

A REVIEW OF MEDIA ROLE IN MILITARY DECISION MAKING

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Abstract— The rapid pace of media technologies, and in particular the near instant access to live news reporting available from the classic and reach of social media platforms, has media emerging as a force multiplier for decision-making on the part of military commanders. This paper explores the complex, evolving relationship between media and military leadership and the manner in which media narratives, framing and public opinion directly inform, and often limit, military and governmental decision making in times of crisis. Borrowing from Piers Robinson's CNN Effect theory (which is a conceptual framework for understanding how media affects foreign policy and humanitarian intervention) as well as multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) techniques, this research offers an in-depth look at how media can shape all aspects of military operations, popular opinion, and responses within the military. By using a powerful mixed-method design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this research conduct content analysis of media stories, large-scale surveys among military personnel deployed to a combat mission, as well as elite interviews with senior military decision-makers. The results identify the sectors where media-derived pressures influence changes in strategic and operational military decisions. ON media scrutiny and the pressures it brings which heighten public demand for answers, make politics more sensitive, and shift the focus in the military campaign. Some key findings from this research include the need to improve media literacy for military members in order to improve knowledge of and critical thinking about media productions. Secondly, the paper highlights the drive for better media relations tactics, which can skillfully manage engagement with the media and public. A balanced, mature perspective that includes a broad range of diverse points of view and a more strategic and truth-based understanding of how to satisfy military objectives are key to combating media manipulated biases and to become media resilient.

The study ends with several practical suggestions for how to shield military leaders from media-induced biases, and calls for more balanced decision-making. The adoption of these strategies allows military organizations not only to better negotiate the contemporary media environment but also adjust to the volatile public opinion climate and to protect their operational independence in a world of continuous media applications.

Keywords—Media influence, military decision-making, CNN Effect, public opinion, media strategies, multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM), media literacy, crisis management, strategic communication, media engagement, public perception, operational integrity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, media power has become so weighty and is such a determining factor in planning and military action. 24-hour news reportage and the prevalence of social media that are changing the patterns of information diffusion about conflicts and crisis. It is this constant feed of real time news that allows public opinion to shift so quickly, and government and military institutions to be forced to react suddenly to changing public opinion. Unlike decades past, when public knowledge of military events was frequently delayed and less detailed, the modern media world provides continual, in-depth coverage of war. This greater exposure to public gaze results in more scrutiny and higher expectations from domestic and international opinion makers, to a point where military leadership treats perception management as a parameter of decision making.

This paper investigates not only that relationship, but also how media portrayals shape public perceptions concerning military operations and policymakers' actions in times of crisis. In a media-rich environment, military decision makers must consistently weigh their tactical and strategic goals against the imperative of securing public backing and controlling the flow of information to the media[1]. Impact is evident in cases where politicians are directly pressured to take action immediately in light of a humanitarian crisis or civilian casualties covered heavily by media. The reporting of such events in real time can change the public and political dynamic, bringing intense scrutiny and urgency to the decision-making of military commanders.

Grasping the nuances of influence is vital for contemporary military strategies, since military leaders must now consider not only their tactical and strategic objectives but also the influence of the pressures of a media environment that insists on transparency, accountability and respect for societal values. In this article, I explore the impact of media on military strategy, why military organizations needs to respond to ensure both operational effectiveness and public confidence, and how they can do so in the era of rapid and ubiquitous media scrutiny[3]. The analysis in this article also takes into account the role of media relations and public communication when military organizations attempt to control public expectation and counter

potential media-induced bias. By examining these dynamics, the analysis seeks to offer the national security community insights that can help military leaders be mindful in the same way Davey was about aligning actions with larger societal goals. Expectations, yet ensure the integrity and effectiveness of military action.

II. RELATED WORK

The impact of media on the conduct of warfare has changed considerably over the last few decades, and each conflict has revealed new aspects of this intricate relationship. With the development of media technology came the ability to influence public opinion, influence policy and affect strategic decisions on the battlefield. The transition from conventional print and broadcast journalism to a news and social media regime that made information available in real time has demonstrated media's ability to influence the public's understanding of military engagement and the resulting government and military decision-making[2].

