

External-National TV News Networks' Way to America: Is the United States Losing the Global "Information War"?

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Hillary Clinton declared in 2011 that the United States is losing the global "information war." Her principal concern was with what she perceived as declining U.S. news media hegemony overseas, and she specified Al Jazeera, CCTV, and RT as examples of threats. Drawing upon the history of these networks, the U.S. market's reception, and their recruiting strategies, we find that the limited reception of these networks renders them of only marginal significance. While they exhibit some variation from the U.S. mainstream, their potential for diversity or even challenge to hegemonic narratives is considerably constrained by the goal and perceived economic necessity of gaining acceptance within the mainstream, coupled with substantial reliance on Western media information resources. These features appear to be a characteristic, not simply of these channels' U.S. initiatives, but also of their foreign market orientation globally. They are therefore better seen as exemplifying a continuity of, not an alternative to, the dominant status of the Anglo-American model in the global news landscape.

Keywords: Al Jazeera America, CCTV America, flow and counter flow, global information war, RT, soft power

Introduction: News as an Arena of Information War

The concept of the Al Jazeera effect, as described by Seib (2008) in relation to the Al Jazeera network's impact on the Arab world, was later generalized in reference to the influences of new transnational media on global politics. These were thought to reduce government and mainstream media monopoly on information, while empowering previously marginalized nations, regions, or groups. The idea of an Al Jazeera effect may be extended in reference to numerous U.S. regional satellite networks and Internet-based news media (Seib, 2012). The rise of these regional and national news networks arguably became a cause for concern to the United States, which was accustomed to a hegemonic influence over

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global news flow, a concern that was reflected in its bombing of Al Jazeera offices in Kabul and Baghdad during the U.S. invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s. The U.S. attitude changed as Al Jazeera, funded primarily by the emir of Qatar, "mainstreamed" its news services to broaden its audience reach in the Western world and to better reflect Qatar's foreign policy goals (which appear increasingly to have complemented those of the United States, as in its coverage of the conflicts in Libya and Syria) (Boyd-Barrett, 2015).

In 2011, in a speech to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton claimed that the United States was losing the global "information war," amid concerns about wide-ranging funding cuts proposed for U.S. overseas propaganda-broadcasting services. *Democracy Now!* (2011), a daily U.S. progressive, nonprofit, independently syndicated program of news, analysis, and opinion, aired Hillary Clinton's speech in which she praised Al Jazeera's dedication to "real news" and explained why she felt threatened:

I'll be very blunt in my assessment. Al Jazeera is winning. The Chinese have opened up a global English-language and multi-language network. The Russians have opened up an English-language network. I've seen it in a few countries, and it's quite instructive. We are cutting back. The BBC is cutting back. (para. 14)

The information war that Hillary Clinton referred to is primarily an American concept involving the use and management of information and information technology in pursuit of a competitive advantage over other countries (Schwartau, 1996). The information war is defined by Jones, Jones, Kovacich, and Luzwick (2002) as

a coherent and synchronized blending of physical and virtual actions to have countries, organizations, and individuals perform, or not perform, actions so that your goals and objectives are attained and maintained, while simultaneously preventing competitors from doing the same to you. (p. 5)

Jones et al. point out that the purpose of information war is to "gain power and influence over others" (p. 7). As such, it corresponds to longer established notions of propaganda and the kind of broadcasting contest that during the Cold War characterized the efforts of state-funded operations such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Moscow. Information warfare may involve the dissemination of tactical information, providing reassurance to one's own side that its perspectives are valid, spreading propaganda or disinformation to demoralize or manipulate the enemy and the public, and undermining the quality of information issued by opposing forces while sabotaging information-collection opportunities for opposing forces.

The achievement of competitive advantage in information war is linked in some measure to competitors' resources of "soft power" (Nye, 2010). These are based on the positive perceptions, sentiments, and goodwill that any given nation has attracted over time within the international community. International broadcasts can contribute to the soft power of originating nations; it can be in

their interest to target broadcasts to nations or other audiences that they perceive to possess potential value for foreign policy success.

Global communication is an arena where the information war between the world's foremost powers has been taking place in the form of media flows and contra-flows; the pursuit of hegemony, which means social control through imposition and acceptance of dominating ideologies (Gramsci, 1971); and counter-hegemony. The United States in the past was an unbeatable winner in this war through one-way, top-down media flow from the United States and other developed Western countries to the rest of world. As Hillary Clinton said, "You know, during the Cold War, we did a great job in getting America's message out" (*Democracy Now!*, 2011, para. 14). "America's message" is conveyed through the media, which, together with hard power in the form of military force and monetary means, constitutes the exercise of U.S. hegemony upon the ruling ideas that prevail through much of the rest of the world.

