

## **North-South Globalization and Action Initiatives: Multiple News Media in the Emerging Global Communication Space**

Francis A. Beer, Political Science Department, University of Colorado, Boulder CO

G. Robert Boynton, Political Science Department, University of Iowa, Iowa City IA

Globalization is a central concern in 21<sup>st</sup> century global discourse. Elites based in different global quadrants have diverse positions, not just on the world's physical surface, but also on its rhetorical plane. Northern elites seem to favor making globalization a powerful symbol in political thought and action. Southern elites may have a more mixed stance, with many favoring local emphases. Among these elites are those at the top of news media.

The news media are major purveyors of globalization. Globalization becomes present to the citizens of the world as news media reach out to a global audience. As improving communication technologies have made real time global communication possible, northern networks like CNN and BBC have used the technology to develop globally oriented television news programs. Their offerings, CNN WorldView and BBC World, attempt to connect with a global audience. The further development of the web has allowed organizations with considerably less funding than BBC and CNN to try for a global audience as well. The southern network Aljazeera, for example, recently supplemented its Arabic language programming and began to produce a news website in English in an obvious attempt to extend its global reach.

As global media develop, the use of common technology, language, and professional norms can help drive international integration. A globalizing regime of international communication creates an emerging common space into which media elites can expand. These new channels allow them to grow their audience, to bring their product to a wider market. In order to play on this stage, media actors must adapt to its globalizing constraints and converge. Common media technology, language, and norms mean that media actors have only limited degrees of freedom. At the same time different media actors spring from distinct roots. Their traditions, cultures, contexts, and agendas can vary widely. They seek to construct discrete brands, appealing to particular audiences. This divergence flavors media content, even in a globalizing age. Globalizing media and localizing differences interact. Together, they produce a mixed result, combining international integration and diversity.

Our paper builds on prior research on globalizing media (Beer and Boynton 2003, 2004; see also Artz and Kamilipour, 2006). It examines similarities and differences in the presentation of news by websites aspiring to a global audience in the north and in the south. We compare the websites of Aljazeera, BBC and CNN. The central question we ask is what does 'global' come to mean as media from north and south attempt to reach a global audience? How are the stories reported similar and dissimilar? Are there greater differences between southern (Aljazeera) and northern (BBC, CNN) centered global media than within the class of northern networks (BBC, CNN)? Examining what they make of globalization illuminates the strains in the contemporary vision of globalization and portends a future influenced by media construction of globalization.

### Scope and Method

This study is based on a large collection of the daily news websites of the English language version of Aljazeera, BBC World, and CNN World. The websites were recorded approximately six days a week between January 1, 2005 and early November of 2005. They were captured by downloading and saving the home page of the site and all the pages linked to the home page. The sites were captured at about midnight central standard time USA, which meant they were what viewers saw when they looked at the sites first thing in the morning. The sites may change more than once a day. Any stories that appear and then are taken off the site between midnight one day and midnight the next day are not included in the dataset. The entire collection was searched for stories that included the word "initiative" anywhere in the text; 367 stories were found.

The Coded Language of North-South

"North-south" is a major theme of academic international relations theorizing and research. Generally, the global north is geographically defined to include states in North America, Northern Asia, and Western Europe. The global south includes territories at lower latitudes. Geography, however, is not the only determinant of north-south identity. The degree of economic development as well as political, cultural, and historical linkages can also be important. As a result, China is sometimes included in the global south and Australia in the north. During the early Cold War years after World War II, the dominant axis of separation was east-west, dividing the United States and its western allies from the more easterly Soviet bloc. With the emergence of detente and the end of the Cold War, the relevance of east-west differentiation declined, and the north-south axis became more prominent. International security issues between major powers like the United States and Russia became less pressing, at least for a while, and domestic security within such states became more important . Terrorism replaced the Cold War and the Global War on Terror replaced replaced deterrence at the top of the issue agenda. In the context of globalization, political economic concerns of less privileged nations also received more attention.

