

International News

*The Many Worlds of the World's Press*

by George Gerbner and George Marvanyi

*A benchmark study of foreign news  
coverage in nine countries representing the  
capitalist, socialist, and "third" worlds.*

Distinctive standards of reporting reflect conditions of industrial investment (including the manufacture of news), national security, and popular support. Studies of newsroom decision making (represented in the bibliography) illustrate various aspects of newsroom climate resting on the real or assumed interests (or actual interventions) of publishers, stockholders, advertisers, parties, and other private or public organizations that set the terms of employment.

When the subject is foreign news, the process is even more variable; there is no effective reality check. Many different versions of the day's "world news" can be equally true and significant when judged by different standards of relevance.

This is the report of a multinational comparative study of foreign news coverage designed to explore the similarities and differences in the images of the "outside world" that each type of society projects for its members. The study included 60 daily papers published in nine countries of the capitalist, socialist and "third" worlds. The countries were the United States, Great Britain, the

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This article is taken from a longer report that includes other findings, detailed country-by-country tabulations, and methodological appendixes. Copies may be requested from the first author for the cost of duplication, \$12.50 (checks to be made payable to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania).

A bibliography of studies on world news flow, compiled by the authors, follows this article.

German Federal Republic (West Germany), the Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Ghana, India, and the Philippines. A total of 5,866 pages and 11,437 separate foreign news items were analyzed to probe dimensions of coverage affecting different societies' views of each other and of the rest of the world.

After a discussion of the development, questions, and conduct of the study, the findings will be summarized in two parts. First, we shall discuss the amounts of foreign news coverage in the different press systems. Second, we shall describe and illustrate the distribution of news-event locations around the world, leading to some conclusions about the "worlds" of the U.S., Western and Eastern European, Soviet, and non-aligned press systems. A comprehensive bibliography lists studies relating to world news flow.

*We decided to focus the analysis on one week's foreign news at a time when the Indo China war still commanded major press attention in order to provide a benchmark for later trend studies.*

We picked the week of May 24, 1970. There were elections in Ceylon, riots in Paris, and runoffs for the world soccer championships in Mexico. Israeli aircraft raided Lebanon, U.S. troops advanced into Cambodia, bombing and fighting raged in Vietnam. NATO ministers met in Rome, Arab leaders met in Khartoum, and the Komsomol Congress met in Moscow. Sudan nationalized some industries and the Queen of England dissolved Parliament in preparation for new elections. These and hundreds of minor stories made up the news of the world of that week. If it was "unique" (and which week isn't?), it fits the typical categories into which each country dips for its own news.

The newspaper samples were drawn to include various types of papers and to approximate a cross-section of news readerships. This required the selection of both elite and popular organs and of both mass-circulation and small newspapers. It was decided to divide the press of each country into five circulation classes and to select the largest circulation paper in each class. In those circulation categories in which a generally recognized elite newspaper was found, that paper was selected. Newspapers were chosen from as many different regions within the country as possible. Furthermore, when a circulation class in a country represented a much larger proportion of all newspapers than the same class in another country, more than one paper was selected from the latter class in order to give it greater weight in the total sample.

The characteristics of the samples reflect the relative circulations and sizes of the different newspapers. The United States press sample included two "elite" dailies of national circulation, the *New York Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. In the "popular" category of large circulation it also included the *New York Daily News*, and the medium circulation, *San Francisco Chronicle*. Three newspapers of relatively low circulation (under 50,000) were included to represent the small local newspaper, and to provide additional geographic coverage. A total of nine U.S. newspapers of a combined circulation of almost 4 million copies and over 2,000 pages were analyzed.

The British sample included the *London Times* and *Daily Telegraph* as "elite" papers. The giant *Daily Mirror* was the "popular" daily, and other

smaller papers represented other circulation and regional categories. The large circulation of national dailies brought the total British sample to over 8 million copies with only 900 pages.

The West German sample included the "elite" *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and *Die Welt*, the "popular" *Bild Zeitung*, and three other smaller circulation regional papers. The combined circulation of the sample was almost 5½ million; its size was 924 pages.

The Soviet press sample included *Pravda* as the "elite" daily, three other papers published in Moscow, and four regional dailies. The combined circulation was nearly 14 million, but the size of the sample was 156 pages.

