

Nov 04, 2016 by *Adam Clayton Powell, III*

Australia, NZ focus on US by looking at US media ^[1]

LOS ANGELES, July 13 - Nothing fascinates media as much as, well, media.

That is the lasting impression after an extended visit to New Zealand and Australia, which boast world-class commercial, public service and international broadcasters and first-rate newspapers. But looking at America through South Pacific lenses, the focus more often than not seemed on American media.

Coverage of the U.S. debate over and involvement in Iraq was a case in point: Stories about the policy debate or even events in Iraq were sot news, typically short items on the latest White House statement or pictures of the car bomb of the day, typically well inside the A section or far down in the newscast.

Of course Iraq is a local story there. The kidnapping and rescue last month of Australian hostage Douglas Wood was big news. And the role of Australian and New Zealand troops in Iraq and Afghanistan is a recurring subject, and quite properly so. This morning we saw the announcement that Australia is sending more troops to the region.

But in three weeks of monitoring national and regional newspapers and broadcast news, there was little analysis or context of the U.S. policy or effort, for which Australians and New Zealanders are now in harm's way. And as is typical of media in the U.S., there was no coverage at all of the progress, or lack of it, rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan.

But when there was a controversy about coverage of Iraq in U.S. media, it was all hands on deck. The best example: *Newsweek's* apology for its May 9 report that American had mistreated detainees and had flushed a copy of the Koran, down a toilet at the Guantanamo Bay detention center.

Coverage of *Newsweek's* initial report was dwarfed by the continuing coverage of the apology. Much of the local coverage throughout the week echoed Middle East skepticism about the retraction, with broad hints that the original *Newsweek* claim was correct.

One morning, New Zealand's TV One Network "Breakfast" morning show presented an extended debate featuring guest "media analysts" in the network's studios in Wellington and Auckland. Following the debate, viewers were invited to email their comments, which were read by the "Breakfast" anchor in the next segment. There may have been more coverage on "Breakfast" than on one of the network TV morning programs in the U.S.

On radio, there were similar debates and discussions, including, of course, on talk radio. One national news-talk network played the apology as a running story. One national newscast devoted much of an hour to the *Newsweek* apology, dominated by a guest analyst who had what seemed an inconsistent set of views: that the magazine had erred in its original report,

but that it should not have apologized.

These longer segments were augmented by updates and short reports throughout the week from Washington and from Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the *Newsweek* report prompted protests.

Perhaps most interesting was the dog that didn't bark: a lack of explanation. Broadcasters clearly assumed viewers and listeners already knew about American news media in considerable detail.

Newsweek cannot have very many readers in Auckland or Christchurch, yet local stories never characterized the magazine. It was always assumed New Zealanders knew enough about the U.S. magazine to distinguish it from, say, the *National Enquirer* or the (London) *Sun*.

There was also an assumption that viewers and listeners were familiar with earlier missteps of U.S. journalism. Plagiarism in American media must have had heavy coverage, given the quick and otherwise unexplained references to missteps at the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe* and the *New Republic*.

And everyone seemed to know the name Jayson Blair.
