

THE MEDIA CIRCUS
**How media events are used in the international struggle for
image power**

by

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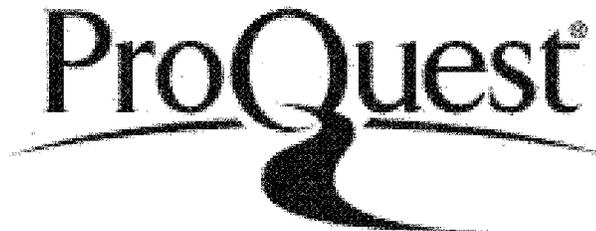


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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes international media events as tools of national image management, assessing the value of strategic exposure to gain influence in a world where image, power and public perceptions intertwine. Media events are scripted and controlled offering an excellent opportunity to steer messages, reach large audiences, influence the agenda and construct images. They are also versatile: rhetoric, visuals, emotional connections and personalization can be adjusted to effectively reach targeted audiences. International media events are a hub of multiple sources, meanings and audiences, where international and domestic politics meet. This is why they are power struggles where the resulting coverage depends on the issues at stake, the combination of political and communication strategies and the media's interests, practices and values. As regional and global issues are increasingly discussed under media scrutiny, this dynamic gains more relevance in the way the public understands and participates in world affairs.

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This apparently lone endeavour actually involved many participants whose contributions became the building blocks of this work, and to whom I am eminently grateful.

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THE MEDIA CIRCUS

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INTRODUCTION



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Published on January 21, 2011 in the *National Post*, this Gary Clement cartoon captures in its simplicity the main argument of my thesis: international media events are strategic tools of image management for nations in search of influence on the world stage. By watching on TV a single picture of the Chinese and American leaders smiling and shaking hands, the spectator realizes the dynamics of power on the continent have shifted. The cartoon depicts Korean dictator Kim Jong-il watching on TV a media event, an action that has been carefully scripted and staged in front of the cameras to influence public opinion. The fact that the spectator is a head of government emphasises, as

cartoons do, the relevance and ordinariness of what he is doing. His grim expression reveals that he, like any other spectator, recognizes the new reality conveyed by the happy smiles on television. It is highly unlikely a national leader will find out that such a change is happening via television, but most of us do. So, Mr. Clement has a point: the world is watching the interactions amongst nations and getting the messages they convey.

“In the modern new media age people are very aware of how visual diplomacy has become and every act communicates, every picture says something about those involved,” says Michael McCurry, a former White House and Department of State spokesman, pointing at the role of media events in shaping perceptions around the world.¹

Unlike other occurrences that make news, media events are planned, staged and highly controlled in terms of access and information. For that reason they offer an excellent opportunity for organizers to steer their message. Just as electoral campaign experts and other public relations practitioners rely on media events to influence the agenda, reach large audiences and construct political images, I will argue that world leaders rely on international media events for the same reasons with the intent of securing a particular position on the world stage.

How does the communication aspect of international media events play a role in the overall dynamics of power in the world? To answer this question, I have divided this analysis into five parts: First, we shall look at what media events are through a literature review on the subject; what makes them efficient communication tools and how they are an actual form of international interaction that plays a role in international discourse. In

¹ Unless otherwise noted, sources lacking parenthetical citations are based on personal interviews with the author. Their names are listed alphabetically in the Sources section under Interviews.

the second chapter, we shall consider the global context in which these events occur and how that contributes to their strategic value. We live in a world that is moving away from geopolitics and power to the post-modern world of influences, (van Ham, 1989) where image and reputation are playing a larger role in tandem with other traditional sources of power. Thanks to democratization, a push for transparency has opened up diplomacy to more and more public scrutiny and participation. All of this takes place in a world of perpetual and instant communications, where political and social life are shaped by the logics of spectacle (Kellner, 2003); this also applies to the way we see and understand international interactions. The combination of these factors sets the stage for world leaders to perform their roles in front of the cameras through media events in search of international stature for their nations. At the same time, the peculiar combination of policy tools and platforms gives media events a high news value for journalists who, despite acknowledging their utterly staged nature, find in them the source of stories that affect people's lives. The third chapter deals with issues of strategy. It considers the combination of elements that contributes to the overall success in conveying a consistent message during a media event – rhetoric, images, emotional connection and personalization – and the unexpected circumstances that may derail an intended message. Fourth, we shall delve into the supports provided to secure coverage by facilitating the work of the media. What is particular about the media relations practices of an international media event is that they create a relationship of mutual dependency between media and organizers. Organizers need the media to convey their message to the public, while journalists rely on organizers for information and access. However, the media come to the event with their own perspective, interests and practices, which create a particular

dynamic that produces the final version of an event and determines how it is presented to the public. The fifth chapter integrates much of the previous discussion with a case study. I analyze the visit to Canada by U.S. President Barack Obama in February 2009, considering how the elements described above resulted in favourable coverage of the visit.

This is a study about media relations, not political strategies or international interests. I do not attempt to define why or how foreign policy is determined, but concentrate on how the communication strategy during a media event represents added value for a country's reputation. I will not try to prove or disprove their effectiveness; every event has its own definition of success. This study will focus on media events designed to reach international audiences and not on media events staged during national or local political campaigns. It is also important to point out that I am aware of the importance of international media events for domestic consumption. "These big international events are all about persuading voters. They have more to do with persuading political change at home, than they do with international relations," observed senior political journalist Craig Oliver when I discussed my project with him. Like Oliver, other experts I interviewed emphasized the strategic domestic value of an international performance for politicians, a point that is recognized and emphasized when relevant throughout all the sections. If we look again at the opening cartoon, the spectator is neither Chinese nor American, and yet he is concerned with the issue at hand. Despite the obvious priority on domestic communication and the difficulty to separate domestic from international targets, world leaders do reach out to foreign audiences. This is the

motivation of this study, one that I found has been hardly recognized – especially by journalists, perhaps because they write mostly for domestic audiences.

It is essential to understand media events in foreign policy. They influence the world agenda, frame international issues, and have an effect on understanding and interactions among nations. The messages that emerge from international media events feed public opinion, for better or worse. From this perspective, media events play a role in the democratic process. They target the very basic level of images and perceptions, which blend into the popular moods and attitudes that frame decisions on foreign policy. Moreover, media events and the resulting coverage are the means of public access to international deliberations. In the international arena, there are no election campaigns, no parliamentary debates or political parties, no means to involve citizens other than in the process of formulating one's own policies – and sometimes this is not even pursued. Once the leaders are face to face, decisions are made and the public concedes, supports, or rejects their own leadership. The policies and perceptions that emerge from an international event are integrated then into the overall practice of democracy. The media play an important role because it is up to them to recognize and assess the true value for society of each event.

This work is based on research from both primary and secondary sources. I relied on information from primary sources, such as transcripts of speeches, press releases and other documents, like media programs, photographs and backgrounders. I also conducted a series of interviews with communication strategists, journalists and diplomats who have extensive experience in the planning and coverage of media events to obtain their first hand accounts and perspectives. A list of those interviewed can be found in the references

section. As to secondary sources: I conducted a literature review to delve into the elements included in my research question to present arguments already in the academic literature on the subject at hand. I also relied on newspaper and magazine articles, Web Pages, blogs, political memoirs and television reports that depict various media events included as examples. In certain instances I rely on my own professional experience, and clearly state that whenever I do so. After a few years at the foreign desk of a major television network in Mexico, I was assigned correspondent in Ottawa from 1993 to 1996. Later I joined the Press Office at the Embassy of Mexico in Canada from 1998 to 2003. My experience dealt precisely with international messages: as a reporter, I covered news for a 24-hour news network that reached most of the Spanish-speaking world and later at the Mexican Embassy our media relations efforts were dedicated to reaching Canadian audiences.

In *Systems of States*, Martin Wight characterized international encounters, like the one depicted in our cartoon, as “*moments of maximum communication*” (Wight, 1977: 32). Even though his analysis referred to the exchanges and discussions between the participating officials, his description has gained a new meaning in our mediatized world because it alludes to the multiplicity of messages, interpretations and interests that characterize an international media event. Indeed, these events are found in the convergence of multiple sources, multiple meanings and multiple audiences, where diplomacy and international and domestic politics meet. Messages move back and forth not only between the participating leaders, but also towards their people at home and to the world, and sometimes also from the people to the leaders and to the world. This point of convergence is commonly dismissed as a media circus, but it actually plays a role in

the way nations and leaders interact and gain influence through the media, which I shall analyze in the following chapters. Enjoy the circus.

Chapter 1

WHAT ARE MEDIA EVENTS?

February 2011. The Arab world is in turmoil. There are demonstrations in Egypt, bloodshed in Libya, and unrest in Tunisia, Yemen and Bahrain. Local police exchange tear gas and stones with protestors. International news services show crowds taking to the streets, followed by a parade of Western world leaders who appear to be in command; they stand in front of colourful flags and behind shiny podiums calling for restraint, demanding respect for democracy, or condemning the violence. Days after the ousting of President Mubarak in Egypt, the familiar images of unyielding demonstrators on Tahrir Square are replaced with pictures of a smiling David Cameron as he walks with an entourage and greets people on the streets of Cairo (BBC, 2011). The British Prime Minister also chats with a boy whose forehead and cheeks are painted with the Egyptian flag. As though it were a competition, newscasters proclaim Cameron the first world leader to come to Egypt. “That was brilliant!” said Senator Jim Munson, former communication director for Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. “One picture alone showed the people of Egypt that the world still cares and respects them, and for the people of Britain and indeed the world, it showed leadership.”

What David Cameron did is an example of a media event. It was not a spontaneous walkabout to meet and greet the Egyptian people that happened to be caught on camera; it was a staged action that allowed him to generate a few seconds of news footage to his and his country’s advantage. “There, is of course, political and national interests in playing a clear, active, visible role when there are new developments like the

one in Egypt,” explains Canadian diplomat Louise Fréchette as she describes the benefits of strategic exposure through media events:

Besides the domestic motivation – Cameron was a new prime minister and wanted to show his people that he is engaged in international affairs – there is great interest in the part of the British government having a proactive foreign policy. The UK as a country is in a sense losing its status in relation to smaller countries, so they want to remind the world that they are a power to be reckoned with.

In this chapter I will focus on what media events are. First, I shall review the literature on media events and the conditions that have led scholars to define and redefine the term according to changing context. Then, I shall compare the various definitions and evaluate their merits, indicating the commonalities that form the overall concept of media event. Finally, I shall elaborate on media events in the context of international relations, first by explaining their role within the practice of media diplomacy – the strategy by which officials use the media as a tool for conducting international interactions – and second, describing them as an integral element of international discourse.

Defining Media Events

In an analysis of mid-twentieth century American society, Daniel Boorstin (1964) reflects on how wealth, literacy and technology resulted in the addition of a layer of unreality to daily life through what he calls *pseudo-events*. He explains that a pseudo-event is a happening that is not spontaneous; is planned in advance primarily to be reported; is ambiguously related to underlying reality; and is usually intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Boorstin criticizes the media for covering pseudo-events to the point that society has taken those artificial happenings to be reality. According to him,

journalists in need of content have become so enterprising that they produce their own news by inciting comments from prominent figures, by writing about any issue they choose or by expressing an opinion in a column in such a way that “news gathering turned into news making” (Boorstin, 1964: 14). For their part – and more closely associated with the subject of this thesis – news sources also create pseudo-events to be reported, such as press conferences, news releases and staged events. Boorstin points out that all these pseudo-events are ritualized and formalized, but “seldom for outright deception, more often simply to make more ‘news,’ to provide more ‘information’ or to ‘improve communication.’” (Boorstin, 1964: 33). In a democratic society, Boorstin points out, politicians, newsmen and news media compete in the creation of pseudo-events. People are confronted by competing pseudo-events and are allowed to judge among them. Pseudo-events, though, have the disadvantage of “increasing our illusion of a grasp on the world, as society has come to think that problems can really be settled by statements, by summit meetings, by a competition of prestige or by overshadowing images” (Boorstin, 1964: 44).

Media Events, the Live Broadcasting of History (1992) is the first academic use of the term *media event* to refer to an enacted non-spontaneous happening, and in some ways is much like Boorstin’s pseudo-event. But this book goes beyond mere news making since its main focus is “events that are not routine but an interruption of routine that propose exceptional things to think about, to witness and to do” (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 5). Impressed by the live television coverage and the impact of the visit to Israel by President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt in 1977, scholars Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz studied media events from an anthropological perspective, concentrating on their ritual

value within a society where television is prevalent. Their book intends to bring the anthropology of ceremony to the study of a “new narrative genre that employs the unique potential of the electronic media to command attention universally and simultaneously in order to tell a primordial story about current affairs while transforming the viewing experience” (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 1).

The authors considered media events by looking at the interactions among three elements: the staged event (or ceremony), in which they examined the objectives or messages of those organizing the event; the broadcast of the event, studying how television presents and interprets the event; and the audience reception, that is, the public acceptance or rejection of the event. They also evaluate the potential for media events to be “transformative” by enacting change – what they called “shamanizing media events” (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 147). This means that despite the fact that media events are, according to Dayan and Katz, mostly rituals that reinforce established values, offices and persons, occasionally a ceremonial broadcast of a proposal for change can induce that change. An example of this is communist Poland, where the prevailing doctrine saw religion as something to be feared, unlikely ever again to become central to the society. The visit to Poland of Pope John Paul II in the 1980s, the authors argue, changed all that.

Dayan and Katz categorize media events as a television genre and list the characteristics that differentiate media events from similar, but not identical events. They group the characteristics into three levels:

Syntactic level: Media events represent a monopolistic interruption of routine, in that almost all channels switch away from their regularly scheduled programming. They

are broadcast live. They are pre-planned and organized outside the media, but with television in mind.

Semantic level: The meaning of the event is typically proposed by the organizers and shared – or negotiated – by the broadcasters. They are staged as “historic occasions” with ceremonial reverence and in most instances with a message of reconciliation.

Pragmatic level: Media events enthrall large audiences, who view them with anticipation and in a festive mood. Thus they unite viewers with one another and with their societies. Viewers actively celebrate, preferring to view in the company of others, and they make special preparations in order to partake more fully in the event.

All three elements must be present, say Dayan and Katz, and when they exist independently of one another they create something other than a media event. For example, the assassination of John F. Kennedy was covered live by all the networks but the coverage was not pre-planned, and the audience did not anticipate it, so it was a *news* event; in comparison, the Kennedy funeral fulfils their typology. The messages in these two are different, their effects are different, and they are presented in quite a different tone.

Dayan and Katz argue that media events use specific narratives of “contest, conquest or coronation” (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 25). Contests refer to events that pit individuals against each other, and the focus is on who the winner will be; examples are political conventions or the Olympics. Conquests are one-time events in which a great individual(s) defies accepted restrictions to achieve success, such as the moon landing or the first visit to Poland by Pope John Paul II. And coronations proceed according to strict

rules, deal with rites of passage and focus not on the success of the specific actors but on the ritual itself.

Most importantly, Dayan and Katz consider these televised rituals as powerful instances to integrate societies because they represent the rare realization of the full potential of electronic media. “All eyes are fixed on the ceremonial centre, through which each nuclear cell is connected to all the rest. Social integration of the highest order is thus achieved via mass communication” (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 15).

However, as Hepp and Couldry (2010) indicate, soon other scholars found that Dayan and Katz’s theory of integrative media events is hard to prove when applied to the very instances that they use as examples, such as the Olympics or Kennedy’s funeral. This is because every event has varied meanings and values for organizers, broadcasters and audiences themselves; they therefore do not produce total social integration. Dayan and Katz’s original work needs to be seen as an attempt to define a particular type of exceptional mass communication in the historical context of national broadcasting, which made possible an extraordinarily shared experience. Their frame does not wholly apply in today’s globalized society, where multi-media, global multi-channel television and the Internet leave behind the era of single hegemonic broadcasts and where live broadcasts have become part of the media routine.

This more recent media environment and its consequences became the focus of Douglas Kellner’s (2003) perspective on non-spontaneous mediated events. He explains that a proliferation of the main means of communication – in which media abundance, ubiquity, reach and celerity combine with the multiplication of media channels – has resulted in the ubiquitous “media spectacle.” Like Boorstin (1964), Kellner looks at how

everyday occurrences become a form of social interaction and construction of reality, as opposed to the exceptional ceremonies of Dayan and Katz. According to Kellner, society today is organized around the consumption of images, and therefore every aspect of contemporary life is driven by the logic of spectacle. Anything – politics, entertainment, food, architecture, fashion – is presented to the sight, which has become the organizing principle of the economy, polity and society. Under these circumstances, daily public life requires a performative dimension that is mostly delivered through the media, becoming what Kellner calls *media spectacles* or *spectacular media events*. For Kellner, those media spectacles are becoming “the form in which news, information and the events of the era are processed by media corporations, the state and political groups and institutions and individuals who have the power to construct political and social realities” (Kellner, 2010: 80). Kellner sees media spectacle as a major social, political and cultural force today and believes that “the future will depend upon what spectacles will emerge and how democracy can be reconstructed and reinvented in the face of the continuing reign of the spectacle” (Kellner, 2003: 177).

More recently, Nick Couldry, Andreas Hepp and Friedrich Krotz (2010) have tried to update the understanding of contemporary media events within an analysis of globalized media culture. In an edited collection, they rethink the concept of media events from a multilateral perspective. Much like Kellner (2003), they look upon them as an important aspect of global power processes. In their introductory chapter, Hepp and Couldry (2010) review the work of Dayan and Katz (1992) in three important areas.

First, they find the ritualistic perspective inadequate because it takes the affirmation of values as a given. The integrative interpretation is problematic, they argue,

because it assumes societies are stable and marked by a shared set of values, which is not true of contemporary fragmented post-modern societies. Instead, media events should be studied a form of media communication that constructs the “myth of the mediated centre” (Hepp and Couldry, 2010: 5). The *centre* refers to the establishment that stands for consensual values; the *mediated centre* refers to the establishment that has the authority to command our attention through the media. From this perspective, media events reflect the fact that the media are related to power and the centre of society, and are an expression of what is important within that society. Under these circumstances, the authors suggest, the processes of construction should become the foreground of analysis and not the ritual itself.

Second, Hepp and Couldry reject the core definition of media events as genres because they can take many forms and presentations and can be studied from various perspectives, for instance, as mediatized performances (cf. Silverstone, 1999), or by distinguishing between “real events” and their mediated representation (cf. Fiske, 1994), or as spectacle (Kellner, 2003).

The third aspect of Hepp and Couldry’s (2010) critique zeroes in on what the authors consider to be an overly narrow typification of media events as integrating rituals only. That leaves unaccounted for events that are oppositional, but are nevertheless monopolistic, broadcast live, interrupt everyday routine and enthral large audiences. Examples could be disasters or terrorist attacks. Hepp and Couldry (2010) explain that media events now incorporate conflict (mediatized terror attacks, disasters or wars) and also include popular events related to the prevailing celebrity culture (the Oscars or the O.J. Simpson trial). They point out that while not being “ritual” in the sense Dayan and

Katz use, these examples nevertheless contribute strongly to constructing the “mediated centre” in contemporary cultures and societies, and should thus be considered media events as well.

Instead of seeing media events as a form of integrative *national* communication, Hepp and Couldry (2010) look for a definition that applies to *globalized* media cultures. First they look at the very concept of media cultures – all cultures whose primary resources of meaning are accessible through technology based media, resulting in the media being constructed as the main mediators of “the centre.” Hepp and Couldry reject the confinement of culture to national territorial boundaries and look at it as a translocal phenomenon by defining culture as the “sum of the classificatory systems and discursive formations on which the production of meaning draws” (Hepp and Couldry, 2010: 10 quoting Hall, 1997). They explain that in this sense, cultures are a kind of “thickening” of translocal processes for the articulation of meaning. Thickening refers to the intensive processes of communication across very different media products and across geographic spaces and time. That is the point where and when collective or shared receptions, interpretations and meanings come together in significant ways (Hepp and Couldry, 2010 and Hoover, 2010).

Hepp and Couldry thus define media events as “certain situated, thickened, centering performances of mediated communication that are focused on a specific thematic core, cross different media products and reach a wide and diverse multiplicity of audiences and participants” (Hepp and Couldry, 2010: 12).

The authors explain that a major aspect of this definition is the expression *centering performances*. It means that media events, which are staged by the centre, are

in general, power-related in as much as they “are intended – by the media or by other social actors who have interests in constructing reality in specific, perhaps conflicting ways – to establish certain discursive positions and to maintain those actors’ power” (Hepp and Couldry, 2010: 12). They also point out that the kinds of performances through which centering is articulated vary in relation to the thematic core of a media event. For this reason, “ritual media events,” as defined by Dayan and Katz, coexist with “conflictual media events” and also with “popular media events.”

Media Events in a Global Age (2010) contains a series of essays that analyze media events within globalized cultures, starting with updates by both Dayan and Katz. In his essay, Dayan (2010) revisits his concept of media event by putting aside the anthropological frame and concentrating on the definitional characteristics. He reformulates, but does not radically change, his original proposition by identifying four major features of media events:

Emphasis: The event is omnipresent in the media and is broadcast live. The broadcast is lengthy and disrupts organized schedules, but is not itself disrupted.

Performativity: Media events are not balanced, neutral or objective accounts, but gestures that actively create realities.

Loyalty: The media accept the definition of the event as proposed by the event organizers.

Shared viewing experience: Formats that rely on narrative continuity, visual proximity and shared temporality serve the construction or reconstruction of “we.”

For his part, Elihu Katz also acknowledges a complete transformation of media events. His essay, co-authored with Tamar Liebes, recognizes the decline of the

ceremonial and integrative event in favour of a disruptive kind. Katz and Liebes (2010) say that the new media ecology and the public cynicism towards establishments and media have undermined the awe of ceremonial events. They add that new mobile technology and the paranoia of our times have propelled major news of disaster to mass coverage. They recognize that news events whose coverage is not pre-planned, which Dayan and Katz (1992) considered a separate genre, should actually be included in the same category to make possible the juxtaposition of two types of events: integrative and disruptive. “If ceremonial media events may be characterized as ‘co-productions’ of broadcasters and establishments, then disruptive events may be characterized as ‘co-productions’ of broadcasters and anti-establishment agencies, i.e. the perpetrators of disruption” (Katz and Liebes 2010: 32).

Media Events in a Global Age (2010) moves forward to analyze the phenomenon from various perspectives – historical, theoretical (social and cultural media theory) and political – and also within varying cultural contexts and identities. From differing perspectives the various contributors delve into global events such as Catholic Youth Day, a World Trade Organization meeting, the Miss World pageant, the Eurovision Song contest, the reunification of Germany, and catastrophic events like 9/11 and the 2004 tsunami in South East Asia. Closing the collection of essays, Stewart M. Hoover (2010) considers that very diversity to be an illustration of the challenges of developing a general theory of media events. At the same time, he finds important commonalities among all the approaches, not least the extent to which the media are active in their construction, representation and consumption, and also the shared experience they provide:

Each [essay in the volume] centres attention around shared ideas and values and each involves the representation of important social, cultural and

political values and symbols. In each, a kind of reflexive engagement may be seen to function as producers, presenters, artists, audiences and communities share a common understanding of the moment and its concomitant practices, whether or not they choose to invest their loyalties. In each there is at the same time at least a contestation of values, symbols and practices. Thus in none of them do we see the kind of cultural definition or determination that instrumentalist theories of the media have proposed. Each represents the kind of “thickening” of which Hepp and Couldry speak (Hoover, 2010: 289).

Without examining many of the foregoing concepts – cultural trends, global mass communication, integration, disruption, mediated centres and cultural thickenings – Dan Schill (2009) opts for a utilitarian approach: he analyzes non-spontaneous mediated events as strategic tools for political communication. He sees media events as planned occurrences by politicians (or any actors, for that matter) to gain coverage in order to set or influence an agenda, reach large audiences, and construct political images in a world of mass media democracy. He defines media events in political communication as “events that have been staged to produce press coverage and influence public opinion” (Schill 2009:15).

Schill’s political media events differ from Boorstin’s (1964) pseudo-events in at least two ways. First, Boorstin said pseudo-events create a synthetic novelty intended to produce any kind of news content, while Schill’s events are staged specifically to influence public opinion. Second, pseudo-events can be initiated by a reporter as well as by other actors, and may or may not be staged performances. By contrast, Schill focuses only on intentional constructions by political actors attempting to reach and influence their target audience through the media.

At the same time, Schill’s media events differ from those originally defined by Dayan and Katz (1992). He focuses on performances, both everyday and exceptional,

staged to favourably influence public opinion at the local, national or international level. Schill's events can appear either as live broadcasts or in news or opinion pieces. In other words, Schill's media events can be either small staged instances covered by a local station or newspaper, or a transformative social experience of wide scope.

Schill explains how media events are constructed and how they function. He argues media events have become a "primary communication tactic for presidents and presidential candidates and other newsmakers who do not only campaign by media events, they often govern by media events" (Schill, 2009: 18). He indicates that changes in the media (such as the integration of television into political affairs and the need for content and ratings for 24-hour news services), together with changes in the political environment (such as the loss of relevance of political parties), have undermined the practice of retail person-to-person politics and increased the importance of staged events to reach large audiences.

Schill summarizes the most common characteristics of a media event within an electoral campaign as follows:

Media events are constructed to obtain news coverage, communicate a favourable message clearly and quickly and influence viewers. They are simple in message and format and use colourful characters and visuals to produce iconic images. The intended audience of a media event is the audience watching the event at home on television or reading it online and in newspapers; the direct audience attending the event in person is seen more as a prop... (Schill, 2009:15)

He identifies tactics that strategists follow to improve the likelihood of positive coverage: ensuring that the events are convenient, newsworthy and follow the norms and conventions of what news is; fulfilling the media need for dramatic pictures; including the press in the planning of the event; managing logistics for the press; and using media-

friendly timing. Schill lists the following as the stock formats of standardized media events: the speech, the press conference, the town hall, the issue event (to attract attention to or advocate for a specific issue or cause), the niche event (scripted to target specific audiences on issues of their own interest), the “spontaneous event,” the cabinet and congressional contact event, the arts culture and social event, the state visit, the foreign trip and the special event (referring mainly to political conventions). The power of media events lies in their ability to combine all communication channels – the spoken, visual, aural and visceral – in a simple, emotional and dramatic form that is easily digestible for public consumption, says Schill (2009: 67). He lists several reasons for the rhetorical impact of media events. Media events drive news coverage and contribute to agenda building since they are excellent tools to secure attention by providing eye-catching visuals and interesting story lines. Leaders use media events to construct their political images by relying on visual information that communicates a desired image. Media events document and authenticate an individual’s activities by providing a visual record of them. Media events dramatize policy; they allow participants to give life to a policy and demonstrate its importance through enactment. Media events compel journalists to accept the desired frame because every aspect of the event is embedded with it and most of the time journalists have to file their stories immediately. For example, the coverage of Cameron’s stop in Cairo focused on the leadership role of the British Prime Minister (Landale, 2011, Jones, 2011 and Bagehot, 2011). Media events tap into values and use iconic symbols to provoke an emotional response. Cameron was in Tahrir Square, where demonstrations led to the toppling of Hosni Mubarak; it is also associated with the 1919

revolution that led to Britain's recognition of Egyptian independence. This linked Cameron and Britain to the emotions of liberations that the plaza represents.

As the previous review indicates, scholars have studied media events as communication, cultural or social phenomena. They see them as integrative experiences or as disruptive occurrences, as an effective campaign and political tactic, and as a spectacle in a society obsessed with visuals and representations. All of these perspectives, however, share the view that media events are power-related, since the discursive form is intended to gain, maintain or challenge the centre's influence.

For my analysis I adopt Schill's (2009) definition of media event. It allows a focus on the construction of such events, especially the relationship between organizers and journalists. It also focuses on media events in the political arena, which can vary from a small photo op to a speech broadcast live or a major international summit; but whatever the form, it is intended to influence public opinion. Since my research deals with international media events, however, the elements included in Hepp and Couldry's (2010) definition may very well apply in many of the examples included in the following chapters, mostly the centering performances, the coexistence of multiple meanings, and the large international audiences involved.

International Media Events

On the international stage, the media events defined by Schill (2009) gain more resemblance to the thickened centered performances of Hepp and Couldry (2010) and may sometimes contain a hint of the ritualistic character described by Dayan and Katz (1992). That is because they are used by the political establishment to consolidate power,

they relate to large transnational audiences, and they may or may not represent extraordinary occurrences of affirmation or defiance.

All of these occur in an environment in which diplomacy and the media are more and more interrelated. Just as Schill (2009) says many politicians govern by media events, we could say that international interactions give the impression of being conducted by media events. That is obviously not the case. But since media events are the point through which the general public accesses the practice of international relations, they become the way people understand and interpret diplomacy. According to Ingrid Volkmer and Florian Deffner (2010), the 24/7 international news cycle has turned media events into a communicative ritual that shapes moments of world experience. “They have become a sometimes short, a sometimes extended moment of, in many cases transnational public discourse and – depending on the nature of the event – even transnational deliberation” (Volkmer and Deffner, 2010: 218). This is because globalization, democratization and media technology have put a new emphasis on transparency and public participation in foreign policy. As a result, the coverage of media events via satellite television or the Internet breathed new life into the practice of media diplomacy (Volkmer, 1999).

Conceptualizations of media diplomacy in academic literature are not uniform. Jyotika Ramaprasad (1973) seems to focus on the media’s own role in international relations when he defines media diplomacy as “the role the press plays in the diplomatic practice between nations” (Ramaprasad, 1983: 70). By contrast, Bosah Ebo casts the media in a more passive role, with governments as the primary actors, when he writes that media diplomacy is “the use of the media to articulate and promote foreign policy”

(1996: 44). Eytan Gilboa (2000) expands on this by defining it as “the use of the media by officials to communicate with state and non-state actors to build confidence, advance negotiations or a cause, or state positions, as well as to mobilize public support” (Gilboa, 2000: 294).² He describes three variant of media diplomacy:

Basic communication variant. Officials use the media as a form of basic communication to send messages to leaders of rival states and to non-state actors. This may be done in the absence of, or instead of adequate direct channels, or when one side is unsure how the other would react to a particular initiative. The use of the media in this case can be with or without attribution. To achieve their objectives, officials rely on press conferences, speeches, interviews, leaks, etc. One prominent example occurred during the 1990-1991 Gulf War, when U.S. Secretary of State James Baker delivered an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein during a speech broadcast live on CNN, rather than through the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad (Neuman, 1996: 2).