While internationalization of media has been ongoing at least since the development of the international and national news agencies and the cable companies of the 19th century (Boyd-Barrett, 1980), the development of digital satellite and cable telecommunications, in tandem with the deregulation and privatization of broadcasting media, have facilitated the extension of media companies and products across national borders. Private media networks of Western countries, with the United States at their core, enjoyed comparative advantage in reaching and influencing global audiences. Framing of their information products has largely corresponded with the official foreign-policy perspectives of the Washington consensus. An ongoing illustration is offered by the scandal of the TV pundits, whereby leading TV networks have employed, as supposedly "independent" experts, ex-military personnel, some of them also engaged in salesmanship for the defense industry, who were briefed by the Pentagon as to what they should say on media talk shows (Barstow, 2008). The phenomenon was initially identified in the context of the first Gulf War, in 1990–1991 (Kellner, 1992). Even though media and official Washington war narratives tend to diverge as wars continue, media very rarely question the basic pretexts for U.S. wars (Herman and Chomsky, 1989; King, 2014).

Global media operators have also contributed to the creation of new professional career paths in media and cultural industries. Examples include CNN in the fields of news and current affairs, MTV in youth programming, and Google on the Internet, to name just a few. For Thussu (2007), global media flow is a "dominant flow" of Americana. "The extensive reach of U.S.-based media, advertising and telecommunications networks contributes to the global flow of the consumer message, helping the U.S. to use its 'soft power' to promote its national economic and political interest" (p. 19). However, in the process of globalization, and also due to the satellite and digital technologies, this one-way flow of information has been joined by another flow from the opposite end, which Thussu has called "subaltern flow" (p. 13). *Subaltern flow* refers to transnational media with "a strong regional presence but . . . also aimed at audiences outside their primary constituency" (p. 13).

Examples among international news media include Al Jazeera Media Networks (a Qatari news network); CCTV-9, the English-language service of China Central Television, China's state TV network; and Russia Today (later renamed RT), the first Russian 24/7 English-language news channel, which provides a Russian view on global news. It extends to many other communications fields, as in the

penetration or attempted penetration of U.S. markets by Chinese media corporations such as Tencent (which since 2013 has endeavored to establish its social media network WeChat in the United States), Dalian Wanda Group's 2012 purchase of the U.S. theater network AMC, and China's Lenovo Group's purchase of IBM's low-end server business and of Google's Motorola Mobility in 2014.

At a time when many major American news organizations are cutting back in response to a long-unfolding crisis traceable to the havoc wrought on print and broadcast news markets by the Internet, foreign news networks have beefed up their presence in U.S. and foreign markets. The three news networks identified in Clinton's speech—Al Jazeera, CCTV, and RT—launched services specifically targeted to the United States in 2012–2013: RT America, CCTV America, and Al Jazeera America. This has been of concern to U.S. policy leaders since it seems that in addition to having fallen short in "sending America's message out," the United States must face a new challenge closer to home, which is that perspectives shaped by political forces from outside the United States have been exported right into the country, representing a contra-flow (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992) or subaltern flow that might threaten U.S. global television hegemony. Thus, in terms of global information warfare, the United States not only struggles to maintain hegemonic influence over other countries, but also fails to prevent competitors from challenging its domestic hegemony.

Media flows commonly match the structures of hegemony. According to Gramsci (1971), hegemonic power is practiced at the levels of cultural and ideological contest, as a substitute for or supplement to the threat of coercion. Thus, the notion of hegemony involves both force and consent and is the result of persuasion following exposure to superior ideological forces. Consent is key to Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony and is nurtured via cultural leadership. The one-way media flow from U.S.-led Western countries to the rest of the world has long constituted a form of soft power, which, together with hard power involving financial dominance and military strength, makes the United States a global hegemon. Hegemony is neither permanent nor unalterable, since it represents often-fragile alliances of major centers of political, social, and cultural power. Rather, it is a process that is always in the making. It is not unchallengeable. If the more voluminous media flows from the United States to the other areas in the world undergird U.S. global hegemony, do contra-flows of media from other parts of the world into the United States constitute an effective assault "through the back door" by exposing American citizens to a broader range of information and information frames?

In this article, we examine the efforts of these three regional or national TV news networks to penetrate the United States. We discuss what the launch and operation of special "America" channels imply for both the United States and global mediascapes (Appaduri, 1996), considering that they have already extended their English services for global reach. What roles have they played in the global information war? Do Al Jazeera America and other external "national" networks that are directed at American audiences indicate that the United States is losing the information war, as Hillary Clinton claimed to fear? We consider the history and development of these networks, their reception in the U.S. market, and their recruiting strategies for professional and managerial staff from the theoretical perspectives of flow and contra-flow and of soft power.