- **The Vietnam War** is frequently cited as a classic example of the impact of media on military strategy. It was the first war to be televised, bringing the horrors of combat into people's living rooms. And images like the unforgettable photo of the "Napalm Girl" came to symbolize the war's brutality and helped spread antiwar sentiment across the United States. This coverage was the first time Americans had directly witnessed their government's war, and it produced a massive shift in public opinion as well as the emergence of nationwide protests and an antiwar movement. The pressure of public dissent helped force leaders to change their military strategies and, eventually, to pull out troops -- a turning point in the ability of media to shape policy as well as public opinion. The Vietnam War had already created a model, showing how media could become the primary evil (or, in some cases, a boon), the decider as to whether or not public opinion should view or not view war as troops fighting for peace[3].
- **The Gulf War** ushered in a new phase of media participation with instant reporting and the onset of 24-hour news coverage. With live reports from its battles, people around the world watched military operations in real time. This direct exposure to the realities of war increased international awareness and ratcheted up public scrutiny - especially on civilian consequences and humanitarian concerns. The all-day space frequently covering bombs on bridges and bodies of civilian victims shaped opinion and conversation about the morality of the military approach. Coalition leadership understood the importance of the media in shaping public opinion, but nothing of its influence could be taken for granted: the operational and image strategies had to be co-ordinate to keep the pub-

lic inside. It exposed the new phenomenon for military commanders that emerged during the conflict; the early recognition that the media defined the public perceptions of the morality and success of the war, and thus were a critical target audience for agenda setting[7].

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To systematically evaluate media's impact on war, in the following pages I draw on central theories and concepts from communication and media to develop an analytical framework. These models illuminate how perceptions are influenced by media, public opinion is molded, and through political pressure how governments and militaries act. As media becomes more and more enmeshed in global dynamics, knowing these theories becomes necessary to understand how media coverage informs, or even creates, the climate in which leaders take high-stakes action.

A. The CNN Effect

The CNN Effect, propagated by Piers Robinson other scholars, posits that compelling, live television coverage in particular during humanitarian crises can hold government and military leaders to immediate account. This theory argues that when the media devotes great attention to human suffering, especially when it can be rendered heart-rending through images, it mobilizes public opinion and thus encourages leaders to pursue quick, visible responses even if they might be at cross purposes with more long-term goals. The CNN Effect applies most in cases where international attention catalyzes pressuring foreign powers to intervene. This episode highlights the potential mechanism through which leaders, under the increased media scrutiny, may respond to improvement in strategic interests, without any guarantee regarding peace and security, but rather in accordance with signals conveyed by public opinion in order to maintain the domestic and international backing. This need to fix a PR problem fast (thanks to media exposure) has caused military institutions to struggle with juxtaposing societal expectations and strategic imperatives, sometimes molding strategic choices around the immediacy of media-driven stories.

B. Agenda-Setting, Framing, and Priming

Agenda-Setting According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media has the power to determine which issues will become politically salient.

Three other theories — agenda-setting, framing and priming — further explain how the news influences public opinion and, indirectly, choices faced by leaders in the military[4].

Agenda-Setting Theory contends that media are influential in the selection of specific issues and that, by repeating this on the screen, the press can tell the public what issues hold the most importance. In a military context, media

focus on an individual dimension of a conflict— such as civilian suffering or the onset of a humanitarian catastrophe— can have a mobilizing influence, as can the expectation that this If damage can be recognized and widely accepted as such, centralized its destruction will be remedied. Agenda-setting becomes especially potent during wars, as it magnifies focus on dimensions of war that may otherwise be peripheral, compelling leaders to re-calculate their strategic priorities in response to the concerns of the populace and to maintain legitimacy[5].

And the most important work is covering the theory is Jacob Framing Theory, which wrote by Stephen D Resnick and Richard D. Wolff. In this variant, the study trying to explain how the media processes the presentation information to the audience and how media may influence the way in which events are interpreted and emotionally experienced by the audience. The framing of the narrative around an issue — “liberation effort” versus “occupation,” for instance — influences public perception and, thereby, the legitimacy of military actions. Framing in the media can construct compelling stories about military action which may influence support or opposition from the public. For military commanders, the spectrum of this framing leads to the possibility of recalibration of strategy, and even the redefinition of goals, to assuage a public opinion inimical to the mission and to fit the preferred narrative.

Priming Theory is the study of how recurrent exposure to the media on certain issues influences the standards individuals use to judge new information. When it comes to military affairs, priming can also make audiences more receptive to issues like civilian harm or collateral damage, which in turn shapes their expectations and reactions to military choices. This primed sensitivity is likely to amplify public reaction to any subsequent event, especially ones about breaches of humanitarian precepts. Military leaders should know about priming effects, because it informs the manner in which media exposure creates a world in which tiny events will be disproportionately scrutinized, and operational decisions are made to maintain public confidence[6].