Traveling diplomacy variant. Correspondents accompanying heads of state and foreign ministers on international trips are used during diplomatic missions, particularly mediation. Gilboa (2000) gives the example of Kissinger’s 1973-1974 “shuttle diplomacy” in the Middle East, when he “used some of the correspondents who accompanied him on his plane by giving them background reports, information and leaks mostly directing their coverage to extricate concessions from Israeli and Arab leaders and

² Gilboa makes a distinction between public diplomacy, media-broker diplomacy and media diplomacy to show the extensive and diverse use of the media as a major instrument of foreign policy. Public diplomacy refers to the direct communication with foreign peoples intended to influence a foreign government by influencing its citizens. It relies on activities in the field of information, education and culture. Media-broker diplomacy refers to international mediation conducted and initiated by media professionals (Gilboa, 2000).

to break deadlocks” (Gilboa, 2000: 295). This is possible because of the close interaction between journalists and officials due to travelling arrangements.

Ceremonial media events variant. As a clear reference to Dayan and Katz’s original concept of media events, Gilboa (2000) indicates that these media events are rituals of conquest or coronation that are usually broadcast live, pre-planned and presented with reverence and ceremony. Officials can use this type of event at the onset of negotiations to build confidence. One example is Sadat’s historic visit to Jerusalem in 1977. The rapprochement between Egypt and Israel was so unexpected that Sadat’s arrival and official welcome ceremony were broadcast live. Ceremonial media events can also be used after the conclusion of preliminary negotiations to cultivate public support before moving to the next phase, such as the signing ceremonies of the Camp David Accords in 1978, or after an agreement has already been achieved, as in the Israeli-Jordan peace treaty of October 1994.

Since media diplomacy is intended to mobilize public opinion, it could easily be confused with propaganda. However, Gilboa (2000) says that media diplomacy is used to search for a breakthrough, while propaganda is used to maintain differences between nations.

With the widespread use of satellite television, live coverage of international media events played an important role in interactions among stakeholders during the Persian Gulf War. For instance, in 1991 Saddam Hussein issued a conciliatory statement that could be interpreted as a readiness to accept Allied conditions to end the war. U.S. President George H. Bush did not believe that Hussein’s position had changed. He needed to quickly notify a couple of dozen allies that the White House had decided not to

accept Hussein's statement. Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater suggested a press conference, which was carried live around the world on CNN (Gilboa, 2002).

Canada has also relied on media events to advance its own causes. One example of a ceremonial media event is the signing of the Ottawa Protocol. On December 3, 1997, representatives of 121 countries gathered in Ottawa to sign an international convention on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of antipersonnel mines. Journalists from across the world attended the event, putting Canada in the spotlight not only as a major factor behind the success of the agreement, but also as an influential international force. Indeed, in anticipation of the signing ceremony, *The Washington Post* described Canada as a medium-sized power gaining more and more influence on the world scene thanks to its diplomacy: "if there is a new world order emerging from the fall of communism and the rise of international trading blocs, then look for a Maple Leaf stamp of approval on it" (Schneider, 1997). For its part, *The New York Times* published a column by Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, calling the Ottawa Protocol "truly a victory for humanity." He depicts how the efforts of a coalition of NGOs and a small group of nations, headed by Canada, led to the success of the land mines campaign. In this article, like others around the world, Canada's name is associated with "a historic moment in the development of international humanitarian law" (Sommaruga, 1997).

In an example of a different sort, Canada relied on a media event strategy during the 1995 Fish War with Europe. After years of trying to impose restrictions on European trawlers that were over-fishing in Newfoundland's Grand Banks, Canada unilaterally extended jurisdiction beyond the 200-mile limit and seized the Spanish trawler *Estai*. A

face-off through the media between European Union minister Emma Bonino and Canadian fisheries minister Brian Tobin put the issue on the public agenda just before a major United Nations meeting that was called to renegotiate fishing quotas within the North Atlantic Fisheries Organisation, NAFO. A *Maclean's* (1995) article indicates that Canada knew the EU was putting on a unified front despite disagreements among its members. At the UN meeting, Tobin confronted Bonino, who accused Canada of fabricating evidence against the *Estai*. *Maclean's* magazine describes what followed:

Tobin and Newfoundland Premier Clyde Wells stood on a barge directly across from UN headquarters, while a 16 storey-high mass of green, grey and orange mesh –the net of the *Estai*- was suspended from a crane. Surrounded by a forest of microphones and cameras, a fisheries department officer dramatically measured the holes in the net and the liner that the Spanish fishermen allegedly used inside it. Both were far smaller than NAFO's minimum mesh sizes for fishing in the North Atlantic. Displaying undersize turbot that he said came from the hold of the *Estai*, Tobin ratcheted up his rhetoric to new heights: "we're down now finally to one last, lonely, unattractive little turbot clinging on by its fingertips to the Grand Banks" (DeMont and Caragata, 1995).

The event ended up being reported by the British media, which had followed the story. Sympathetic fishermen from Cornwall pressured London to support Canada's attempt to save the stocks. This strategic use of the media in search of public support was backed by a widespread diplomatic effort in which Canadian officials kept the diplomatic channels open as negotiations continued. A settlement resulted, allowing for closer monitoring and enforcement of turbot catches in the contentious area outside Canada's jurisdiction. It was considered a clear victory for the Canadians (DeMont and Caragata, 1995).

Not all international activities by political leaders and diplomats are purely media diplomacy, of course. For instance, summits and foreign visits by heads of state involve

face-to-face interactions, not interactions through the media. Even so, however, these encounters contain such a large communication and public opinion component that eliminating media participation would change their very nature. Although summits and foreign visits have other objectives in sight – diplomatic, economic or political – they also have the important characteristic of being staged to influence public opinion.

A summit is defined as “the meeting of political leaders for official purposes, an activity that constitutes diplomacy at the highest level” (Dunn, 1996:20). Summitry became an established part of political interactions between states in the twentieth century. The term “summit” was coined by Winston Churchill in the depths of the Cold War, when he suggested that nothing would be lost by “a parley at the summit.” The meeting of the American, Soviet, British and French leaders at Geneva in July 1955 was billed as a summit by the media and thereafter that term became a common way of referring to encounters of world leaders (Reynolds, 2007). Several factors have contributed to the consistent rise of summitry. Developments in technology and transport have made meetings easier and safer to arrange, and the process of democratization around the globe has turned face-to-face interactions into a desirable practice in foreign policy.

The symbolic importance of summitry for public opinion is recognized in *Diplomacy at the Highest Level*, edited by David H. Dunn (1996). Diverse academics consider the multifaceted nature of such meetings and their role beyond the actual negotiation of agreements, that is, the staging that is intended to shape public opinion. For example, Bill Park (1996) explains that NATO summits have been seen as useful and necessary devices to counter the impression of endless dispute and potential

fragmentation within a military-political alliance that has an inherent strategic need to demonstrate cohesion. Under these circumstances, “agreed communiqués purporting to demonstrate unity and consensus issued in the name of smiling and handshaking government leaders have a totemic quality” (Park, 1996:96). J.D. Armstrong (1996:51) sees the G-7 meetings as an aspect of and a contributory factor in “‘international discourse’: the ongoing exchange of ideas, symbols and words which interpret and give meaning to ‘reality.’” This interpretation is echoed by Michael Andersen and Theo Farrell (1996: 69), who examined the tense crises of the Cold War and argued “summits provided an alternative, safer way for superpowers to assert their position in the world.” On the other hand, Tran Van Dinh (1987) deplores the politicization of summit diplomacy. While the background papers, preparations and analysis of conclusions of a summit are made by professional diplomats and bureaucrats, Van Dinh points out that it is important for a summit to demonstrate international power and a cosmetic projection of cooperation and agreement. He therefore concludes that a summit serves mostly “the political and economic interest of individual nations and especially its leaders” (Van Dinh, 1987: 97).

The symbolic value of public international interactions is also evident in state visits and foreign trips. They allow the host and visitor to symbolically play the role of leaders and demonstrate diplomatic alliances. Normally, these events include the staging for the media of some direct contact between leaders. This can incorporate joint press conferences, ceremonial events such as welcoming ceremonies, state dinners, and trips to national landmarks or cultural events (Schill, 2009), mostly with attractive visuals and a positive environment. Because of this, foreign trips are considered very strategic in terms

of *domestic* political communications and are carefully planned and executed to gain as much value as possible for the participating leaders, who seek to gain popular approval not only abroad but at home as well. Foreign trips may receive sizable media coverage depending on the countries and the circumstances involved.

The following example of media coverage illustrates the strategic value at home and abroad of foreign trips. In 2001, as the first state visit of his administration, U.S. President George W. Bush invited his Mexican counterpart, Vicente Fox, to Washington, D.C. The event received sizeable coverage in the U.S., Mexico and Canada, demonstrating the ability to drive news and influence the agenda, as Schill (2009) indicated. A *New York Times* editorial framed it within the context of an improved relationship between the two countries (New York Times, 2001). For its part, *Newsweek* reflected on the strategic interests of the new Bush administration on the Mexican leader to gain the support of the ever-increasing Hispanic population:

The hottest ticket in town since the impeachment trial is an invitation to the White House state dinner for Mexican President Vicente Fox. The frenzy isn't merely about the usual scramble for social cachet, but something far more profound: the Latinization of American politics (Fineman, 2001).

Conversely, Jesus Silva-Herzog, a Mexican commentator and former Secretary of Foreign Affairs, described the event as the “most successful journey of Vicente Fox’s presidency.” He emphasized the increased international credibility of the Mexican government and noted that the “words, the tone, the message of the Mexican government penetrated the power structure in the United States where the position of Mexico is carefully listened to” (Silva-Herzog, 2001). At the same time, the state visit resonated in Canada, where the event was framed within the context of Canada-U.S. relations and was interpreted as “official confirmation that George W. Bush hasn’t placed [Canada] at the

top of his priority list.” *The Globe and Mail* explained that, under Bush, “Mexico has been elevated to the status of America’s most important relationship, apparently outstripping the larger and more complex economic ties with Canada” and the newspaper considered this disdain as “arrogance that can only prove harmful” (*Globe and Mail*, 2001).

The coverage demonstrates the multiple meanings and interpretations (mostly differentiated by nationality) that emerged from one event while maintaining its thematic core. Also, this media event enacted foreign policy by visually representing the renewed relations between Mexico and the U.S. and the waning influence of Canada. At the same time it was an opportunity taken by the leaders to construct their own political national and international images – Bush as a friend of the Hispanic population and by extension of Latin Americans, and Fox, surrounded by the symbolism of the White House, as a relevant leader on the international stage.

According to Schill (2009), media events influence the media agenda, media frames, and ultimately each individual’s mass mediated reality. This ability to construct realities is what makes them particularly relevant in international politics because most people do not encounter those international transactions in a direct, participatory manner, but as a media spectator (Louw, 2005). Media events, as the public side of diplomacy with its utterly planned and staged performances, have a major strategic value to attain both policy goals and stature on the international scene. This particular combination of instrument and platform, playing a role in the world’s dynamic of power and carrying news value, is what we will analyze in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

THE VALUE OF STAGED EVENTS

“Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his British counterpart, David Cameron, have issued dark warnings that the world is on the verge of another recession,” reported a September 23, 2011 *Globe and Mail* story on global market turmoil and increasing recession fears (Carmichael, 2011: A1). Author Kevin Carmichael, based in Washington, was not reporting on Cameron’s visit to Ottawa, where the warnings were issued, but on world finances. This demonstrates how an international media event can go beyond formulaic ceremonial welcomings and wreath-layings, which Cameron did in the Canadian capital, to venture into wider international power struggles. The threat that Greece’s debt problems might spread to other European countries required decisive multinational action, but there was little consensus among G20 capitals at the time about what to do. The highly staged visit to Canada represented a concerted offensive by Ottawa and London to promote their fundamental prescription of austerity, which clashed with those, like Washington, who favoured spending to stimulate growth. Cameron described his message as “part of the pressure that needs to be brought to bear to make sure that the G20 does what is necessary” (Clark, 2011).

“A media event is an ideal opportunity to position a leader and to position a country in the public’s mind,” says communication consultant Barry McLoughlin. “On the international stage, the event is important often, but it is really the perception that falls from it that is more important.” Those perceptions were at the centre of Cameron’s visit. With messages of mutual admiration in the way they handled the economy of their respective countries and images of support and statesmanship, Harper and Cameron made

a show of strength for their position in the global debate. They also pointed out the support of such other nations as Australia, Indonesia, Mexico and South Korea in the battle for decisive action. This is because, according to Jorge Heine, Director of the Centre for International Governance and Innovation, “in today’s world, unless you take your case effectively and convincingly to the many constituencies on which you depend, you will not carry whatever issue you are battling for” (Heine, 2006: 16). That is what the media event in Ottawa was all about.

In this chapter I shall consider the value of media events in international power struggles and interactions. First, I shall analyze the context that gives prominence to perceptions on the world stage, including the rise of public diplomacy, the role of image in the dynamics of power, and the media environment. Second, I will evaluate the strategic value of international media events, with their unique combination of staged performances and policy goals, to advance international relations. For that, I shall delve into their merits as foreign policy instruments and as platforms for the nations involved and also into the shortcomings that prevail when the rhetorical side takes precedence. Then, I shall evaluate their news value. Critics see them as predictable, highly managed and controlled; supporters consider them the source of relevant stories that affect people’s lives and allow us to see the world as it happens.

A Giant “Big Brother Show”

“We live in a giant Big Brother show,” says Heine, describing the new imperatives of international relations – what he calls new diplomacy. In it, “diplomats are no longer in charge of representing their countries, but of projecting them to the public at

large” (Heine, 2006: 13). His witty description refers to *The Big Brother Show*, a worldwide franchise that revolves around a group of people living together in a large house, isolated from the outside world but continuously watched by television cameras. The audience votes to determine who has to leave the house and thus lose the opportunity to win a hefty cash prize. Heine’s Big Brother seems a fitting metaphor for today’s world, in which perceptions gain more and more strategic value in international interactions that occur under public scrutiny. Democratization and globalization have changed the nature of diplomacy, opening it up to many stakeholders. Communications technology adds to the mix, resulting in changes in the nature of power; image and reputation play a greater, even if undetermined, role. All of this is framed and presented to the public via media that are powered by competition and profit.

New Diplomacy

Traditionally, diplomats dealt only with government officials and amongst themselves as fellow members of a “club,” and they focused their minds on negotiating agreements between sovereign states, giving little thought to public opinion (Heine, 2006). Diplomats conveyed their messages in private, using diplomatic pouches. They were careful to hide their secrets from the press and the public. The First World War changed all that, as secret diplomacy was seen as one of the causes of the war. In 1919, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points pushed for transparency in international negotiations, declaring that no international agreement should be signed in secrecy. Decades later, scandals exposed by the media, such as Watergate, reinforced the public perception that everything secret is bad, while transparency is a virtue. The

expansion of communication technology and broader public participation tied diplomacy more and more to international media and public opinion in what prominent Israeli diplomat Abba Eban called the “most potent and far reaching transformation on the diplomatic system” (Eban, 1983: 345). He deplored the “intrusion” of the media into every level of the negotiation process because it changed the nature of diplomacy. He argued that the modern negotiator now played a double role: he transacted business simultaneously with his negotiating partner and with public opinion at home.

By the late twentieth century, the contours of a global public sphere seemed to be emerging as national boundaries no longer defined communication systems so distinctly and the organization and flow of mass communications were being internationalized. Many had increasing access to non-national sources of entertainment, information, play, sociability and politics, and politicians and pressure groups increasingly strived to reach and influence international audiences (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999). Satellite communication played a major role in this transformation. It allowed international crises, like the hostage crisis in Iran in 1979, to be played every night on network television. So did the major revolutions of the 1980s in the Philippines, the USSR and the European Eastern Bloc. When students took over Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989, President George H. Bush, worried about public opinion at home, escalated his rhetoric against the Chinese crackdown, cut off contacts with Beijing, and designed a weak economic embargo. Johanna Neuman (1996) considers these to be symbolic actions, but she explains that the high profile of the events in China meant Washington had to “be seen doing something about it” (Neuman, 1996: 196).

By the early 1990s, the proliferation of 24-hour news services turned information and news into mass entertainment as “rolling news channels made foreign policy making almost like a televised live event, a spectacle for viewers around the world to tune into... 24 hours a day” (Cushion and Lewis, 2010: 20). Regular live coverage of events and crises around the world sent shock waves to the centres of power already in turmoil after the end of the Cold War, creating a new and apparently chaotic international environment. “Diplomats and policy makers worried that CNN and other international networks had overtaken the agenda of international affairs usurping the government’s traditional role of identifying problems, outlining options and pursuing solutions” (Neuman, 1996: 15). This is what has been called the *CNN effect* and it suggests that when international networks flood the airwaves with news of a foreign crisis, policy makers have no choice but to redirect their attention to it, because it evokes an emotional outcry from the public to do something about it, and to do it now (Neuman, 1996).³ Politicians and diplomats now acknowledge that television news is not in charge of determining policy, but it has seriously affected the environment in which foreign policy decisions are made (Gilboa, 2003).

Under these circumstances, diplomats have come to accept the presence of the media and to embrace and use them strategically. Diplomats have strengthened the efficiency and effectiveness of their foreign policy by means of a systematic multifold communication. They have expanded their functions by adopting approaches that

³ CNN effect, also called, CNN curve or CNN factor, has been the object of many studies from diverse disciplines to try to prove or disprove its validity. After surveying the definitions and approaches taken by scholars and after examining theories, theoretical frameworks and methodologies employed by researchers in a decade, Harvard scholar Eytan Gilboa (2005) concluded that there is insufficient evidence validating the CNN effect, that many works have exaggerated this effect and that the focus on this theory has deflected attention from other ways global television affects mass communication, journalism and international relations. His article *The CNN effect: the search for a communication theory of international relations* (2005) compiles many of the studies (for and against) published by then.

collectively are called public diplomacy. Public diplomacy strives for intense exchange of information, neutralization of clichés and prejudice, popularization of one's foreign policy and social system, and strengthening of one's country's positive image. "Now, diplomats work more and more in cooperation with the media, not against or in competition with them" (Plavsak, 2002: 114).

Former Canadian diplomat Richard Kohler, who is a major proponent of public diplomacy, describes this cooperation as the means of advancing the interests of the country he represents:

We have to have an impact and so we have to do what we need to get our message across to people who read the newspapers or watch television in other countries and learn about our country through us. So, we have to engage with the local television and newspapers and magazines and state to them why Canada is a good place to have a relationship with. Once they start to know about us, we begin to figure in their strategic thinking.

This is not a futile exercise in public relations. What Kohler refers to goes beyond the power of persuasion. "More world decisions will be made in a multilateral context. If you hide in Ottawa, you won't have any friends to support you. To make friends you have to have the media reflecting your message," he says.

Image Power

The relevance of "making friends," as Kohler calls it, has entered the international lexicon as *soft power*. The term was coined by U.S. diplomat Joseph Nye (2004), who advocates for its greater use to complement, or if possible replace, traditional sources of power, that is, military and economic. It is defined as "the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion that is getting

others to want the outcomes that you want” (Nye, 2004: 5). Nye distinguishes soft power from influence, which can also rest on threats or payments, and from persuasion, which is only one important element of soft power. According to Nye, “soft power is the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence” (Nye, 2004: 6). His analysis of post Cold War affairs shows that the information revolution has increased the political and social cost of using military force in a world where post-industrial democracies are focused on welfare and dislike high casualties. For him, a global economy requires that nations consider how the use of force might jeopardize their own economic objectives, which has resulted in islands of peace where the use of force is no longer an option; this now characterizes most modern liberal democracies. According to Nye, in international politics, the resources that a nation exploits in pursuit of soft power are the values it expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. These elements are important components of a nation’s image.

“Image matters,” says Evan Potter, a University of Ottawa communication scholar who researches public diplomacy and international image management. “Image is becoming increasingly important in international relations just because of the rise of democratization and the power of popular opinion.” In democracies where public opinion and legislatures matter, internal power is dispersed rather than concentrated. As a result, political leaders have less leeway to adopt foreign policies without popular support. “Your image is your share of the global conversation on any given issue, whether a crisis or advocacy, and as such it is a form of power,” adds Potter, explaining that more and

more nations see the need to combine military or economic might with image management.

Colin Robertson, a former diplomat and current Vice-President of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, agrees that image plays an important role in diplomacy. He recognizes that every country is constantly working on its image and is conscious of it because of how it plays both abroad and domestically: “For instance, Canadians derive a tremendous amount of their own self-identity by how we are seen to perform abroad.” On the other hand, other regimes, such as Venezuela or Bolivia, prefer isolation from the international community, mostly for internal political benefit. “Governments are not passive,” adds Potter, “and they use any event to create their own messages for their own purposes.” This is why enormous communication efforts go into many public events, from sporting events to international conferences to humanitarian interventions.

But Robertson also cautions that “image is not the game in international politics and it has limitations,” by giving an example of the elusiveness of image power:

Canada has a good image, and usually ranks up there as one of the most liked countries. And yet when we ran for a UN Security Council seat recently, we thought that our image with some effort would be sufficient for us. We give treasure, we participate, we have troops fighting under UN flag in Afghanistan and yet at the end of the day we lost rather badly to Portugal. Not just to Germany, but to Portugal. The image that we had really didn't translate into diplomatic currency when it counted.

He explains that since unexpected events, like the SARS crisis of 2003, can easily intrude on any effort of image management and since image depends on many variables, such as commercial enterprises abroad, foreign aid contributions and elements like advertising, tourism, sports and popular culture, image should be seen as a component

that frames a wider strategy to achieve specific goals. Signalling that there are many contradictions when assessing the effects of image management, Robertson wonders rhetorically: “What does it mean at the end of the day? I am not sure.”

That is a question many diplomats and academics have been trying to answer for some time. For example, before 1950 researchers began looking at psychological aspects of international behaviour. They focused on national stereotypes, attitudes towards war and public opinion on foreign policy issues. Soon, however, they attempted to link images more closely to the foreign policy process. In *International Behaviour: a Social-Psychological Analysis* (1965), for example, Herbert Kelman compiled articles assessing how images and attitudes develop out of the relationship between nations and what role they play in the foreign policy process. William A. Scott (1965) asserted that the image of a nation consists of three components that cannot be distinguished empirically in most people: cognitive attributes, by which the person understands a country in an intellectual way; an affective component, liking or disliking the country; and an action component, the responses the person deems appropriate according to the country’s perceived attributes. Despite all its components, Scott adds, any image of a nation is necessarily oversimplified. “The nation itself includes various types of people and displays diverse behaviours in the international arena; yet the image that any person holds of it is marked by a relative coherence and consistency” (Scott, 1965: 80). This is relevant, says Kelman (1965), because images frame the “moods” of the general public and the “broad orientations” toward national and international affairs that are an essential part of the climate within which foreign policy decision-making takes place.

Decision-makers are not only influenced by the widespread sentiments within the population towards certain other nations. They also hold such sentiments themselves. For example, in 1962 O.R. Holsti published a case study on U.S. Secretary of Defence John Foster Dulles. He concluded that Dulles' personal beliefs and images had an important effect on the form that U.S. policy took towards the Soviet Union in the 1950s, that is, on the intensity with which the Cold War was pursued and on the lack of openness in Washington to possibilities of settling Cold War issues (Holsti, 1962).

For their part, communication scholars and public relations experts enter the field by trying to understand how those valuable images are created and manipulated. John McNelly and Fausto Izcaray (1984) delved into the effects of the media, particularly of international news, on people's images of nations. They examined knowledge and attitudes about specific countries (liking a country and perceiving it as a success) relating them to variables such as media exposure (news and entertainment), education, and such other background factors as demographics and standard of living. Comparing the effect of each variable on the attitudes defined, they concluded that "news exposure is significantly related to liking for the countries and to perceptions of them as successful" (McNelly and Izcaray, 1984: 552). Such results signal the benefits of an adequate national media relations and news management strategy, which Jarold Manheim and Robert Albritton (1984) examined. They looked at intentional external efforts to manipulate media coverage by studying attempts by public relations consultants to influence images of foreign nations in the United States press. Their research identified "consistent patterns of improvement along two primary dimensions of national image, visibility and valence, which were associated with the public relations contracts"

(Manheim and Albritton, 1984: 641). This means that news management can result in improvements in the amount of media coverage that a country receives and affect the degree to which available media content reflects favourably or unfavourably on the country in question.

Such studies help explain the many efforts to gain positive media coverage abroad. “What we see in Washington, D.C., just about any day, are those advertisement supplements inside major newspapers from countries that are trying to create a better image for purposes of attracting foreign investment and foreign capital,” observes Michael McCurry, a former White House spokesman and now a public relations consultant with Public Strategies Washington, Inc. “Many countries undertake significant work to present a better public image to various constituencies and stakeholders to help promote their brand.” Nation branding is a growing trend that focuses on promotion and the importance of a positive national reputation for economic, political and social developments in a globally connected world. It has become “the new arms race of marketing” (Anholt, 2009: 170). In *The Rise of the Brand State*, Peter van Ham (2001) describes how marketing and international politics merge. Nations, like products and services, are given an emotional dimension with which people can identify. “The unbranded state,” says van Ham, “has a difficult time attracting economic and political attention. Image and reputation are thus becoming essential parts of the state’s strategic equity” (van Ham, 2001: 3). Van Ham deems that the catchy slogans such as “Cool Britannia” and colourful logos that now represent nations on billboards “imply a shift in political paradigms, a move from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the post-modern world of images and influence” (van Ham, 2001: 4). This is consistent with

earlier arguments by John Herz (1981). In *Political Realism Revisited*, he says power was traditionally conceived in the narrow military sense, neglecting the subjective 'view factor.' "What others think of you may, by itself, add to or detract from your power," Herz explains. "Today half of 'power politics' consists of image-making" (Herz, 1988: 186). He acknowledges that "hardly anything remains in the open conduct of foreign policy that does not have a propaganda or public-relations aspect, aiming at presenting a favourable image to allies, opponents, neutrals, and last but not least, one's own domestic audience" (Herz, 1988: 187). The combination of all these elusive elements is what makes "images that the people of one nation have of the people and governments of other nations variables in world politics," concludes Finnish diplomat Alpo Rusi (1988). He advocates for a multi-disciplinary approach to research on image politics, international relations and the transformation of power politics because image is an unpredictable variable and will continue gaining importance in our mediatized society.

Canadian diplomat and former UN undersecretary Louise Fréchette has seen the interactions of power and reputation first hand. "When the issue has big public resonance is when image makes a difference," says Fréchette. She says there is a core group of countries whose influence depends on the fact they have real capacity to make an impact on whatever issue is at stake. They are such big players that they are involved in every negotiation. Their reputation is closely linked to their capacities. "The next level down is among the middle countries, where their power depends very much on their reputation and their image at a given time, because those elements are what make them different from others in the same level. This is why they have to work at it all the time," Fréchette

explains. Image, then, is the cumulative effect of every action taken and every message conveyed by a nation.

Thus perception is a weapon – and a battle in itself – for world leaders and their nations in search of status and influence. International media events and their magnetism for media coverage fit into this dynamic of image power. As Robertson puts it: “These photo ops are part of the effort.” Remember Prime Minister Cameron in Egypt? He also issued stern public warnings to Mohammar Gadaffi in the early days of the Libyan uprising. “The world is watching you, and the world will hold you in account,” (Sky News, 2011) he told the Libyan leader during a television interview on February 2011, competing for the limelight with French President Nicholas Sarkozy. Both leaders pushed for international intervention in Libya, in a way that looked like a popularity contest of some sort. “Britain has been nearly as far out front as France in the operation, but France has seemed to lead the way... Sarkozy has been better at getting international media attention,” said *The Washington Post* (DeYoung and Cody, 2011) in a chronicle of the battle for the international spotlight. The article describes how the French President, searching for a means to assert leadership on the international stage, seized the initiative early in the Libyan crisis, while the White House took a low-key approach. For example, after Sarkozy and Obama came to an agreement on the issue, it was the French President who briefed the international media. But Sarkozy’s leap into the limelight did not please everyone; Italy, Germany and Turkey questioned his motives, dismissing them as “Sarkozy’s domestic interests and France’s incessant jockeying with Germany for European leadership” (DeYoung and Cody, 2011). This is an interesting case, because it illustrates the power of perceptions on the international scene where real capabilities of

power prevail, but reputations are gained. Louise Fréchette was present when the UN authorized a no-fly zone in Libya in early 2011:

Many had the impression that it was Mr. Sarkozy's influence on decision makers that has triggered the decision in the Security Council to authorize the no-fly zone. In fact, what had this determining influence was the position of the Arab countries that favoured it. China and Russia, who normally reject this kind of intervention, did not veto the resolution because they have very real and significant interests in the Arab world and they did not want to oppose something that was being requested by the Arab League.

And yet, Sarkozy and Cameron were the ones who, in an apparent tie, received the hero's welcome in Tripoli and Benghazi after the fall of Gaddafi. The Associated Press reported that "schoolchildren wore T-shirts that said 'Generations will never forget the favours and support from Great Britain' and 'Sarkozy: Benghazi loves you.'" It described the "jubilant Libyans grateful for NATO air strikes that helped turn the tide of the war in their favour," adding that people who gathered at Benghazi's central square "cheered and hoisted banners that said: 'Thank you France' and 'Thanks UK'" (Gamel, 2011).

"Visibility certainly increases your influence," Fréchette sums up. "You have more influence if you are proactive, engaged and visible than if you are passive and never heard of – but it is not necessarily a substitute for other kinds of hard realities of power."