The Way to America

Al Jazeera, CCTV, and RT are all TV networks funded principally, but not exclusively, by governments (RT and CCTV) or, in the case of Al Jazeera, by the ruling royal family of Qatar, which is barely distinguishable from the government of Qatar. These America channels are not their first steps toward global status. Each started English services for global audiences prior to their establishment of specific America channels. These America channels are widely interpreted as direct challenges to the mainstream TV news, such as the broadcasting networks of ABC, CBS, and NBC and the cable networks of CNN, FOX News, and MSNBC in the domestic market. In the following discussion, we delineate the trajectories of these regional media networks from local/regional to global and to a U.S. presence.

Al Jazeera: Arabic, English, and America

Al Jazeera was launched in 1996 with funding of \$140 million from the emir of Qatar, and it recruited many of its first journalists from the Arabic service of the BBC. Al Jazeera's initial mission was to provide uncensored and critical coverage of news in the Middle East, as summed up in its slogan, "the opinion and the other opinion." According to Marc Lynch (as cited in Powers, 2012), its starting years from 1996 to 2004 could be considered the "Al Jazeera era" due to its huge significance in Middle East politics and unparalleled popularity among the Arab audience. However, Al Jazeera also offended governments of some Arab countries (notably Saudi Arabia, with which Qatar has often had tense relations, and, at the time of writing, the postrevolutionary and military-backed government in Egypt) and of some regional viewers by critically covering politically sensitive issues, including the extension of a sympathetic voice to the Palestinian Intifada and challenging culturally taboo topics such as homosexuality and women's rights. In the early 2000s, it offended the U.S. government by airing video clips featuring Osama bin Laden, the head of Al Qaeda, which were deemed "hateful propaganda" by the Bush administration. But none of this discouraged the continuing development and expansion of Al Jazeera.

In 2006, Al Jazeera initiated its service targeted to global audiences, Al Jazeera English (AJE). Powers (2012) cited Imad Musa, an Al Jazeera producer, as saying that the initial impetus for AJE was to deal with a market vacancy for international newsgathering from a fresh perspective that extended beyond the pro-Western consensual boundaries characteristic of CNN and BBC World. Musa recalled that after 9/11 in 2001, Al Jazeera received about 60 phone calls each day from American viewers wondering what Al Jazeera was saying about 9/11. Al Jazeera's first effort at reaching English speakers was through the Internet, at aljazeera.net, an English-language website launched in March 2003. In October 2004, Al Jazeera officially announced its intention to launch its global English service, initially named Al Jazeera International. Its mission is to serve "everyone who speaks English" by meeting "growing demands for news from around the world that is not filtered through the lens of the West" (Nielson Parson, managing director of AJE, in an interview with Powers [2012, p. 19]).

In November 2006, the English service was officially launched as Al Jazeera English. AJE certainly may be considered as a contra-flow, given its history, identity, source, and resources, and even as a counter-hegemonic power offering a substantially alternative perspective and enjoying powerful if

controversial backing. While some scholars perceive it as an exemplar of contra-flow (Figenschou, 2012), others argue that Al Jazeera has become more a lackey to the West than a challenger (Sakr, 2010). In much of its coverage of social unrest in the Middle East, starting from the contested Iranian elections of 2009 through to the destabilization of Syria coverage (which was ongoing in 2014), Al Jazeera paid considerable, and often sympathetic, attention at street level to the protestors and rebels, some of whom were Western-backed (as in Libya, Syria, and Tunisia). This positioning seemed, on occasions, to increasingly align Al Jazeera with admittedly shifting and sometimes paradoxical Western interests just as Qatar itself had played host to the U.S. Middle Eastern Command: The U.S. Combat Air Operations Center for the Middle East, that moved to Qatar from Saudi Arabia in 2003. This may be interpreted variously as an effort by the station to "mainstream" itself in a bid for broader audience share in the West, or as a political alignment with the foreign policy goals of Qatar in countries such as Libya and Syria, where Qatar, along with other Middle Eastern powers as well as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, has contributed support to "rebel" forces (Boyd-Barrett, 2015).

In August 2012, Al Jazeera made its debut broadcast to American audiences. The following January it acquired Al Gore's little-viewed Current TV. This move was widely seen as a solution to the difficulties experienced by Al Jazeera English in securing access to cable and satellite distribution in the United States, as an attempt at mainstreaming its content to suit the tastes and expectations of U.S. audiences, and as a bid to acquire more advertising revenue. The station promised to introduce more in-depth coverage of domestic and international news, with fewer commercials than is customary among the major U.S. networks. The main purpose of Al Jazeera America is to combat the mainstream TV news networks in the United States, which, in addition to the major free-to-air networks, include ABC, CBS, FOX News, CNN, MSNBC, and the BBC. Al Jazeera America is headquartered in New York and maintains 12 bureaus in other American metropolises including Washington, DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle.

