

The New Orientalism: The Influence of Media Representation of 'the Other' in International Affairs

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<https://doi.org/10.12982/CMUJASR.2018.0007>

ABSTRACT

The concept of Orientalism refers to the distorted manner in which Eastern people and cultures are often viewed by the West. Despite long awareness of this tendency it persists in modern media. However, its focus shifts depending upon which states are perceived by Western governments as presenting the most significant threat to their dominance of international affairs. In recent years Russia and China have begun to supplant the Islamic world as preeminent among such perceived threats. This paper argues that a pattern of media reporting exists which limits views of such states in a way that generates a shallow and stereotypical conception of its people. The danger in this is that, lacking a well-rounded view of the people and culture of such states, the use of force becomes more easily framed as a necessity amongst other policy options, rather than a choice of absolute of last resort.

Keywords: Security, Media, Orientalism, Propaganda, China, Russia.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the Cold War there seemed to be a growing consensus that the West, in its victory over the U.S.S.R., had proven the superiority of the liberal democratic system over that of authoritarianism with authors such as Fukuyama (1992) arguing that we would soon see a shift from competing political structures to a global order based around a clearly dominant system. These claims now seem presumptuous, and in recent years a different thesis has arisen which views the very foundations of liberal democracy as being under threat, specifically from the authoritarian nature of the Russian