Since we are interested in the way that north-south differences appear in the globalizing news media, it seems appropriate to begin directly with the key words themselves. Surprisingly, the language of north-south does not exist in the language of news media that aspire to a global audience. The phrase north-south" as well as the separate words "north" and "south" are present mainly in their absence. They are just not there -- the count is 0 in the ten months we examined. It is unclear what we should conclude from the missing key words. At the very least, media actors do not seem to include "north-south" explicitly in their professional vocabulary.

At the same time, many issues that international relations scholars might categorize as north-south do appear in media stories about "initiatives." News media that aspire to a global audience present many north-south issues in terms of initiatives. The language of initiatives is the language of innovation and action. Initiatives signal that action is breaking into the ongoing stream of events. Revisionist actors are attempting to change the status quo. They may, for example, seek to find a new solution to an ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Or they may attempt new health programs in particular regions. Initiatives are news. Something new is happening. Globalizing news media naturally focus directly on initiatives and indirectly fold north-south themes into stories about them.

Categories of Initiatives

With these concerns in mind, we coded the initiatives we found into several major issue categories and counted the frequencies of each for the three global news websites as described below in Table 1.

Reports about initiatives in conflict and health appear more often than other types of reports. Other issues receive lesser coverage. Stories about economic assistance initiatives are about actions by a nation or group of nations to aid another nation. Reports about economic development initiatives are about activities by a country to improve its own economy.

TABLE 1  
GLOBAL MEDIA NETWORKS:  
INITIATIVE FREQUENCY BY ISSUE CATEGORY

Type of Initiative	Aljazeera	BBC World	CNN World	Total

Conflict	54	21	15	90
Health	7	32	14	53
Local [national] politics	9	15	18	42
Economic assistance	10	14	12	36
Economic development	14	7	10	31
Nuclear proliferation	12	3	9	24
Human rights	12	3	2	17
Education	1	6	9	16
Environment	3	7	2	12
Culture	4	3	4	11
Corruption	4	3	2	9
Elections	3	1	5	9
Global institutions	4	0	2	6
Diplomacy	1	2	1	4
Disasters	1	1	2	4
Democracy	3	0	0	0
Total	142	118	107	367

The communication convergence hypothesis suggests that globalizing media will cover different initiative issues in similar ways. Alternatively, a divergence perspective implies radically different news reports. Northern globalizing media--BBC World and CNN World, might be more concerned with east-west issues left over from the Cold War, nuclear weapons, for example. Southern globalizing media, represented by Aljazeera, might be more interested in post-colonial conflicts and development (Slater, 2004). Our results tend to be mixed. Table 1 shows that Aljazeera does somewhat more stories on initiatives overall, particularly conflict. Aljazeera also takes the lead in reporting initiatives on economic development, human rights, and--contrary to our expectations--nuclear proliferation. At the same time, BBC does more on economic assistance, the environment, and health. CNN does more on education, elections, local/national politics. There is no clear north-south pattern in general issue coverage.

### Types of Initiatives

Inside each of these major initiative issue categories, there are different sub-types of initiatives. Since globalizing media coverage did not reveal clear north-south dimensions between issues, we decided to examine more closely media coverage within two separate issue areas: conflict and health.

### Conflict Initiatives

Conflict initiatives include action items for different locations. Table 2 below presents the geographical target of conflict related initiatives. The Table shows that there is some difference in geographical coverage between websites. Aljazeera, with its Middle Eastern roots, covers Iraq and Palestine/Israel the most, though the other two networks also give them some play. BBC likes Pakistan-India and Darfur, perhaps because of its imperial heritage. "Global" gets some attention from Aljazeera and CNN. North-south dimensions again range from mixed to unclear.