CCTV: CCTV-9 to CCTV News to CCTV America

Less than a year before the launch of Al Jazeera America, China Central Television, the state TV network in China, officially started to offer its service of CCTV America, in January 2012. CCTV America is an English-language news channel based in Washington, DC, and it maintains bureaus across the continent of America. China Central Television, as the state broadcaster of China and by far the strongest, has a much longer history as a broadcaster than Al Jazeera. Its experience in 24/7 news, on the other hand, falls some seven years short of Al Jazeera's.

CCTV started as the mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party in 1958. Since 1988, when it only had two channels, it has enjoyed rapid development, growing to approximately 40 channels by 2013. By 2014, CCTV had acquired 11 years of experience in 24/7 news. CCTV initiated CCTV-13 in May 2003 to respond to the challenge posed by Phoenix TV, a broadcaster established in Hong Kong by a Hong Kong entrepreneur, which was for several years aligned with Rupert Murdoch's News International. Phoenix TV programs have been popular among the high end of the socioeconomic hierarchy in China and in the Chinese diaspora worldwide. It had embarrassed CCTV with its much faster and fuller coverage of 9/11 (Boyd-Barrett & Xie, 2008). With the advantage of being the only state broadcaster in China, CCTV-13

made itself available in every Chinese province within one month after its launch. The slogan of CCTV-13 is "to keep the same pace with the world, to walk together with the times" (Dong & Shi, 2007, p. 162). CCTV's ambition was to achieve a reputation as a world-class broadcaster and to expand its media territory in the world (Dong & Shi, 2007).

The English-language services had their roots in an early stage of CCTV's development, in 1979, when CCTV considered English-language international news programming after the government had initiated its policy of reform and "opening up." English news bulletins started on CCTV-2 in 1984. CCTV-9 was later established as CCTV's English channel, a mixed general-interest channel featuring news, travel programming, and language training. In April 2010, as part of a broader, state-financed boosting of all China's international information platforms, including the international news services of the national news agency, Xinhua, CCTV-9 was relaunched as a 24/7 English-language news channel, with its name changed to CCTV News. Just as Western corporations are generally required to find local partners when they penetrate the Chinese market, so CCTV sought Western corporate partners for its expansion into Western countries. In 2003, Viacom helped CCTV-9 broadcast to hotels in the United States (Fung, 2006).

CCTV's endeavors toward global expansion arguably can be considered more ambitious or aggressive than those of Al Jazeera. In 2009 alone, it launched channels in Arabic and Russian languages to complement its existing Chinese Mandarin, English, Spanish, and French services. Shortly after starting CCTV America, it launched CCTV Africa, headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, where Chinese media have achieved considerable penetration (Shambaugh, 2013). Unlike Al Jazeera and RT, CCTV services strive for political neutrality, bordering on inoffensiveness. While none of these channels are especially useful or dependable sources of information about their countries of origin, CCTV is perhaps the least daring of the three, with a perspective on the world that both reflects the Chinese government's policy preference for noninterventionism and is broadly sympathetic to Western neoliberalism. In its coverage of the Western-backed coup in Ukraine in February 2014, for example, a CCTV America news discussion invited panelists to consider the "prospects for democracy" as though the coup were a pathway to democracy rather than an interruption of democracy, seemingly oblivious to the irony that the state broadcaster of a country that does not have democracy should exercise concern about the prospects for democracy in another nation. This may detract from CCTV's potential to secure a market niche.

The mission of CCTV America is "to provide English-speaking viewers everywhere a different way to see the world by simply covering more of it" (CCTV, n.d.). Based in Washington, DC, CCTV America is the American division of CCTV news. On its website, CCTV America claimed to be "the media crossroads where news and 'views' about the world's two largest national economies intersect and sometime collide" (CCTV America, n.d.). CCTV America is carried by cable providers in New York, Washington, DC, and Los Angeles, among other big cities.

RT: Global to America

Unlike CCTV, RT was born as an international operation. It started broadcasting at the end of 2005 to provide news from a Russian perspective in English. RT is a satellite news network headquartered

in Moscow, Russia, but aimed at an international market. It started as Russia Today, but officially changed its name to RT, possibly with a view to diluting the visibility of its Russian origin. It is a nonprofit news organization funded by the federal budget of Russia. It has historical roots in the propaganda services of RIA-Novosti, an agency whose purpose up until 2013, when it was folded into a broader umbrella of state information services, was to provide a Russia-friendly view of the world to the world beyond Russia.