Together, these theories reiterate media as not simply a submissive recorder of events. Rather, it refers the battle space in which military and government officials must operate, constructing narratives that affect how the public think about the military’s actions and applying pressures which leaders must juggle and reconcile. Media sets the agenda by identifying what the public will pay attention to; frames events by suggesting the way events will be interpreted by audiences; and primes the public to take other information into account (prior to other information) when processing news about warfare. These processes display the ways in which media can shape the wider social conversation about the use of military force,

with leaders in many cases having to factor in as much the strategic nature of their decisions as the inclination of public sentiment. An understanding and awareness of these theories is critical for military leaders working to formulate strategies, not only based on operational objectives, but also in response to a media environment that continues to develop and change. At a broader level, it is believed that this framework represents a tool that can be used to make sense of the mutually dependent relationship between both media and public opinion and the decision process, and in the process can be a way to understand how the leadership in question comes to understand changing circumstances to keep a balance between strategic consistency and public confidence in a world of media driven discourses. Recognizing these dynamics will allow military institutions to move efficiently within the modern as well as media-soaked constrictions of strategic warfare and will help to ensure that resistance can still be operationally effective, while addressing media-conditioned sociopolitical as well as media molded cognitive realities.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This work uses complementary mixed methods to study the effects of the media on military decision making in depth and provide a balanced assessment. By utilizing content analysis, surveys and interviews with military members, this scholarship will investigate how media narratives shape strategic decisions, and how military leadership both understand, react and mitigate the risks associated with five minutes of fame.

A. Media Content Analysis

The samples of articles compared consisted of those published in 1990 and 2004.

Through a systematic analysis of media images of different military missions, an investigation was made of how current armed conflict is extended in the media and the impact this may have on the public perception, and hence, also on military strategies. The study included a variety of military interventions, between NATO forces in Libya to during the Gulf War to counterinsurgencies in Afghanistan to standing by in Rwanda[5].

Current military actions by Russia. This entailed a process of systematically analyzing the tone, frequency and framing in respect of coverage from a range of leading news media accounts. Sentiment analysis were then performed to understand the overall emotional tone of the reporting, i.e., demonstrate how conflicts are depicted positively/ negatively/ neutrally. Frequency analysis also enabled us to quantify the prominence of a theme (or set of themes) that was found to be commonly repeated – humanitarian disaster, military successes or failures and civilian casualties, leading us to identify those topics that were most likely to shift public opinion.

Through following these narratives and pinpointing changes in media focus, the content analysis exposes how media focus shape public discourse on military affairs. The current analysis attempts to understand if there are any common themes—such as impact on civilians or geopolitical implications that are being consistently projected, and whether they are in line or in contrast to the objectives of the military actions. Insight into these patterns is particularly important as it can offer an understanding of how public opinion may affect media-aware decision-makers[8].

B. Surveys and Interviews

In addition to the content analysis, this study examines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with military personnel at a broad range of command echelons. The survey was given to a sample population of military personnel from both senior and junior ranks to gain insight into the breadth and depth of military perceptions regarding the influence of media on tactical and strategic decisions. These surveys elicited respondent opinions concerning perceptions of media impact such as whether personnel believe media coverage influences their operational environment, morale, and the difficulty in accomplishing mission goals[10].

Senior policymakers, senior military officers, and strategists who engage routinely with media narratives or who are in charge of handling media-related pressures, were also interviewed in-depth. These interviews allowed military officials even more space to discuss ways that they counter or adjust to media pressures and obligations, for instance, how they decide what to disclose in their operations when under intense public scrutiny. Some of the questions revolved around how leaders weigh public opinion against military necessity; and ways of dealing with the media, crisis management and keeping a focus on the big picture. Through examination of this primary source material the analysis reveals the coping mechanisms leaders use to operate in a media-saturated environment, offering a rich insight into the decision-making processes which synthesises media-savviness with operational utility[2].

C. Data Integration and Analysis

The mixed-met hate technique employs data from content analysis, surveys, and interviews, which combine to facilitate the triangulation of results to ensure reliability and a deeper understanding. the media effect pattern in a more general perspective using quantitative data derived from the content analysis and surveys, but also refine this view in a rich manner through the qualitative data obtained in the interviews enables us to understand various contextual, personal and receiver facteurs and experiences of the media[9].

experiences, and specific examples. This syncretism furthers our comprehension of the media/military decision-making conjunction, emphasising that media agendas can influence

operational priorities, exposing public opinion as a factor in decision-making[.

The use of these techniques together provides a complete model for analyzing the dynamic relationships among media reports, media conditions, and military actions. This layered analysis highlights not only problems with media influence, but it also explores the strategies that military leaders use to continue to focus on strategy and maintain the confidence of society. By using this methodology, the research attempts to feed into an understanding of the ways in which military organizations can manage the pressures of a media-driven environment such that decisions remain robust, are balanced and stay as responsive as possible to the often complex relationships between public opinion and military outcomes[4].