TABLE 2  
GLOBAL MEDIA NETWORKS:  
CONFLICT ISSUE CATEGORY:

## INITIATIVE FREQUENCY BY GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

<b>Locus</b>	<b>Aljazeera</b>	<b>BBC</b>	<b>CNN</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Palestine-Israel	34	5	9	48
Iraq	7	2	0	9
Pakistan-India	1	6	0	7
Global	3	0	3	6
Darfur	1	3	0	4
Africa	1	1	1	3
Chechnya	1	1	0	2
Afghanistan	0	1	0	1
China-EU	0	0	1	1
China-Russia	1	0	0	1
China-Taiwan	0	1	0	1
Cyprus	1	0	0	1
Eritrea-Ethiopia	1	0	0	1
France-Martinique	0	0	1	1
Iran	1	0	0	1
North Korea	0	1	0	1
Sri Lanka	1	0	0	1
Syria	1	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>90</b>

Health Initiatives

Table 3 presents results for health initiatives, the second most frequent issue category. Among the networks, BBC seems most interested in health issues, Aljazeera the least. Malaria and AIDS get somewhat more attention than other themes. There do not seem to be clear north-south asymmetries in the coverage of particular diseases. Interestingly, though, Aljazeera's malaria coverage is relatively strong, while a sexually transmitted disease like AIDS does not exist in Aljazeera netspace.

TABLE 3  
GLOBAL MEDIA NETWORKS:  
HEALTH ISSUE CATEGORY:  
INITIATIVE FREQUENCY BY TYPE

<b>Health Initiative for</b>	<b>Aljazeera</b>	<b>BBC World</b>	<b>CNN World</b>	<b>Total</b>
Malaria	3	4	2	9
AIDS	0	4	4	8

Polio	1	2	1	4
Hospitals	0	4	0	4
Bird flu	2	0	2	4
Stem cell research	0	2	1	3
Fevers	0	2	1	3
Diet	0	2	0	2
Child Abuse	0	2	0	2
Weight	0	0	1	1
Prostate Cancer	0	1	0	1
Prenatal Illness	0	1	0	1
Policy Information	0	1	0	1
Mad Cow Disease	0	0	1	1
Life Expectancy	0	1	0	1
Health Politics	0	0	1	1
Health Education	1	0	0	1
Gulf War Syndrome	0	1	0	1
Fertility	0	1	0	1
Drug Trafficking	0	1	0	1
Asthma	0	1	0	1
Alcohol	0	1	0	1
African Brain Drain	0	1	0	1
Totals	7	32	14	53

Table 4 shows the geographical locations of the different networks' health stories. There are some North-south differences. Aljazeera, to the extent that it covers health, is most interested in African, Arab, and Islamic sites. BBC likes England best, and indeed many of its stories focus on local themes, for example the National Health Service or the problems of aging. CNN health stories also reflect the news carrier's national origin, the United States. While reports about initiatives in the nation of origin are the largest category, they are fewer than half the stories for both BBC and CNN. Both these northern networks cover southern health stories more extensively than Aljazeera.

TABLE 4  
GLOBAL MEDIA NETWORKS:  
HEALTH ISSUE CATEGORY:  
INITIATIVE FREQUENCY BY GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Geography	Aljazeera	BBC World	CNN World	Totals
England	0	15	0	15
Africa	1	5	2	8
US	0	1	5	6
Indonesia	1	3	0	4
EU	1	2	0	3

Global	1	1	1	3
India	0	1	2	3
Iraq	1	1	0	2
Egypt	1	1	0	2
Nigeria	1	0	0	1
South Asia	0	0	1	1
Tropics	0	1	0	1
Uganda	0	1	0	1
Saudi Arabia	0	0	1	1
Zambia	0	0	1	1
Developing World	0	0	1	1
Totals	7	32	14	53

## Presenting the News

The presentation of the news includes both formatting and content.

## Format of the News Pages

The format for presenting the news is quite similar for the three websites. There are, however, significant differences, particular in advertising content.