The Kremlin spent \$30 million on the launch of RT in 2005 (Knobel, 2009). RT started the Arabic-language channel Rusya Al-Yaum in 2007 and the Spanish-language channel RT Actualidad in 2009. RT America was launched and headquartered in Washington, DC, in 2010. In 2011, it began to be carried on cable networks in San Francisco, Chicago, and Philadelphia, also joining the lineup for satellite provider Dish Network. It focuses on covering the news in the United States from an international and Russian perspective, and its contents concerning the United States not infrequently reveal evidence of a far more overtly critical bite than those of either Al Jazeera or CCTV. This is nowhere more evident than on one of its flagship talk shows, *The Kaiser Report*, whose husband-and-wife copresenters, American broadcasters Max Keiser and Stacey Herbert, offer a trenchant critique of the U.S. polity and corporate economy, more powerful even than the left-of-center bombasts against the Bush administration in the days of Keith Olbermann on MSNBC's *Countdown*. Both constitute rare exceptions in a U.S. television landscape, whose presentation even of "liberal" viewpoints would be dismissed as right-of-center throughout much of Western Europe. In acknowledgment of the proficiency of its more conventional journalistic reporting, RT won the award for best 24-hour news program at the prestigious Monte Carlo Television Festival in 2013, the year in which it became the first news channel to attract 1 billion viewers on YouTube.

To sum up, this comparison of the three networks' initial motives to enter the U.S. news market shows that all three are interested in combating the U.S. mainstream news networks' leadership in the global information war. There is room for more research on the issue of whether, or to what extent, these networks overtly seek to promote the interests of their respective government sponsors in their services to the domestic U.S. market.

Who Watches in America: Reception in the United States

These three regional or national networks' development and penetration into the domestic market of the United States arguably constitute a contra-flow into the heart of the nation from powers that are relatively detached from, or even opposed to, Washington interests. Their reception on the U.S. market suggests that the balance between flow and contra-flow is far from even. To have made it into the U.S. market at all may be regarded as a professional triumph for these news networks at a time when, in the global marketplace, it is still important to have established a significant presence in the United States in order to count as a major player—a condition that may not survive the growth of the economies of Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC) and BRIC-like nations. That their presence counts as a triumph in the eyes of U.S. audiences is doubtful. Viewership ratings for foreign government-sponsored news in the United States, including the three we discuss here, remain minuscule according to Nielson, the media-rating survey company (as cited in Kramer, 2010).

Cable and Satellite TV

The initial attempt of AJE to penetrate the U.S. market was rocky. Immediately after Al Jazeera had started its English website, *aljazeera.net*, in March 2003, Yahoo and AOL canceled their advertising contracts. The New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) and NASDAQ revoked press credentials from Al Jazeera reporters (Powers, 2012). Comcast reversed its decision to carry Al Jazeera English shortly before its launch. The two major American satellite providers, DirecTV and Dish Network, dropped their plans of carrying it to American households, with speculation that the decision may have been influenced by allegations of the Bush administration of "anti-American bias" in the channel. Availability through these satellite providers was subsequently resumed. According to Youmans (2012), by early 2011, Al Jazeera was fully accessible in only three cities' cable systems, Washington, DC, Toledo, Ohio, and Burlington, Vermont. Clearly, the audiences in these three cities only constitute a tiny portion of the national population.

Early 2011 marked a turning point (Youmans, 2012). The Arab Spring brought AJE into the spotlight of world events and catapulted the station into carriage renegotiation with Comcast and Time Warner Cable. AJE's coverage of the Egyptian Revolution caused 1.6 million people to click AJE online video streams (Ungerleider, 2011). Audience attention to Al Jazeera's coverage of the Libyan civil war triggered Hillary Clinton's concern that the United States might be "losing the information war." Many potential viewers still despised or distrusted the station because of U.S. government propaganda against the channel from the years leading up to and during the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003. Even larger numbers simply have no knowledge of Al Jazeera or what it represents.

Immediately after Al Jazeera announced its acquisition of Current TV, Time Warner dropped Current TV from its portfolio (although it later agreed to reinstate it). DirecTV, a provider of direct-to-home satellite TV service, and Comcast NBC, a cable operator, continued to offer the channel (Nakashima, 2013). Being carried by Direct TV and Comcast, Al Jazeera America theoretically can reach 40 million households in the United States with Current TV's placement. To be accessible for audiences does not necessarily mean that audiences actually access Al Jazeera, however. When Al Jazeera America officially started broadcasting on August 20, 2013, the viewership rating could be deemed disappointing. Drawing from Nielson media survey data, Yu (2013) reported the ratings of various programs of Al Jazeera America as of August 2013. The highest rated show, *Real Money* with Ali Velshi, drew 54,000 viewers on the evening of August 22. The debut edition of *The Stream*, a talk show using social media for audience participation, reached 38,000 viewers on August 20. *America Tonight*, one of the channel's key prime-time shows, drew 34,000 viewers for its first show. In total, about 22,000 viewers tuned into the launch hour at 3 p.m. on August 20.

