

# Consequences of one-dimensional Canadian news reporting



*Rodger Harding, a former lawyer and diplomat, is a Business Leadership and Corporate Intelligence Awareness consultant. He may be reached by phone at (416) 962-6700, by e-mail at [rodger@hardingintelligence.com](mailto:rodger@hardingintelligence.com), or at his Web site [www.HardingIntl.com](http://www.HardingIntl.com).*

**Whenever broadcasters get together, talk seems always to be about new technology, regulatory affairs, or ratings. While this is a generalization, I sometimes wonder if the industry has forgotten the enormous responsibility it has of shaping public opinion.**

It is especially in news-related programs that context seems to be ignored. We live in the age of the sound byte... less is more! News reports are pretty much safe run-offs of what is available on the wire. In-house journalistic questioning, debate or commentary hardly seems a priority.

Clichéd inaccuracies are accepted with great alacrity by a trusting public, relying (unthinkingly) on their favourite news channel. Journalists, and by default audiences, seem unwilling or too busy to

remember what happened five minutes ago, let alone five weeks, months, years or decades.

Is the broadcast news industry providing sufficient and reliable context for a society that proclaims itself a thinking democracy?

The Afghanistan engagement provides an excellent illustration. The word NATO suddenly crept into Afghanistan-related newscasts as, for me, a discordant note earlier this year: "NATO forces suffered further losses..." "The NATO engagement in Afghanistan..." "In terms of NATO commitment..." ...NATO... When did this become a NATO deal?

As I recall, Bush set out to "catch the folks who did this" after 9/11. He called for those who "were either for us or against us" to step forward and the "Coalition of the willing" came into being.

Then came Canada's involvement... to rebuild, reconstruct and lend a hand. This suddenly escalated into Canada holding the baby in southern Afghanistan, "in terms of its NATO membership". Anyone following would swear that this was a NATO-driven initiative. In actual fact NATO only officially took over command of the engagement from the U.S. in late September/early October. Will the eventual withdrawal then be penned as a NATO failure?

I would love to see journalistic insights that provide background and clarity. One has only to read the blogs that abound to realize that most of us are adrift on a sea of nonsense! Dangerously, we all believe we know it all, because we have heard from the experts. It is scary to think that a network has only to repeat a phrase six times and it is downloaded as fact by thousands all over the world.

Uncritical reporting by major broadcasters more often than not validates the foolishness that pours out of politician's mouths. How often have we heard that Canada is a terrorist target because "they hate our freedoms". A silly enough phrase,

but repeated often enough becomes a powerful mantra that is easily digested by a scared and uncertain electorate.

I long to see a journalist stand up and challenge: "Why would anyone hate Canada's freedoms?" I would like to be reminded that our success as a country was not achieved by riding roughshod over lesser economies and smaller countries just because we could. I would love emphasis on the fact that our international and domestic reputation blinks as a beacon for the oppressed worldwide.

I would really be grateful if it was pointed out that thundering across the world stage, bugles blaring, sabres rattling and guns blazing, amid a welter of blood and bodies, are not what it takes to be respected. They are, however, what heighten a climate of fear and the inevitable downward spiral that violence brings in its wake.

The impressive, but unreported, work of Allan Rock at the U.N. could provide any Canadian journalist or politician intent on domestically showcasing the wonder of Canada's position in the world with a rich source of material. Instead we are treated to an endless rehash of the Mackay/Stronach saga and attendant salacious titbits.

We are all scared of labels. If we oppose a military engagement we are dismissing all soldiers who ever died for Canada. If we are anti-Conservative we are automatically Socialist. Human rights protagonists are soft on terrorism.

So we become flatliners, abetted by lazy journalists with the same fear of labels. The fearful and unthinking buy into one-dimensional promises of certainty, blindly trusting authority figures and those they perceive to be in the know.

Small wonder that so many thinkers are ignoring mainstream information sources, preferring underground blogs and chat rooms. Small wonder that youth prefer the *Daily Show* and the *Colbert Report*.

Canada deserves better!