The Media and the Audience

Together with the growing trend towards new diplomacy and soft power, the media contribute to turn the world into an apparent reality show by providing access to a perpetual audience, the big brother who is constantly watching and needs to be brought on side. The media are not, of course, the only means by which national reputations are

forged and communicated. As Simon Anholt (2009) notes, others that play a part include direct experience, word-of-mouth, products and services, diplomacy, international development assistance, famous people, education, history, films, art, sporting events, etc. What is remarkable about the media, however, is that most of these other phenomena ultimately reach the world's attention through their editorial content. "If one does not understand how that vector operates then one cannot begin to think about influencing the image of a place," Anholt states (2009: 179).

Under these circumstances, countries trying to influence their image abroad have to manage their relationship with the media, which need to maintain their economic viability. Journalists may be in search of true stories that have relevance and importance for their audiences, but their employers push for stories that sell and cost less to produce. This creates pressure to cover politics and government in ways that make it cost-effective. For that, the media hype events in the hope their audiences may find reasons to continue watching or reading (Lee and Man Chan, 2005). "In a sense, you have a classic collusion," says Evan Potter, explaining how the media need attractive content and world leaders provide it:

Just because editors are saying it is so dry to talk about yet another Kyoto accord and the CFC emissions and all the technical details, so a politician does something unusual – skis down a mountain, gets on a roller skate or anything – it gets in the news. That is why Jean Chrétien jumped on a bicycle or Pierre Trudeau did a pirouette behind the Queen. These are irresistible for the media.

Robert Fife, CTV's Ottawa Bureau Chief, agrees: "If you only do the policy or substance of it, it is less interesting for the people and we are doing news for people to be interested and watch it. If there is a human side, it helps."

It helps because there is increasing competition among media outlets that are becoming more regionalized and fragmented. The result is a paradox: audiences seem to be shrinking while the supply of news increases. People still watch the news; they are just not watching the same news from the same source at the same time and with the same interest. The carefully scheduled, edited, sequenced and branded nightly news shows are not as predominant as they once were. The essence of classic television news, the routinization of the unexpected, works no longer (Blondheim and Liebes, 2009). Nowadays the multiplicity of sources, combined with the proliferation of mobile shooting crews, allows for news to come from anywhere, anytime and be framed by anyone on any show. “This is exactly the challenge. Today is not just traditional media,” says communication consultant Barry McLoughlin, “it is the *twitterverse*, where they are already tweeting about everything and anything and blogging live.” With the multiplication of 24-hour news services and on-line 24-hour news access, individuals get their fragmented doses of world events whenever and wherever they want – or they stumble into them – from whatever source they choose to read, watch or download. The constant bombardment of news fragments does not cohere, but somehow tries to shape international public opinion in an arena where it is hard to tell who, if anyone is watching or interested. Despite the fact that 24-hour news channels routinely attract less than 1% of people at any given time across different nations they are considered influential because their core audience is ‘opinion leaders,’ the political class and journalists (Young, 2010). In 2009, the BBC claimed 7.5 million viewers watched a weekly average of 3 minutes of *BBC News* programming (Young, 2010). With such a short attention

span, “the competition in politics to be seen is now centered around who could produce the best sound bite from the best event of the day” (West, 2003: 10).

The Show Must Go On

“[A media event] may look utterly staged and somewhat phoney, but this is more than simply a show,” says CP reporter Bruce Cheadle, who has covered many Canadian and world leaders. “They take this very seriously.” That is because international media events are valuable on many levels. They deal with political issues and negotiations that may have major impact on large populations and they can achieve concrete results to advance, or not, one’s particular national interests.

“You don’t go to Barbados with the objective of appearing on the Barbadian media,” says former Chrétien advisor Edward Goldenberg in his characteristic blunt style. “You go to sit down with the decision maker to advance an objective, be it a trade deal, or a security issue, to get agreements like Kyoto or the international criminal court or something like that where all the leaders have one vote, for example.” This is what makes international media events a fusion of a show (for those staging it and watching it) with an instrument of foreign policy (for those politicians, officials and diplomats involved).

A remarkable example of this peculiar combination can be discerned in Reynolds’ (2007) chronicle of the summits carried out by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980’s. Three encounters occurred under the scrutiny of international media and “helped ensure that the Cold War ended not with a bang or a whimper, but with a handshake” (Reynolds, 2007: 400). Reagan, the archetypal Cold Warrior, thought of the

Soviet Union as “an evil empire.” Early in his presidency he proposed a program to develop a system to intercept and destroy nuclear weapons, the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI). This initiative, dubbed “Star Wars” by its critics, not only escalated the arms race, but also had the potential to allow the U.S. to mount a nuclear strike without fear of retaliation. It was at the beginning of his second term in 1985 that Reagan, who sincerely wanted to eliminate nuclear weapons, invited the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, to meet. Gorbachev had assumed the presidency of the USSR that year with the intention of revitalizing his country. He believed that the Soviet system needed radical changes, such as reducing the arms burden and cooperating peacefully with the West. Gorbachev’s advisors interpreted – in part correctly – that Reagan’s invitation was propaganda to quiet Western critics of the U.S. President’s hard line. So as not to fall into the rhetorical vortex of such an event, the USSR agreed to a summit in Geneva, not Washington, and pushed for an agenda that would go beyond the get-acquainted photo ops and instead focus on reducing confrontation. The media converged in Geneva in November 1985 with high expectations, knowing that both sides were wide apart. The Soviets wanted to scrap SDI, while the Americans were adamant to keep it. And yet, appearances took front stage as Reynolds (2007) describes the leaders’ first encounter:

The handshakes were firm, the smiles warm, but what struck waiting journalists and TV viewers around the world was the way the two leaders looked. Gorbachev muffled against the cold in coat, hat and scarf; Reagan supremely elegant in his dark navy suit –almost, it seemed, the younger man... Gorbachev’s aides were furious at Reagan’s public relations coup. (Reynolds, 2007: 368).

After two days of gruelling meetings, both sides pledged to intensify dialogue at various levels. But more importantly, the personal encounter resulted in a better

understanding of each other as individuals. It planted the seeds of mutual respect and trust, conditions that had never before existed between the two superpowers. Each leader put out his own spin without delay. Reagan stressed the personal rapport and the agreement to meet again; Gorbachev played up Geneva as a real skirmish, describing how he talked frankly and forcefully to the president.

Their next encounter took place in Reykjavik in October 1986. Iceland was chosen as a venue by Gorbachev because it was “halfway between us and them, and none of the big powers will be offended” (Reynolds, 2007: 386). This time, Reykjavik was actually planned as a short one-on-one discussion whose “purpose and significance would be to demonstrate political will” (Reynolds, 2007: 387). However, Gorbachev, who aimed at securing an end to SDI, arrived with a bold and even risky approach to the arms race, while Reagan wanted to widen discussion to other issues, such as human rights. Unexpectedly, the highly symbolic encounter gained momentum with both delegations working frantically to negotiate what their leaders wanted. The result was an arms control package with an unprecedented number of key points agreed to. But the fact that SDI remained unresolved left an aftertaste of failure, which was the message graphically conveyed to the international media. Indeed, it was not Regan, but a weary Secretary of State George Schultz who briefed reporters. For his part, Gorbachev gave an upbeat assessment, noting the numerous issues that had been agreed to and calling the encounter a breakthrough.

The following year, the Reagan administration was seriously weakened by the Iran-Contra scandal and in need of a foreign policy success. For that reason the White House was responsive to Gorbachev’s efforts to conclude a treaty on intermediate nuclear

forces. In December 1987, Gorbachev travelled to Washington for the signing of the INF treaty just finalized by negotiators. America seemed in the grip of Gorbymania and the highlight of the visit occurred when Gorbachev suddenly ordered his chauffeur to stop so he could plunge into a crowd of onlookers delighted to greet a popular Soviet leader up for his public relations coup. The Reagan-Gorbachev summits illustrate how media events pursue policy objectives, while providing an invaluable image management opportunity to the nations and the leaders involved.

“These summits are often criticized for being shows for the greater glory of the participants, but they have other merits,” says Canadian diplomat Louise Fréchette:

Summits certainly help to seal agreements, to give them the full weight of the leaders; it is not the content itself that is new. What comes out is the fact that the leaders have formally, officially and publicly signed on to this agreement that is very important. And the other thing is that these summits allow for leaders to have more informal conversations amongst themselves, because international relations are based on trust.

Developing trust and personal rapport by having leaders meet each other is an important part of bridge building among nations. This is a point on which proponents and opponents of media events seem to agree. Says Goldenberg: “I was a bit sceptical because these meetings are planned ahead and you know, the more people in the room, the less useful the meeting is. However, it is worth the trouble that leaders get together and get to know each other.” He emphasizes the value of the networking opportunities that these encounters provide:

I know that at the time of Iraq⁴ it was very useful. Mr. Chrétien at the time picked up the phone and called the President of Chile, whom he knew well,

⁴ In March 2003, the UN Security Council was bound to vote on competing resolutions on disarming Iraq. One by the United States, Britain and Spain, sought U.N. authorization for war. The other was a French-Russian-German proposal to continue weapons inspections at least into July. The issue came to a standoff to be resolved by the votes of rotating members. Mexico and Chile held such seats. They favoured the

and asked what are you going to do? And then he said what he thought, and called him by his first name. And he did the same with the presidents of Mexico and France. And that only comes from getting to know you.

For his part, Canadian Press journalist Bruce Cheadle sees another benefit of these events: “Certainly the host countries have a fair amount of latitude of what the key issues are going to be at a summit. So in that sense, a summit is directed toward something that is significant to a country’s individual foreign policy.” He recalls how the Harper government chose maternal and child health as a core issue for the 2010 G8 and G20 summits; Jean Chrétien put forward an African initiative at the G8 in Kananaskis. Hosting a summit gives nations the opportunity to act as an interlocutor among participants to formulate the agenda. The host nation takes the driver’s seat; the other participants concede. Another example from the 2010 summits shows Canada taking advantage of its position as host to shape opinion on how to save the global economy. The result: “It’s Harper’s world now” (Geddes, 2010), declared *Maclean’s* after the summit. Geddes chronicles the efforts behind the scenes by Canadian officials to breach the gap during a nine-month preparatory period leading up to the G8 and G20 meetings. Some nations, such as the U.S. and key developing countries, favoured continuous stimulus spending to shore up recovery. Canada and Europe, on the other hand, demanded that government deficits and debt shrink. The differences were expected to turn the meeting into a clash that did not actually happen:

For Prime Minister Stephen Harper, one big challenge was defensive – preventing a bank tax, and another offensive – promoting deficit reduction. In the end, Harper’s advisers could boast, without straying outside the

continuation of inspections but were under intense pressure because they have close ties to the U.S. For its part, Canada had no vote but put forward a plan that could reconcile the bitter differences (AP, 2003). Goldenberg refers to the intense efforts behind the scenes for and against each resolution.

bounds of acceptable political exaggeration, that he'd shaped the summit's outcomes on both issues (Geddes, 2010: 18).

"Sure there is a lot of PR involved in these events," communication strategist Leslie Swartman acknowledges, "but the fact that you are staging an event doesn't mean it is not real." She indicates that staged events can be the trigger for other accomplishments. She recalls the Team Canada approach for promoting Canadian trade: all premiers participated and a large number of business leaders signed deals for the cameras. According to Swartman,

It created a bigger splash than just the Prime Minister going on his own. But also the advantage is that you get all the business leaders all together and they start doing business among themselves and I could see that when I went to the Team Canada missions to Mexico, Argentina, Chile and Brazil. The objective was to open doors and do the high level introductions because in a lot of countries you need the backing of your government to be able to do business and we were doing that.

International media events set deadlines for bureaucracies trying to solve irritants and to find points where agreements could be reached between the countries involved. "You don't do international affairs spontaneously," says *Globe and Mail* columnist Jeffrey Simpson, who explains that diplomats on both sides have worked out beforehand what is going to be discussed:

One of the virtues of a meeting that is covered by the media is that it drives the two civil services to work on those issues before the two leaders meet, because ideally you want for the leaders to be able to say we solved this, we made progress on this, we instructed our officials to do that. That's weeks and weeks of work by both civil servants and probably wouldn't happen in any case unless they were having a meeting at which they wanted to announce certain things.

This can be noticed with a quick review of the visit to Ottawa by British Prime Minister David Cameron mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. In this case, Canada and

Great Britain released a joint declaration outlining their shared objectives in trade, global security and the economy, while Cameron also announced that Britain is upgrading its trade office in Calgary to a consulate (Kennedy and Fekete, 2011).

Heather Scoffield of Canadian Press agrees with Simpson but adds that not all meetings represent “a done deal in advance.” Some actually enable people to reach deals:

If you look at the G20 in Toronto, it was a mess beforehand on the policy side. There was nothing happening. There were big problems on the road that they had to solve and the fact that they had this summit meant that they had a lot of pressure to show something for all their preparations. I think just that pressure made for an agreement on fiscal targets globally. It is not the strongest deal, but it was something.

Canadian diplomat and former chief of protocol Malcolm McKechnie sees other benefits. Media attention has value beyond international affairs such as tourism or business sense, since journalists could write articles about those issues too. And so they do. Caroline Hepker (2010) from the *BBC World Business Report* published an article during the G20 Summit in Toronto that depicted how Canada is recovering from only a mild recession while the Americans and Europeans face deficits and drastic government cuts. Writes Hepker: “The Canadians, it seems, have answers for even the toughest puzzles and they are keen to share their strategies with the rest of the world. Why in this economy, we all want to be Canadian” (Hepker, 2010).

Not everyone is eager to see the benefits of large international gatherings. They are expensive and require large security contingents. They gather together a huge number of officials and journalists, turning events into targets for all sorts of causes, from save the turtles to free Palestine to end globalization. “They tend to play an effect almost in a negative way,” reckons former Canadian diplomat Colin Robertson. “They become big

circuses and for what they accomplish, I am not persuaded that they matter that much, especially with the use of the telephone and bilaterals. But they have become part of the new drama.” Robertson suggests that they used to be useful, but now there are so many that they have become redundant. He thinks international encounters are better when they are smaller and where there is no set agenda, because “too often these things turn into a medieval charade where you go in and you have a script and you play by the script.” Edward Goldenberg agrees. “Most leaders would say that they might happen too often. And there is a tendency that you say, you know, ‘I am not going to get much if I go to this particular large meeting but my absence is going to be noticed. So I show up and I do the crossword puzzle or whatever during it.’” Exaggerations aside, the critics have a point. Many of these events have fallen victim to their own rhetorical success.

Bruce Cheadle sums it up. “You can’t teleconference these things, you can’t do it over the telephone. It is important for political leaders to sit down side by side and talk, so for all their faults, media events are necessary.” Adds Heather Scoffield: “Whether or not they have to be that extravagant, that’s another question.”

It is the combination of merits and faults that makes international events newsworthy. “The more they are circuses, the more the public focuses on what is wrong with these circuses – either the demonstrations, police brutality or alleged police brutality – and much less on the substance or good relations,” says Edward Goldenberg. “I don’t think they are worthy of media coverage. The media are all there in case something happens, in case someone is shot... Now I am exaggerating, but you get my point.”

For their part, journalists don’t seem to agree with such an extreme interpretation, although they acknowledge not all international media events deserve front-page

treatment. “The signing of agreements, for example, is not newsworthy unless it is a big agreement,” concedes Scoffield. But she notes the value of most international events: “once you have enough leaders in the room, things happen, things move forward, difficult issues get resolved or not and they come to a head. As far as news goes, it is bound to be news there, even if you have heard about it before.”

Robert Fife sees other merits in reporting such stories: “The coverage of these events helps people understand what is going on in the world. For example, I think people got a better understanding of what the currency problems are as a result of the G20 and what it means to them.” Fife explains that nowadays the G20 is what makes a real difference in the world because it gathers the biggest economies. It is the forum where stories that affect people’s lives happen. Being present at these events gives journalists the opportunity to see beyond the formalities of a staged event, even if it is only a glimpse of the dynamics at play:

I’ll give you an example. The Chinese president walks out of the G20 meeting. The U.S. Treasury Secretary, Tim Geithner, is there and it seemed that he was hoping that the Chinese president would approach him. But he goes and talks to another Chinese official, very briefly. He ignores Geithner, he doesn’t even say hello to him. Tell me that is not significant!

Its significance may be hard to determine, but it illustrates the limits of a controlled environment. Former DFAIT communications director Malcolm McKechnie agrees that it is very difficult to stage a public event showing an image that does not reflect the realities behind the scenes, especially during tough negotiations.

Fife concludes: “That is why I find so fascinating to watch the G20, because it is not just a media event set up for television. I mean, this is a real power shift that is happening in the world and we are watching it.”

Perceptions have become a key element in today's world interactions. Diplomacy has evolved to dedicate major efforts in projecting a nation to the public at large, image has taken a major role in the dynamics of power and international affairs take a larger share of the news agenda due to democratization and globalization. International media events are a good fit for such a political and news environment due to their peculiar combination of platforms and policy instruments. They are so valuable as communication tools to reach international audiences. As such, they require careful planning and strategic considerations, which we will analyze in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

“I’ll give them a sixer,” said Stephen Harper, surrounded by a troupe of bejewelled Bollywood dancers who exploded in applause after their guest granted them a perfect score (Leach, 2009). The Canadian Prime Minister was a guest on the popular contest show “Dance Premier League” during a 2009 visit to India. The trip was intended not only to reverse decades of distance between the two countries, but also to pitch Canada to a variety of Indian audiences. To that end, Harper visited two significant religious temples. He laid a wreath in memory of Mahatma Gandhi. Harper stopped at Chabad House, the hostel that was a target during an attack on Mumbai by Muslim extremists the previous year. More than 170 people died. He took part in the launch of the Canadian Tourism Commission’s campaign to showcase Canada as a must-see destination for Indian tourists; there he presented a prototype of the Olympic torch to Bollywood mega-star Akshay Kumar, an Indo-Canadian who would later run in the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Torch Relay.

Besides visiting the cultural and political hot-spots of the moment and mingling with movie stars and aspiring dancers, the Prime Minister also got down to business. He addressed India’s business leaders, delivering an aggressive sales pitch by singling out Canada as “the best positioned economy of the G8 and one of the most welcoming environments for investment in the world” (PMO, 2009). He had encounters with India’s political leadership, including the nation’s political kingmaker, Sonia Gandhi; and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Not everything was picture perfect though. It had been expected that Canada and India would sign an accord allowing the former to sell civil nuclear technology to the latter, but negotiations were not concluded on time. Both leaders assured the media it would be signed “in the near future” (Ibbitson, 2009a). The issue is actually an important one that kept the countries apart for 30 years. After the 1974 Pokhran tests, Canada snapped nuclear ties with India in the wake of allegations that fissionable material from Canada was misused. “We are not living in the 1970s,” Prime Minister Harper said to reporters inquiring about India’s reliability. “Notwithstanding the challenges that face this country and the neighbourhood in which it lives, this is a stable and reliable friend ... and we have certainly no reservations about pursuing this kind of agreement” (Ibbitson, 2009a). During an interview with an Indian television network, a journalist questioned Harper on the same issue and also pressed him to explain the specifics of Canadian police involvement in the investigation surrounding the Mumbai attack, as it had just recently been discovered that one of the accused is a Canadian citizen.

Although busy, the trip is typical of its kind. Messages were prepared to reach different audiences – the general public, business and political communities, and those with a personal association with Canada. When Prime Minister Harper gave recognition to Punjabi settlers, honoured Gandhi and visited two meaningful religious sites, he established an emotional connection with the Indian people. All this was contained in a well-presented package of careful rhetoric and attractive images featuring Harper as the central character. In that role, he positioned Canada as a cool, responsible, open-for-business country with close personal ties to India.

This example also illustrates how external factors can deflect attention from the main message. In this case, the fact that the agreement on civil nuclear energy was not reached reminded the public of the incident that kept both countries apart for many years, and the timing of the arrest of a Canadian terrorist suspect directed media attention towards issues of terrorism and international policing.

The variety of meetings, roundtables, wreath laying and photo ops is a good illustration of the detailed preparation behind international media events. Nothing is left to chance to ensure positive coverage – foreign and domestic – that reflects the intended message. “Media coverage is what determines if you accomplished what you set out to do,” explains communication consultant Barry McLoughlin. “If all the headlines or the lead stories either don’t mention you or reflect kind of a muddled story line, then you didn’t succeed.” A quick overview of stories published on the India trip indicates that the media got the message. “Canada owes its prosperity to Punjabi settlers: PM Harper” is the headline of a story in *The Times of India*, a local newspaper published in English. It reported on the visit to Amritsar, saying not only that the Prime Minister called Punjabi settlers “partners in the progress of Canada who have been contributing to the country's development through their hard work and grit for more than a century,” but also that Canada has a “keen interest in exploring the feasibility of setting up joint ventures” (Times of India, 2009a). The newspaper also dedicated an article to the civil nuclear deal indicating confidence that the agreement would be concluded and “asserting that prejudices of the past would not be allowed to come in the way” (Times of India, 2009b). Furthermore, the event featuring movie star Akshay Kumar “brought out a huge throng of Indian media” (Cheadle, 2009b) and can still be found in popular e-magazines like

Bollywood World and other Internet sites.⁵ In Canada, too, the visit received ample coverage with catchy headlines such as the *Toronto Star*'s "Harper goes Bollywood to sell Canada in India" (Cheadle, 2009b) and in-depth analysis and commentaries on Canada-India relations. *The Globe and Mail* looked back and reflected on the government's "determination to redress decades of distance" between the two countries and described how Canada has been taking actions intended to re-engage in India "in a way Canadian governments have not since the 1970s" (Ibbitson, 2009b). Harper's trip to India can be deemed a successful media event because of the diversity and scale of the coverage and its mostly favourable tone in both countries.

In this chapter I shall analyze the elements that play a role in ensuring that international media events produce positive coverage to raise the profile of a nation. The focus of this analysis is on the communication strategy itself. The elements shaping the political strategies – the substance, interests and direction for the event – are not within the scope of this study. First, I shall elaborate on the strategic value of media events to reach both domestic and foreign audiences. Then, I shall analyze the strategic considerations in the planning of the rhetoric, the images and the emotions that are used to communicate through media events. Third, I shall assess the strategic value of personalization in today's mediatized and celebrity-minded world. And fourth, I will analyze how external factors may interfere with the intended message of an international media event.

⁵ These are some of the websites where the event was reported. It only contains a few of the Indian sites found in a search in English language: <http://www.bollywoodworld.com/bollywood-news/canadian-pm-stephen-harper-gives-olympic-torch-model-to-akshay-kumar-16035.html>
<http://www.prokerala.com/news/photos/canadian-prime-minister-stephen-harper-and-9222.html>
<http://www.cinebasti.com/albums/Bollywood/165/all,page=1>

The Target Audience

“The Canadian Prime Minister is more interested in what is covered in Canada than what is written in South Korea,” states Edward Goldenberg. The former advisor and chief of staff to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien is a major proponent of the domestic value of international events. He says the main communications target of any international endeavour is the domestic media and almost dismisses the idea of courting international public opinion. *Globe and Mail* columnist Jeffrey Simpson agrees, indicating that one of the ways in which a leader is judged domestically is how he conducts the foreign business of his country. He adds that in the television age, it is natural that when they travel, leaders want to project the best image they can back home. Schill (2009) considers state visits and foreign travel as two categories of media events staged to influence domestic public opinion. “These events impart stateliness and gravity to the newsmaker. When the president represents the nation abroad he assumes the presidential role and can capitalize on the symbolic trappings of the position” (Schill, 2009: 24).

Indeed, that international media events are carefully planned for domestic consumption is not a recent phenomenon, though it has evolved with advances in media and transportation technology and with innovations in political communication. These advances allowed politicians to give intentional visibility to their international forays. In 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made a risky move by secretly arranging a meeting with Adolph Hitler in an effort to avoid war in Europe. Chamberlain’s popularity was low as elections were looming and he also saw the potential impact of a personal diplomatic triumph on his government’s popularity (Reynolds, 2007). Chamberlain announced his trip on the evening of September 14,

summoning the London press at 9 p.m. to a special briefing at 10 Downing Street. The announcement was carefully timed to ensure coverage on the evening radio news and in next morning's papers. He was also available for photographs the next day, just before departing for the fateful encounter with the Fuhrer (Reynolds, 2007).

With the advent of television, foreign trips became a strategic tool to gain popularity at home. Eisenhower's "Peace Trip" to Italy, India, Greece, France and Spain in 1959 was arranged to produce television film of massive crowds welcoming him as a hero (Minow, Martin and Mitchell, 1973). In 1972, Richard Nixon, who incorporated spin doctoring and staged events into the U.S. executive, orchestrated a remarkable use of television production when he travelled to China. Three huge cargo planes transported a twenty-ton "portable" transmitting station and fifty tons of additional equipment to China requiring more than one hundred television staff. All of this enabled approximately 100 million viewers to see at least some portion of forty-one hours of network coverage. The president's plane arrived in Peking in prime time and managed to return to Washington in prime time only by sitting on the ground for nine hours in Anchorage, Alaska (Minow, Martin and Mitchell, 1973).

By the end of the twentieth century, transportation and communication technology made foreign travel more accessible for leaders. With what is known as the "Rose Garden Strategy" – control the agenda, control access, control the sound bites and control the visual image (Louw, 2005) – Ronald Reagan's communication team pioneered the "media event presidency" (Schill, 2009) which profited from satellite technology to incorporate foreign trips as a routine strategy in domestic political communication. For example, Reagan used a foreign trip marking the 40th anniversary of D-Day to reinforce

his image as the new patriot willing to confront communism but nonetheless seeking peace over war at a critical time during the 1984 campaign (Schill, 2009).

“All this focus on the domestic angle is a lost opportunity,” laments Richard Kohler, former chief of protocol, who thinks that the main reason for overseas travel is not to get elected at home but to advance Canada’s interests abroad. For that Kohler adds, “Your focus should be having an impact in the region you are visiting by engaging the local media.”

In practice, though, international media events are not targeted to either a domestic or a foreign audience, but a combination of both. “There are two audiences: the audience in the country where you are trying to make an impression and your domestic audience,” explains Jeffrey Simpson. He adds that the level of interest a leader generates abroad depends on the significance of the leader in question:

For example, when President Obama gave his speech in Cairo, he was talking not only to his own people about how they should relate to the Arab world and Muslims in general, but he was also making a direct pitch to the Egyptian population and the Arab world. The leader of a country much smaller like Canada really doesn’t have much of an ability to communicate a message in such a large scale because Canada is not that important in the world.

Former chief of protocol Malcolm McKechnie also describes the issue of targeting a foreign audience in terms of a country’s relevance. “Those [leaders] who were known and those who were from countries with which Canada has important relations were especially interested in reaching the Canadian audience,” he says, recalling his experience organizing foreign visits to Canada. “It depends on the type of relationship we have with that country. One way to enhance that is for the foreign leader to give a speech

designed for a specific audience – like the chamber of commerce, if they are trying to build stronger economic ties – and some leaders do that effectively.”

This is similar to what Harper did in India by participating in many diverse events. “It is not necessarily about getting a headline in *The New York Times*,” Goldenberg summarizes, “you have to reach particular communities to deliver a message in another country.” Under these circumstances, media events have to be carefully targeted, not always to a mass audience but often to the opinion leaders, an elusive group that varies according to the issue in question. This explains the meetings with businessmen, the visits to religious temples and the speeches at universities or trade associations that variously constitute media events.

Planning Messages: Rhetoric, Images and Emotional Connection

Communication consultant Barry McLoughlin addresses the most important element of a media event: “You should know what your message is and you should make it simple. If you cannot say it in one sentence, it is not a message. It is a lengthy explanation and is not going to emerge in any news story.” He explains that everything that is done during an event – the speeches, media availabilities, photo ops or walkabouts – is meant to reinforce the main message.

“We certainly planned and defined our messages before any foreign trip,” confirms Leslie Swartman, communications officer for Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. She recalls that the Chrétien administration concentrated mostly on increasing trade and commercial partnerships. With that in mind, Team Canada was created. A novel approach for its time, Team Canada gathered all provincial premiers and dozens of

business people, led by the Prime Minister, to travel on trade missions around the world. Visits to 21 cities became a hallmark of Chrétien's administration, which claimed Team Canada resulted in some \$30 billion in new business (Toronto Star, 2003).

“What Mr. Chrétien was trying to do with those Team Canada missions was to show that Canada can work together internationally,” explains *Globe and Mail* columnist Jeffrey Simpson. The division of jurisdictions in Canada, especially in the area of trade, is confusing for foreign investors, Simpson says; the federal government can negotiate an agreement only to find that some provinces don't accept it. “So we look like we are not speaking with one voice overseas,” he adds. It was important for Canada to convey cohesion. On the other hand, Team Canada also had a message of cohesion for Canadians themselves – a demonstration of how the two levels of government can work together. “Ordinary Canadians don't want to see them fight all the time,” Simpson says. Chrétien's former chief of staff, Edward Goldenberg, agrees the approach “did communicate to business leaders that this was important and that was noticed in the countries we visited.” In 1997, for example, Philippine and Canadian businessmen signed \$505.58 million worth of agreements, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported. The newspaper referred to comments by the Chair of the Philippine Long Distance Co., who said that “in the past, the Philippine government would go to Canada to look for trade and investment opportunities, but now, Canada was the one that came to its shores wanting to do business” (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 1997).

At the same time, the rhetoric should be mindful of the political environment as messages may have unintentional – or, perhaps, very intentional – consequences for another country. Charles de Gaulle's “Vive le Québec libre!” is an extreme example of a

message with lasting consequences. On July 24, 1967, during a state visit to Expo'67, the French President felt compelled to respond to the crowd that gathered outside Montreal's City Hall to welcome him. "By repeating the slogan of a Quebec separatist party, de Gaulle provoked a diplomatic incident that resulted in the cancellation of his visit, initiated an incredible campaign of French interference in the domestic affairs of Canada and, above all, lent his worldwide prestige to the Quebec independence movement" (Axworthy, 2009). Since then it has been debated whether de Gaulle had ulterior intentions or was simply carried away by the chanting crowds, since he was not scheduled to speak in public at that time (Thomson, 1988).

