

# News World Order

*Somewhere between the headlines and the soundbites, history is being made — but the way the media works, you may never know it.*

by Gamal Abdel-Shahid

For those unfamiliar with some evils of the current "New World Order", let me give you a brief introduction.

Starvation of shocking proportions occurs in the Sudan, Somalia and the Horn of Africa, where over a million people have already died in 1991; disease and malnutrition devastate Iraq in the aftermath of a war that left over 500,000 people dead and threatens to kill far more. Civil war rages through Yugoslavia, Georgia, Zaire and Liberia — to name a few. Extreme nationalism, often manifested in brutal and violent forms, is again on the rise in Germany, Russia, France, India and the United States. Daily the economic conditions of the lives of most people in the world are reaching horrifyingly low levels.

In the face of these horrors, why is there such a degree of apparent consent in our society?

In an attempt to inform the general public, mainstream media simplifies and "packages" serious news events — like the examples cited above — to make things more appealing to the public. Media giants such as *USA Today* and CNN simply blurt out headlines, so decontextualized and dehistoricized that they are effectively meaningless.

Debate in these forums, as well as in the more "respected" media institutions such as the *Globe and Mail* and the CBC, is non-existent. For example, recent media coverage of the mid-east "peace" talks has centred on the relationship between Arabs and Jews and their historic attempts to speak to one another. Are we so naive to think that "Arabs" and "Jews" are two masses of homogenous and undifferentiated people who all think and act the same?

Furthermore, by dehistoricising the talks, nobody questioned what factors — other than a sort of 'natural or inherent dislike' of one another — prevented these talks from taking place earlier. The mainstream media made no attempt to explain the underlying reasons for the convening of this peace conference — namely consolidation of U.S. capital and strategic interests in the region. By doing so, the media has taken a set of rather complex issues and simplified them to an extent that they are meaningless to an informed observer.

But are they meaningless to the general public? No, and this is precisely the tactic employed to create consent and apathy within our society.

Two questions arise: First, why it is that the media does this; and second, does the mass media even intend to do this? Media corporations are private institutions that exist to make profits. So rather than engage in the very costly exercise of educating people and informing them, the owners of the media choose the profit-maximising route.

There is an immense cost involved in stationing reporters around the globe who, instead of simply gathering government-issued press releases, actually investigate the real reasons why things occur as they do. We know that institutions such as the *Globe and Mail* have horrifying imbalances with respect to the number of correspondents in the United States versus the number in the Middle East (one), in India (none) or in the Caribbean (none).

Moreover, reporters in Canada and the U.S. act as spokespeople for Ottawa and Washington by rereading government statistics and stories without any analysis. Can one expect balanced and objective coverage to come out of such an arrangement?

Further, since these institutions are solely dependent on advertising revenue, any process that would anger or scare advertisers is avoided — such as critical examination of Canadian or U.S. policy in countries where these companies may have financial ties. There is also little interest in questioning the practices of major corporations. It seems very clear that advertisers are not interested in catering to a critical or questioning audience, but rather one which accepts facts and information unquestioningly.

Those seeking to question the practises of mainstream media soon find they are not welcome. For instance, witness the serious reprimand in 1988 of CBS anchor Dan Rather after he attempted to ask then presidential candidate George Bush about his involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal. And witness the marginalisation of writers and reporters at the *Globe and Mail* who attempt to "rock the boat." These instances point to a serious attempt by media institutions to essentially drown out criticism and narrow the terms of its public debate.

Thus it becomes evident that the horrors of the New World Order take place and are presented to us by a subjective voice which seeks to create a consenting audience, not one which seeks to inform an audience wishing to question and reexamine the world we live in. In light of this, one must give little, if any credibility to the mass media in trying to understand the New World Order.



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