The Hungarian and Czechoslovakian samples each included ten papers in the respective categories, amounting to a combined circulation of less than 2 million with a total of over 50 pages each.

The non-aligned "third" world was represented by three papers each in Ghana, India, and the Philippines, each including one "elite" daily, and all printed in English. Their combined circulation was over 11 million; the size of the sample was 60 pages.

We defined news as non-advertising printed matter (text, picture, or tabular information) except editorials, cartoons and comic strips, book reviews, indices and tables of content, and Sunday magazine sections or other special supplements not part of the general weekday format of the newspaper.

The world, meaning the outside world, was defined as any territory outside of the geographical boundaries of the country in which the newspaper is published. Colonies or protectorates of the home country were to be considered foreign for purposes of our study.

*The general rule for the identification of a foreign news story was that the bulk of the information contained in the story had to come from abroad.*

Therefore, stories originating abroad (e.g., having a foreign dateline) were to be considered foreign news even if the subject matter involved domestic affairs. Second, when most of the information came from abroad or the story dealt mostly with foreign matter, or both, it was to be considered foreign news, even if it had a domestic dateline. Third, a story about foreign visitors was always to be considered foreign news. News originating in or written about international zones and their affairs (the U.N. in New York, Geneva, etc.; Berlin, East or West) was to be considered foreign in all papers.

The unit of analysis was the foreign news story or item, which we defined as a substantively and typographically distinct unit of relevant printed matter. Several items sharing the same headline were considered separate items if they were substantively and typographically distinct. Each item was to be marked, measured, and coded separately, except that a block of tabular information from abroad printed without other text, such as financial, weather, or sports statistics, was to be considered a single item.

Two coding forms were developed: one for a given issue of a newspaper *in toto*, and another for each item of foreign news within each issue. A core group

of four researchers worked with two issues from each sample to compile a master list of foreign items and to develop examples of completed forms for coder-training purposes.

Coders were first trained on materials which were not in the sample, then tested on the issues coded by the core group. Coders were not permitted to code newspapers on their own until they demonstrated a high degree of reliability with the core group on the materials they had coded for testing purposes. The coders worked independently on each stage. They were randomly assigned to a given stage of a given paper.

The analysis of the material was conducted simultaneously in Philadelphia and in Budapest following the procedure worked out jointly in advance. The U.S., Western European, and non-aligned press samples were analyzed in Philadelphia while the Soviet and Eastern European samples were analyzed in Budapest. Sample analyses were exchanged and recoded to improve coder reliability.

*The amount of attention newspapers devote to foreign news (or to anything else) depends on their physical characteristics and their policies.*

The American press ranked first on the average *length* of foreign news items. As Table 1 shows, Western European papers carried nearly twice as many foreign news items *per day* as U.S. papers, with Eastern European papers

**Table 1: Ranks and measures of foreign news coverage**

	United States		Western Europe		Soviet Union		Eastern Europe		Non-aligned	
	Rank <sup>a</sup>		Rank		Rank		Rank		Rank	
Number of foreign news items per newspaper per day	4	25.1	1	49.8	5	19.4	2	39.7	3	30.8
Square inches of foreign news space per newspaper per day	3	518	1	857	5	206	4	321	2	535
Square inches of foreign news space per item	1	20.7	3	17.2	4	10.6	5	8.1	2	17.4
Number of foreign news items per page	5	0.6	4	1.8	1.5	4.6	1.5	4.6	3	2.2
Square inches of foreign news per page	5	12.6	4	32.4	1	48.9	3	36.9	2	37.5
Foreign news space as percent of all nonadvertising space	5	11.1	2	23.6	4	16.5	1	27.4	3	22.8

<sup>a</sup> Items are ranked across rows.

second and the non-aligned press third. The press of Western Europe also led in the absolute amount of space per day, with non-aligned newspapers second and U.S. dailies third. In average length of foreign news items, U.S. newspapers were followed by non-aligned and Western European papers.

Large papers have more space, but much of that is devoted to advertising and other non-news features (which is why they are large in the first place). Nearly 60 percent of U.S. newspaper space, and over 40 percent of Western European newspaper space was devoted to advertising matter. Ads occupied only 15 percent of Eastern European and 2 percent of Soviet newspaper space. The average amount of non-advertising space per issue in U.S. newspapers was one-quarter larger than in Western Europe, twice as much as in the non-aligned countries, and almost four times as much as in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union.