Is Al Jazeera's status as a model of contra-flow viable if continuing stigma renders the channel unable to break through American audience resistance (Youmans, 2011)? If the station sacrifices its capacity for critical, or simply different, analysis, in a bid to avoid frightening off American viewers, will it sacrifice its potential to brand itself as distinctive?

The relatively modest global standing of CCTV and RT, their dependence on government funding, and deep tensions between their respective governments and that of the United States is hardly likely to convince American audiences (long embedded in an Anglo-American journalistic ideology of "impartiality," "objectivity," and "independence") that these channels are independent of state propaganda, or to persuade Americans that propaganda is not always inherently bad. This will most likely maintain these channels in a market limbo in which they will be deemed unacceptable, or even repulsive, to U.S. audiences, who continue to believe their U.S. media are "free" in spite of widespread evidence of complicity of private U.S. media with U.S. foreign policy objectives.

By 2013, RT was accessible to 85 million viewers in the United States. RT claimed that viewership ratings from the Nielson survey have more than doubled from 2011 to 2012, making RT the most watched foreign TV channel in five key U.S. urban markets. RT clips are also widely available on YouTube and social media (RT, 2013). Viewership in New York alone has nearly tripled in the past three years, while the channel also made significant advances in Washington, DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. However, RT has declined to reveal specific data. In broader perspective, RT occupies "only a small outer orbit in the crowded cable news universe" (Kramer, 2010, para. 18). Rankin (2012) cited a press official from Nielson to say RT's audience in the United States is too small to be measured. The same is true of other foreign news stations, with the major exception of the BBC. CCTV America does not use Nielson ratings, so it is hard to know how many viewers it actually has. The number of subscribers to CCTV America's YouTube channel was merely 1,200 in October 2013.

New and Social Media

Whether or not their influence is constrained by decisions of cable or satellite carriers, all three new networks actively take advantage of the convergence of TV and broadband, as well as of social media, to reach audiences. By June 19, 2014, RT had 1.6 million "likes" for its Facebook page, and Al Jazeera America had 594,000. The number of likes for CCTV America was little more than 119,000. In contrast, CNN's Facebook page had more than 13 million likes, and FOX News had almost 8 million. All have a YouTube channel. By June 19, 2014, RT America had more than 201,000 subscribers, but RT internationally had over 1.2 million subscribers. RT is very popular on YouTube, second only to FOX News. Al Jazeera America only has 8,442 subscribers for its YouTube channel, while Al Jazeera English has 581,450 and CCTV America has only 3,000. These numbers comprise interested people from all over the world, diluting their significance as sources of insight into respective strengths on the U.S. market. In addition to the Internet, RT and Al Jazeera also take advantage of mobile devices. RT provides two free apps: RT News and More and RT Live, for users of Apple products. Al Jazeera America's free mobile app is named Stream. CCTV America had not provided any mobile apps at the time of writing.

The reception of these regional news broadcasters in the United States via cable or satellite systems so far has been limited, exemplifying the view that contra-flow in itself is likely insufficient to undermine hegemonic media flows in the way that one might predict of a more level playing field. As Rai and Cottle (2010) argue after mapping the contemporary landscape of satellite TV news, the reach and access of a handful of major Western news networks remains the most pervasive, and media contra-flow represents merely a small trickle. It is undeniable that news production and distribution from regional or

national networks originating from outside the United States do constitute contra-flows whose existence, in principle, challenges the model of one-way flow from the United States and other Western countries to the rest of the world. But contra-flow is not the same as counter-hegemony. Consider that majorities of U.S. viewers still believe that Saddam Hussein was implicated in 9/11 (as implied, erroneously, by the Bush administration), that Iran actually possesses nuclear weapons (it does not, but the U.S. administration encourages the perception that Iran is a potential nuclear threat), or that Syria's Assad was responsible for a major Sarin gas attack on Western-backed Syrian "rebels" in 2013 (the evidence is very thin, despite administration insistence otherwise) (Boyd-Barrett, 2015; Telhami and Kull, 2011). Accounts of world events that run counter to the official Washington consensus have a hard time breaking into the U.S. mediascape.

Who Works for the American Channels: Reliance on Western Journalism

Al Jazeera, CCTV, and RT are representative of regions and countries that are quite distinctive from the United States in terms of politics, culture, and ideologies. Each, at various times, has been in political opposition to the United States. Alternative perspectives cannot be expected simply on account of these channels' provenance and without consideration of the political economy of survival in the international marketplace. Although Al Jazeera English once claimed that its major agenda was to challenge the Western media agenda and reverse the flow of information to the South, its recruitment strategies of professional staff exemplifies its acceptance and pursuit of the standards of what Tunstall (1977) has described as Anglo-American journalism. This is also the case with CCTV America and RT, although RT applies the Western canon with a noticeably more determined critical force than its competitors.