The screenshot shows the Al Jazeera website interface. At the top, there is a banner for 'madrid 3 TIMES A WEEK' and 'QATAR AIRWAYS'. Below this, the 'NEWS ARAB WORLD' section is prominently displayed. The main headline reads 'Arab-Israeli normalisation ruled out' with a sub-headline 'Wednesday 23 March 2005, 2:26 Makka Time, 23:26 GMT'. The text states: 'Arab leaders have said Israel cannot expect peace or normalised ties with the Arab world if it does not make concessions and give up occupied lands.' A photograph of a summit is included. To the right, a 'Top News' sidebar lists several stories: 'Ecuador police gas Congress protest', 'Several killed in Afghanistan battle', 'Many killed in US refinery blast', and 'Rise in new controversy over Iraq war'. The left navigation bar includes links to 'Home', 'News', 'Economy', 'Culture', 'Sci-Tech', 'Special Reports', 'Weather', and 'Polls'. At the bottom, there is a 'Low Graphics version' link and a 'Change edition' link.

Each has a banner at the top identifying the site as Aljazeera.net or BBC NEWS or CNN.com. The news report is bracketed on the left with a navigation bar to facilitate moving through the websites. Aljazeera and CNN prominently indicate the section of the website for each report at the top of the page. This Aljazeera report is in the "ARAB WORLD" section. The CNN report is in the "WORLD" section. BBC does the same but the section is not as prominently displayed; the section for the report is grayed out on the left hand navigation bar. On the right, each lists relevant stories that viewers might want to read. For CNN the list is below the photograph in this case. Aljazeera and CNN World both have ads on their pages. On the Aljazeera site there is a banner ad for an airline at the top. The CNN ads generally are on the right of the page. CNN carries more ads than Aljazeera does. BBC World is publicly supported and does not have any ads at all.

The report begins with a headline and the date and time the report was posted. The 'time stamp' is important because all three websites keep at least some of their reports available for several days. The reader needs to know how new the news is. In each case there is a lead paragraph presented in bold text that is flanked by a photograph. This standard practice is based on the view that web pages need to have a way to focus viewers' attention. On these busy pages that is even more important than it is on other



web pages. Even though the photos are rather small they play the role of standing out to focus attention.

The colors are different. The fonts are different. Otherwise there is a standard for presenting global news on the web that is adopted by all three sites. There is no obvious north-south split here.

### Conflict Stories--Middle East

The Arab League met on March 23, 2005 to consider a Jordanian proposal to revise the Arab peace initiative of 2002. Aljazeera carried the

most coverage with the most detail. It devoted three pages to covering the meeting. The headlines and captions to the photographs give the basic themes of the reports.

In, what we have labeled as Report 1, the headline indicates that the Arab League leaders rejected the Jordanian proposal for Arab-Israeli normalization without meeting the demands of the 2002 peace initiative. The text elaborates: "Arab leaders have said Israel cannot expect peace or normalized ties with the Arab world if it does not make concessions and give up occupied lands." The second important element of the story is in the caption of the photograph. The photograph shows political leaders sitting in the round to conduct their business. But "several Arab leaders were absent from the summit." Only 13 of the 22 heads of state were present, according to the text. Others offered diplomatic excuses about health or personal matters; they obviously did not want to be a party to what was going to happen at the meeting. The strong support for the earlier 2002 initiative, reflected in the headline, is softened by the limited attendance, reflected in the lower caption.

Report 1	Report 2	Report 3
<b>Arab-Israeli normalisation ruled out</b>	<b>Arab League relaunches peace bid</b>	<b>Israel rejects Arab peace initiative</b>
		
<b>Several Arab leaders were absent from the summit</b>	<b>A congenial atmosphere marked the proceedings in Algiers</b>	<b>The meeting sidestepped some glaring recent issues</b>

The headline and caption to the photograph in Report 2 do the same work as in Report 1. The Arab League issued a communique reaffirming their commitment to the initiative of 2002. The communique outlined the basic requirements of their position. That is what you learn from the headline. From the photograph and the caption you can infer that the leaders decided not to raise the matters on which they differed. Hence, a congenial photo op and a caption pointing out the congeniality. The text of the report indicates that it could have been otherwise. "The summit managed to avert differences over prickly issues . . ."