Even an intended compliment can cause a storm. During his trip to the Philippines in 1997, Chrétien stepped into a touchy issue when he told President Fidel Ramos before a business forum: "the world community would be disappointed that you cannot run again because you have gained a lot of respect around the world" (Seguin, 1997). Ramos, elected in 1992, was limited to one six-year term by the constitution. Chrétien's comments occurred just when church, unions and opposition groups were blocking attempts by Ramos' supporters to change the provisions so as to allow him to run again. The Prime Minister's comments, "which were unscripted and delivered at the end of his speech, surprised the Manila-based media. They were amazed that a foreign leader would express such a strong view on such a sensitive domestic issue" (Seguin, 1997).

On the other hand, words can be carefully designed to have a strategic political effect. A good example is a statement given by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher on the impending Quebec referendum in 1995. A few days before the vote, Christopher met with Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet. In addressing the

media, Christopher “went beyond the usual non-interventionist stance,” wrote Julian Beltrame of Southam News, when he said: “I do want to emphasize the very important value that we place on the relationship that we have with a strong and united Canada... We’ve very carefully cultivated our ties with Canada and... we shouldn’t take for granted that a different kind of organization would obviously have exactly the same kind of ties” (Beltrame, 1995). The statement received ample coverage in Canada. It was not an “off the cuff” comment, Peter Mansbridge reported: “his officials had called Canadian reporters to make sure they’d be there to hear the statement” (Mansbridge, 1995). The message was in favour of federalism without saying so, but the presence of Ouellet and the effort to have Canadian journalists attend confirms its intentional nature.

Messages should maintain the integrity of the messenger despite an adverse environment, however. For example, Prime Minister Chrétien traveled to China in 1998 to promote business, but he wanted to balance that objective with a human rights message consistent with both Canadian values and public opinion. “We were not there just to do business and business trumps everything,” explains Swartman. “We wanted to say to them, we encourage you to grow but you can’t do it at the expense of your people.” To achieve that, the human rights issue was raised in a public event in China in 1998. Chrétien delivered an “unusually blunt speech” to an elite audience of China’s next generation of leaders at Quinhua University. He described how Canadians “are disturbed” when they hear about Chinese restrictions on free expression and the harassment and imprisonment of people whose views differ from the government’s (Greenspon, 1998). By expressing the feelings of Canadians, Chrétien managed to make his point without pointing fingers at Chinese authorities.

Diplomacy thrives in nuance and a sloppy public message may derail a bilateral relationship. This is why a lot of preparation should be done before any foreign trip so that leaders are as ready as possible to express their views and produce the desired results. “The prime minister would always be briefed on local irritants, in case they were raised by the president or the prime minister of that country and if those also came out during a press briefing, he would be able to deal with that,” says Swartman. It is important that communication staff prepare the leader for a successful visit by anticipating carefully worded messages. “Harper blames Canada for visa furor” (Chase, 2009) is a good example. In 2009, Prime Minister Harper traveled to Mexico to participate in the North American Leaders Summit. A few weeks before the gathering in Guadalajara, Ottawa imposed a sudden visa clampdown on Mexican citizens in an attempt to curb the surge of refugee claims from that country. The move was interpreted in Mexico as an insult. Mexican journalists questioned Harper about the permanency of the measure. “The visas will stay as long as the problem exists,” he replied, producing headlines in the local press: “Canada won’t back away; will keep visa requirements” (Jimenez and Otero, 2009). “This is not the fault of the government of Mexico – let me be very clear about this. This is a problem in Canadian refugee law which encourages bogus claims,” said Harper referring to the inadequacy of the Canadian immigration system. Francisco Barrio, Mexican Ambassador in Canada briefed the media after the bilateral encounter between Harper and President Calderon, during which the latter rebuked the measure. “They [Canadians] are convinced and determined that this measure is what will solve the problem, one that is mostly related to the system in place than anything else,” said Barrio in support of Ottawa’s argument (Reforma, 2009). Harper’s

choice of words indicates a shift in his administration's rhetoric on the issue. When announcing the measure, an outraged Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Jason Kenney, emphasized the backlog created by the sheer volume of bogus claims that undermined Canada's ability to help people fleeing real prosecution (CIC, 2009). "It is an insult to the important concept of refugee protection to allow it be systematically violated by people who are overwhelmingly economic immigrants," said Kenney indicating that the majority of Mexican claimants are middle class and not people living in UN refugee camps fleeing war or prosecution. "These are people who can afford plane tickets... they must not be allowed to jump Canada's immigration queue," Kenney pointed out defending his government's decision to impose a visa (CBC, 2009 and Blanchfield, 2009). For his part, while in Mexico, Harper avoided blaming the large number of Mexicans wrongly using the refugee provisions to enter Canada. He did so, reported *The Globe and Mail*, because he was "trying to repair frayed relations with Mexico" and wanted "to soothe the feelings of an insulted NAFTA partner" (Chase, 2009).

Because international media events attract attention, the reputation and foreign policy of a country could be at stake. That is why leaders should be provided with sufficient background to allow them to respond aptly to tough questions. Although most such briefings are led by ambassadors and political affairs officials at the foreign affairs department or a local embassy, press officers contribute material that highlights the media environment. For example, when I was a press officer at the Mexican Embassy in Canada, we would prepare reports in advance of a presidential or ministerial visit. One would describe the main Canadian media outlets, including their circulation, influence and leaning; prominent journalists who write about international affairs in general and

Mexico in particular; and a summary of recent news about Mexico, including the most frequent themes and news about the visit itself. The briefing also included the topics that the embassy anticipated might come up during encounters with local media. While travelling, the president or minister received a daily summary of the main news in the local media, so that he or she was aware of the issues on the local public agenda along with a report from Mexico City on the news of the day. These news reports were submitted before the activities of the day began.

On April 15, 2001, a couple of days before the arrival in Canada of Mexican President Vicente Fox, the *Toronto Star* published a story by Linda Diebel on a tour of northern Mexico by Canadian church leaders to “see for themselves” how NAFTA was working. “They expected to find misery, but were shocked to see how bad it is,” Diebel wrote, proceeding to describe the dire living conditions of workers in Ciudad Juarez and to condemn Mexico for allowing foreign-owned factories to profit from cheap labour and natural resources at the expense of the local population (Diebel, 2001). This is the kind of article that was normally included in the media portion of the embassy’s preparatory briefings. In a press conference in Ottawa, President Fox was questioned about it. Graham Fraser reported his reply in the *Toronto Star* as follows:

“People that work on maquiladoras are getting salaries over the average salary in Mexico and that's what we call fair wages,” said Fox... he disputed the group's findings, insisting the maquiladoras pay four times the minimum wage in Mexico, which is \$7 (U.S.) a day. Fox acknowledged at least 40 per cent of his population of more than 90 million is poor, but he said that's why negotiating trade pacts is so important to Mexico (Fraser, 2001).

Alfonso Nieto, who at the time was Press Counsellor at the Embassy of Mexico in Canada, recalls this case:

President Fox knew about it. I discussed this article and another one related to labourers hired at Mr. Fox's farms in Mexico with his Communication Director, Martha Sahagun. Also the day of the visit in Ottawa, these two issues came up when I quickly reviewed with him the main topics for discussion while he was being applied make up for a TV interview.

Messages are also delivered proactively. "We always tried to do something with the local media before a trip," says Chrétien's one-time communication officer, Leslie Swartman. "We would take the biggest local media outlet and do an interview with them beforehand to set up the trip." In 1994, when I was a correspondent for the Mexican network Televisa, I interviewed Chrétien a few days before he travelled to Mexico for a large Canadian trade fair. This was the first trip of his administration and Chrétien explained that he intended to improve the trade balance between the two countries and open more opportunities for Canadian businesses in Mexico as part of attempts to diversify trade relations. The interview was aired on Mexican television on the eve of Chrétien's arrival, allowing Mexican audiences to know beforehand the Canadian prime minister and his interest in increasing economic and political ties with their country. This proactive communications strategy is common practice. In 2010, British Prime Minister David Cameron visited Canada. He was interviewed by Peter Mansbridge (2010b) for *The National* and also authored a commentary in *The Globe and Mail*. His article, published the day of his arrival for the G8 Summit, served to introduce him as the "new kid on the block" – he had only recently become Prime Minister – and to lay out his views on how to make summits more effective (Cameron, 2010). In 2001, when Mexico's Fox travelled to Canada, the Mexican Embassy approached some media outlets and soon received requests from many others to interview the President. Fox, who wanted to promote his vision of future integration in North America, made himself

available. Before the trip, he talked to newspaper correspondents, such as Mike Trickey of Southam News and Paul Knox of *The Globe and Mail*, and once in Canada he was interviewed by the main networks, CBC, CTV and SRC. These interviews with the Canadian media allowed him to discuss a variety of subjects, including drug trafficking, NAFTA's Chapter 11, the environment, poverty, the Summit of the Americas and continental integration. Trickey's (2001a) article opened as follows: "President Vicente Fox says he's looking forward to a new hemispheric trade agreement and closer ties with his North American amigos, but he's also getting tired of the rich gringos telling Mexico what it has to do and how," a summary that indicates that the interview evolved around Fox's views on North American integration and Mexico's role in it as an independent nation. This topic was of particular interest to Fox but was also a controversial issue because experts were debating the pros and cons of deepening integration while maintaining sovereignty and diversity in Canada (Crane, 2001). The focus of that debate was mostly on Canada-U.S. ties; Fox wanted Canadians to consider Mexico as well since he saw integration as the means of improving the standard of living in the whole region. "If we accept the free flow of products, of services, of capital, sooner or later we should accept the free flow of people. That's the long-term view but I think it's fair to promote it," he told Mike Trickey, who traveled to Mexico City for the interview. "We should work in NAFTA for integrating further and to make sure all three of our economies are strong, healthy and have convergence... we should work until Mexico is in the same situation economically and (at the) level of life so that the border can become just a line between countries and not a dividing line between people" (Trickey, 2001b).

Words are not the only way to convey messages. Media events are particularly suited to do so with pictures. In 2009, Michael McCurry, a former White House and Department of State spokesman, was hired by the Canadian government to help Harper secure interviews with leading U.S. television networks. In an interview, McCurry acknowledged that his engagement with the PMO was short but did result in media exposure for the Canadian Prime Minister. He recalled one particular instance that “tried to communicate in pictures some of the endless thousands of words of diplomacy.” In order to get the U.S. press to pay more attention to of Harper’s proposals at the 2009 G20 in Pittsburgh, McCurry suggested arranging an impromptu photo opportunity between Obama and Harper without using formal diplomatic channels, which are cumbersome. He suggested that an advance official on the ground approach Obama’s advance team and agree to pull them together in the hall and walk in front of the cameras:

They did, and it produced a picture that I’ve actually seen many, many times since then showing Obama walking and talking in a very animated way with Prime Minister Harper and it looks like two guys heavily engaged in conversation. But it was largely staged for the cameras because I don’t think there was a lot of substance to the conversation, but it did help communicate that Obama was listening carefully to what Harper had to say.

Communications consultant Barry McLoughlin suggests a leader should create his or her narrative through visuals, much as Harper’s team did in Pittsburgh. Pictures are a valuable component of image management strategies. Most of the time it takes much more than the collusion of two advance officials to produce good pictures; it requires professional preparation and careful planning. Columnist Jeffrey Simpson understands that having a good image, a lot of nice photo ops is part of the presentation of the leader

overseas, since most people in western democratic countries get most of their information from television. Simpson has witnessed this preoccupation with good visuals:

I traveled to Australia with Mr. Harper, and I was tremendously struck at how there wasn't one moment that hasn't been scripted in the entire trip. The advance team knew where the cameras are going to be, they knew where he was going to walk, they knew who he was going to meet and what he was going to say. I was talking to an experienced Australian diplomat and he said he has never witnessed such degree of preparation in terms of the presentation of the image of the Prime Minister. In fact, there is an anecdote. Harper was going to have a press conference at the hotel where the Canadian delegation was staying in Sydney, but at the last minute they changed it – at a considerable expense, I presume – to the Intercontinental Hotel on the top floor because you could see the Sydney Opera House, which is a beautiful building and made a better backdrop.

Thus, the actual immediate surroundings gain relevance because they are the set on which the event is staged. Setting is an element of the communication strategy. Every feature is considered to prevent any tiny detail from derailing the implementation of the strategy. Lighting, fixtures, decorations, windows and plants are carefully located and scrutinized, as they may get in the way of the picture or appear with deplorable consequences. Flags are another example of how important it is to have every element right: they have to be right side up, they have to be evenly spaced, they have to be the right number to look good, and they have to be placed so that they are seen but do not stick out of someone's head. Victoria Terry, who was in charge of such tasks at the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa, admits that it may seem silly or egotistical to dedicate so much effort to deciding where a flag goes, but if anything is out of place it can produce an unflattering picture that can easily spread and would be difficult to erase once it is in the public's mind.

To prevent that, officials have very detailed advance site surveys. A plan of each room is drawn indicating where the VIP is going to stand and where the doors and the

windows are and which door will be used as entrance or exit so that camera placements can be planned anticipating movements and lighting requirements. Usually, the site survey is done in what is called the pre-advance, which focuses mainly on the location. Then a follow-up advance team makes another site survey to concentrate on all the details of time and placements. A photographer who will travel with the principal is brought in to make suggestions so that all the sites are camera-ready. Not all delegations have the same level of preparation. But they all do some advance surveys because they are also part of the logistics and security arrangements.

These advance surveys result in better-suited images. Consider the antlers decorating Papineau House in Montebello, Quebec, where the North American Leaders Summit took place in 2007. During a survey, officials noticed large antlers decorating the entrance of the mansion precisely where the photographs would be taken. They might have appeared on top of the leaders' heads. Antlers have negative cultural connotations in Mexico, where they are interpreted as the representation of a cuckolded husband. To avoid ridicule for any of the leaders, flags were placed in front of the decoration, obliterating the otherwise picturesque Canadian image. "The Mexicans did not know about it since all this happened during a survey done by the American Embassy with Canadian officials," points out Victoria Terry, indicating that everybody involved tries their best to make things look right for all participants.

"The most important thing is to make your principal look good. That's the image that is going to be sent around. So he has to look good," explains Terry, who participated in advance preparations for President George W. Bush's visits to Canada. She recalls an instance when Bush traveled to Alberta. He was to be presented with a white Smithbilt

hat, a local tradition. American officials wanted to make sure the President would not offend his hosts by declining to wear the large cowboy hat, but given the preoccupation with pictures, they also wanted to make sure he would not look silly wearing it. “It became such a big issue to decide whether he would wear or not the hat,” said Terry, who was present at the meeting where the issue was discussed. It was decided the president would don it for only a few seconds.

Consultant Barry McLoughlin points out that news values other than relevance and importance, which produce hard news, also help to communicate a message. For that, a human-interest story is particularly attractive. During the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto, for example, the news agenda was filled with stories of the leaders’ attempts to deal with the world economic crisis, excessive security around the meeting, protesters and the police crackdown, costs, and the disruptions to Toronto. Among all these stories, CBC’s *The National* reported that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh “took a moment to honour the victims of the Air India bombing by laying a wreath at the memorial in Toronto” (Mansbridge, 2010a). It was only a brief mention, but it represents a good example of a compelling media event that tried to communicate how two countries relate on a personal level.

“One of the things President Clinton used to do when we were in a foreign country, was to show some genuine interest about the country we were visiting and he made a stop at a museum or a cultural place of interest,” said Michael McCurry, who was Clinton’s spokesman. He recalls, for instance, having toured the El Prado Museum in Madrid at midnight with his boss. Most of the time, this genuine interest in the local

culture requires careful staging that goes beyond having the authorities open a museum after hours. McCurry says:

The advance team who takes care of the logistics on the ground for a trip always looks for interesting stops. They can be used for an OTR, which stands for Off the Record, because they are impromptu events that are not part of the formal program or the formal schedule. They are always designed to kind of communicate something about being in touch with the people and good advance people will always look for something that would create that kind of interesting interaction.

Finding the local angle is a common practice to establish a connection with the population of the country visited, although more often as a carefully planned event than an impromptu one. When Prime Minister Cameron came to Canada in 2010, he stopped in Halifax and toured the aircraft carrier *H.M.S. Ark Royal* as part of the Canadian Navy centennial celebrations. The visit was reported by *The National* (2010), for example. This is similar to Harper's visit to Chabad House in Mumbai, the charity and hostel attacked by terrorists the previous year.

Events in which the visitor finds a few moments to commemorate a significant occasion or to honour a local hero, as Harper did with Gandhi, may seem formulaic, but they have come to be expected. They are missed if they are not included in the program. Michael McCurry calls Bush's impatience to engage in diplomatic small talk a "big mistake" because people felt he was not interested in their country and what they were about:

I asked some of my friends who worked for President Bush about it and they said that he was a very impatient man and didn't like traveling, and it really showed. So he did a very poor job of trying to communicate interest and awareness of the world community and the countries that he was engaged with.

Local events help establish personal and permanent associations with a community. Harper did that when he honoured Punjabi settlers and when he visited the set of a television show popular with both Indians and Indo-Canadians. “If you make an effort to do a local event that indicates how does Canada connect to that local country, it will help to raise your media profile as well,” says Swartman. She recalled an event during the Sommet de la Francophonie in Benin in 1996 in which Chrétien announced CIDA money to build a permanent road in Cotonou, where the dirt road was normally washed out in the rainy season. “It was a beautiful photo op,” says Swartman. “Even though it did not involve a lot of money, people were really excited and emotional during the event because now they will be able to use the road all year long.” The road’s name is Boulevard du Canada.

This kind of event is perhaps the most strategic in terms of domestic and international audiences because it is particularly touching for both. It also demonstrates that in international media events, the audience at the event itself does not have to be a prop, as Schill (2009) says, but can be as important a target as the people who watch or read the event through the media.

All the previous considerations demonstrate the sophistication behind the planning of media events at the international level to maximize the potential for a successful media event. Positive media coverage is not a given and strategists must work in coordination with officials and diplomats to come up with the right words, even if some are controversial, to reach the targeted audiences. They need to make sure the images are attractive and help convey the intended message. Strategists also need to

design compelling events that reach the target audience at an emotional level, to give the event local significance in the cluttered media environment.

Personalization

The hiring of two former White House communications strategists in 2009, as mentioned above, was part of a “‘sustained’ effort to raise Canada’s profile in the U.S. media –with Prime Minister Stephen Harper acting as salesman-in-chief” (Alberts, 2009). Harper gave a series of interviews to major American news outlets as a result. “‘Canada has a very good story to tell...’” Harper’s spokesman, Kory Teneycke, was quoted as saying. “‘The person best-positioned to tell that story in the U.S. media is the Prime Minister’” (Alberts, 2009). The logic behind such a strategy can be traced to the personalization of politics, which has become more prevalent as a result of the sense of intimacy created by television with its close-up views of personalities (Lang and Lang, 1984).

Increasingly, institutions are represented and identified by the individual faces who front them (Corner and Pels, 2003), and so are nations. “‘We form a lot of our perceptions and images of countries based on their leadership, and the personality of a particular strong figure can really heavily impact the image of a country,’” says Michael McCurry. Accordingly, personality needs to be considered in forming communications strategies. “‘The reputation around the world of the U.S. took a very severe nosedive because people did not have a good impression of George W. Bush. He came across as being a disinterested, uncurious cowboy-like figure for many world audiences,’” says McCurry. He points to other extreme cases, like Mohammar Gadaffi or Hugo Chavez, whose odd behaviour has been tied to a detrimental image of their nations.

Senator Jim Munson, the former communications director for Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, agrees that personality has an important role. He says a leader's personal manner has an effect on his or her international influence: "Prime Minister Brian Mulroney had a manner on the international stage that was positive for Canada when it came to dealing with apartheid or with the Free Trade Agreement." Following the footsteps of U.S. President Ronald Reagan, Mulroney took command of the international spotlight as the central character of Canadian foreign policy. Wrote *Financial Post* editor Hyman Solomon: "The relegation of cabinet ministers to the wings as bit players, media briefers, and backroom toilers... gave Mulroney a singular, dominant presence that was almost without precedent in Canadian politics." Commenting on Mulroney's encounter with Reagan in Quebec City in 1985, Solomon concludes, "Besides his personal public relations triumph, his national singing debut, and his growing enjoyment of style, Brian Mulroney managed to produce a fair amount of substance" (Solomon, 1985).

Since leaders have individual personalities, communications specialists try to find the best way to take advantage of their merits. McCurry says that the best strategy is for a leader to steer towards things he or she enjoys:

Bill Clinton loved staying behind after a speech and talking to people who had been in the audience, but I understand that President Obama doesn't like to do that. And the couple of times they tried, he didn't look comfortable and they pulled that off the schedule and just have him doing things that he found more enjoyable.

As a result of relying on personal preferences, "the private sphere of politicians is now more than ever being used as a resource" (Corner and Pels, 2003: 76). In consequence, world leaders take centre stage to showcase their persona:

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney made his live musical debut on cross-Canada television last night, at a gala variety show in honour of visiting

U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Reagan, Mulroney and their wives appeared on stage during the closing minutes of the hour-long performance at Quebec City's Grand Theatre. And while the performers were belting out the last few bars of *When Irish Eyes Are Smiling*, contralto Maureen Forester pointed her microphone at Mulroney, who obliged by singing into it (The Gazette, 1985).

This was the musical finale to a 1985 Canada-U.S. summit in Quebec that signalled a new era in the bilateral relationship. Having the two individuals at the centre of the public's eye helped convey the message of a close-knit bilateral relationship with potential benefits of closer ties for both nations.

"The mass visibility that is afforded by modern mediated politics has foregrounded issues of 'style, appearance and personality,' breaking down some of the fences that separate politics from entertainment and political leadership from media celebrity," write Corner and Pels (2003: 3). This trend is illustrated by Cosentino and Doyle's analysis of Silvio Berlusconi. The former Italian prime minister "innovatively used branding of his persona in his transition from business to politics and in the process he became a unique type of political brand that increased its force through the interconnection of formerly separate social and cultural domains" (Cosentino and Doyle, 2010: 219). Politicians, then, take a page from the media celebrities' handbook; if they don't like to sing, other options can put a personal touch and innovative associations on international relations. A hamburger or a soccer bet may do the trick. In July 2010, Barack Obama invited his Russian counterpart to have a burger at his favourite restaurant, like two old friends going out for lunch – followed by the media. Afterwards, Obama and President Dimitri Medvedev reinforced the friendly message by declaring, during a press conference, "We have succeeded in resetting our relationship which

benefits from regional and global security” (BBC, 2010). Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron gave each other a case of beer, fulfilling a bet made on the World Cup match between the United States and England, which ended in a tie. “After clinking bottles, both men made statements reaffirming the ‘special relationship’ between the two countries” (Thai, 2010). Former White House strategist McCurry reckons there is an advantage to relying on personal preferences because, “even though these events are staged, the public gets a glimpse of what the person is like.”

Of course, some personalities may have the opposite effect. “Personality does affect the receptivity of public opinion and therefore of governments,” explains Canadian diplomat Louise Fréchette. “It didn’t work at all for George W. Bush. It was the opposite. Even when he occasionally had reasonable ideas to offer, it was bound to be unpopular with public opinion and with their governments.”

But personality is only one element in the mix and strategists need to know when it is beneficial to play that card. “Official visits are with a deliverable. A president is mainly there for a political meeting or to sign an agreement of some sort,” explains Victoria Terry, former press officer at the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa, indicating that the deliverable usually is the main focus of the communications strategy.

The issue of personality is relevant, nevertheless, because the events are performed by individuals who become the centre of attention. Under these circumstances personality plays a double role. On one hand, personality can be the vehicle to convey a message (like the new relationship between U.S. and Russia) while on the other, the event helps build personality itself in the public’s mind (Obama as a regular guy who eats hamburgers). This constant appearance in the world’s news has turned leaders into a new

breed of celebrity: politicians seek legitimization of their international influence through public opinion, and the general public grants them the celebrity treatment. “It would be an incredible thing if they (G8 participants) walked in...” said Greg Young, the manager of a trendy pub in Huntsville, Ont., when he was interviewed by a *Toronto Star* reporter about the town that hosted the 2010 G8 Summit. Lorraine Morin, the owner of a popular café where some menu items were named after the visiting personalities, also hoped to lure the distinguished guests to “come into town and get a feel for the people.” She offered Obama Muffins and Harper Lattes and thought, “If I make them, they will come” (Brijbassi, 2010).

In his critique of modern society, Boorstin (1964) makes the distinction between a celebrity, fabricated to satisfy exaggerated expectations of human greatness, and a hero, a human figure who has shown greatness in some achievement or great deeds. Despite this difference, both have a similar relationship with those who admire or follow them. “We revere our heroes... because they embody popular virtues... because they reveal and elevate ourselves;” (Boorstin, 1964: 50) while celebrities, “these new-model heroes, are receptacles into which we pour our own purposelessness; they are nothing but ourselves in a magnifying mirror” (Boorstin, 1964: 61). Hero and celebrity are both the embodiment of the society that reveres them.

Friedman (1990) explains the celebrity explosion of our times in terms of changes in authority. In the modern world, authority has been reshaped. Traditional hierarchical, face-to-face authority has eroded. In its place is a horizontal form of authority, in which celebrities do not need to be authorities in the literal sense of the term, but are more and more models of expressive behaviour. In politics, according to Marshall (1997), the

system of celebrity is one of the ways in which the mass is categorized and understood. He argues that the emergence of democracy created a need for building the means and methods of understanding and controlling the expression of the popular will. Turning politicians into celebrities became one way to meet that need. Corner and Pels (2003) agree with Marshall (1997) and they emphasize the importance of each individual's personality in the process. "The significance of celebrity is that public figures embody stylized forms of individuality, which offer a temporary focus for identification and organization of audiences" (Corner and Pels, 2003: 10). This is because, they argue, the public has been shifting away from political parties and programs and their attention has turned towards individuals and their ideas.

Political celebrities are by-products of mass media. It was with the emergence of the first mass media that ordinary people could identify with the famous – cultural figures, political outsiders, adventurers – who in turn gained influence over followers who sought new agents of authority. Established leaders (kings, presidents, clergymen) had to compete for the recognition they had long taken for granted (Giloï, 2010). By the end of the nineteenth-century, Kaiser Wilhelm II tried to consolidate his power over a recently unified Germany by blending mass media and politics into a charismatic form of government. He combined political power and mediated power in the form of public presence. Wilhelm II was able to attract mass audiences thanks to his distinctive character, his ability to use the media to communicate his agenda and the emphasis placed on his persona (Kohlrausch, 2010). In the early 1900s, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson became a worldwide household name when his propaganda machine gave

universal circulation to his addresses by translating them and dispatching them to every corner of the world through news services (Creel, 1972).

Modern world leaders also benefit from their celebrity status to gain media attention for themselves and their countries. During the 2000 federal election in Mexico, opposition candidate Vicente Fox gained unprecedented international media attention in part because of his unorthodox appearance and personality, which also contributed to making him a media magnet once he became President. Southam News journalist Mike Trickey included the following physical description of Fox in an article he wrote after interviewing him in 2001:

Looking relaxed but tired in the Mexican “oval office”... Fox kisses visiting women on the cheek and shakes hands with the men as they arrive at Los Pinos, the official residence of the Mexican president. He has taken off his jacket in deference to the sweltering heat... But he still looks the part of a dashing leading man from a Hollywood western, with his huge FOX silver belt buckle vying for the eye’s attention with his black, ostrich leather cowboy boots (Trickey, 2001a).

Such focus on personality has changed politics in such a way “that emotional affect replaces political effect” (Taylor and Harris, 2008: 154). Some leaders have been able to capitalize on their celebrity status during media events to achieve political goals. “President Clinton really captured the imagination of the Irish people and helped advance the peace process,” recalls former White House spokesman Michael McCurry in speaking about Clinton’s role in the Northern Ireland peace settlement of the 1990s:

His personality was a very winning personality and Irish people really loved having him there and it was a big national occasion when he visited, which had a direct impact on the ability of the various factions to gather around the peace table and complete the Good Friday Agreement.

In his memoirs, Clinton (2004) recalls his participation in the peace process in Northern Ireland. Eager to please the large Irish-American constituency, he got involved in the

efforts to put an end to the violence that had long plagued the island. In this case, Clinton assumed the position of what van Zoonen (2005) defines as the “ultimate celebrity politician,” that is, someone “who projects a persona that has inside experience with politics but is still an outsider; his performance builds in a unique mixture of ordinariness and exceptionality” (Van Zoonen, 2005: 84). As president, Clinton had the inside experience with politics but was an actual outsider as the U.S. had no direct stake in the negotiations. Furthermore, the fact that he is of Irish descent made him one of them (ordinariness) while being a powerful foreign leader made him exceptional. At the same time, the media events staged during his two visits allowed him to establish an affective connection with the Irish people, who came to the streets by the thousands to cheer him. In his 1995 visit, he made a stop on Shankill Road, the centre of Protestant Unionism, bought flowers and fruits at a local shop, and talked with people and shook their hands. He made a similar stop on Falls Road, the heart of Belfast’s Catholic community. He participated in other massive public events and met with political leaders and local celebrities. “I had the feeling,” Clinton wrote about his first visit, “that my trip has shifted the psychological balance in Ireland. Until then the advocates of peace had to argue their case to the sceptics, while their adversaries could just say no. After those two days, the burden has shifted to the opponents of peace to explain themselves” (Clinton, 2004: 688). The Good Friday Agreement was clearly the result of the efforts of all the parties involved in the negotiation process, not simply of Clinton’s presence. What is remarkable about these visits is how the masses that attended the many media events performed by Clinton positioned Ireland’s political mood in favour of peace. British Prime Minister

Tony Blair (2010) recognized the contribution of Bill Clinton's personal commitment and his two well executed visits to Northern Ireland.

The focus on individuals during media events also serves as the representation of world interactions, for better or worse. Senator Jim Munson tells of an incident in which statements made by Primer Minister Jean Chrétien were reported by a Canadian newspaper to the detriment of U.S. President George W. Bush:

Traveling to Athens in 2003, Prime Minister Chrétien came to the back of the plane in the middle of the night and he decided to talk on his own to the media and they all gathered around and Mr. Chrétien quietly and with great reserve and a bit of humour talked about the differences between him and President Bush.