The amount of foreign coverage can thus be measured in two ways. One is the absolute number of items and square inches of space devoted to foreign news. These measures are strongly influenced by physical characteristics. The other is the relative amount of available space or percent of the "news hole" devoted to foreign news. That is more a matter of editorial choice.

In absolute terms, the U.S. press used almost as much newsprint per issue as the other eight countries combined. While the U.S. dailies averaged 41 (mostly large-sized) pages per issue, those of Western Europe averaged 26, the non-aligned countries 14, Eastern European papers 9, and Soviet dailies 4.

Relative allocations, however, present a different picture. As Table 1 shows, Soviet and Eastern European papers led in the number of foreign news *items per page*. The Soviet press was also first in the amount of *space per page* devoted to foreign news, with non-aligned papers second and Eastern European dailies a close third. Eastern European newspapers devoted the largest *percentage of non-advertising space* to foreign news, with the press of Western Europe second, of non-aligned countries third, and of the U.S.S.R. fourth. The U.S. newspaper sample ranked last on all relative measures.

The U.S. press, then, ranked low in comparison with the other areas on relative measures of attention to the outside world, reflecting low priority of editorial attention. The press of Western Europe led in absolute numbers of items and amounts of space, and the daily papers of the Socialist countries led in the proportion of available space devoted to foreign news. The non-aligned countries came in second and third on all measures.

Taking the percentage allocation of non-advertising space as perhaps the most sensitive measure of editorial policy, we find that the leader is the German paper appropriately named *Die Welt*; it devoted 43.7 percent of its total non-advertising space to foreign news. Five other papers gave more than 30 percent: the Soviet *Pravda* (38.0 percent); the Hungarian *Magyar Nemzet* (37.6 percent), *Népszabadság* (36.0 percent), and *Magyar Hírlap* (35.6 percent), and the Czechoslovakian *Lud* (30.1 percent). Another 16 dailies, including the *Christian Science Monitor* (28.7 percent), gave more than 25 percent, but no other U.S., British, or Soviet paper did. The *New York Times* used 16.4 percent of its non-advertising space for foreign news, the *London Times* 22.4 percent.

**Table 2: Foreign news content as a percentage of total news space in 1951 and 1970**

	1951 %	1970 %
New York <i>Times</i>	16	16
New York <i>Daily News</i>	2	7
London <i>Times</i>	25	22
<i>Pravda</i>	30	38
<i>Rude Pravo</i>	25	29
<i>Times of India</i>	14	25

Less than 10 percent of available news space was devoted to foreign news by one Philippine, two Soviet, one British, and six U.S. daily papers. "Elite" papers gave generally more attention to foreign news than did the "popular" press.

An interesting comparison is made possible by the fact that six papers of our sample were also included in Jacques Kayser's study of the news in 1951. Table 2 shows that three of the six papers devoted about the same percentages to foreign news in 1951 as in 1970, and that the rank order of the six papers shifted only because the *Times of India* nearly doubled its foreign coverage, perhaps as a result of independence.

In general, there is an inverse relationship between commercial sponsorship (and the consequent demand for sales and localized news service) and foreign news coverage. On the whole, the publicly owned or institutionally managed press assigns higher priority to the outside world than does the strictly commercial press.

*How do these institutional forces shape the distribution of attention to different areas of the world?*