The third report is about Israel's rejection of the Arab call for action. The headline is followed by three substantial paragraphs outlining Israel's rejection. That is followed by a recapitulation of the Arab proposal. But the photograph and the caption carry the story back to the Arab League's deliberations. They are again sitting in a circle producing a communique that they knew will be rejected. It is easier to reaffirm the 2002 initiative than to tackle the 2005 differences over how best to proceed.



BBC tells a story in prospect. The headline for the report is: "Arab summit to renew Israel offer." They are writing as the meeting begins, so this is BBC's informed speculation about what will happen. The prospective character of the news report is reinforced by the photograph and caption. "Libya's leader was first to arrive . . ." The accompanying photograph is Libya's leader, Muammar Khaddafi, being greeted by his host, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the president of Algeria. This is a picture of a meeting that is only beginning.



The report covers many of the points covered in the three Aljazeera reports. The Jordan proposal that is being rejected, the attendance of only 13 of 22 heads of state, a review of the 2002 initiative and attribution to Saudi Arabia. In addition, the story reports on the agenda for the meeting, and reports on a point that is not covered by Aljazeera. On the first day Algerian President Bouteflika "called for the UN to issue a definition of terrorism." He called for a definition of terrorism that that could be the basis for "an alliance between civilizations."

Finally there is a CNN web page from March 23 about the closing of the conference. It is the briefest of the reports, but it covers the major points about the meeting: rejection of Jordan's proposal, reaffirmation of the 2002 peace plan, and a point not mentioned by Aljazeera or BBC. "Arabs 'to better market peace plan'" was the headline. CNN means business, and marketing is the metaphor that frames the action. CNN reports that Arab leaders conclude the meeting with a plan to set up a committee that will "explain their plan to Europe, the United States and other nations." However, they are unable to agree on the membership of the committee. The photograph accompanying the report, a picture of the Algerian horse guard, provides what northern CNN editors presume is a bit of oriental local color.



The overall story gets generally similar coverage by the different websites. The central themes of the coverage are the rejection of the plan proposed by Jordan and the reaffirmation of the 2002 initiative.

There are, however, some differences in texture and details. Aljazeera, appropriately for its regional location, covers the conference more fully than BBC and CNN with a before, during, and after report. BBC, consistent with Britain's colonial history in the Arab world, has a rather long story about what the conference will probably do. And CNN has the briefest and most business-like coverage.

### Health Stories

Following our discussion of the different networks' treatment of a specific initiative in the Middle East conflict, we turn to sample news stories from each of the networks about health issues.

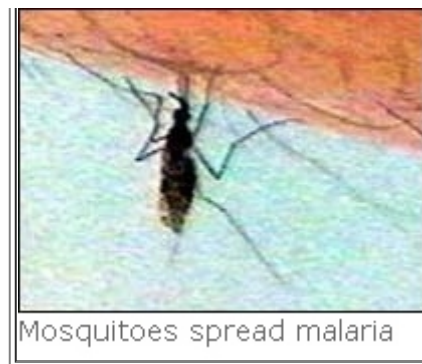


The Aljazeera story leads with a picture of victims of malaria, African victims. The caption says that "malaria kills an African child every 30 seconds." The headline focuses on the disease: "New boost to malaria research." The lead paragraph again focuses on malaria. Only next do we read about a new large grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The text that follows again focuses on malaria. At the bottom, there is a wider north-south theme. "If those children were in rich countries," Bill Gates is quoted as saying, "we would have headlines, we would take action. We wouldn't rest until every child was protected." The story itself is framed by columns of links to other stories. There are five links to other stories about malaria, but the rest are only distantly related or completely unconnected to malaria.

The BBC presentation starts with the same technology and the same story, but the framing and interpretation are different. In tune with the BBC's greater attention to health issues, the flanking columns, particularly the one on the right, provide more supplementary links to information about malaria and health issues. The leads are a bit more action oriented. The



headline highlights an actor and an action, rather than the victims. "Gates gives 28m to malaria team." There is a threatening picture of the mosquito enemy. The article tells the story of Bill and Melinda Gates helping the effort to conquer this debilitating disease and lead all the world's people to a more healthy future.



