can be presented, and reported, as an appropriate remedy. That, in turn, opens more space for discussion about human rights, and ways to encourage reform, even change, of an objectionable regime:

Any external use of force will simply drive the fiercely nationalistic Iranians back into the arms of the regime.... It is critical for all governments concerned to support those components of the Iranian opposition that want a democratic political system that respects human rights and the rule of law... the idea of regime change in Iran through people power is far from fanciful. The Iranian people have done it before.²³

It is only if the conflict is represented as consisting of this delicate balance of forces across a broad formation, open in time and space, that it starts to appear relevant to hold such a discussion. This last example appeared in a Murdoch paper, *The Australian*: not the work, to be sure, of a Wapping editor, but close enough. And another small sign of the shifting and unpredictable 'valency' of issues around international conflict, which Peace Journalism is well positioned to pick up.

Jake Lynch is an experienced professional journalist who is currently anchoring an international television news programme while teaching postgraduate students in the *Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies* at the University of Sydney.

Appendix

FT 60	Y22 N38	Y22 N38	Y8 N52	B16 Y2 N42	Y9 N51	Y63 N221 (Q1 16.4%, Q2 33.8%, Q3 21.3%, Q4 13.3%)	22.20%
TIMES 27	Y9 N18	Y6 N21	Y4 N23	B12 Y0 N15	Y1 N26	Y20 N103 (Q1 14.3%, Q2 25.8%, Q3 14.3%, Q4 9.7%)	16.30%
SCOT 5	Y1 N4	Y1 N4	Y0 N5	B3 Y0 N2	Y2 N3	Y4 N18	18.20%
GDN 52	Y7 N45	Y7 N45	Y6 N46	B14 Y4 N34	Y2 N50	Y26 N220 (Q1 7.7%, Q2 15.6%, Q3 7.7%, Q4 10.8%)	10.60%
ECON 11	Y4 N7	Y3 N8	Y2 N9	B4 Y2 N5	Y2 N9	Y13 N38 (Q1 25.0%, Q2 21.4%, Q3 46.7%, Q4 0.0%)	25.50%
SUN TIM 6	Y2 N4	Y2 N4	Y1 N5	B3 Y0 N3	Y1 N5	Y6 N21	22.20%
SUN 16	Y0 N16	Y0 N16	Y1 N15	B3 Y0 N13	Y0 N16	Y1 N76	1.30%
EVE STD 7	Y0 N7	Y0 N7	Y0 N7	B5 Y1 N1	Y0 N7	Y1 N29	3.30%
D MAIL 15	Y0 N15	Y1 N14	Y0 N15	B8 Y0 N7	Y2 N13	Y3 N64	4.50%
SPEC 2	Y1 N1	Y2 N0	Y2 N0	B1 Y1 N0	Y2 N0	Y8 N1	89.00%
NS 5	Y1 N4	Y1 N4	Y1 N4	B1 Y0 N4	Y0 N5	Y3 N21	12.50%
OBS 5	Y1 N4	Y0 N5	Y2 N3	B0 Y0 N5	Y1 N4	Y4 N21	16.00%
TOTAL 211						Y 152 N 832	15.40%
Q1	Y21 N132	13.70%					
Q2	Y48 N141	25.40%					
Q3	Y33 N157	17.40%					
Q4	Y20 N161	11.00%					

End Notes

¹ Original table by Johan Galtung, in Jake Lynch, *The Peace Journalism Option*, Conflict and Peace Forums, Taplow, 1998, p 44

² Bush: 'All options are on the table regarding Iran's nuclear aspirations', Associated Press, Jerusalem, August 13, 2005

³ Alan F Kay, *When Americans Favor the Use of Force*, May 16, 1999

⁴ Retrieved from US State Department website at <http://www.state.gov/t/np/trty/16281.htm>

⁵ Daryl G Kimball, 'Replacement nuclear warheads – buyer beware', *Arms Control Today*, Arms Control Association, May 2005, retrieved from http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005_05/focus.asp

⁶ Richard Norton-Taylor, 'As the US lowers the nuclear threshold, debate is stifled', London *Guardian*, October 5, 2005

⁷ Dafna Linzer, 'No proof found of Iran arms program', *Washington Post*, August 23, 2005

⁸ IAEA document, 'Developments in the Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Agency Verification of Iran's Suspension of Enrichment-related and Reprocessing Activities', Update Brief by the Deputy Director General for Safeguards, January 2006, retrieved from <http://www.campaigniran.org/heinonen31012006-2.pdf>

⁹ Trevor Kavanagh, 'Why the West is paying for going soft on Iran', *Sun*, October 12, 2005

¹⁰ Ann Leslie, 'Ayatollah time-bomb', *Daily Mail*, August 11, 2005

¹¹ Ed Pilkington, *Guardian*, quoted in *Reporting Iraq – what went right? What went wrong?* In *Mediawar*, Mediaactive issue 3, Barefoot Publications, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2004, page 114

¹² Quoted in Dominic Ponsford, 'Great expectations – will *Guardian's* Berliner relaunch signal move to the centre?' *UK Press Gazette*, September 8, 2005

¹³ Ian Traynor and Ian Cobain, 'Weapons proliferation: Intelligence report claims nuclear market thriving', *Guardian*, January 4, 2006

¹⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/iran/story/0,,1680456,00.html>

¹⁵ Ewen MacAskill, 'Iran's London envoy sacked as President purges officials', *Guardian*, November 1, 2005

¹⁶ Colin Campbell, BBC1 0900 news in *AM*, and 0900 bulletin of *News 24*, February 5, 2006

¹⁷ Daniel Dombey, 'Moment of truth looms for Europe on Iran', *Financial Times*, September 22, 2005

¹⁸ David Clark, 'The Blairite love affair with the bomb will cost Britain dear', *Guardian*, November 1, 2005

¹⁹ Trevor Kavanagh, op cit

²⁰ Bronwen Maddox, 'Nuclear plan could be enriching', *Times*, November 23, 2005

- ²¹ Roy Bhaskar, interviewed by Christopher Norris in *The Philosopher's Magazine*, issue 8, Autumn 1999
- ²² Ray Takeyh, 'Diplomacy will not end Iran's nuclear programme', *Financial Times*, December 20, 2005
- ²³ Leanne Piggott, 'The sensible option on Iran', *The Australian*, January 19, 2006

References

- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/decoding. In Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A., & Willis, P. (Eds.), *Culture, media, language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972 – 1979* (pp. 128 -138). London: Hutchinson.
- Hojjer, B., Nohrstedt, S. A., & Ottosen, R. (2002). The Kosovo war in the media: Analysis of a global discursive order. *Conflict & Communication Online*, 1(2), 4.
- Jowett, G. S., & O'Donnell, V. (1999). *Power and persuasion*. London: Sage
- Lynch, J., & McGoldrick, A. (2005). *Peace journalism*. UK: Hawthorn Press.
- Molotch, H., & Lester, M. (1997). News as purposive behaviour In D. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Social Meaning of News: A text-reader*. London: Sage.
- Tumber, H., & Palmer, J. (2004). *Media at war: The Iraq crisis*. London: Sage.
- Wright, N. T. (1996). *The New Testament and the people of God*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.
- Zelizer, B. (2004). *Taking journalism seriously*. London: Sage.