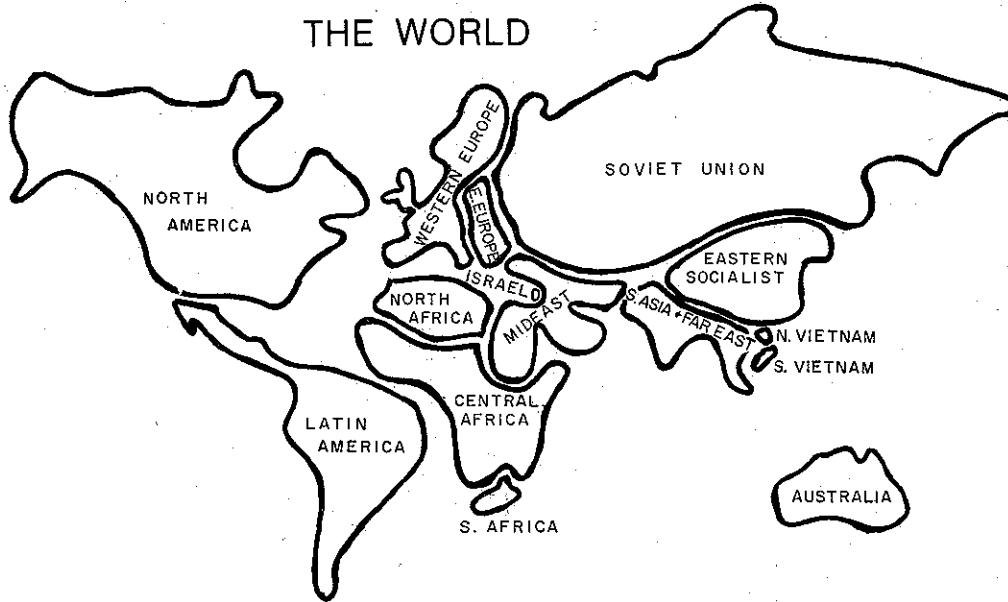
To make the description of the global play of attention manageable, we divided the world into 15 regions on the basis of a combination of geographical, political, and current affairs considerations. The regions are: (1) Western Europe, (2) Eastern Europe, (3) the Soviet Union, (4) the Mideast, (5) Israel, (6) North Africa, (7) Central Africa, (8) South Africa, (9) North Vietnam, (10) South Vietnam, (11) Eastern Socialist countries (China, Mongolia, North Korea), (12) South Asia and the Far East (including Burma, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan), (13) Australia and Oceania, (14) Latin America, and (15) North America.

The first figure on page 58 is a map of the world simplified into these regions. The next five maps are the "worlds" of the five press systems scaled to the percentage of representation of each region in each press system.

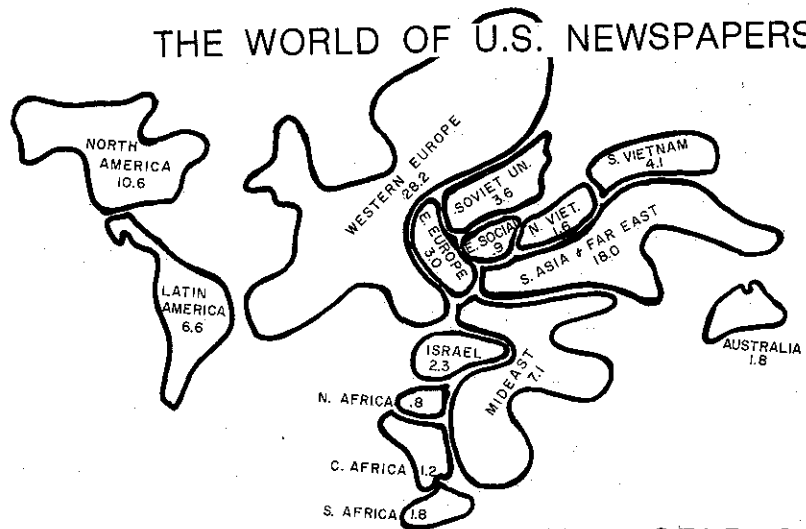
Starting from the necessarily arbitrary assumption that each region has equal chance of newsworthiness, we first equalized the size of all regions, and then reduced each to the percentage of the equalized size that corresponds to its percentage representation in each press system (indicated on the map of each region).

Looking at the world of U.S. newspapers, we can see that foreign news events happening in Western Europe, South Asia and the Far East, North