We found no parallel CNN story at this time. There were, however, earlier treatments in May and June. The first story starts in the global north, highlighting the Gates Foundation but moves quickly to the Zambia in the global south, victims of malaria, and contributions to prevention and treatment. Interestingly there is almost a full column ad, no picture, and no focused array of related web links.



The second CNN story begins with the headline "Gates targets global health crisis," and there is a graphic picture of a malaria victim. In this story, however, advertising and web clutter have advanced, eating the news hole, which now gets only about one third of the available space on the page.

All three networks cover malaria with similar formats and themes. Again, there are important differences. Aljazeera focuses more on southern victims. The northern networks, BBC and CNN, pay more attention to northern donors like Bill and Melinda Gates. But, BBC moves southward in providing more links to other health stories. CNN doesn't get carried away with alien insects, suffering victims, or charitable

heroics in the news hole; it maximizes advertising.

### Globalizing Media, North-South Issues, and Global Action

Globalizing media ride the wave of emerging communication technology. Our study has focused rather narrowly on three networks that aspire to a global audience--Aljazeera, BBC, and CNN. We have sought to investigate the way they approach global north-south issues by focusing very specifically on the frequency of the keyword "initiative" on their websites and its surrounding textual context.

Our research suggests that globalizing journalists are not drawn to "north-south" as an independent topic. We found no use of "north-south" at all. Given this fact, we substituted "initiative" as the object of our attention and got better results. Even here, however, the findings were mixed. Initiative appeared rarely in the headlines; most often it was embedded further down in the text of the story. It did not appear in quotes from the leading political actors but rather in journalistic summaries of their actions.

"Initiative" appears to be a journalistic term of art, describing a plan, policy, proposal, or project. More than those terms, however, "initiative" frames global events in the language of action. Although it has too many syllables and is too abstract to pack much punch, "initiative" still implies agency and free will, the possibility of change and new beginnings. Above all it suggests newness, and that is, after all, the domain of news.

We found that the different networks reported initiatives in ways that reflected common technology and professional norms, on the one hand, and their diverse cultures on the other. As we had expected, the web page format itself structured what they could say and how they said it. At the same time, each network started from a different historical and geographical place, which influenced content. American, Arab, and British professional and popular cultures helped frame the news of the day to some extent, even in networks that aspired to a broader global audience.

While north-south terms are explicitly missing, north-south perspectives appear implicitly in the reporting of different initiatives. The cultures of the media elites and their target audiences give particular flavors to each network and help to differentiate its personality from competitors. The technology and professional norms of the globalizing media are largely a creation of northern actors. They have had an important influence in establishing a common platform, a space in which political and media elites create the news. This space has been, at least till now, largely a northern space, reflecting northern professional "best

practices" and appealing to northern audiences. Further, Aljazeera's production of an English language website uses not only a northern language but also points to an audience using that language.

Southern actors have largely had to try and fit themselves in. At the same time, the emergence of globalizing media with southern roots, such as Aljazeera, has allowed southern media actors to speak in a somewhat different voice. To survive in the common communication ecosystem, they must also differentiate themselves and create their own niches. Northern dominated common technology and norms have driven the convergence of globalizing news media and the integration of international communication. At the same time, northern and southern identities and interests, ideologies and interpretations now interact in the mixed, hybrid space that is the emerging international communication order.

## References

- Artz, Lee and Yahya Kamilipour. 2006. The Media Globe: Trends in International Mass Media. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Beer, Francis A. and G. R. Boynton. 2004. "Globalizing Political Action: Building bin Laden and Getting Ready for 9/11", *The American Communication Journal* 7 (2004).  
<http://www.acjournal.org/holdings/vol7/index.htm>
- Beer, Francis A. and G. R. Boynton. 2003. "Globalizing Terror", *POROI Journal* 2, 1  
[http://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/poroi/papers/beer030725\\_outline.html](http://inpress.lib.uiowa.edu/poroi/papers/beer030725_outline.html)
- Slater, David. 2004. Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial: Rethinking North-South Relations. London: Blackwell.