Next morning's headline in the *National Post* read "PM says he's better than Bush." The story referred to "a frank discussion with journalists" in which Chrétien "took issue with the Bush administration running a US\$500-billion deficit while claiming to run a 'right-wing' government." The article also mentioned how Chrétien described their ideological differences: "...he is a conservative. I am for free choice on abortion. He is not. He is against gun control. I am for it. He is for capital punishment. I am against it. I am a Liberal" (Fife, 2003). According to Munson, the reaction in Washington was so intense that in a matter of hours he, as the Prime Minister's communications director, had to arrange for Bush and Chrétien to cross paths in St. Petersburg, Russia, where they were attending celebrations to mark the city's 300th anniversary. Even though it was not pre-scheduled, Munson made sure Chrétien met with Bush and that the media photographed them shaking hands and laughing so that the public, and officials on both sides of the border, were reassured of the stability of the relationship between the two allies.

For all these reasons, personalization is strategic in international media events. “You have to take the stage on the world scene if you want the rest of the world to pay attention to you, and you better go out there front and centre delivering who you feel your country is as a nation,” states Senator Munson. “And you better have personality to be doing that.”

External Factors

The guests began assembling at the Los Pinos presidential compound in Mexico City just after 7 p.m., at the invitation of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. At either end of the banquet room Mexican and Canadian flags had been fashioned from flowers in full spring bloom. The guest of honour, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, had been in the country only a few hours. At about the same time, in the northern city of Tijuana, a 23-year-old gunman was firing two shots at Salinas's handpicked successor, Luis Donaldo Colosio Murrieta – an act that would throw Mexican politics into turmoil and take Chrétien's carefully scripted visit along with it (Caragata, 1994).

With this introduction, *Maclean's* describes how a carefully planned media event was upstaged by unexpected political turmoil. In 1994, Chrétien traveled to Mexico for Expo 94, a \$1.9-million exhibit of Canadian products, the largest export trade fair organized by the Canadian government to that time. The visit was anticipated as the opening of a new frontier for Canadian business, with NAFTA in effect only a few months before. Trade between Canada and Mexico remained relatively small and one way – about \$4 billion the previous year, with Canadian exports at only \$815 million. Canada was determined to gain a larger piece of the Mexican market (Austen, 1994). Instead, the official reception was cancelled and media attention both in Mexico and Canada centred on the dramatic developments surrounding such a high profile political assassination.

“These staged events can take a life of their own,” observes Senator Munson, who as a foreign correspondent covered the Tiananmen insurrection, itself an example of a derailed media event. In 1989, the Chinese government allowed foreign media into the country to cover the official visit of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to Beijing. The event was intended to mark a new stage in relations between the two nations. But Chinese students took over Tiananmen Square in protest against the system, knowing they would gain world attention because of the enhanced international media presence. “I can recall this being so bizarre,” says Munson. “On one side you had Gorbachev coming out of the Great Hall of the People in this magnificent staged event and in the meantime the real story is happening across the street.”

In his analysis of media events during electoral campaigns, Schill says politicians consider the “overarching benefit of media events as the ability to control situations” (Schill, 2009: 76). However, he fails to recognize there are factors outside the organizer’s control that may affect the way an event is reported. Even in favourable circumstances, major international events are not guaranteed to produce the desired coverage, since journalists may find that other issues have a higher news value or produce higher ratings. Says CTV’s Robert Fife: “You go to these events, but if there is any other international or domestic story, you go to the leader with that and write about a side issue, not the substance of the actual summit or meeting, which may be useless from the reporter’s point of view.”

The crisis in Bosnia took over the 1995 Halifax G7 Summit. “For journalists, that was the story right off the bat,” said Malcolm McKechnie, who was Canadian spokesman at the summit, “and also for the leaders, who thought that it was important to spend the

first evening of the conference speaking about the crisis in the Balkans and what the Western response should be.” Instead of concentrating on economic content, the summit agenda was modified to deal with unexpected circumstances. So was the communication strategy. “The worsening situation in Bosnia pushed the economy off the agenda at the opening dinner of the Group of Seven leaders' summit in Halifax last night,” reported Jeff Sallot in *The Globe and Mail*, indicating that Chrétien “told a hastily assembled international media corps that ‘when all information indicates that there is a danger of renewed intensification of fighting in Bosnia, in particular in Sarajevo, we send out to all of the parties a strong call for the greatest restraint’” (Sallot, 1995).

Pressure on journalists also has an effect on the way they cover media events. “Reporters know that events are staged all the way through, and they know their news desks are not going to be happy unless they have some colour, some controversy in their stories,” says Munson, explaining why colourful but almost irrelevant issues can upstage the main event. A burning car did the trick at the Genoa G8 Summit in 2001. Canadian Press’s Bruce Cheadle remembers Chrétien’s frustration with the attention that the media gave to the demonstrators’ antics. “He said, ‘It is a darn car,’” Cheadle recalls, describing the Prime Minister’s rebuke of media preoccupation with violent demonstrations. “He noted that he’d seen the same burning vehicle in newscasts and newspapers over and over again, but little mention of what the leaders were discussing.”

It is hard to judge whether Chrétien was overreacting or the media went overboard. Chrétien’s comments occurred when he was still in Genoa and he might have seen the same burning vehicle many times since such an incident has higher news value for local stations. Remnants of a burning car made it all the way to Canada, though; the

National Post published an AP picture of a passer-by staring at the remains of a car in Genoa to illustrate a story about the discontent that the riots generated in the local population (Jimenez, 2001). The same newspaper ran another story on a young Italian who was killed during the riots (Coman and Carroll, 2001). A third story anticipated the potential for riots the following year, when the summit would be held in Kananaskis, Alberta (Remington, 2001). Furthermore, the *National Post's* front-page story about the G8 summit on July 23, 2001 was dedicated to Chrétien's own comments on the role of protestors and his determination to prevent such chaos when the summit came to Canada (Fife, 2001). For its part, *The Globe and Mail* ran a front-page story on the riots and the death of a young protester at the beginning of the summit (Scofield, 2001b) and another at the end of the summit about the G8 pledges to tackle African poverty, although not without mentioning the violence that surrounded the event (Scofield, 2001a). A third story considered the benefits of Kananaskis' isolation to prevent chaos similar to Genoa's (Walton and Chase, 2001).

But large-scale incidents like the Genoa riots cannot be dismissed by the media. They actually happened and were part of the event, even if such antics are normally planned solely to gain media attention. *Maclean's* described clashes in Toronto during the 2010 G20: "A band of balaclava clad anarchists broke away from the rest of the pack during a peaceful march, torching several police cars and smashing store windows in the name of antiglobalization" (Intini et al. 2010: 27). The story depicted other less destructive but colourful protests:

Young men at the front chanted, "Free, free Palestine." Pro-choicers carried empty coffins with coat hangers attached. Others clung to banners. One read, "Animal rights are human rights." On another: "Defend Iran against

imperialist attack.” ...When asked what he was protesting, a native man with a long ponytail said, simply, ‘everything’”(Intini et al., 2010: 27).

“Activists know that they can create a totally different media event with a very different story line that will trump whatever is going on behind that barbed wire,” explains Barry McLoughlin. “They create their own theatre for media coverage and it largely works, as small bombs and smashing windows are normally covered by the media.”

Indeed journalists don’t want to write only about good things happening, because they may feel they are not doing their job as expected, explains Munson, a former broadcast journalist. “We as reporters who live on Parliament Hill, we would be looking for flaws, really looking for how to throw an irritant into this story because we don’t want to be seen as a mouthpiece for the government.” And that is what happened, he points out, during the 2010 G8 Summit in Muskoka when the Canadian government was accused of lavish expenditures surrounding the G8 and G20 meetings, including a decorative lake in the media centre. The fake lake controversy received media attention not only in Canada, but also in international media, like CNN (Soichet, 2010). “You have a fake lake and that’s part of the debate instead of the Muskoka initiative,” laments Munson, who recently returned from Ethiopia where he was able to see the benefits of the maternal health initiative brought about by the G8. “Journalists, especially television journalists, have a tendency to go towards what is blowing up in your face as opposed to having the tools to accepting that governments actually do things to help other countries.”

Messages from international media events also have to compete with domestic agendas that may work at cross-purposes. As the director of communication for the

Department of Foreign Affairs, Malcolm McKechnie was the spokesman for the 1997 APEC Summit in Vancouver; he recalls having to regain control of a multinational press conference when Taiwanese journalists flooded the microphones and kept asking why their country was not given proper status as a participant:

At one point and for the rest of the press conference, I actually didn't recognize journalists from Taiwan, and I would skip over and I didn't allow any more Taiwanese questions. Which at the end I think this is what we had to do, otherwise we would have been completely sidelined.

Communication consultant Barry McLoughlin knows that it is common practice for journalists to attend an event in search of comment on an unrelated issue, and he says that politicians have to be prepared to deal with that by being very disciplined in the execution of their message. "They make their answers to unrelated questions as uninteresting as possible because if they make it really interesting, then they wasted the money and time and everything that went into getting this event on and making it work." The fact that politicians must be prepared for other issues to surface also proves that media events are not as controllable as Schill (2009) concludes.

There are as many interests as there are journalists at a media event, which is considered an open invitation to ask about any of them. I can provide a personal example. In 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yizak Rabin visited Ottawa, becoming the first foreign leader to meet with Prime Minister Chrétien. They held a joint news conference on the lawn of 24 Sussex Drive to discuss bilateral issues and the Middle East situation. It was an unusually bright November morning and the stage was nicely set up complete with flags, podiums and two red-coated RCMP officers flanking the leaders as they talked to the Canadian and Israeli media. I attended this event as a correspondent for a Mexican

television network, assigned to do a story on NAFTA. That particular day, the U.S. Congress was set to vote on the deal, which had major significance for our Mexican audience. Since Canada was also a partner, I was assigned to get the Canadian perspective. The Rabin-Chrétien press conference represented the only opportunity for me to get an official comment, as the ministers of trade and foreign affairs were not in Ottawa. I attended the press conference with no intent to cover the main event.

There is no specific formula for dealing with a derailed media event, other than to make sure you regain control of the message. There are many ways to try to do that. During his 2009 trip to India, Stephen Harper maintained the focus on his message of renewed bilateral relations, despite media attempts to discuss the unfinished civilian nuclear deal or terrorism; in China, as the army troops were poised for a crackdown on the students on Tiananmen Square, Beijing pulled the plug on television coverage (Neuman, 1996); the G7 leaders took the initiative in Halifax to discuss Bosnia and appear on top of the issue; and for the Mexican crisis, Chrétien's visit turned out to be an endorsement on the stability of the government:

Mexican officials were initially unsure what to do with their Canadian guest. They soon realized that it was crucial to demonstrate that the government was still in charge. A decision to cancel Chrétien's official visit might be interpreted as a signal of Mexico's inability to cope with a crisis. As Chrétien put it: "President Salinas told me we have to carry on. The program should continue" (Caragata, 1994).

Whether it is the Canadian Prime Minister trying to re-engage with a modern India, or the British Prime Minister wanting to position himself in the forefront of current affairs, or world leaders discussing issues of global concern, international media events are planned and executed with the objective in mind of producing favourable media

coverage, but it is the media who “ultimately construct the event, and the host image for global audiences” (Rivenburgh, 2010:188). Under these circumstances, communication strategists deal not only with the content and form of the media event, as we saw in this chapter, but also with logistics details to make it easy for journalists to cover it. A series of media relations practices are put in place intended to provide supports and manage information and access. These are the considerations that we will evaluate in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

MEDIA RELATIONS LOGISTICS

“The airbus is scheduled to depart the Canada Reception Centre, Hangar 11 at 09h00 on Wednesday, May 25th. We ask that everyone arrive at the Hangar no later than 07h00 to complete check-in.” So reads the Departure Notice issued by the Prime Minister’s Office on May 20, 2011 in preparation for Stephen Harper’s trip to Deauville, France and Athens, Greece. Addressed to the “traveling media,” it contains practical information, a travel itinerary, instructions for free parking at the airport, and details about accommodations, foreign currency exchange, climate, time zones changes, electric voltage, and international dialling codes for the cities to be visited. The itinerary includes a detailed program of events, locations, departures and arrival times, as well as photo opportunities, media pools and briefing times.

For their part, the French and Greek governments were also ready to welcome the visiting media. In Deauville, a fully equipped and serviced media centre was set up, shuttles were scheduled, accommodations were assigned, and information packages were handed to arriving journalists, so that they could easily navigate the summit sites, activities and services. The French kit came in a trendy canvas bag and provided details not only about Deauville, the G8 Summit and the international media centre (IMC), but also gifts, such as a watch and umbrella decorated with the Deauville G8 Summit logo, books and traditional candy. The Greeks welcomed their visitors with a blue laptop style bag filled with information, guides, and books. “A warm welcome to our country” reads a hand-written card bearing the seal of the Hellenic Republic and the compliments of the General Secretariat of Communication.

All these apparent “trivialities” (Rivenburgh, 2010: 193), from long-distance codes and electrical outlets to transportation, programs and briefing times constitute the basics for the coverage of an event. After analyzing research on 11 global media events over 20 years, University of Washington scholar Nancy Rivenburgh found that “quite simply, anything that affects the media’s ability to do its job during an event is attributed to the quality and personality of the host” (Rivenburgh, 2010: 193). That means that the treatment of the media makes a difference in how an event is presented to the public. This goes beyond the niceties of a hand-written note. It involves efficient services that support the media, timely information and relevant access to the event. These are an integral part of media relations strategies. In practical terms, media relations is where the objectives, interests and practices of both officials and journalists meet, for better or for worse.

In this chapter I shall analyze media relations logistics in the context of international media events, looking at the interactions between government officials and the media. First, I shall analyze the supports provided (by the host and the visiting nation) for the media contingent that travels with a head of state during a foreign trip, and consider the implications of such a system. Second, I shall focus on the main considerations that media relations practitioners take into account in order to obtain positive media coverage by facilitating the media’s work during an international media event. These include supporting services, information management and access control. I shall consider their effect on the ability of journalists to cover the event.

Traveling with a Head of Government

“When we had the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in 2001,” recalls former chief of protocol Richard Kohler, “George W. Bush came with a large contingent. Several aircraft flew into Quebec City. Some aircraft had all the vehicles that go in the cortege, but also came with 1,300 people to support him for two nights. Half of them were security, and half of them were media.” Although extreme in size, this example highlights what is common: most world leaders travel with their own media contingent, plan their own events and arrange for the images to be seen at home.

Kohler, who coordinated many foreign visits to Canada from 2000 to 2003, indicates that a major component of each delegation is the accompanying media. From the organizational perspective, the media are primordial. Planning for them is as important as making sure that the visiting VIP fulfills his agenda. The Department of Foreign Affairs hires a specialist on contract when an incoming delegation requires support for its media contingent. “The media is treated like gold. They are taken care of and their needs are looked after,” says Kohler. Journalists arriving in Canada with a foreign delegation are met at the airport, they file off the back of the aircraft, they are fast-forwarded through immigration and customs, and they are provided with special buses that move together with the official caravan or in advance of it to arrive beforehand at the upcoming event. They are given access to photo opportunities and they are led in to open venues before anything official happens. All this is prearranged and planned; the same privileges are normally granted to the Canadian media when they travel with the Prime Minister abroad.

“Chinese officials closed the street and provided a bicycle for Prime Minister Jean Chrétien when he felt like riding one for the cameras,” recalls CJOH cameraman John Ledo as an example of the willingness to comply with a foreign visitor who feels like improvising a photo op. As it turned out, the resulting picture on the bicycle became one of the most enduring images of Jean Chrétien, even illustrating the front cover of his political memoir. In *My Years as Prime Minister* (2007), Chrétien discusses his penchant for pleasing the media by providing spontaneous action-shots and he describes how during the visit to Shanghai in 1994 his host provided what he unexpectedly requested:

Coming out of a meeting in Shanghai to go to another, I saw that the street was full of people riding bicycles. “Why don’t we go by bicycle?” I asked my host. No time, they replied. But when I emerged from the second meeting, they had a bicycle waiting for me. So I jumped on it and took off for a couple of blocks, with the bodyguards and the media all running and laughing behind me. It even made CNN Live... (Chrétien, 2007: 234).

For their part, embassies normally provide support for the media accompanying the visiting head of government. In addition to the media specialist of the host country, explains Kohler, a representative from Canada’s embassy, consulate or high commission works with the locals to take care of the Canadian media and to make sure they are able to cover all the events that the Prime Minister attends.

Every detail counts, and officials look after each to ensure that the domestic media are able to cover the events and file their stories. In 2000, when I was a media relations officer at the Mexican Embassy in Canada, then President-elect Vicente Fox came to Ottawa to meet Prime Minister Chrétien. In anticipation of the joint press conference, I arrived early on Parliament Hill. The Reading Room was being set up; the podiums and flags were in place. The simultaneous interpreters’ cabins were being tested. I located the

audio feed for journalists, one in English and one in French. No one had thought of having a Spanish feed, so I had to request one on the spot and ensure it was clearly identified so Mexican journalists would know where to plug in their recorders.

Our efforts at the Press Office of the Mexican Embassy were not limited to saving trouble at the last minute. We were in charge of a wide range of logistics for the Mexican media. We found them accommodations, leased transportation, and set up a temporary media relations office and media centre, complete with television, computers, phones, fax, photocopy machines and Internet connection. We helped arrange for satellite uplinks to feed the images back to Mexico. We prepared media programs and background information and, when needed, provided contact information for Mexican journalists interested in talking to Canadian officials. All of this was intended to facilitate the work of the traveling media. It was closely coordinated with a dedicated team within the president's press office in Mexico City whose responsibility was arranging all the services for the traveling media. (In Ottawa, the PMO similarly has a Manager of Tour and Scheduling.) During any presidential visit, the Mexican Embassy's Press Office also provided information to Canadian journalists, invited them to attend the events, and arranged for interviews with Mexican officials, including the president.

By contrast, some delegations maintain their focus solely on their domestic audience. "My job was to look after the visiting White House press and I was actually reminded that the Canadian media were not my issue," explains Victoria Terry, who as a media relations officer at the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa, participated in several presidential visits to Canada. "I had to make sure that the American media got the pictures that they wanted."

Even with all the supports available, access to the media is not always guaranteed. In October 1999, Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo traveled to Canada to address the International Conference on Federalism at Mont-Tremblant, Quebec. His participation was arranged only a few days beforehand and the visit lasted less than 24 hours. The delegation arrived in Ottawa the previous night and Zedillo traveled to Mont-Tremblant by helicopter early in the morning to deliver his speech at the conference, after which he flew back to the airport to leave for other engagements. The Mexican media could not accompany the President to Mont-Tremblant, as it was impossible to bus them back in time to leave on the president's plane. The Embassy set up a media room for journalists to watch on television as the Canadian networks broadcast the conference live. However, President Zedillo's address was cut off the air when he delivered it in Spanish; no network had arranged for an interpreter. Mexican officials in Mont-Tremblant used the telephone to allow journalists in Ottawa to listen to Zedillo's remarks.

Appendix A contains part of the media itinerary given to journalists traveling with Prime Minister Harper to the Hellenic Republic on May 28 and 29, 2011. It illustrates the sophistication and detailed preparation involved in scheduling the media and arranging services, including a filing room with snacks and a boxed lunch for the road. In this particular case, the media were divided into two groups, Pool Media and Media, with differing access to events due to space limitations.

The practice of having a media contingent travel with the leader was born out of necessity. At the end of World War I, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson went by ship to Europe in a trip arranged with little time to spare. With no passports and unable to secure transportation, a committee of Washington correspondents appealed to the Director of the

Committee on Public Information for support. George Creel, who was actually in the midst of dismantling his office, found himself struggling to make sure that the journalists obtained the necessary documentation in time and that they were able to get aboard the *George Washington*, on which Wilson was traveling. Due to the limited space available and in agreement with the correspondents, only the representatives of the Associated Press, the United Press and the International News Service traveled as guests of the president. Later, Creel was able to secure the *Orizaba* through the War Department for the rest of the media. Without Creel's intervention, no American journalist would have been in Paris to cover the peace negotiations (Creel, 1972).

Even today, an accompanying media contingent is the only practical way to cover such trips. It would be impossible to find commercial flights that match the schedule, and it would take enormous time and effort to obtain travel documents, clear customs with television equipment, and move around in foreign cities – not to mention the distractions of finding accommodations, local transportation and places to eat or write and edit stories. There are also financial considerations; it would be expensive for individual media outlets to travel on their own.

“In practical terms, the system works for journalists,” says Canadian Press reporter Jennifer Ditchburn, evaluating it from the utilitarian perspective of eliminating most of the distractions and stresses of traveling and allowing journalists to be where they need to be. For television crews these supports are an especially great convenience. “A major advantage of traveling with the Prime Minister is getting the PMO to get you through security, not just at the airport and customs, which is a blessing, but also through

the massive security apparatus that now functions at major events,” says CTV Ottawa Bureau Chief Robert Fife.

However, such a system has its drawbacks. “The main disadvantage is that PMO people are always hovering around, trying to listen to our conversations and what we are reporting,” points out Fife. “It is somewhat constricting,” says CP reporter Heather Scoffield. “Sometimes it is difficult to break away and get other points of view. You have to be very determined to get beyond the PMO hold.” Indeed, there is some tension associated with being ushered from event to event. “The media has rebelled against this hold,” observes Ditchburn, recalling her experience during a trip to Ukraine. In 2010, Prime Minister Harper gave a speech at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv intended to highlight Canada’s support for freedom and democracy in Ukraine where the Yanukovich regime was resorting to heavy-handed measures to intimidate opponents. To support his point, Harper also toured a museum that chronicled victims of Nazi and Soviet oppression and visited St. George’s Cathedral, whose parishioners were repressed during the years of Soviet occupation (Ibbitson, 2010 and Ditchburn, 2010). Ditchburn recounts:

I was the pool reporter during the visit to the museum. The director of the museum had been arrested by secret police, which also seized materials he had been collecting on Ukraine's Soviet resistance. After the visit, I wanted to talk to him because I thought his story was relevant in the context of Harper’s activities. But I was told there was no time and was taken to the next event at a Church, which was a photo op. There, I suggested going back to the museum while the Prime Minister was at the Church and other colleagues joined me. PMO staff were not happy, but we were so determined that they could not prevent us from going back.

Another disadvantage for reporters is the strict schedules that have to be followed.

“They did not change the filing times to accommodate us who returned to the museum

and we had a hard time working like that,” recalls Ditchburn, referring to the consequences of not following the schedule as determined. “This arrangement is very regimented and there is really a sense that you have to be with the PM all the time.”

For his part, fellow Canadian Press journalist Bruce Cheadle evaluates the system with a degree of resignation. “In a sense,” he says, “you are very much inserted into a bubble that is going to carry you along and you certainly don’t have a lot of influence in the way it is going to unfold at the time.” But Cheadle also points out that since he is reporting what the Prime Minister is doing abroad, he needs to be able to follow him closely: “We have to stick to the agenda, so we cannot go very far off the script because that is the main object of our assignment.”

Television networks experience other constraints. The media pay a fee to cover travel expenses, which is higher for them because they send a full ENG crew, producer and reporter. “The networks started to share resources because there wasn’t a lot of money to put towards these things,” recalls Leslie Swartman, who as communication officer during the Chrétien administration saw how the networks organized themselves by creating a rotating pool for international trips. This means that one full ENG crew provides the technical support for all the reporters involved in the arrangement. “This results in propaganda for the government... but they want to save some money,” comments a CTV senior cameraman who, as an experienced ENG crewmember, knows the limitations of having a single crew produce stories for three or more networks.

“There is no avenue anymore for spontaneous work by an individual television network particularly, and in some cases for newspapers,” adds Senator Jim Munson:

I remember traveling with Trudeau in the 1980s. We were in Singapore and Philippines and Jakarta and part of the story had to do with how the

Canadian manufacturing sector was losing out to cheap labour in Asia and I found this factory where they were making shoes and I got pictures of labourers... to give myself a sense of the event before we had the staged part with the heads of state. Now, because you have a single producer and a single camera with all the networks, it is difficult as a reporter to have your own set of eyes and ears on a staged event to give it context. You cannot move too far, so you just focus on the environment that the governments have created and sometimes it is difficult to have a critical view and you end up sort of accepting what is happening.

Ditchburn, who used to be a TV reporter, finds that this arrangement results in uniform coverage. "All the networks use the same images, you cannot do anything different. Even stand-ups are the same because of time constraints. You can do more as a print journalist. At least you can do interviews by phone, for example."

Swartman sees the other side of the coin. "There is less independent coverage," she agrees, but she also acknowledges: "I think it is a good thing from a message standpoint because everybody reports your message and that is the kind of coverage that you want."

In practical terms, being part of the media contingent simplifies the arrangements and the paper work, provides access, and saves time and money. In exchange, there is some loss of journalistic freedom. For their part, by hosting the media, leaders ensure that they obtain coverage at home, and mostly under the terms dictated by their communication strategists.

Facilitating the Work of the Media

"In Puerto Rico, I never ever saw any of the leaders because they were kept away from reporters until the end," says Senator Jim Munson recalling his 1976 experience at the second G7 summit. "And then you had the press conference but for pool reporters,

pool camera, pool this, pool that. You had briefings from senior people and then you just have the leaders for 30 minutes. What did you really learn? Not much.” Senator Munson’s unsatisfactory experience with the limitations of access, the pool system and the information control illustrates the challenges faced by the media and by communication officials during international media events. Facilitating the work of the media by providing services, managing information and controlling access are the main media relations considerations, not only to obtain positive coverage, but also to gain a better handling on what gets covered and how. However, in practice, the interaction between media and officials is very sophisticated. It involves many variables and actors and differs from event to event.

Services

Journalists arriving at the Lisieux train station in Deauville, France were able to take a shuttle to the accreditation centre for the summit, and from there, to the International Media Centre (IMC), where a detailed schedule was posted for transportation between the hotels and the IMC. Located at the Deauville la Touques Hippodrome, the IMC was open 24 hours and provided a reception and information desk, 1,000 workstations with Internet access, 220 telephones, 138 broadband Internet connections, 40 ISDN lines, 48 computers, closed-circuit television transmitting images from the host broadcaster, and lockers. There were also services for a fee for those requiring audio-visual facilities. These included 90 TV booths, 30 radio booths, 30 stand-up positions, and one TV interview studio. There were also press conference rooms and such other services as the Deauville and Normandy information centre, regional product stands selling candy, cheese, wine and souvenirs, a newsstand and medical services.

Lunch and dinner were provided in the media centre restaurant and a 24-hour snack and beverage service was available in the working area of the media centre (G8-G20, 2010). The various time zones make it a necessity for the media centre to function around the clock to accommodate deadlines. Some services may seem extravagant to the onlooker, but they are essential for international journalists. “Most of the time you can’t leave the site at all,” says Bruce Cheadle. “Especially in this security age, it takes hours to get in, so once you are in you are stuck for the duration of that day.” Free food, newsstand and medical services thus become essential.

According to Canadian Press reporter Heather Scoffield, even “summits in less developed markets are better at providing for the media than 10 years ago. Stuff works and they are better in translation than they used to be.” Her description reflects how sophisticated the services have become, to which I can attest based on my own experience. In 1993, I covered the Vancouver Summit for a Mexican television network. It was the first encounter between Presidents Bill Clinton of the U.S. and Boris Yeltsin of Russia and attracted journalists from around the world. The IMC was set up at the Vancouver convention centre, where the meetings occurred. It was a large, rather unattractive hall with rows of portable grey tables equipped with an occasional telephone and foldable black chairs. That pales in comparison with the well-equipped and nicely decorated hall that France set up in Deauville, as the photographs in Appendix B demonstrate. The modern media centre is not only beautiful, but contains comforts like reading lights and plenty of plugs for journalists’ laptops. In Vancouver, a large corkboard was used to post messages and press releases and there was a table with information about Vancouver, British Columbia and Canada. Television networks had

their own tables separated by white curtains where they could receive the pool feed and edit their stories. In Deauville, numerous risers for the cameras flanked one side of the main hall and a separated area with cubicles allowed ENG crews to set up their edit suites and guard their equipment. In 1993, security was not a burden; there was no free food – and certainly not a lavish buffet like in Deauville. There was no television studio – only a couple of camera stands outside the convention centre. Since this was before the widespread use of the Internet and laptops and no typewriters were provided, journalists had to have their own means to write stories; I, for instance, wrote by hand on a notepad. The Vancouver media kit was contained in a simple royal blue bag of dubious quality decorated with a rather cheap reproduction of the summit logo on one side and the McDonald's logo on the other. There were no gifts, no souvenirs, no candies; maybe a pin, a pen and a notepad were added, but not a watch. All of this seems rather simple in comparison to what was provided in Deauville or even in Toronto in 2010, where the media were treated to an interior lake, complete with canoes and Muskoka chairs.

“In the planning leading up to Kananaskis and the planning leading up to the 2010 G20, enormous energy was invested in hosting the media and defining where they would be accommodated, what kind of facilities they would be given,” recalls protocol expert Richard Kohler. He says the artificial lake at the Toronto media centre is an example of the extent to which Canadian officials try to make journalists happy, while projecting a positive image of the country. The interior lake was part of what summit organizers called the “Canadian corridor,” a \$1.9-million exhibit intended to showcase Canadian investment opportunities and local points of interest. This is because the government

considers the media to have a crucial influence over its primary target audience, senior business decision makers (CP, 2010).

The mock rustic northern scene featuring the Muskoka region also served to bring a sense of place to the event, which is common practice around the world. “From a reporter’s point of view, we go into a big hall and we cover the summit and it could be in any country in the world. They are all the same, it doesn’t matter,” says CP’s Scoffield sympathizing with the reasoning behind the efforts to make the event somewhat especial and unique for a country. “It’s exactly the image I imagined, the beautiful scenery,” said Motosada Matano, a Japanese press officer travelling with the 160 Japanese journalists covering the summit. Matano, who had never been in Canada before, indicated to a CBC reporter that the display reinforced the image of Canada he already had (Elliot, 2010).