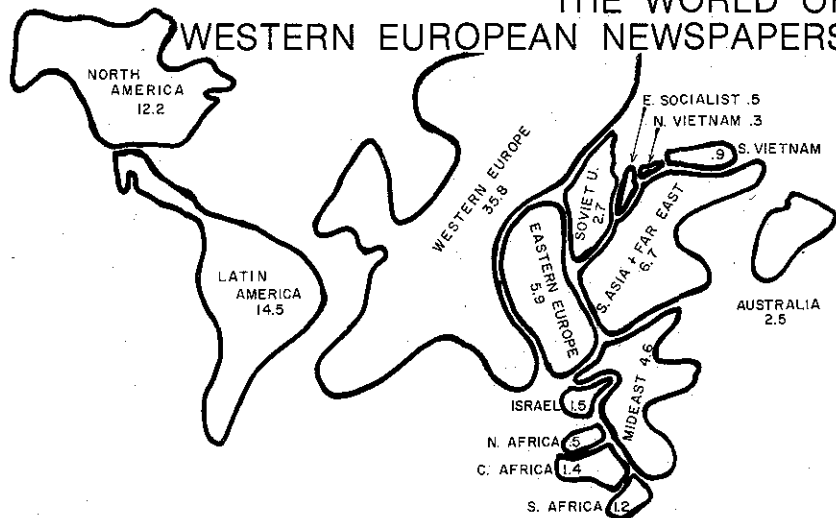
# THE WORLD



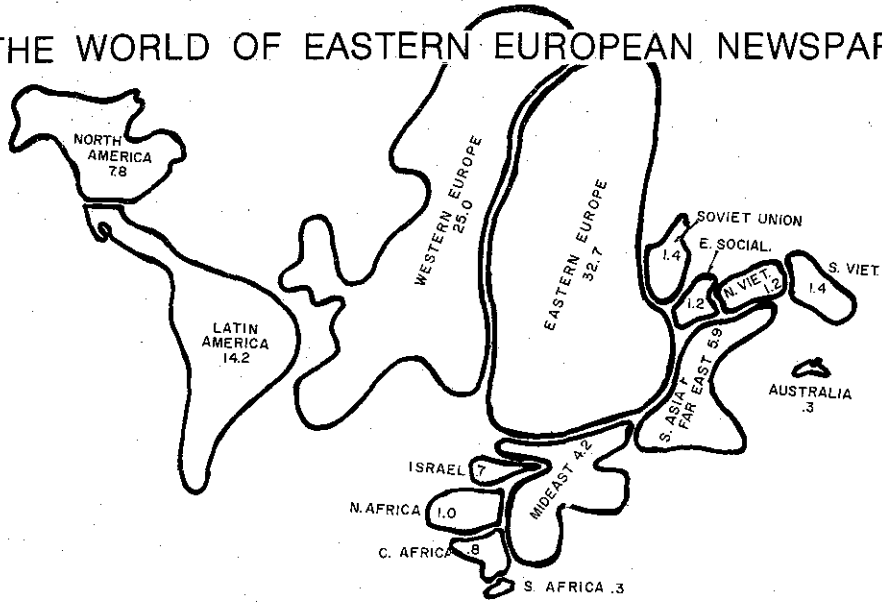
# THE WORLD OF U.S. NEWSPAPERS



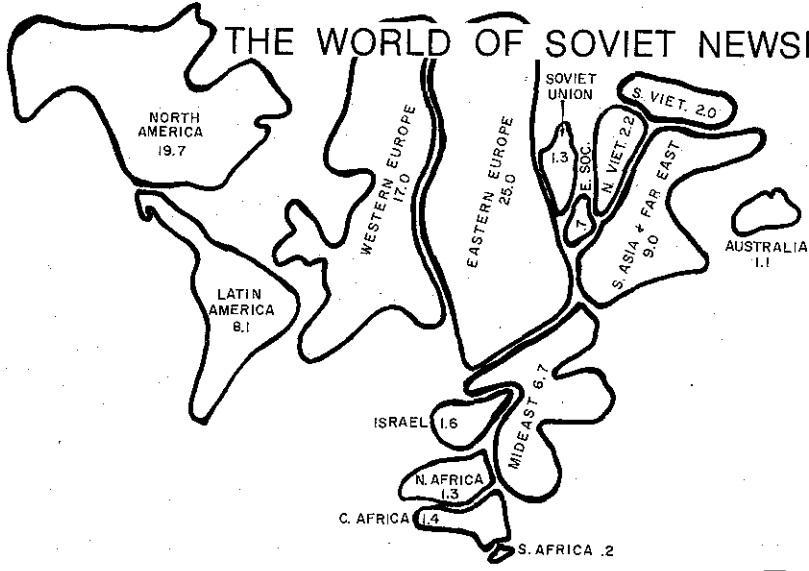
# THE WORLD OF WESTERN EUROPEAN NEWSPAPERS