Al Jazeera English started by recruiting 150 journalists from the BBC's Arabic service, a British-Saudi joint venture that had collapsed after Saudi financiers and BBC media staff fell out over issues of editorial freedom that can be traced back to the BBC's showing of *Death of a Princess* in 1980. Powers (2012) states that "Al Jazeera consistently sought out journalists . . . with training in mainstream media reporting typically associated with 'Western journalism'" (p. 9). Al Jazeera America also follows this strategy when recruiting professional staff. While such sources provide mainstream credibility, they are not best known for their critical appraisal of Western foreign policies or capacity to think outside of the canon of Western presumptions as to the inherent goodness of the United States and the UK and the benign character of neoliberal oligopolistic capitalism.

Al Jazeera America announced the recruitment of Ali Velshi as host of a daily prime-time business program in April 2013. Ali Velshi was CNN's former chief business correspondent and anchor of *Your Money* and CNN International's *World Business Today*. On June 18, Al Jazeera America announced the appointment of veteran journalist Bob Wheelock as senior executive producer. Wheelock moved to Al Jazeera America from Al Jazeera English, where he had served as executive producer of newsgathering for the Americas. Before joining Al Jazeera English, Wheelock had served for 25 years as a senior broadcast producer for ABC News special events. On July 22, the acting director general of Al Jazeera Media Network, Dr. Mostefa Souag, announced that Ehab Al Shihabi, the executive director for international operations, was to be an interim chief executive officer of Al Jazeera America and that ABC News veteran

Kate O'Brian had been named the president of Al Jazeera America. In addition to these high-ranking producers, Al Jazeera America received help from *The New York Times (NYT)* in filling its 170 middle and entry level positions. With the *NYT's* promotion, Al Jazeera received 180,000 applications.

RT and CCTV America also hired journalists and producers with working experience in U.S. mainstream TV networks. According to Yin Zhu in an interview with National Public Radio (as cited in Folkenflik, 2013), CCTV America sought to incorporate standards of Western journalism by hiring dozens of staffers from ABC, Bloomberg, CNN, the BBC, and similar outlets. The current anchors and hosts at CCTV America at the time of this writing include ex-Bloomberg Television anchor Phillip Yin, former *60 Minutes* producer Barbara Dury, former *USA Today* correspondent and four-time Emmy winner Mike Walter, and veteran BBC correspondent Michael Voss. BBC veterans joined the staff in the Washington bureau of CCTV America, along with former employees of CNN, NBC, CBS, and FOX News. Two Chinese reporters were to be posted from Beijing (Associated Press, 2012). Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of RT, pursued her higher education in the United States. She placed a recruiting advertisement in the *Guardian* and received many applications from young, enthusiastic British journalists or prospective journalists, mostly straight out of journalism school, who were trained in presenting, editing, reporting, and all the other skills necessary for running a television station. With RT's heavy use of native English-speaking anchors and contributors, viewers may hardly realize that this channel is a Russian government project, although, as in the case of CCTV coverage of China, RT's coverage of Russia itself can hardly be described as in-depth or critical.

News media serve functions of agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and framing (Entman, 1993), which, respectively, tell the audience what issues to think about and how to think about them. In this sense, how can TV networks that rely heavily on Western journalists who are steeped in the values, presumptions, and techniques of Anglo-American journalism (including heavy dependence on official and "authoritative" sources—see Herman and Chomsky, 1989) select agendas and cover events from alternative viewpoints, working for stations that are non-Western in terms of provenance but targeting U.S. audiences? The short broadcasting history of Al Jazeera America suggests that they do not take a different perspective from the major mainstream news providers when covering major political events. Through analysis of Al Jazeera America's coverage of the crisis in Syria, and comparing that with coverage by CNN, MSNBC, and FOX News, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, and Masta (2013) found that "Al Jazeera America cable news channel provided viewers with content that often resembled what Americans saw on other U.S. cable news outlets" (para. 1) because Al Jazeera America covered the Syrian crisis from the same standpoints as the mainstream news outlets, namely, that the Assad regime was evil and that the United States should get militarily involved in that area, directly or indirectly, through funneling of arms and supplies to "rebels," many of whom were foreigners affiliated with Al Qaeda.

One of the authors of this article has worked for two years as an international news editor for CCTV. CCTV's domestic services in China rely heavily on international news agencies based in the West, such as Associated Press (AP) and Reuters, for their supply of news materials in foreign countries. This is also the case for news networks in other developing countries. This tradition has helped promote the spread of Western journalistic standards and agendas (Schramm & Atwoord, 1981; Sheller, 1983; and

Szende, 1986, as cited in Wu, 2013). Although some of the regional and national news networks of countries such as China, Russia, and Qatar have received substantial funding from their respective political authorities and have been able to hire more of their own journalists and establish new bureaus in many corners of the world, their reliance on Western journalism has barely shifted.