Journalists too seem interested in giving an event a local flavour. In 1998, when I worked at the media centre for the signing of the Landmines Convention in Ottawa, some foreign journalists approached the main desk where I was coordinating accreditation to enquire about local attractions to write about; others wanted help contacting the RCMP to obtain images of Mounties for their stories.

Much of the sophistication in media centres nowadays is due to a number of factors. First is technology. On the one hand, technology allows for better access to information about the event, as the closed-circuit television demonstrates. But on the other hand, it makes journalists even more dependent on the services provided by the hosts, like Internet access, with which to communicate with editors and file reports. Second, the large number of journalists attending international events requires hosts to be prepared to support the huge numbers. This entails not only larger spaces and more

equipment, but also such services as transportation; taxis cannot move a couple thousand people, food and medical services. And third, governments are more and more aware of the strategic benefits of facilitating the work of the media that “they depend on the most for image success” (Rivenburgh, 2010: 188).

Information

International media events have proven to be media magnets. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 2,655 journalists received full accreditation to cover the G8 and G20 in 2010. Because of such large numbers, providing services for the media is in itself a major endeavour for organizers, but it is not the only one. “It is a real challenge to manage that many journalists and to keep them fed with information through press conferences and various presentations about what is going on behind closed doors so that they can report about that,” says Malcolm McKechnie, who was the spokesman during the 1995 G7 Summit in Halifax and the 1997 APEC Summit in Vancouver. He points out that every journalist and every participant has his or her own interests, which adds to the challenge for any communication director during large events. He explains that organizers normally try to keep journalists informed with technical briefings by officials while the conference is still going on. Normally, organizers set up briefings at the beginning and halfway through with the foreign minister, finance minister or trade minister, for example. At the same time, every delegation schedules its own media briefing. “It’s a delicate balance in terms of ‘feeding the beast’ as they say, making sure you are getting your information out in a kind of prepared and effective way and at the same time allowing the leaders to get on with their work.” McKechnie points out another challenge: some politicians don’t like to see other

officials take the limelight. They prefer to deliver the most important agreements themselves.

There are other means to prevail in the information tug-of-war. One strategy is to refuse to give any content except through leaks, observes former Canadian diplomat Colin Robertson. “Americans are masters of it, and they succeed probably because there is more of them and because English has become the medium of transmission and as a consequence the other foreign language media – whether they are French or Spanish or anything else – they know English and tend to play off what it is being said in English.”

At the end of multilateral events, the host leader has a press conference and he speaks on behalf of the other participants. McKechnie recalls that as host, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien made himself available, an attitude that contributes to the overall communication strategy. Also, it is common practice that the other leaders hold their own press conferences that are open to any accredited journalist, not just their own national press. All of this creates an environment of information overload and competing narratives for journalists to sort out.

Heather Scoffield considers multinational events as opportunities to widen her horizons. “It may take a bit of foot work, but you don’t have to take the official information package and run with it,” says Scoffield who looks at other delegations’ perspective to complement her own stories:

Especially at a summit, where you have lots of different countries, they all have their packaged goods, but they are different. And so, if you go to other countries or you talk to other people that you meet in the corridor, you may find another point of view that is not included in the Canadian shiny package.

Indeed, journalists do what it takes to obtain information to write their stories. Jennifer Ditchburn travelled with Prime Minister Harper to the 2006 APEC Summit in Vietnam, where tension between China and Canada became a major issue for the Canadian media. The encounter between Harper and the Chinese President, Hu Jintao was cancelled and rescheduled twice. Prime Minister Harper had previously pointed to China's "unwillingness to hear Canada's blunt message on human rights concerns" and Chinese officials responded by calling such a comment "irresponsible" (Woods, 2006) producing public controversy. "The media had been barred from most [Canadian] events and the PMO was not providing information," Ditchburn recalls. "After the meeting between Harper and Hu Jintao we learned that Chinese foreign affairs officials were giving a briefing, so we attended, and we got a description of the bilateral encounter by Chinese officials." As a result, Canadian media reported on contradictions between the two delegations:

Canadian officials... who only informed reporters about 12 hours after the meeting had occurred [and by a short e-mail], insisted it was "frank" and covered a range of issues. Most notable, they said, was the case of Huseyin Celil, 37, a Canadian citizen who was sent from Uzbekistan to a Chinese jail without Ottawa's knowledge... Liu Jianchao, a top Chinese foreign ministry spokesman told Canadian reporters China's version of events. On the Celil matter, Liu said that they consider the Chinese-born man as a "Chinese national" - not a Canadian citizen - but played down the significance of Saturday's discussions on the APEC sidelines. "I don't want to stretch the point," he said, "both sides reiterated their position on this" (Woods, 2006).

Not every media event permits multiple sourcing, however, and even if there are multiple news conferences available, it is still true that covering such staged events is challenging. "The information is filtered down," says Senator Jim Munson, who thinks that staged events are quite a sterile environment for journalists who are "spoon-fed information" through public communications people. "The reporter has very little

information and research of what to accept and ends up basically, most of the time delivering a news package which is to the advantage of the government.”

Communication consultant Barry McLoughlin describes how challenging it is for journalists to cover staged events:

You just covered the event that they structured and formatted for you and you just need to fill in the blanks and the story has been written for you. Well, most serious journalists realize that their stories have to reflect what is happening at the event because that is why they are there in the first place. But the second half is to wonder if that is the whole story or if there is an alternative storyline. If there is one, it better be clear and not just a twisted little version of reality. You need proof to say something different than what government officials are presenting. Journalists really need to do their homework in that sense.

Journalists recognize that they mostly depend on officials to do their work. “The material that we are working, the raw material that we are reporting is what we are provided by the summit host and the participants,” confirms Bruce Cheadle who also indicates that journalists may find it difficult to interpret the events because they tend to arrive late in the process and have little insight on the details of an international event. “For instance,” he explains, “I am assigned to a summit maybe two or three weeks beforehand and I would probably write one or possibly two set-up stories in advance to a summit that has been in the working for a year or more.”

Under these circumstances interactions between the media and officials are not as rigid as they may seem at first. In practice, they address interests on both sides. For their part, officials deliver information according to the timing and to the extent that they consider beneficial for their own purposes, much as the Canadian delegation did during 2006 APEC Summit, just discussed. Even though there is no official explanation, this media relations approach of barring the media might have been an attempt to prevent a

public escalation on the rhetoric between China and Canada. “When a reporter sought Harper's reaction to a counter-charge from Beijing's foreign ministry ... the prime minister refused to answer and PMO officials barred journalists from attending any of his subsequent photo opportunities with APEC leaders,” wrote Allan Woods (2006). The drastic measure were probably not only about who said what. Ties with China were already shaky after representatives of the Conservative government met the Dalai Lama, tacitly recognized Taiwan as a country separate from mainland China, and accused the Communist government of industrial espionage. The tension gained new urgency following revelations Canada revoked the diplomatic standing of a high-ranking Chinese diplomat in Ottawa, allegedly for spying on Falun Gong practitioners. All this happened in the few months the Conservative government had been in power (Woods, 2006).

Other delegations participating in the same event had different approaches:

U.S. President George W. Bush provided the media gaggle travelling with him an emotional, off-the-cuff commentary on the poignancy of being in Vietnam while the war in Iraq rages on. Australian Prime Minister John Howard granted reporters covering him three or four opportunities a day to get his take on the proceedings. The Chinese organized a special briefing for journalists immediately following an important meeting with Bush. Harper took questions only on the final day of the APEC summit. (Ditchburn, 2006).

Malcolm McKechnie sums up:

Journalists need to have the feeling that they are actually able to know what is going on and report about that. My view is that the more forthcoming the organizers are about providing information through press conferences or background briefings you are going to have a much more satisfied press group.

Access

Here at the G-8 summit meeting –well, O.K., I am not precisely ‘here’ pillow fighting with the leaders at their tiny summer camp in the remote

Canadian Rockies. The press has been quarantined two hours away in Calgary, Canada's Guantánamo, and my effort to gate-crash the summit was blocked by very friendly, very many Mounties on a road near the invitingly named Dead Man's Flat (Kristof, 2002).

This is how *New York Times* columnist Nicholas D. Kristof conveyed his frustration at not being on site for the 2002 G8 Summit in Kananaskis Provincial Park in Alberta. Journalists covering an event, after all, expect to have reasonable access to it and its participants. However, media access cannot be taken for granted. It depends on many variables. Some are strategic – to achieve the objective of the event or to better control the narrative – but some are practical, such as security, disruptions, transportation, and limitations of time and space.

In instances where stakes are high for the participants, isolation might be central to success and therefore media access is highly or totally restricted. This model of “closed-door diplomacy” limits the media to exposure of mostly technical aspects of the negotiating process, but excludes the more substantive access” (Gilboa, 2000: 282).

The summit in Camp David in 1978 is a good example of the strategic value of limiting access. In his search for a peace agreement in the Middle East, U.S. President Jimmy Carter hosted “one of the most risky summits of the twentieth century” (Reynolds, 2007: 283) by bringing together the key players in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat and his Israeli counterpart, Menachem Begin. At Carter's invitation, the leaders participated in closed-door negotiations at the presidential retreat of Camp David that lasted for thirteen days. In *Summits: Six Meetings that Shaped the Twentieth Century*, David Reynolds (2007) explains that the secluded site was chosen as a venue by the president precisely because “he would be able to control the environment and minimize leaks as the State Department was convinced that a recent meeting in

England was ruined by constant briefings from Egyptians and Israeli participants to hovering journalists” (Reynolds, 2007: 303).

The author notes the White House knew the media could not be silenced. They would simply fill any news vacuum with gossip and rumour. This had to be avoided to make sure that the president was always portrayed as being in control. The White House then created a media centre some six miles away, equipped with offices, a canteen, a briefing area, typewriters, telex machines and 200 long-distance phones while a bus provided by the State Department enabled the media to commute from the city every day. All the participants agreed that Carter’s spokesman, Jody Powell, would be the only official spokesman at the summit. As such he delivered periodic briefings of mostly mundane happenings without giving any details on how the negotiations were evolving. During the thirteen days, journalists were allowed access to the site only once to cover a marine drill attended by the leaders, who were on the opposite side of the parade ground, and they were allowed to film the leaders at designated points during a visit to the battlegrounds of Gettysburg. Access to the historic site “was intended to placate the increasingly frustrated newsmen” (Reynolds, 2007: 319).

A similar model of seclusion was applied in 1995, when President Clinton gathered Presidents Milosevic of Serbia, Izetbegovic of Bosnia and Trudjman of Croatia for a peace summit in an Air Force base in Dayton, Ohio. All agreed to confine dealings with the media to periodic briefings conducted by spokespersons “so that the work was not interrupted by opportunities for posturing before the cameras” (Gilboa, 2000: 283).

The media blackout works for the purpose of some meetings, but it has implications for journalists. In an analysis of the role of the media in contemporary

diplomacy, Eytan Gilboa (2000) describes the effects of closed-door diplomacy on journalism:

Journalists are totally cut off from their normal sources and are unable to conduct interviews or to receive information at press conferences. Therefore media coverage becomes inherently limited and problematic. In the absence of hard news the coverage is confined to background stories, human-interest stories, speculations and vague assessments... Instead of routine and special interviews with officials, correspondents interview each other and often file reports bearing little substance or insight. (Gilboa, 2000: 285)

However, closed-door, high profile negotiations are exceptional. Most events require some degree of accountability, for which access is imperative. "This falls under the general theme of transparency," explains the former UN Under-Secretary, Louise Fréchette. "Access to the media during events is based on the notion that in a democracy at least, citizens have the right to know what their leaders are up to, so there is small place for confidentiality and the media play a big role by covering all of it in detail."

For world leaders, who value the public relations aspect of international events, the presence of the media is strategic and opting for remote locations with limited access offers some advantages in that sense. "They can control the message better," indicates communication consultant Barry McLoughlin. "A lot of these events are so heavily structured and the media are in confined areas so that organizers can control the narrative." He explains that this leaves journalists little choice but to obey the rules or risk not being allowed in the next time.

It is in deciding who gets access, and when, that practical considerations enter into play. One of them is security. "Reduced access is the price journalists pay," explains Richard Kohler, "because the primary concern is safety. And guaranteeing the safety of the VIP visitors sometimes results in more difficulties for the media." Another reason to

choose remote locations is to minimize disruptions to citizens due to street closures and to safeguard the well-being of individuals and businesses, as there is a higher probability for large demonstrations and riots in big cities or towns. This is what happened in Genoa in 2001 when the G8 Summit was overshadowed by violent demonstrations in the streets; a 23-year-old Italian protester was shot to death by police. “Genoa was a turning point,” recalls Malcolm McKechnie, describing how Prime Minister Jean Chrétien wanted to prevent such chaos and disruption the following year when the summit was scheduled to take place in Canada. He decided to change the venue from Ottawa to Kananaskis. During the final Genoa press conference, when the unlikely Canadian site was announced, officials and journalists – including Canadians – scrambled to find out where Kananaskis was and which was the closest city.

Seclusion creates logistical challenges for communication officials. They struggle to keep journalists informed since the meeting site and the media centre can be hundreds of kilometres away from each other. “It has become a serious issue,” McKechnie notes. “The more remote and secluded the place is, the more difficult it is to get around to achieve the balance that you need.” To be successful, organizers have to make sure that buses are available for the media and that video is easily distributed, but the separation creates frustration among journalists who feel limited in their ability to do their job. “The media was so fed up,” recalls Victoria Terry from her experience as information officer for the U.S. Embassy during the Kananaskis summit. “There were only pools that were allowed to go to Kananaskis. Everybody else was in Calgary with nothing much to do, and when the media are unhappy, they start looking for secondary stories, digging around

for a contentious issue.” She describes how U.S. officials did their best to keep the media happy by providing plenty of food and leads to positive stories:

I dug out stories myself, which were good stories and gave them handouts on all the good things that were going on around, so that they weren't sitting at their computers waiting for a picture to arrive to write a story. I provided historical facts about Calgary and interesting information about Kananaskis to give them as much positive stuff that they could write about so that they didn't have to go digging for a negative story... Not that it always worked.

In the case of *The New York Times*, lack of access seems to have led to a critical commentary on unrelated issues. Nicholas D. Kristof (2006), the reporter who complained about being “quarantined in Canada’s Guantánamo” and whose attempts to crash the summit site were thwarted by the RCMP, did not focus on the summit in that column. From the town of Dead Man’s Flat, he wrote his commentary on what he saw as President Bush’s polarizing stance in world affairs. After putting down the moralistic streak of some Americans and pointing out inadequacies in the White House’s approach to Iraq, Cuba and the Middle East, Kristof suggested “if Mr. Bush is going to achieve results, rather than just thump his chest loudly, he needs to add nuance to that instinct for moral clarity and lower the contrast on his world view” (Kristof, 2006).

Distance is not the only variable that limits access. The large number of journalists covering international events has become a hindrance in itself. There is not enough space for all of them and when there is, it takes too much time to let them all in. To deal with this, a system of pools is in place to give access to a representative group. Sometimes it works on a first-come, first-served basis; sometimes it works by allocation of space to each nation’s media delegation. Communication strategist Leslie Swartman calls this “a necessary evil” because there is no better way to accommodate large numbers of journalists. Malcolm McKechnie agrees, adding that the better the pool

system is handled, the smoother things go. “In theory, the pool system is supposed to help, but in practice it is difficult to manage,” he says noting he had to work very closely with the Prime Minister’s communications director and with representatives of the other governments to coordinate it at the APEC summit in Vancouver. “Pooling is always kind of a problem because nobody accepts the concept really,” reckons McKechnie. “Journalists that are left behind always complain and never feel that there is enough in the pool.”

But even with its disadvantages, pooling has become the preferred means of access during international events, resulting in a contradiction: despite a large media presence, events are covered mostly by a select pool of reporters. Appendix C contains the media program for the 2010 G8 and G20 Summits in Canada. It serves to illustrate how prevalent pools are. Only one item allows for open media coverage – the G20 Chair’s press conference, which in theory could have been attended by all 2,655 accredited journalists.

Under the circumstances, journalists accept the need for pooling and look at the system as the only way to “keep their eyes on key events, even if space is limited.” This is how Heather Scoffield characterizes pools. She thinks the system can work well as long as the pool reporter is reliable and the pool events are selected wisely. “However,” she adds, “the PMO frequently schedules many pool events during the day, and often they have no news value.” She recalls the G20 summit in Korea, where Prime Minister Harper attended a remembrance ceremony. “It was really hard for me to make a story out of that. There were nice pictures, but there was not much to say other than mentioning that he was present at the ceremony.”

Access is critical but it has to be balanced to satisfy journalists' need for relevance and transparency while providing delegations with the required privacy to discuss the issues at hand. "There is no point in attending events where you are only standing around with no interaction," says Ditchburn, pointing out that photo ops are useful but journalists need to be able to talk to officials.

The availability of 24-hour news outlets on TV and the Internet creates the need for content resulting in coverage of any open activity, regardless of importance. For instance, on June 25, 2010, CNN aired live not only the arrival of U.S. President Barack Obama in Toronto for the G8 and G20 Summits, but also the G8 leaders' pose for a group photo and the greeting of participants by the Canadian Prime Minister (CNN, 2010). Canadian diplomat Colin Robertson says such coverage trivializes the event. He describes how television networks showed world leaders walking out of the 2010 G8 hotel on a carpet, reaching a fountain, turning around and shaking hands with Prime Minister Harper. "It was almost like walking in a beauty pageant," says Robertson. "When the media is allowed to cover only peripherals, what you see in the news is how people walk and you judge accordingly. You don't judge the event by the content of the discussion, and that is ridiculous."

In that sense, Robertson, who as a diplomat has extensive media relations and communication experience, indicates that officials are aware of the need to provide some form of access for the media, either to the event or to officials. "When journalists are not allowed in the room, inside we say that 'we have to feed them a burger bit,'" he says. As a journalist, I benefited from such an approach. In 1993, I was covering negotiations between Canada and Mexico on NAFTA's environmental and labour side deals. Officials

worked behind closed doors. I waited outside the room for hours and was able to obtain a short comment by the main Canadian negotiator indicating that talks were advancing well. But that was not enough to produce a story. At the end of the journey, all officials left without saying a word. To help journalists, a representative of Mexico's business sector, who attended as advisor for the Mexican delegation, was made available. He did not discuss the negotiations, but talked about the particular concerns of the private sector in the context of what was discussed. With that "burger bit" and my hard-earned Canadian negotiator's clip I was able to do a story.

Too many restrictions can also add to the frustration of journalists, who may take matters into their own hands. "Since the PMO closed all the events attended by the Prime Minister, we approached other delegations trying to find our way in," says Ditchburn about the 2006 APEC summit. "We called the New Zealand embassy in Hanoi and asked for access to the photo op at the bilateral encounter between Harper and Prime Minister Helen Clark. And that is how we got in. At that point, the Prime Minister had no choice but to briefly talk to us." What she describes almost amounted to an ambush.

Communication strategists Malcolm McKechnie and Victoria Terry agree that the more separated journalists are from the action the less interesting it is for them to cover the event. Warns Terry: "You get them either not bothering to go or working on side stories and the very positive image that you want to portray could be sidetracked by an unhappy media looking for controversy." She says the best strategy is to "keep them happy, or keep them close to the principals."

Media relations practices vary from event to event and even from delegation to delegation, but together with the communication strategies that we evaluated in the

previous chapter, they give shape to the coverage of an event and determine how it is portrayed to the public. To get a better understanding of this combination, and its effects, a case study is helpful. Next chapter is dedicated to analyzing a particular international media event: the first foreign trip by U.S. President Barack Obama, who traveled to Ottawa in February 2009.

Chapter 5

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S COOKIES

“It was the best day of my life,” says Ahmed, an employee at Le Moulin de Provence, a cafeteria and traditional French bakery in Ottawa’s Byward Market. And it is good he feels that way because recalling it has become part of his routine: he is often questioned by curious visitors about the unexpected visit to the shop by the newly inaugurated U.S. President, Barack Obama. “People still want to talk about it,” says Ahmed ten months later, standing in front of a larger than life picture of a smiling Obama at the entrance of the bakery. He feels privileged for having encountered the popular figure, whom he compares to the likes of Mandela, Kennedy and Clinton.

It was February 19, 2009. Obama completed a seven-hour working visit to the Canadian capital, his first foreign trip since taking office a month earlier. He was welcomed by Canada’s Governor General Michaëlle Jean. On Parliament Hill he signed the guest book and met privately with Prime Minister Stephen Harper, with whom he also had lunch and later held a joint press conference. On his return to the airport to meet Opposition Leader Michael Ignatieff before boarding the plane back to Washington, he unexpectedly stopped at the popular market. He purchased souvenirs for his family, including two large butter cookies shaped as maple leaves covered in red icing and with the word Canada written in white. This gesture defined the Ottawa visit and made the day for Ahmed, his colleagues at the bakery, and the bystanders who happened to witness the unlikely shopping spree.

“From an image point of view, the trip was immensely successful for everyone,” says *Globe and Mail* columnist Jeffrey Simpson:

First, for Canada, where there is this thing about being the first country to be visited by a newly inaugurated president. Secondly, this trip was a trial to see if all the logistics worked right, a few hours in Canada is an easy trip in that sense. Thirdly, he knew that he was going to get a great reception, we all love him here, so that would make for a very friendly series of messages back to the United States. And fourth, Obama campaigned on restoring America's reputation in the world. We have very good relations with the U.S. It wasn't going to really turn Canadian opinion around, but it was a signal to the world.

In this chapter I analyse the visit to Ottawa by U.S. President Barack Obama as a media event designed to venture into the international struggle for image power. This case study looks at the visit to Ottawa as, in the words of former White House spokesman Michael McCurry, "a conscious effort to try to communicate effectively inside Canada that this new American President understood what an important relationship this is and wanted to have a direct connection to the Canadian people." To achieve that, the strategic and logistical considerations of media relations that were analyzed in the previous chapters are put together, linking them with the coverage produced. In reviewing the coverage of the visit, though, I put an emphasis on the Canadian media, which was the main international target. Some reference is made to international and U.S. coverage, however. By combining elements analyzed throughout this thesis, I intend to better illustrate how media events, as a whole, play a role not only in advancing the interests of the nations involved but also in managing their international image.

To that end, I shall first describe briefly the background of the visit that defined the major communication components. Second, I shall describe the media relations practices that facilitated the work of the media and contributed to the overall success of the communication strategy. Third, I shall consider how the strategic elements described in the previous chapters combined to produce a consistent message and how they were

interpreted by the media. These elements are: the rhetoric that specifically defined the main message and supported it while discussing diverse topics; the effort to establish an emotional connection with the people of Canada and the central role played by Obama's personality in delivering the message. I will close this chapter with an assessment of the event and its value by some of the experts who contributed to the development of this thesis.

Background

“The view that America is part of what has gone wrong in our world, rather than a force to help make it right, has become all too common,” Senator Barack Obama (2008) admitted with regret during an overseas speech delivered to 200,000 ecstatic Germans in Berlin in 2008. It was the middle of the election campaign that eventually took the popular Democrat to the White House and his stop overseas allowed him to delineate the issues that he considered to be at the top of the world's agenda (Schmitz, 2008). Afghanistan, terrorism, trade, poverty, climate change, nuclear weapons and the Middle East were all mentioned in varying detail, but somehow all were considered as challenges that the world must face in partnership. This was the key of the speech: Obama indicated on the world stage that under his command the U.S. would leave the unilateralism of the Bush administration behind. “True partnership and true progress require sharing the burdens of diplomacy, of progress and peace. They require allies who will listen to each other, learn from each other and, most of all trust each other,” the candidate said.

Obama took Presidential office on January 20, 2009 as his nation faced dire economic recession – the trip to Ottawa happened two days after he signed a high-stakes

\$787-billion economic recovery package – and was embroiled in expensive military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan that were highly unpopular both domestically and abroad. The reputation of his country was low. The Global Attitudes Project of the Pew Research Centre (2008) found that only 27% of the countries polled in 2008 had a level of favourability towards the U.S. exceeding 60%, compared with 72% of the countries polled in 2002. It was now up to Obama to turn this around and position himself and his country in a positive light.

To fulfill the vision described in Berlin, the new administration set in motion what *The Washington Post* (2009) called “listening tours,” dispatching Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to South East Asia – to “reach out to the entire world,” as Clinton said while in Indonesia (Schneider, 2009) – and preparing for the Presidential working visit in neighbouring Canada. Ottawa was a good, sensible place for President Obama to venture into the world. His predecessors – Kennedy, Reagan, Bush Sr. and Clinton – all chose Canada as their first foreign stop, a gesture that Canadians have appropriated as a fitting tradition that demonstrates the value of their friendship and gives Canada international stature. This is not only because Canada and the U.S. are neighbours, but also because their relationship is among the closest and most extensive in the world. Thanks to the approval of two major free trade agreements, Canada and the U.S. maintain the world’s largest trading relationship which, according to the U.S. Department of State (2011), moves an equivalent of \$1.6 billion in goods and some 300,000 people across the border every day. The two North American allies traditionally cooperate widely in international security and political issues, both bilaterally and through numerous international organizations. They maintain extensive defence arrangements and cooperate closely on

border security and to combat terrorism. Bilateral relations are generally close, but have undergone some changes in tenor over the past decades. After a period of distancing but cordiality in the early 2000s, the election of a Conservative government in Canada in 2006 facilitated bilateral cooperation since it was regarded as being more philosophically in tune with the George W. Bush administration. The election of President Obama in November 2008 signalled a new chapter in Canada-U.S. relations because Obama is quite popular in Canada, while Bush Jr. never was (Ek and Fergusson, 2011).

Ottawa announced the trip on January 10, 2009, issuing a short press release confirming that Obama had accepted the Prime Minister's invitation. No more details were provided because the event had to be planned once the new administration took over, which is when the date and the nature of the visit were made public. Victoria Terry, now a retired media relations officer from the U.S. Embassy in Canada, reckons the trip was categorized as a working visit rather than a full state visit because of timing: "Obama had just been sworn in and so it was done as a really quick visit to show allegiance and friendship without getting too fancy so that Canada didn't feel snubbed and to show that Canada is important." She explains that official visits are sophisticated and take too long to plan to be practical when things have to be done fast.

The choice of destination was more than a nice neighbourly gesture; core political and policy issues were at play. As John Geddes (2009) wrote in *Maclean's*, Obama's security adviser James Jones, a key figure behind the trip, had two major interests in mind when considering the benefits of courting Canada: Afghanistan, because he was worried that the international coalition might fray, and Alberta's oil sands, because he

favoured a U.S. shift toward Canada and Mexico as sources of oil instead of relying on the Middle East.

During a telephone conversation after the inauguration, Harper and Obama agreed the economy would be the top priority of their encounter. This fits the fact that the economy is the major area of bilateral interaction and that both governments were putting forward their own stimulus packages. They also agreed to deal with energy and environment issues, as well as international security, particularly Afghanistan (Geddes, 2009). The machinery got into gear with government officials and diplomats moving ahead to plan for the day.

“The first couple of times when the president gets to be on an international stage they are watched very, very carefully. There is somewhat greater attention paid to those trips and for that reason a lot of care gets put into them,” says McCurry, adding that strategists would keep in mind that the same event would have meanings not only for the people at home, but also for the place visited and the rest of the world.

The Communication Framework

While supports for the media were being arranged by the Embassy’s media relations personnel and the government of Canada, political and communication strategies were also in the works. The U.S. Embassy in Canada did not have an Ambassador appointed yet and it was the responsibility of Charge d’Affairs Terry A. Breese (2010) to brief the White House on the local political environment, the main issues of the bilateral relationship and the key themes to discuss with the media. A short, confidential report appropriately named *Scenesetter* was dispatched to Washington as

part of the preparations. Under the heading *Some Home Truths*, Breese informed the President of his enormous popularity in Canada – 81% approval rating – and its impact on local politics. Obama was also told that making Ottawa his first destination as President “will do much to diminish... Canada’s habitual inferiority complex vis-à-vis the U.S., and its chronic but accurate complaint that the U.S. pays far less attention to Canada than Canada does to us” (Breese, 2010). The scenesetter also describes a political environment in which the minority government was under constant threat of defeat and faced the country’s first deficit in more than a decade. A paragraph was dedicated to trade figures and the perception that the tight security implemented after September 11 has driven up business costs and delayed border crossings. It describes Canada’s hopes for coordinated economic stimulus packages to revive both economies. The diplomatic cable refers to Canada’s wish to be recognized as the largest source of imported energy for the U.S., the associated sensibilities over the higher environmental footprint of oil production, and the implications of Obama’s support for renewable energies. The Conservative government is described as seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and advocating coordinated environmental protections policies with the U.S. “[Canadians] hope and expect this will be a central theme of your visit,” adds Breese. A paragraph is dedicated to Afghanistan. Canada has the highest casualty rate among NATO partners, it says, noting the “virtually zero willingness across the political spectrum” to extend the mandate of its military beyond 2011. It is pointed out that Canada could offer significant new funding to strengthen the Afghan army and police. “Much will depend upon convincing Canada that its continued contributions are a critical component of your strategy for success in Afghanistan,” Breese suggested. Another brief

paragraph refers to the Arctic. The U.S. interprets the Northwest Passage as a strait for international navigation, while Canada considers it to lie within its territorial jurisdiction.

This scenesetter is interesting because it allows an unusual, even if limited, peek into official briefings that contribute to the overall strategy of a foreign visit, including the communication aspect. In that respect, Mr. Breese dedicates a second section titled *Key Themes* to suggest a few points that, from the embassy's perspective, "would be most useful in public remarks and media availability." The highlights are: a) Canada is a true friend, trusted ally, valued trading partner; b) Canada and the U.S. are working together to defeat terrorism, promote economic development, prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and advance human freedom; c) Canada and the U.S. will strive to protect and preserve the environment; d) Canada and the U.S. will emerge stronger from the economic crisis thanks to cooperation, creativity and sacrifice; e) Canada and the U.S. need to work together to build a shared vision for the security of the two nations while supporting trade; f) the U.S. considers the Northwest passage for international navigation, but does not dispute Canada's sovereignty over Arctic islands; and g) Canada has paid a high price in human life to help Afghanistan, the U.S. salutes these Canadian contributions, and it counts on continued Canadian cooperation.