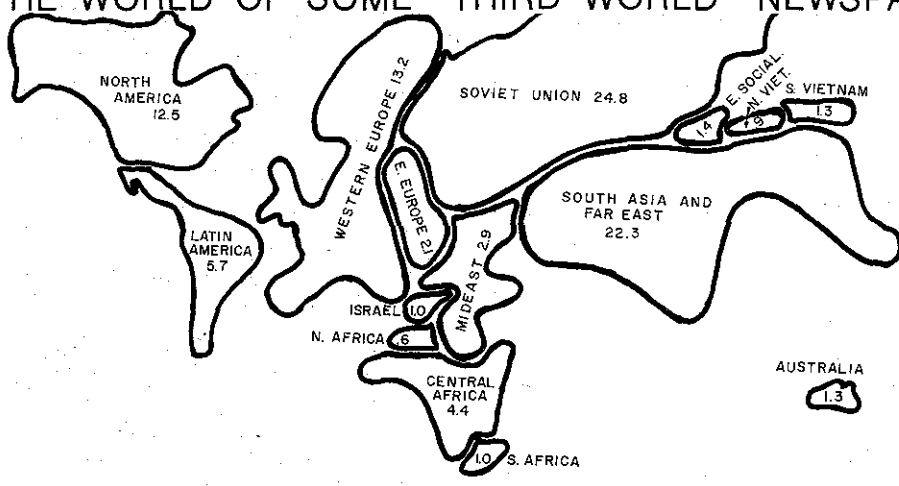
# THE WORLD OF EASTERN EUROPEAN NEWSPAPERS



# THE WORLD OF SOVIET NEWSPAPERS



# THE WORLD OF SOME "THIRD WORLD" NEWSPAPERS





America, and the Middle East (including Israel), make up two-thirds of the U.S. foreign news map of the world. The war in Vietnam made that small region loom larger than all of Africa and China combined. The Mideast and Israel attracted more attention than the Soviet Union plus Eastern Europe.

In the world of British and West German newspapers ("Western Europe"), events in Western Europe, Latin America, and North America (in that order) occupied nearly two-thirds of all attention. These Western European papers paid less attention to Israel and to Vietnam than did the U.S., but more attention to Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Eastern European papers gave as much news to events about their own region as Western European ones did to theirs, but much more to Western Europe than vice versa. Otherwise, Eastern European press allocations followed fairly closely those of Western Europe. However, Eastern Europe devoted less attention to events in the Soviet Union than did any other press system, including that of the United States. Even Africa got more play in the press of Eastern Europe than did the Soviet Union.

The Soviet press, on the other hand, ranked Eastern Europe first and North America second (the highest rank of attention devoted to North America of all the press systems). Western Europe ranked third in the Soviet press. The three regions accounted for two-thirds of Soviet press attention to the outside world. (Yet neither the American nor the Western European press paid much attention to the Soviet Union.) The percentage of Soviet attention to Israel or South Vietnam or South Asia and the Far East was about half of that devoted to these regions by the American press.

The world of the "third world" newspapers was the only one in which the Soviet Union loomed large, in fact the largest among all regions. Next were South Asia and the Far East, Western Europe, North America, and Latin America, in that order, together making up two-thirds of the world of the non-aligned press. In that world, the Mideast ranked lower and Central Africa ranked higher than in any of the others.

What can we conclude from these findings? Readers of all press systems know most about Western Europe. For American readers, non-communist Asia and the Mideast are next. The relative blind spot of the American press is Latin America, at least in comparison with the other press systems.

The Western newspapers studied have little interest in the Socialist countries. News of the Soviet Union is also kept out of the press of Eastern Europe, but gets top play in newspapers of the "third world." Soviet readers get more news about the U.S. and Western and Eastern Europe than readers of those areas get about the Soviets. The regions of Africa, Australia and Oceania, and the Eastern Socialist countries of China, Mongolia, and North Korea were barely visible in the world's press of 1970.

This study suggests some dimensions underlying the present state of communications between different social systems. Our findings indicate where the process of reciprocal information may be out of joint. But our "snapshot" of the global flow of foreign news can only serve as a starting point for comparative

analysis. Certainly the end of the war in Southeast Asia, and the relative rise in prominence of other areas, may have altered the distribution of news attention. More comprehensive and reliable insight into the "many worlds of the world's press" will come from indicators of trends over time and of the conceptions they cultivate in the minds of readers around the world.

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