It is arguably either too early or too naïve to claim that these TV news networks are effective examples of counter-hegemony. Al Jazeera America's coverage of the Syrian crisis, and before it, of the Libyan crisis, may, to some extent, have helped reinforce rather than challenge U.S. hegemony and in doing so may have reflected Qatar's foreign policy. As lead consultant for CCTV America, Jim Laurie, who used to be a foreign correspondent for ABC News and NBC News, noted, "We see what the British have done; what CNN has done for years. We need to be part of that" (as quoted in Folkenflick, 2013, para. 8).

Conclusion: Who Is Winning the Global Information War?

Soft power, as described by Nye (2010), is a source of influence that complements, but is different from, the hard power exercised through military force and monetary influence, and it highlights assets that are attractive and pleasing to audiences. Such attractions serve to co-opt national populations in support of outcomes that are desired by the sources of soft power. Nye argues that a country practices soft power with three resources: culture, political values, and foreign policies. News, with its function of agenda setting and cultural transmission, plays an important role in the implementation of soft power, as has long been recognized of the BBC in the context of promoting a positive image of Britain. In this sense, CCTV America and RT no doubt represent the soft power objectives of their respective governments. In the views of both Powers (2012) and McPhail (2011), what has genuinely driven the launch of Al Jazeera, under the cloak of "the opinion and the other opinion," is striving for influence.

The English-language networks of CCTV exemplify the Chinese government's acknowledgment of English language as the key to success for global communication and to the strategy of bringing Chinese public diplomacy to a global audience (Thussu, 2007). CCTV America is generally considered to be the Chinese government's practice of soft power in the United States, a way to project influence through ideas and culture rather than the display of military might (Folkenflick, 2013). Yin Zhu (as cited in Folkenflick) acknowledges that CCTV America cannot be exempted from the censorship of the Communist Party: "What's missing conspicuously [is] . . . any real political news about China itself. CCTV America unfortunately can't really reveal anything that's beyond [the] scripted version of what happened in China. CCTV America is very much on the party's short leash" (para. 15). For example, CCTV America is unlikely to air an interview with the Dalai Lama about his criticisms of the Chinese regime. Seib (2008) cited Svetlana Miroyuk, the editor-in-chief of RIA Novosti, who argued that RT was started in 2005 to change the all-too-common popular perceptions of Russia as reducible to "communism," "snow," and "poverty" and to present a more complete picture of Russia.

Al Jazeera is often cited in association with the discourses of hegemonic flow and contra-flow. Hegemonic flow and contra-flow may be considered the play of soft power and contestations of soft power. Thus, Al Jazeera is an instrument of soft power. Quite different from China and Russia in size, Qatar is a tiny country in the Middle East. That it is known to the wider world at all is to a considerable

extent due to the advent and global expansion of Al Jazeera. Powers (2012) states that the hidden agenda behind launching a 24/7 news network was to gain power, either political power or financial power, or both. The motive for funding Al Jazeera with \$140 million arguably was linked to the invitation to the U.S. military to move its Gulf Central Command to Qatar. The emir wanted "to make himself a player in the region" (McPhail, 2011, p. 294) and to spend money to start Al Jazeera was "to put his country 'on the map'" (El-Ibiary, 2011, p. 201), with very significant economic implications for Qatar and the capital that it represents. Powers (2012) states that reaching the target audience with the information deemed important by the networks' managerial team can provide broadcasters with the political power of influencing foreign affairs. It is this kind of power, embedded in regional television news production and distribution, that has come to be seen by some as a potential threat to U.S. interests and that has prompted U.S. concern that it may risk losing the battle for hegemonic power over the globe.

Analysis of the reception of these foreign regional and national networks in the U.S. market and of their recruiting strategies suggests that U.S. concern is overstated insofar as the security of its domestic media markets is concerned. If these channels have difficulty penetrating the wealthy media markets of the Western world, they will also be constrained in the resources and leverage available to them for penetration of non-Western markets. Some scholars argue that in a global media landscape, which they characterize as a plurality of players and flows, it is no longer possible to sustain the notion of American media hegemony. This study suggests that the U.S. mediascape is still dominated by American institutions and models and that this has implications for the support of its hegemony overseas. By saying this, we do not mean to bring relief to the elite U.S. media. Nevertheless, Hillary Clinton's concern in her speech to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the United States is losing the global information war may not have a substantial basis in fact. With continuing evidence of U.S. information hegemony worldwide, these three external news networks' less than wholly successful attempts to penetrate the U.S. news market bring little benefit to U.S. news consumers, since they fail to represent as broad a range of alternative perspectives on current affairs as they might had they not sacrificed so much to gain market entry.

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