Once the program and discussion topics were agreed on, the media were briefed. On February 17, Denis McDonough, Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communication, provided journalists in Washington with a short description of the program, described the composition of the U.S. delegation, and elaborated on the substantive content. "The President obviously recognizes that there is no larger trading partner or important economic partner for the United States than Canada. And that will be

the primary issue that they'll discuss on Thursday, namely the economy," said McDonough (2009). "There will be a lot of discussion of the economic recovery plan that the President is signing today, and the synergies of that plan with the stimulus package that Prime Minister Harper has proposed in Canada." Using terms like "shared interest," "global security challenges that we jointly face" or "vitaly important friends and allies," he conveyed the nature of the White House's approach to the trip. Answering a specific question on the message that this visit is sending to the world, McDonough replied: "The President is trying to ensure that we send a clear signal to the rest of the world that the United States was leading on this economic recovery package; that we're trying to dramatically expand demand at a difficult time in the economy." Positioning the U.S. on multilateralism, he added:

This trip is a renewed opportunity for underscoring that it's vitally important that America revitalize its alliances, look for opportunities to use those alliances to advance our shared goals and our shared interests – be that on global challenges like Afghanistan, or democracy throughout the hemisphere, or concrete and aggressive efforts to stem global climate change.

Facilitating the Work of the Media

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, a total of 700 journalists were accredited for the visit. With such large numbers, organizers had to be ready to provide satisfactory access. As soon as the visit was announced in January, the press office at the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa shifted its focus to concentrate on the needs of the White House press that would travel with the President. "The first important thing that always happens is the pre-advance and the advance visits," explains Victoria Terry, "but in this case due to time constraints, only one advance visit was done." All the sites listed in the tentative

program were visited and scrutinized, allowing American officials to become familiar with Canadian practices and plan accordingly. “The main sticky issue that normally comes up – as it did this time – is passes, because Americans always want a lot and the Canadian government wants the space for the local media, especially when the areas are confined,” says Terry. The day of the visit, access to Parliament Hill was restricted to pool media only. All the journalists in the American contingent were given pool passes, while Canadians were selected by the PMO. The press conference allowed for 40 journalists from each side. “There were representatives of the major Canadian news outlets,” recalls Canadian Press journalist, Jennifer Ditchburn, “but also journalists from other media that are not normally included in a pool. The PMO decided under their own criteria.” Those journalists accredited but without access to the Parliamentary precinct were able to follow the developments at a media centre set up by the Canadian government in the Conference Centre. Others were posted on public spaces or at the airport. Transportation was provided for accredited journalists who wished to go to the airport. For American journalists – who would spend most of the day on Parliament Hill – a special room was assigned on the first floor. It was fully equipped with telephones, Internet connection, tables and chairs. Lunch was also provided; its cost was included in the fee paid by the media when they signed up for the trip.

Pools were organized for the American contingent, according to the level of access provided and the distance between events. It is common practice to assign one lot of journalists to one site and another lot to the next, but it is customary that a small group travels with the U.S. President throughout. This is called the *tight pool* or more cynically, the *death watch*. For the Ottawa visit, the media arrived before Air Force One. A group

stayed at the airport to cover the arrival; other groups moved to positions on Parliament Hill to be ready for the signing ceremony on the Rotunda and the photo op at the Prime Minister's Office. Later all the groups would unite to participate in the press conference.

The program was thus divided into sites, each of which was assigned an Embassy official and a Canadian counterpart to take care of all details. All the media's needs, such as cordoned-off areas, camera stands, microphones and lights were taken care of. Details were discussed and determined in advance. "When the principals were coming up the stairs there was a place for the two cameras, one Canadian and one American, so that was the first shot," says Terry, describing the arrangements at the Rotunda:

In the middle of the Rotunda again two cameras were allowed to get them going around one side and the other cameras were shooting from the side. Then the next shot was the welcoming ceremony by Parliament officials and the signing of the book that took place at the other side of the Rotunda. For that, there were some cameras right in the middle and in another cordoned-off area that also covered the way up to the PM's office.

The scene inside Parliament Hill was carefully arranged and produced striking pictures framed with well-placed U.S. and Canadian flags and red carpets covering all the brightly illuminated hallways. "Television-wise it looked great. Everything they could do was done for television, one scene after another," says CTV's Robert Fife. "They used the Parliament Buildings to a really great effect; those are beautiful buildings and it was a beautiful display." Photographers were able to get interesting and colourful shots of the leaders walking through what are normally dimly lit and plain-coloured hallways, securing a space on *The Globe and Mail* and *The Gazette's* front pages, for example. "It is a public display of their role as leaders, and all that nice stuff they put up looks good on television and contributes to that," says Fife, acknowledging the importance of the

environment, especially for Obama who was stepping on the international scene for the first time.

The American Embassy assigned an official and posted local employees as runners at each site. Each official was responsible for guiding the press and securing space on the risers and cordoned-off areas. "Space is another point of contention with the Canadian media because they want the front line and arrive before anybody and set up their tripods on the risers," says Terry, "so I made a practice of being there fairly early, with my gaffer tape, putting down squares, sitting over, putting coats and if necessary use embassy staff to stock up the places for the White House press who cannot arrive as early as the local media." The support personnel are also present to solve problems that arise at the last minute. An example of problem-solving that secured the presence of the American media at the Rotunda, where the President was welcomed by the Prime Minister, is narrated by Victoria Terry:

I picked a group up at the Conference Centre where they arrived from the airport. We arranged during the advance meetings to be allowed to get up the Hill with a quick turn from Colonel By to Wellington Street, because it was relatively early. Once we were all on the bus, the first thing that happened is that we couldn't make that turn; the streets were closed. I told them it had been okayed and I made phone calls to the Embassy, to the police, to DFAIT and you name it, I had all my numbers... but there was no way and we were wasting too much time. So we were sent over the Mackenzie Bridge and up O'Connor. I was already nervous about getting there on time when we find that access was also restricted there and we had to unload on Albert and walk up across Queen, across Wellington, up the stairs to the Parliament Buildings, with all the equipment: we had trolleys, we had boxes, cameras, everything. I took them in through the West Block, down the tunnel to the Centre Block and then up the stairs. By then I was in terror and they were cursing and swearing. Only because I knew the way through the West Block we were able to arrive on time to set up all the equipment in the space that I had already reserved.

Journalists also received background information aimed at providing a better understanding of Canada-U.S. relations. The document issued by the Canadian government, for example, includes a brief description of the following topics: bilateral relations, trade and economic relations, border cooperation and global cooperation, and biographies of the participants. These quick references normally provide journalists with hard data like figures and statistics so they do not have to dig them out themselves. The U.S. Embassy backgrounder for American journalists, a small booklet entitled *Press Ready Reference*, contained practical information, such as long distance codes and a map of the downtown core; more general information, such as a brief history of Ottawa and a list of such interesting sites as the Canal and the Byward Market; highlights of Canada-U.S. relations; and an overview of previous Presidential visits to Canada. For its part, the White House provided a media program with details of each event, including contacts, pick-up times, filing times and places, lunch breaks, transportation and media briefings. “There isn’t a thing that hasn’t been looked after,” says Terry. “There was no thinking that had to be done, and the reason is that this way journalists can focus on the job at hand.”

Strategic and Media Relations Considerations

One Clear, Focused Message

As considered in previous chapters, to be successful, media events should convey a consistent message and everything done during the event should support that message. The various events of the day did so by conveying that the new U.S. administration is ready to lead the world through partnership and collaboration. This is consistent with the

concerns raised by Obama himself in Berlin and the description given by McDonough. The Ottawa visit showed the world that now in the White House, Obama intended to deliver word by word.

Indeed, before the trip, Obama indicated to Canada and the world that he intended to promote international collaboration. The White House arranged with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for a one-on-one interview with the President, a rare occurrence in Washington (Mansbridge, 2009). A television interview, with its centred attention on an individual, seems an appropriate choice given the huge popularity of Obama in Canada, which made his persona his main tool for reaching the Canadian population. It introduced Obama as the face of the American government, too. In terms of content, the interview gave the President the opportunity to restate his vision of partnership and multilateralism, not only by emphasizing economic cooperation between Canada and the U.S. and reaffirming his commitment to NAFTA, but also by calling for the participation of developing nations like China and India in the global strategy to reduce greenhouse emissions. On specific issues related to Canada, he reassured the Canadian public that the Buy America provision of his stimulus package was consistent with his country's international obligations. He also was mindful of Canadian sensibilities: "The Canadian contribution [to Afghanistan] has been extraordinary and for all the families who have borne the burden in Canada, we all have a heartfelt thanks," Obama said, very much in line with what Breese (2010) suggested in his briefing. He reassured the Canadian public that he did not intend to pressure Ottawa to change its decision to withdraw its troops in 2011, a comment that can also be traced to Breese's memo. The tone of the interview was deferential and Obama avoided irritating his

upcoming host, using careful wording that indicates he was well aware of sensitive topics and local interests. For instance, when asked if the oil sands produce dirty oil, he replied by calling it a “big carbon footprint.” The interview was aired two days before the visit and set the tone that the President would use to address Canada and the rest of the world.

“It is not because of the fact that the U.S. President is visiting Canada that triggers world attention,” former UN under-secretary Louise Fréchette says about the wider perspective of a bilateral event. “The professional in the field will scan the horizon to check whether the President says anything new or different on what I call global issues. They’ll watch for it and they will listen if he modifies a little bit his position in his statements.” The press conference, broadcast live, offered the main opportunity to state such a message to an attentive world. “I came to Canada on my first trip as President to underscore the closeness and importance of the relationship between our two nations,” Obama (2009) said, acknowledging his host. He then addressed those interested in the wider implications: “and to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to work with friends and partners to meet the common challenges of our time.” On the economy, he called for a global response to the financial crisis and described how his nation is working within the G8 and G20 to restore confidence in the markets. On Afghanistan, as U.S. policy was being reviewed, Obama reaffirmed his intention to “consult very closely... make certain that all our partners are working in the same direction.” He also confirmed his commitment to NATO. Addressing specifically the Americas, he described his administration as “committed to active and sustained engagement to advance the common security and prosperity of our hemisphere.” For those international audiences who did not follow the event step by step, the BBC (Webb, 2009) offered its take on

Obama's message by focusing on Afghanistan. "I certainly did not press the Prime Minister on any additional commitments beyond the ones that have already been made. All I did was to compliment Canada..." was the President's quote chosen by BBC correspondent Justin Webb to sum up Washington's new stance. Then Webb reiterated: "The Obama approach is gentle: build bridges, build relationships. As he says goodbye this evening, he has achieved that limited goal." Webb illustrates his point by describing the people of Canada as returning to "their ice-bound winter lives with a warm feeling towards their giant neighbour."

President Obama's international message was consistent also in his approach to Canada. "As neighbours, we are so closely linked that sometimes we may have a tendency to take our relationship for granted," Obama said in his opening statement, "but the very success of our friendship throughout history demands that we renew and deepen our cooperation here in the 21st century." The latter was a response to Canada's resentment of the lack of U.S. attention. The press conference offered the opportunity to elaborate on the same bilateral issues discussed during the CBC interview (the questions dealt with the same topics). "I want to grow trade and not contract it. And I don't think that there was anything in the recovery package that is adverse to that goal," said Obama, reassuring his largest trading partner afraid of protectionism. After clarifying that he did not pressure Ottawa to maintain a military presence in Afghanistan, he added a renewed note of gratitude: "there has been extraordinary effort there, and we just wanted to make sure that we were saying thank you."

Obama was willing to raise differences between Canada and the U.S. when necessary, but he tried to place them within an overall context of collaboration. For

example, he defended his position on NAFTA despite Canada's refusal to discuss re-opening discussion of it and in Harper's words, "unravelling what is a very complex agreement." This is because a *Wall Street Journal* reporter asked Obama if he had tried to convince the Canadians to agree with his view to incorporate the labour and environment side deals within the core of the agreement. "If those side deals mean anything, then they might as well be incorporated into the main body of the agreement so that they can be effectively enforced," said Obama, maintaining his argument but adjusting the rhetoric in recognition of Canada's position. "My hope is, that as our advisors and staffs and economic teams work this through, that there's a way of doing this that is not disruptive to the extraordinarily important trade relationships that exist between the United States and Canada."

For 45 minutes, broadcast live in Canada and the U.S., Obama and Harper took the opportunity to reach the public at large on issues like climate change and their willingness to cooperate in areas of technology development, the thickening of borders, security, and the financial crisis.

"With politicians often rhetoric is substance," Craig Oliver (2009) said that night on CTV News, highlighting the significance of Obama's word choice. "Harper got a long-term commitment from the new American president of a continuing strong bilateral relationship with Canada, that's important; and the language on trade should give Canadians a lot of comfort." The front-page of next morning's *Globe and Mail* announced: "A new era of co-operation – Obama aims to strengthen U.S. ties with Canada..., speaking out against protectionism and offering to work together on economic

crisis and clean energy” (Clark, 2009: A1). This headline and Oliver’s assessment illustrate the positive interpretation in Canada of Obama’s words.

The president’s manner also was interpreted in support of his main message. Prominent front-page photographs of Obama and Governor General Michaëlle Jean sharing a spontaneous laugh while walking side by side reinforced the concept of partnership. *The Ottawa Citizen*, for example, featured it under a prominent headline quoting President Obama: “We could not have a better friend and ally.” These images draw value from the advantage of seeing individuals as the embodiment of their nations. Obama and Jean represent the U.S. and Canada happily advancing forward together.

However, Canadian media also kept in mind “serious substantial policy differences,” as the *Toronto Star* (2009) called them. “Despite Obama’s promise to ‘grow’ trade, [differing approaches to border security and NAFTA] don’t exhaust the potential for cross-border friction,” the newspaper said, “there is a long way to go before we see a comprehensive North American approach to slowing global warming” (Toronto Star, 2009: A18). For its part, *The Globe and Mail* (2009) also went beyond the “cordiality... that augurs well for their [Obama and Harper] ability to resolve disputes and pursue new agreements,” by pointing out that “each leader soft-pedalled sensitive issues, raising the possibility that in some regards they could – in Mr. Obama’s words – ‘take our relationship for granted.’” *The Globe and Mail* concludes: “This visit was a starting point for pursuing matters of mutual interest, and gave impetus for high-level officials to work together... it will be months if not years before the full measure of yesterday’s events can be taken” (Globe and Mail, 2009: A14). This sample of Canadian media opinion indicates the rhetoric was accepted as the frame for the bilateral

relationship, but journalists remained expectant to see how things would actually develop.

The format of the press conference contributed to the focus on the main message. The White House and the PMO agreed to respond only to four questions, two from Canadian and two from American journalists. Jennifer Ditchburn was a pool reporter selected by her peers to ask one of the questions. “We were all gathered in the Press Gallery’s Hot Room on Parliament Hill forming a large circle with someone writing down ideas for questions,” Ditchburn recalls. “It took a long time to come up with something, because we were looking for the most interesting scenario to obtain material that everybody could use. We considered the economy, the border, all these general topics.” While Canadians pooled their ideas, the Americans used their customary system of taking turns and letting each journalist select a question of interest to himself. “The problem with that set-up [two questions each] is that you end up with pack journalism and elite questions,” says Ditchburn, who says the opposite is not necessarily better. “We are forced into that by the limitations of the environment because a free-for-all can also result in a press conference where only very narrow issues are discussed. For example, if a business journalist takes the initiative, then it might be all business.”

Organizers did not have any control or influence over the questions asked. Ditchburn confirmed that the leaders had no advance notice of them, although they knew who would do the asking. Limiting questions reduces the chance that issues not on the agenda will come up, though it does not eliminate it. As it turned out, Canadians focused on the environment and bilateral relations, while Americans happened to ask about NAFTA and Afghanistan – the four central topics discussed by the leaders. But there

were other issues of public interest that might have come up had the press conference followed a less stringent format. For instance, the day before the trip, *The New York Times* published an editorial calling for Obama to use the trip to “demonstrate his commitment to human rights and the rule of law by addressing Mr. Arar's case” (2009: 26). The editorial is referring to Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen tortured in Syria who became one of the most prominent cases of what the paper termed “the Bush administration's notorious policy of extraordinary rendition, or the outsourcing of interrogations to foreign governments known to use torture.” The newspaper points out that the U.S. government refused to admit the grave injustice done to Mr. Arar on the basis of national security. The interest in this issue arose from the fact that the previous week, in a rendition case argued in San Francisco, Obama's Justice Department sent, according to *The New York Times*, “a troubling signal of continuity by embracing the extravagant state-secrets claims pioneered by the Bush administration.”

Barack Obama and Canada Share the Love

Television screens across Canada showed President Obama uttering, “I love this country.” That was followed by three short clips of the cookies purchase, the President with admirers, and the President waving at the crowd outside the Byward Market while Peter Mansbridge announced: “Barack Obama and Canada share the love.” Then back to Obama declaring: “I think that we could not have a better friend and ally.”

This was the opening sequence of that night's *The National* on CBC, an interesting choice that draws attention to another aspect of the communication strategy: the emotional appeal to reach Canadians beyond statements on the economy, trade,

carbon emissions or Afghanistan. The declaration of love was prompted by the question put to the President by Canadian Press' Ditchburn, who wanted to know how he foresaw the bilateral relationship in four years. "It will be even stronger than it is today. I expect that you will see increased trade. I think we will see continued integration of efforts on energy in various industries, and I think that's to be welcomed," he replied as might have been expected. But then he switched to a personal tone. He referred to his brother-in-law and two of his key staff people who are Canadian. "And I love this country and think that we could not have a better friend and ally. And so I'm going to do everything that I can to make sure that our relationship is strengthened," he added, scoring what Ditchburn referred to as "the money quote" opening newscasts and grabbing newspaper headlines. *The Ottawa Citizen*, *Toronto Star*, *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Gazette*, to name a few, all featured the phrase prominently in their February 20 headline. "He knew what he was doing," says Ditchburn. "He is a savvy politician." Indeed, Obama also thanked the many Canadians who volunteered during his election campaign and added that he was looking forward to coming back "as soon as it warms up." Such unexpected reference to winter for someone accustomed to Chicago's wind and cold is touching to Canadians who are weather obsessed and proud of their winter resilience, and it was also repeated by the CBC and CTV newscast that night, for example.

"And when all is said and done, what's not to love in an American president who drops by Ottawa's Byward Market to pick up a souvenir key chain [said to be a moose] and sample maple leaf cookies and beavertails before heading home? That artery-clogging moment alone sealed the summit as a success," concluded the *Toronto Star* (2009). For Ottawans, the Byward Market is not just any farmer's market; it is so

significant that it is simply known as “the market.” It is located near Parliament Hill in an eclectic neighbourhood that combines trendy restaurants, boutiques, small stores, street vendors, hotels, apartment and office buildings, broadcast studios and embassies; it is also the heart of city nightlife. The place belongs to all Ottawans and is a major tourist attraction due to its location, its historical significance and the variety of experiences that it offers. For Ahmed, the bakery employee, Obama’s choice seemed therefore an obvious one. “This is a real place, a historic place. It is like a museum in the heart of Canada where you can get a real sense of the people,” he told me when I asked for his interpretation of the President’s motivations. “Here you can get a real souvenir, too. Those cookies are maple leaves. That’s an authentic souvenir.” And then, there is the beavertail, a sugary pastry that for more than 25 years has been a favourite among the locals who venture outdoors to have fun during the winter season. With just one stroke, Obama surrounded himself with popular Canadian icons providing, as Bruce Cheadle called it, “a big moment of Canada-U.S. relations, depicting closeness and how comfortable a President can be walking around,” like any other friendly visitor.

The Presidential Detour

The perfection of the whole incident piqued the curiosity of Cheadle who wondered what it took to pull off such a successful walkabout that wasn’t part of the official program – one that, by the way, still kept the President safe, on time for his next meeting, and within the range of news cameras that got the images on national television before Air Force One left the ground. “This is one of those things that looks spontaneous but is not. A 40-car motorcade does not spontaneously go off on a shopping excursion at

the end of a day-long summit,” says Cheadle, who wrote a story for Canadian Press debunking the official spur-of-the-moment explanation.

The market incursion is an example of an OTR as described in chapter 3, that is, an event previously scouted by advance personnel with a focus on creating interesting interaction with the local people. “You set it all up in advance,” says Cheadle, “and if it feels right, and if the timing is right, you’ll do it. At the last minute you decide. If you don’t go for it, no one knows that it was going to happen anyway.” Researching his story, Cheadle (2009) spoke with Gordon Giffin, former U.S. Ambassador to Canada, who related his experience planning an OTR for President Clinton in Ottawa in the 1990s. “The shops that Obama wandered into, seemingly by chance,” wrote Cheadle, “would have been discreetly scoped out days in advance by secret service agents, unbeknownst to anyone on the ground.” Besides, Giffin also pointed out, he has “never seen a president with any cash in his pocket, let alone a Canadian bill!” (Cheadle, 2009), a nuance that in itself reveals the scripted nature of the incident. Ottawa Police confirmed that the market scenario was not included in their exercises and credited contingency planning for the success of the operation. At the last minute a couple of hundred Ontario Provincial Police officers – who were on stand-by for the day – secured the whole block and the area just in time for the presidential motorcade to arrive (Cheadle, 2009).

“It was not planned as part of the official program,” says Terry, who participated in the advance preparations for the trip. “In none of the meetings that I went to – and there were meetings almost every day and we go through everything, even the weather – it never came up. So it was done at a separate meeting, very close to the top.” She explains that there are practical reasons to do it that way. An event that is previously

known must accommodate the American and the Canadian pool reporters. That alone is already too many people to handle in a restricted space where you want to make a quick in and out. Moreover, if it is a known event, security and crowds would change the nature of the event, making it lose its communication value completely.

“You make news out of the unexpected; and certainly this was very good at that,” says communication consultant Barry McLoughlin, who describes the whole day as highly structured and engineered, even the out-of-program aspect of it. This is because access played an important role in the success of the market incursion. Since it was unannounced, only the journalists traveling with the President in the motorcade covered the visit inside the market building. Witnesses described how they saw police cruisers suddenly turning left towards the market area, followed a few minutes later by half a dozen black SUV’s – probably carrying security personnel and the American media to get into position. Within 10 minutes, along came the rest of the President’s motorcade (Cheadle, 2009). Ziyada Callender, a producer at the local TV station A Channel, witnessed the incident. She had just finished the morning show and was in her office next to the market when someone called saying that the motorcade was heading that way. “My colleague Laura Loewe and I immediately sprang into action,” says Callender and recalls:

We looked outside and there was the motorcade. One of the secret service agents had stopped at the Beavertails, which is right beside us. Laura grabbed her camera and we went outside. We were running, and people were running. But once the President made it inside nobody else was allowed in. All the secret service agents kind of blocked off all the entrances. So, we went to the exit where his motorcade was waiting, and we got video of him as he came out of the bakery.

Apart from the fortuitously well-located A Channel, Canadian media were excluded from witnessing the walkabout, but were provided with plenty of images of it.

“That’s O.K., that’s efficient,” says Terry, explaining why the American delegation was probably not worried about not including the Canadians. “You only need one good picture, and they are very good at quickly sharing what the pool shoots.” Canadian networks soon ran the raw footage they received on their live broadcasts, a presentation that emphasized the spontaneity of the whole incident with surprised journalists commenting on how impressive the gesture was. “That would be the over-the-top moment of the day,” declared CTV’s Rosemary Thompson (2009) over shaky images of the President talking to a young woman outside the market. Thompson added: “Who would have expected that he would come out of his security bubble and have the confidence to walk on the streets of Ottawa? I think it is fantastic that he did it.”

Based on previous experiences when thousands of people gathered to cheer a visiting American president, Terry speculates the market incursion intended to fill a void. “They probably wanted to go into the market, because there wasn’t any lovely picture in that lawn full of people and the president. Parliament Hill was all cordoned off and waving from behind the bullet-proof glass was too distant.” Terry’s educated guess seems consistent with comments by former U.S. Ambassador to Canada James Blanchard, who told *Maclean’s* that he encouraged the White House to make sure Obama didn’t leave Canada without reaching out to the people because of his enormous popularity (Geddes, 2009: 17).

Still, journalists find certain authenticity within the scripted photo op. “It may have been planned, but still was impromptu for everybody at the market,” says CTV Bureau Chief Robert Fife. “It was improvised in the sense that nobody knew it was happening. Down there, nobody had notice. People were not waiting for him coming to

buy a cookie. That's what makes the story so interesting: People suddenly looking and reacting to his presence." Bruce Cheadle finds meaning beyond the apparent show:

Staged or not staged, it signals that there is a difference in the working environment, the attitude towards this particular president. When George W. Bush was in Ottawa for a visit a few years earlier, there were protesters smashing windows at McDonald's. I can't image an event like that taking place then... The fact that not everyone can pull off that show makes the difference.

This incident also illustrates the versatility of media events. While Canadians appreciated the gesture of the presidential spontaneity and charm, Americans focused on the cheering crowds. CBS's chief White House correspondent Chip Reid (2009) referred to it as "adoration" by Canadians to the president. CNN's Suzanne Malveaux (2009) compared this Canadian journey with one taken by President Bush in 2001. "It was amazingly different. This time you had thousands of people lining the streets and Parliament. They just couldn't get enough of Barack Obama. Before we had protests for President Bush... Yesterday, they even changed his schedule." It is important to point out that such an event heavily targets the domestic (i.e., U.S.) audience. "They wanted to show the President meeting the Canadian people, as they normally like to do," explains Terry. "It worked both ways because it had a lasting effect in the Canadian perception, but they were also definitely targeting their domestic audience."

How does one make sense of the whole experience? I asked Ziyanda Callender so as to get a glimpse of the effect of such a personality-centred event on the general public's perception of the U.S. "It kind of gave me hope that maybe America is a little bit different, more like him [Obama]. If that makes any sense, that is what I thought: O.K., maybe this is the face of America that is changing."

The Value of the Event

“This is a piece of cake for a politician like Barack Obama,” says Barry McLoughlin. “The media were all wrapped up in the Obama euphoria and there was simply no hard news to cover. It was a soft news visit, one pure photo op to the next.” Indeed, this strategic exposure advanced the image management aspirations of the Obama administration. Canadian Press journalist Bruce Cheadle understands the media event strategy as a tool to communicate Obama’s message. “Our relation with the U.S. is obviously very broad and something like Obama visiting the market, for example, puts a human face to it,” Cheadle explains. “It seems to confirm that we really are very good friends and good neighbours.”

The journey won over the Canadian public, officials and journalists alike to the force of the new president’s personality. “Spontaneity is definitely part of who he is,” a spokeswoman from the U.S. Embassy told the Canadian Press (Cheadle, 2009). “This is a man who likes people and likes to have the opportunity to look somebody in the eye and shake their hand and get a little sense and feel for where he is.” That was the tone that characterized the visit. The most memorable moments of the day are associated with instances in which the President relied on his spontaneity and approached the public. “At Mr. Obama’s suggestion [Obama and Prime Minister Harper] stepped outside to acknowledge the cheering crowd,” is how CBS (Reid, 2009) reported the gesture to respond to the people who gathered on Parliament Hill by waving from behind the bullet-proof glass. But it was Obama’s unscheduled stop at the Byward Market that best highlighted this invaluable resource of his persona.

“Everybody was so impressed that he was just so nice,” recalls Ziyada Callender, who interviewed witnesses at the Byward Market for A Channel newscast. “‘He is so nice,’ that’s all that I heard. ‘He is so sweet,’ and ‘he asked me this, he actually talked to me.’ ‘He made jokes’ and ‘he took a picture with me,’” says Callender, paraphrasing people’s comments. “‘So nice and down to earth’ – those are the terms that they used.”

“These kinds of events have to be genuine and authentic for them to work,” says McCurry, who assessed the strategy based on his prior experience in the White House. “People want to know something about the character and personality of the leaders they see on television and so, you better be giving them an accurate and genuine look at what this person is like, or it will probably backfire because people will notice right away that it is not real.” None of those witnesses interviewed by Callender seemed cynical about the incident. “I didn’t hear any negative feedback from it,” she recalls.

Even insiders were star-struck. “He could have read the telephone book and he would have got a standing ovation,” says Edward Goldenberg, former advisor to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien describing how the presidential charisma was an element in play. “He came over as Barack Obama, rock star. He was who he was. I heard from people who were in the room with the Prime Minister that all everybody wanted to do was get their picture taken.”

For experienced journalist Heather Scoffield the media’s focus on personality came as no surprise. “Generally, we are always fascinated by American leaders,” she explains, “but Canadians really like Obama and he is great to cover: he is so open, he has great quotes, he is effusive, he is good-looking, he’s just got this whole personality that is really nice to cover.”

The celebrity appeal, carefully crafted words, beautiful environments and perfectly timed movements are only relevant, however, if the resulting image can be translated into achieving wider diplomatic goals. Colin Robertson, a former diplomat and an expert on Canada-U.S. relations, uses the terms of Nye's (2004) soft power to describe the benefits of the President's trip. "Canadians embraced Obama," he says, "and this means that they were prepared to give their leadership much more rope to do deals with the U.S. now led by Obama. They wouldn't have given the same leeway to the U.S. led by George W. Bush." That interpretation did not escape media scrutiny. A *National Post* (2009) editorial reflected on the impact of Obama's presidency on Canadian foreign policy: "The U.S. President, through his immense popularity on this side of the border, provides cover for Canada's Conservatives to hold hands with Washington in plain view. Shared goals that would have been anathema under Mr. Bush are perfectly okay under President Obama" (National Post, 2009: A18). Justin Webb (2009), BBC North America Bureau Chief, similarly interpreted the political strategy when he said the President was "content... to let Canada see a smiling American leader and hope that this good feeling can be put to use when the going gets tough."

Robertson also looks beyond the publicity to point at its tangible repercussions. "Obama's aura was such that it was great that he came because it gave a focus to bilateral issues: we began a dialogue on energy, we will start looking at the border, Mr. Harper came around his scepticism to look differently at climate change and we obtained assurances on NAFTA." Robert Fife assesses the whole event combining both perspectives. "He was only here for a few hours but they managed to mount as much publicity as they could. He did this little stunt in the market, which was a fun story," says

Fife, “but there was substance too. These meetings are important to discuss issues of mutual interest.” For his part, BBC’s Justin Webb (2009) offered his reflections on the value of the Ottawa event on his daily blog: “Obama will not be rushed into confrontation of even the mildest kind,” he wrote, interpreting the President’s deference to Canada as the necessary relationship building in the post-Bush world. But he also wondered if foreign leaders were able to get a real sense of what the new president stands for. Webb then pointed out the advantage of Obama’s approach:

His approval ratings here are at 80% – the waitress was wearing an Obama T-shirt when I had my fish and chips in Ottawa tonight. Canadian television treated him with the respect they would normally reserve for the Pope. This can be bottled and used. It is the epitome of soft power.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

“Mission accomplished.” That phrase appeared on a big banner framing U.S. President George W. Bush in May 2003 when, after piloting his own plane, he addressed troops on the *USS Abraham Lincoln* returning home from the war in Iraq. Schill characterized it as a “perfect media event” (Schill, 2009: vii). This event was intended to celebrate the fast fall of Baghdad as a turning point in the war on terrorism; Bush did not claim victory in Iraq, but announced the “end of major combat operations” (Bush, 2003). With a spectacular performance, he marked a shift from the dominance of foreign policy to domestic issues in preparation for the following year’s election, during which he planned to exploit his popularity as a triumphant war leader (Shovelan, 2003). It was broadcast live by the main U.S. networks and was also reported around the world.

“In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed,” declared the president, surrounded by 5,000 troops on the deck of the aircraft carrier, “one of the world’s mightiest warships,” according to *The Globe and Mail* (Koring, 2003). Bush spoke about the skill and might of the American forces and maintained a bellicose tone throughout the speech, reminding the international community who was in charge:

Any person involved in committing or planning terrorist attacks against the American people becomes an enemy of this country and a target of American justice. Any person, organization or government that supports, protects or harbours terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent and equally guilty of terrorist crimes (Bush, 2003).

The images, the rhetoric, the personality of the president and the emotional setting of troops returning home combined to portray the U.S. as a super-power. This highly

scripted media event was used as a tool of image management on the world stage, and it was noticed. “The occasion symbolises the staggering military pre-eminence of the U.S., that the war to remove Saddam has underscored so clearly,” wrote Rupert Cornwell in the British newspaper *The Independent* (Cornwell, 2003). “[Bush] was serving notice that henceforth, pre-emption is the way of the colossus,” is how Lee Kim Chew (2003) from Singapore’s *Straits Times*, summarised Bush’s message – an interpretation echoed by the South Korean newspaper, *Dong-A Ilbo Daily* (2003), which stated, “George W. Bush set a new definition of U.S. superpower.” Beth Gardiner (2003) of Associated Press compiled reactions to the speech. Leaders around the world responded according to their own positions, either for or against the war, and pointed to the many challenges still to be met. What is worth noticing in Gardiner’s report is that it concludes with a quote from a Chinese citizen interviewed on the streets of Beijing that easily illustrates that international audiences were reached: “Cao Beifang, a textile salesman, said he admired U.S. resolve, a sentiment rarely aired in public in China. ‘Someone has to lay down the law,’ he said. ‘That’s the only way the world can work.’”

This example contains the main elements analysed in the previous chapters. It refers to a staged event that ventured into wider power struggles, using every tool available – rhetoric, images, personality and emotional connections – to convey a consistent message. This successful combination is what led Schill to qualify it as perfect. The fact that an ordinary citizen in the streets of Beijing assimilated so accurately the message is what makes me consider it a good illustration of the main subject of this thesis. Reaching foreign audiences through international media events is intended to turn the popular mood abroad in one’s favour. This quest for reputation is as elusive as its

gains because the results are determined by the intervention of a third party, the media; and the prize is as volatile as an image in the public's mind. And yet it is still pursued.

International media events have become an important phenomenon of our time. Communication technology, democratization and globalization have opened the field of international relations, where there is growing public participation and demand for transparency. The media have become an integral part of international interactions such as summits and foreign visits by heads of state. These events are intended to attain a policy goal – a treaty, an agreement, increased trade – but they contain such a large communication and public opinion component that the symbolic aspect plays as important a role as the practical in these encounters. This makes them strategic tools of image management for nations in search of influence on the world stage.

The multiplicity of interests that converge in a typical international media event have been dismissively referred to as a media circus. But rather than a pejorative term, I see it as a descriptive one: international media events turn into circuses where simultaneous performances compete and where messages, images and personalities are strategically aligned for maximum effect, not only to secure a position in the world, but also to obtain a desired outcome. They are like a giant juggling act of messages, meanings and audiences, where diplomacy and international and domestic politics meet. To better understand the dynamic of this circus and how it reaches foreign audiences, I identified the following major components for analysis: a definition of media event and its characteristics; a description of today's political and media environments that have propelled media events into such powerful communication tools; and a closer look at the

elements that shape communication and media relations strategies during international media events.

In the first chapter, I reviewed the theoretical framework of media events, as defined by scholars. Media events have been studied under the framework of various disciplines. Dayan and Katz (1992) took an anthropological perspective, focusing on the ritual value for national audiences of staged events that are broadcast live and considering them as the pinnacle of mass communication in which a people achieve total integration. Kellner (2003) built his analysis from a sociological perspective, looking at a consumer society that revolves around the creation and consumption of images through the media, an exercise that has become a form of social interaction. Boorstin (1964) concentrated on the role of fabricated realities in a society that has reached a point where it is hard to tell the difference between what is real and what has merely been staged for public consumption. For their part, European communication scholars Couldry, Hepp and Krotz (2010) analyzed the concept from a global perspective, concentrating on the processes for the articulation of meaning and the power-related dynamics that media events generate. Media events involve social actors with an interest in constructing reality to establish a specific discursive position and that is what makes them a tool of power struggles. While the authors admit that these exchanges of meaning give an event differing interpretations, the event nevertheless retains a thematic core. Schill's (2009) study of media events concentrated on political campaigns and how media events are designed and carried out to be covered by the media with the main objective of influencing public opinion.

All these concepts and perspectives have some commonalities that could be found throughout my analysis. They accept the scripted nature of the event, the media's

involvement and the presence of a particular power-related endeavour. Today's international media events go beyond Boorstin's (1964) pseudo-events of made-up realities and acquire the performative dimension that Kellner (2003) described as a requirement in the prevalent logic of spectacle. Media events, with their characteristic staged photo ops and carefully planned performances, are presented to the sight in a society organized around the consumption of images. Once an event has been performed, it is on the record. It is no longer made up but becomes part of the real world. This is why Kellner considers these non-spontaneous happenings a form of social interaction. As we have seen in the various examples presented throughout this thesis, international media events state positions, define associations, and defend policies for the public to see and respond to. In other words, they are an integral element of international discourse.

All of the definitions and analyses of media events included in this literature review consider the media as an integral element, of course. The authors include the media in their analyses as a given. They look at their role, their interventions and practices. Dayan and Katz (1992) understand the media's participation in an event as an outsider whose needs are taken into consideration by the organizers. They see the media as a third party that becomes the means to achieve social integration. Katz and Liebes (2010) called media events "co-productions" between the establishment (or the anti-establishment) and the media, a description that casts the media into the role of an accomplice, supporting those individuals or institutions that perform an event to achieve their goals. This description goes to the heart of Hepp and Couldry's (2010) preoccupation with the myth of the mediated centre. The European scholars consider media events as the articulation of the power of the media to establish certain discursive

positions, mostly those of the establishment. This means that it is a powerful media that determines what staged action or what happening or personality becomes a local, national, transnational or global media event. Indeed, Hoover (2010) emphasizes that despite the diverse nature of the events that can be considered media events, they all show that the media are active in their construction, representation and consumption and in providing a shared experience. This description puts the media not in the role of a third party, nor of an accomplice, but an intervener that actively participates in the process of articulation of meanings that surround a media event. In this capacity, the media act as a bridge for exchanges between those interested in constructing a specific reality or establishing a specific discursive position and the interpretations by the public. This bridging role is also considered by Schill (2009), who sees the media from a utilitarian perspective, that is, the means to reach and influence an audience.

The authors reviewed framed media events as elements of wider power struggles, although from differing perspectives. Boorstin's (1964) world of illusions leaves society detached from reality, and thus powerless. Kellner (2003) empowers the spectacle itself when he calls it a cultural and political force. Hepp and Couldry (2010) see media events as the arena where the power struggle occurs, that is the centering performances and the multiple meanings they produce. For his part, Schill's (2009) practical approach locates the struggle between organizers who want their own interpretation to prevail and the media who accept or reject the presented frame. In the case of international media events, all these interpretations of power struggle seem to occur at one point or another: Cameron's tour of Tahrir Square created the illusion of a leader with clout on the international scene. Clinton's spectacular visit to Ireland became a force in the peace

process by embodying the public's commitment to peace. The multiple meanings associated with the first official visit to Washington by President Fox illustrate the thickening of such centering performances. The contention between the Canadian media and PMO officials in Hanoi is an example of the tension between organizers and the media for control of the message. Indeed, international media events are power struggles by nature, since they are political events and they involve individual and public interests and the public's right to be informed. However, the consideration of the elements in play included in the previous chapters show that these power struggles are not hegemonic. They are the result of the interaction between the parties involved: organizers, media and the public.

The second chapter analyzed the context in which media events have risen to prominence. This happens in a mediatized world where diplomacy and the media work increasingly in cooperation with each other, and image and reputation gain greater relevance in the dynamics of power. So-called soft power (Nye, 2004), which is the competitive advantage of being liked by others, is gaining acceptance as a complement to traditional capacity. Image, as the main resource for soft power, is an unpredictable and intangible variable in world politics. Nations are constantly working on polishing theirs to their advantage and the media are one of the most important means to do so. We live in a mediatized world of permanent communication, where 24-hour news is available anywhere, at home and in public spaces, on television, newspapers, the Internet. News is a constant presence but, like the perennial fishbowl in the dentist's office, you may see it but not notice it. As a result, our Global Village is largely perceived and understood as a giant collage of the striking pictures, sound bites, events and personalities in the news.

This is a world of perceptions and mass mediated realities in which media events are a perfect fit. With their characteristic combination of policy and dramatic settings, they provide much needed news content, one that may also be visually attractive and emotional. Despite being utterly staged and targeted, journalists accept media events as legitimate sources of news because they are the fora in which more and more issues that affect people's lives are discussed.

The third chapter focused on the considerations that go into planning and executing an event that is intended to both achieve a policy goal and gain positive media coverage at home and abroad. Due to their staged nature, media events allow organizers to gain considerable control over the intended message. The rhetoric and the images can be planned and adjusted according to the particular objectives of each event. Leaders can also rely on emotional connections and personalization to reach a foreign audience to emphasize certain traits that will complement the main message. The fact that so many strategic considerations enter into play indicates that international media events are very versatile forms of communications and can be profited from as such. A major consideration in this case is that international media events reach two audiences at the same time, domestic and international. Their interests and approaches to the same issue can differ, but in this context leaders need to address both simultaneously. They can be prioritized or combined depending on the event, but it is preferable not to isolate or ignore one over the other. This requires careful consideration of national and international interests to deliver a consistent message abroad. As the review in chapter three illustrates, none of the elements involved in a communication strategy should be left to improvisation. The rhetoric can be carefully adjusted to maintain the integrity of a

message even in adverse environments. To that end, collaboration between diplomats and political strategists is essential. The physical environment also plays a role in defining the message, as it is integrated in the images that people see and associate with the event and their participants. At the same time, emotional connections offer another level to relate to certain audiences that are not easily interested in issues associated with trade or international relations. Human-interest stories help to make a point. They provide the media with material that is emotional and visually attractive, which makes it easy to be integrated into news shows and newspaper articles. Personalization is another valuable element in the communication strategy due to the focus on the individual and the rise of celebrity in today's society. A well-addressed focus on personality can help to create positive links that support the main message. There is no formula for producing a flawless communication strategy, other than to figure out an effective combination of all the elements involved, as the event on the aircraft carrier illustrates. But such planning also has implications. On the one hand, it helps maintain control of the message, while on the other it restricts heads of state by limiting their performances to pre-determined utterances and movements. Although this may be beneficial for communication purposes, it may also deter the leadership and initiative that is expected in an international environment.

The careful planning of all of these strategic considerations is intended to contribute to the overall positive coverage, but there is no guarantee organizers will maintain total control of the message. Media events can be overshadowed by external factors that the media consider of higher interest to or importance for their audience. A derailed media event may result in the opposite effect, as the negative connotations

associated with it are compounded by the fact that it occurred precisely when the media were watching.

All the strategic communication considerations combine with particular media relations practices, analyzed in the fourth chapter, to produce the overall output of a media event. The supports provided to facilitate the work of the media, the information made available and the access provided to journalists play an important role in achieving the desired coverage. International media events are not business as usual for political reporters. For a few days they find themselves in an environment in which their basic needs of services, information and access are in the hands of organizers. This gives officials an upper hand as they are in control of the media's every move. The journalists feel removed from their daily practices. Some consider media events sterile environments where information is filtered down by officials. They also feel watched and enslaved under a regimented schedule of many events, some of which have little news value. They follow the script because it is their assignment, but also because they recognize their value for society. A controlled environment can backfire, though. Journalists feel pressured to find a scoop, a colourful story or an excuse to criticize the government. Indeed, media practices, interests and values play a role in the way an event is presented to the public. It is difficult for reporters to counteract the machinery of media relations practices and communication strategies, but when they feel they are not getting the full picture, they can go after it, as the Canadian media ambush of the Prime Minister in Hanoi showed.

The interactions described in this chapter touch on many issues related to journalistic practices that are particular in the context of international media events.

Future research could focus on this topic to better understand its implications for the media and the quality of the coverage that it produces. Further research is needed to explore the nature of the relationship between the media and communication officials and its effects on the quality of coverage, including implications like uniform coverage, professional tension or even the coverage of otherwise irrelevant events.

Each international media event takes shape according to its own circumstances: the political issues and interests at stake, the combination of political and communication strategies by all the delegations involved, and the media's own interests, practices and values. Such events are an ongoing struggle where the result depends on the give and take of every element involved. This is like a chess game, where every element has its strengths and limitations, where every move has repercussions. These exchanges and the resulting interpretations by the media and the general public are what make media circuses interesting to observe and important to understand.

International media events have evolved and continue to change with the times. Early summitry was seen as an extraordinary measure for an extraordinary situation. Chamberlain met with Hitler in an attempt to prevent war in Europe, Carter gathered the Israeli and Egyptian leaders to try to bring peace to the Middle East, and Reagan discussed with Gorbachev the end of nuclear weapons. This may continue to be the case during a crisis, but summits and related international encounters have become recurrent. Regional and global issues are now discussed under media scrutiny, even if journalists wait patiently in cordoned-off areas. Under these circumstances, communication strategies, and the strategies of both media relations practitioners and journalists gain more relevance in the way the public understands the world and reacts to it. As

delegations try to maintain control of the message, the media need to be able to better understand government's motivations. A closer analysis of the working conditions during these events may help determine ways to allow journalists in the field to regain the feeling of being in control or to find ways for the media as a whole to support the work of those attending these events.

As communication technology changes, international relations adjust. So does mass communication. The effect of the increased use of individualistic means of communication and the presence of cameras at every moment in life may impact the way we understand each other and how media events are managed. These developments in communication technology most probably will be integrated into the already stimuli-loaded media circus, for the public to sort out. New media will open new territory in events coverage. They will allow for the diversification of views through numerous sources and easier access to information, but also give communication strategists more reasons to attempt to restrict access and information. This will make it worth revisiting the subject of this thesis in the future.

The media circus is an international competition for a 10-second clip – the picture, the emotional appeal, or the personality trait – that might give someone an edge. The most recent battle for European supremacy was fought in the media circus' arena: a series of summits between France and Germany occurred from October to December 2011. They were aimed at finding a solution to the euro crisis. For weeks, Nicholas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel had been in deep disagreement over how to resolve the euro zone's debt crisis. However, they eventually realized that showing leadership and a united front would be better for finding a solution. "Germany and France yesterday struck

a grand bargain that they hope will save the euro, burying their differences to unveil a new regime designed to drive down euro zone debt and restore market confidence in the battered single currency,” is how Britain’s *The Guardian* reported the new approach (Traynor, 2011). Sarkozy and Merkel announced their new deal during a press conference that also served to showcase their determination to seek a preliminary accord at a forthcoming EU summit (MARNEW, 2011). For weeks, Sarkozy and Merkel worked so closely together that journalists dubbed them “Merkozy.” Their efforts were covered eagerly by the media, which reported not only on the main points of contention and agreement between the two leaders but also on their personalities and how they related to each other. It even transpired that the German Chancellor sent a Teddy Bear to Sarkozy’s new-born daughter, a gesture interpreted as the “Iron Chancellor’s showing her cuddly side,” (Bremner, 2011), and as a symbol of the nations’ rapprochement (Willsher and Hall, 2011). This partnership left Great Britain isolated, since Prime Minister Cameron opposed integrating the proposed fiscal union into the core of the Lisbon Treaty that rules the EU. Many observers wonder how Cameron so completely misjudged the negotiations at the EU Summit in December, thinking that he could divide and rule Germany and France when they had been so openly showing a united front (Watt and Traynor, 2011). The media were quick to declare France’s supremacy, Germany’s gains and Britain’s loss: “The French president emerged as one of the big winners of a European Union summit on Friday which ended with up to 26 member states agreeing to move forward in economic integration around the euro zone, and Britain alone in staying out,” wrote Paul Taylor of Reuters News, indicating that Sarkozy finally achieved “a Europe of Nations with France in the cockpit and Britain on the sidelines.” Taylor added that for Merkel the

result was “a more ambiguous success, given that she failed to keep the new ‘stability union’ inside the EU treaty... Cameron managed to unite Europe against him,” wrote Taylor, declaring Britain the loser of it all (Taylor, 2011).

This is the brave new world of perceptions: the results of these negotiations will be seen in the shape Europe’s economy takes and how it overcomes the crisis, but in the shorter term France and Germany raised their profiles, advanced their reputations, and secured their positions in the international public’s mind.

“In today’s world you have to be seen to be heard,” is how Senator Jim Munson described the importance of strategic exposure for nations to gain influence in a world where image, power and public perceptions intertwine. His statement sums up in itself the essence of this thesis, and seems sufficiently convincing that any leader should want to join the circus!

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Media itinerary for Prime Minister Stephen Harper bilateral visit to Athens and Kalavryta, Hellenic Republic (Subject to change – May 25, 2011 – 1330 hours)

1855 hours
(1255 ET) The Prime Minister's aircraft departs Deauville for Athens

Note:
Flying time: 3 hours 30 minutes
Aircraft - Airbus 001

Time change: +1 hour

ATHENS, HELLENIC REPUBLIC

2325 hours
(1625 ET) The Prime Minister's aircraft arrives at the Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport, Hellenic Republic

2332 hours
(1632 ET) The Prime Minister and Mrs. Harper disembark the aircraft and are greeted by His Excellency Eleftherios Anghelopoulos, Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic to Canada, Ms. Renata Wielgosz, Ambassador of Canada to the Hellenic Republic and Mr. Ralph Lysyshyn

Note: Pool photo opportunity

2337 hours
(1637 ET) Media depart for the Divani Caravel Hotel, Vasileos Alexandrou 2, Kesariani

Note:
Media 1 Media
A. Mohamed
Media 2 Media
A. MacDougall
Z. Delibasis
Media 3 Media
J. Fletcher
Media 4 Edit Suite

Appendix A

**ATHENS, HELLENIC REPUBLIC
SATURDAY, MAY 28, 2011
MEDIA ITINERARY**

- 0012 hours
(1712 ET) Media arrive at the Divani Caravel Hotel
- Note:**
- Room keys available in the lobby of the Hotel
 - The Filing Room and Editing Room are located on the Mezzanine Level
 - Light snacks and beverages available in the Filing Room
 - Luggage delivered directly to individual rooms within 60-90 minutes
 - Irons and ironing boards are available upon request at the front desk
 - Private time for remainder of evening
- Note: Breakfast is available in the restaurant on the Lobby Level from 0600 hours onwards**
- 0930 hours
(0230 ET) Pool Media depart the Divani Caravel Hotel for the Hotel Grande Bretagne
- 0940 hours
(0240 ET) Pool Media arrive at the Hotel Grande Bretagne
- 0940 hours
(0240 ET) Media depart the Divani Caravel Hotel for the New Acropolis Museum
- 1000 hours
(0300 ET) Guided Tour for Media of the New Acropolis Museum
- 1000 hours
(0300 ET) Business Roundtable begins
- Note: Pool photo opportunity**
- 1010 hours
(0310 ET) Pool Media depart Hotel Grande Bretagne for Constitution Square *(on foot)*
- 1045 hours
(0345 ET) Media depart the New Acropolis Museum for Constitution Square

Appendix A

065 (0355 ET)	
1141 hours (0441 ET)	The Prime Minister accompanied by Mrs. Harper lays a wreath and acknowledges the Monument of the Unknown Soldier Note: Pool photo opportunity + Open coverage
1150 hours (0450 ET)	Pool Media depart Constitution Square for the Hellenic Parliament <i>(on foot)</i>
1155 hours (0455 ET)	Pool Media arrive at the Hellenic Parliament
1155 hours (0455 ET)	Media depart Constitution Square for Maximos Mansion
1156 hours (0456 ET)	The Prime Minister is greeted by His Excellency Philippos Petsalnikos, Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament Note: Pool photo opportunity of the arrival
1200 hours (0500 ET)	Courtesy Call with Speaker Petsalnikos Note: Pool photo opportunity
1200 hours (0500 ET)	Media arrive at Maximos Mansion
1205 hours (0505 ET)	Pool Media depart the Hellenic Parliament for Maximos Mansion
1210 hours (0510 ET)	Pool Media arrive at Maximos Mansion
1230 hours (0530 ET)	The Prime Minister is greeted by His Excellency George A. Papandreou, Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic Note: Pool photo opportunity
1235 hours (0535 ET)	Tête-à-Tête with Prime Minister Papandreou Note: Pool photo opportunity

Appendix A

**ATHENS, HELLENIC REPUBLIC
SUNDAY, MAY 29, 2011
MEDIA ITINERARY**

Note:

LUGGAGE CALL: All luggage must be in the Filing Room prior to departure at 0535 hours. Media are advised to have a small carry on with any belongs that they may need

Note: Boxed breakfast and lunch will be provided

Note: Media must check-out no later than 1900 hours

0545 hours <i>(2245 ET)</i>	Media depart the Divani Caravel Hotel for Kalavryta
0750 hours <i>(0050 ET)</i>	Pool Media depart the Divani Caravel Hotel for Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport
0820 hours <i>(0120 ET)</i>	Pool Media arrive at Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport

KALAVRYTA

0920 hours <i>(0220 ET)</i>	Media arrive in Kalavryta and proceed directly to the Agia Lavra Monastery
0930 hours <i>(0230 ET)</i>	Guided Tour for Media of Agia Lavra Monastery
1000 hours <i>(0300 ET)</i>	Media depart Agia Lavra Monastery for the Municipal Museum of the Holocaust of Kalavryta
1007 hours <i>(0307 ET)</i>	Pool Media depart airfield for the Agia Lavra Monastery <i>(Prime Minister's motorcade)</i>
1010 hours <i>(0310 ET)</i>	Media arrive at the Municipal Museum of the Holocaust of Kalavryta
1015 hours <i>(0315 ET)</i>	Guided Tour for Media of the Municipal Museum of the Holocaust of Kalavryta

Appendix A

05
(0315 ET)

■ 1M 8 8

1020 hours
(0320 ET)

The Prime Minister, Mrs. Harper and Prime Minister Papandreou visit the Agia Lavra Monastery including the Chapel of Agia Lavra and the plane tree

Note: Pool photo opportunity

1045 hours
(0345 ET)

Media depart the Municipal Museum of the Holocaust of Kalavryta for the Place of Sacrifice Monument

1055 hours
(0355 ET)

Media arrive at the Place of Sacrifice Monument

1112 hours
(0412 ET)

Pool Media depart the Agia Lavra Monastery for the Municipal Museum of the Holocaust of Kalavryta
(Prime Minister's motorcade)

1120 hours
(0420 ET)

Pool Media arrive at the Municipal Museum of the Holocaust of Kalavryta

1121 hours
(0421 ET)

The Prime Minister and Mrs. Harper are given a tour of the Municipal Museum of the Holocaust by Mr. Athanasios Papadopoulos, Member of Parliament in the Prefecture of Achaea which includes the Original Entrance of the School, Museum Galleries and Exhibition Halls

Note: Pool photo opportunity

1152 hours
(0452 ET)

Pool Media depart the Municipal Museum of the Holocaust of Kalavryta (Prime Minister's motorcade)

1157 hours
(0457 ET)

Pool Media arrive at the Place of Sacrifice Monument

1158 hours
(0458 ET)

The Prime Minister accompanied by Mrs. Harper, Prime Minister Papandreou and Mr. George Lazouras, Mayor of Kalavryta light a candle of remembrance and pay tribute to the Men and Women of Kalavryta

Note: Pool photo opportunity

Appendix A

1210 hours
(0510 ET) The **Prime Minister** lays a wreath on the cross and pauses for a moment of silence

Note: Pool photo opportunity + Open coverage

1215 hours
(0515 ET) Media depart the Place of Sacrifice Monument for Athens

1345 hours
(0645 ET) Pool Media depart for Athens

ATHENS

1530 hours
(0830 ET) Media arrive at the Divani Caravel Hotel

Note: Filing time

1900 hours
(1200 ET) Media depart for Divani Caravel Hotel for Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport

1935 hours
(1235 ET) Media arrive at Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport

2100 hours
(1400 ET) The **Prime Minister's** motorcade arrives at Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport, Hellenic Republic

2102 hours
(1402 ET) The **Prime Minister** and **Mrs. Harper** are bid farewell by **Mrs. Renata Wielgosz**, Ambassador of Canada to the Hellenic Republic and **Mr. Ralph Lysyshyn**

Note: Pool photo opportunity

2105 hours
(1405 ET) The **Prime Minister** and **Mrs. Harper** board the aircraft

2115 hours
(1415 ET) The **Prime Minister's** aircraft departs Athens for Ottawa

Note:

Flying time: 10 hours 35 minutes

Aircraft - Airbus 001

Time change: -7 hours

Appendix B: 2011 G8 International Media Center in Deauville, France

Photographs courtesy of Giancarlo Ciambella



Appendix B

2011 G8 International Media Center in Deauville, France



Appendix C: 2010 G8-G20 Media Program

This is the Media Program for the Muskoka 2010 G-8 Summit which was distributed to the journalists attending the Summit. It is subject to last-minute changes which might have occurred on the ground. Provided by DFAIT

G8 Media Program June 24, 25 and 26, 2010

Thursday June 24, 2010

Arrival in Canada of G-8 Leaders
Location: Toronto Airport Infield Terminal
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Photo Opportunity
Time: TBC

Official Welcome of the Extended Outreach Leaders by the Prime Minister of Canada
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Time: 16:30

Friday, June 25, 2010

Official Welcome of the G-8 Leaders by the Prime Minister of Canada
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Photo Opportunity
Time: 11:45

G-8 Working Session with the African Outreach and the Extended Outreach Leaders
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Time: 16:45

G-8 Family Photograph
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Photo Opportunity
Time: 14:00

G-8 African Outreach and the Extended Outreach Family Photograph
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Time: 17:45

Saturday, June 26, 2010

Official Welcome of the African Outreach Leaders by the Prime Minister of Canada
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Time: 14:30

G8 Working Session
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Time: 09:00

G-8 Working Session with the African Leaders
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Time: 14:45

Chair's Press Conference
Location: Deerhurst Resort
Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
Time: 12:00

Appendix C

This is the Media Program for the Muskoka 2010 G-8 Summit which was distributed to the journalists attending the Summit. It is subject to last-minute change, which might have occurred on the ground. Provided by DFAIT

G20 Media Program June 26 and 27, 2010

Saturday June 26, 2010

Arrival in Canada of the G20 Leaders
 Location: Toronto Airport Infield Terminal
 Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
 Photo Opportunity
 Time: TBC

Chair's Press Conference
 Location: Metro Convention Centre
 Media: Open Coverage
 Time: 17:00

Official Welcome and reception of the G20 Leaders and spouses by the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada and Mrs. Laureen Harper
 Location: Royal York Hotel
 Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
 Photo Opportunity
 Time: 18:30

Sunday June 27, 2010

Opening Plenary Session
 Location: Metro Convention Centre
 Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
 Photo Opportunity
 Time: 09:00

G20 Family Photograph
 Location: Metro Convention Centre
 Media: Restricted Coverage (Pools)
 Time: 12:30

SOURCES

Interviews

Ziyada Callender	December 14, 2010
Bruce Cheadle	November 30, 2010
Jennifer Ditchburn	December 5, 2011
Robert Fife	November 23, 2010
Louise Fréchette	March 27, 2011
Edward Goldenberg	April 5, 2011
Ahmed H.	December 14, 2010
Richard Kohler	April 7, 2011
John Ledo	December 16, 2010
Michael McCurry	December 1, 2010
Malcolm McKechnie	April 2, 2011
Barry McLoughlin	December 16, 2010
Jim Munson	March 1, 2011
Alfonso Nieto	February 10, 2012
Craig Oliver	November 16, 2010
Evan Potter	January 8, 2011
Colin Robertson	December 12, 2010
Heather Scoffield	December 7, 2010
Jeffrey Simpson	December 7, 2010
Leslie Swartman	March 23, 2011
Victoria Terry	January 10, 2011

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