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study illustrate the significant influence that media narratives wield over public opinion and the decision-making processes within military organizations. The findings underscore that media not only shapes strategic perspectives but also creates immediate pressures for military leaders to address public sentiment and respond to evolving narratives. These pressures are intensified in an era of 24/7 news coverage and the rapid dissemination of information through social media.

A. Media's Impact on Public Opinion

The content analysis reveals that extensive media coverage of military conflicts, particularly when it highlights humanitarian concerns or civilian impacts, can strongly influence public opinion. Consistent exposure to specific themes—such as the plight of civilians or collateral damage—tends to generate emotional responses, which in turn can lead to significant shifts in public sentiment. This effect is especially powerful in high-profile conflicts, where news outlets prioritize stories that resonate with their audiences. Such changes in public sentiment often place pressure on governments and military leaders to account for the public's perspective when formulating strategies or executing operations. For instance, in scenarios where civilian casualties are frequently highlighted, public support for military action may decline, prompting leaders to adapt their tactics or communication strategies to mitigate negative perceptions. This finding underscores the media's ability not only to inform the public but also to shape its understanding and, indirectly, influence military priorities[11].

B. More Pressure on Military Leaders

Introduction The rise of social media has created new obstacles for military decision makers. Given the current immediacy and popularity of social media, where everything from breaking news (both confirmed and unverified) is spread at an unprecedented pace, military officials sometimes struggle to keep a lid on classified data. The propagation of on-the-

ground information from civilians, or the leaking of classified information, can also muddy military planning by exposing important information to America's enemies or sparking public controversy. This is an environment which puts huge pressure on military leaders who increasingly have to pursue strategic objectives, and at the same time operate in a media environment where they know that every move is being scrutinized by a public audience. During crises, the rapid dissemination of information on social media can create a pressure for leaders to react in the moment, which means accommodating public sentiment in their decision making. The need for adaptive communication strategy becomes increasingly important at these moments, when leaders need to manage the tension between an open posture and mission integrity while also managing public expectation.

C. Mediation of Military Narratives By Media

Media organizations play a huge role in shaping the narrative of wars and humanitarian disasters, thanks to their ability to select what they focus on and how they frame it. The media is able to focus the attention of the public on certain aspects of the conflict, by the way it sets up its agenda and represents certain events, such as civilian suffering, the political stakes and the ethical side of the conflict. Such selective focus frequently influences both public and official responses, conditioning domestic and international understanding of military behaviour. For instance, media emphasis on a conflict's humanitarian consequences might generate popular demands for a prompt response to intervention, whereas portraying an action as controversial may encourage calls for restraint. So military commanders are more and more aware of these media narratives that either aid or hinder their longer term objectives. Leaders must consider the extent to which media framing reinforces or undermines their strategic objectives, and they may see fit to modify their approach to mitigate unfavorable portrayals or to ensure that public opinion can sustain operations over a protracted period. This conclusion emphasizes the double-edged sword of media as both an informer and a molder of public opinion and the tension that may exist between media, public opinion, and military decision-making.

D. Mastering the Art of Adaptation: The Necessity of Media Literacy

The demands of media sensationalism and responding to hysterical public opinion, have, in the case of the military at least, encouraged a relatively pragmatic and mature response to managing media generated problems. Many of the leaders that press coverage have given weight to pro-active media interaction and clear communication as strategies that help to mold public thinking and manage support. Especially, it has been about exploiting, say, military spokesmen, about briefing regularly or simply about having teams specifically trained to handle media who are dealing with sensitive information. And there is also increased realization of the importance of media

education within the military. By promoting knowledge about the impact of media exposure, soldiers can react to and shape media stories in a manner that protects operational security, while maintaining good order and discipline and public trust. These observations show that media has indeed taken a central position in the conduct of war, and how public opinion, which is often led by media, can potentially impact both tactical level actions as well as a strategic level thinking. The study concludes that military leaders must not only focus on achieving operational objectives but also remain alert to the effects of media storylines. The results also offer evidence of the need for military entities to incorporate media conscience into their decision processes, in order to have it serve as an effective weapon on one hand, while remaining unshakeable given public pressures or outcry.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates the importance of the media in shaping modern military decisions and informing public opinion. In this age of cable and satellite TV, the potential of the media to pretty instantaneously frame and deliver events to the minds of people is something that is going to have clear strategic implications in the military world. The study emphasizes the increasing requirement for military leaders to understand how media can influence (both during and after) military campaigns. Since media narratives have a strong influence over public opinion and are shaping domestic and international support for military actions, military personnel should be educated in learning to read media critically, in identifying media bias, and on knowledge of how media representations may impact national and international perception of military actions.

As media's part in the war is getting more complicated than ever, it seems that armed forces have to change to adapt to rapid changes which reflect change in nature of information warfare. The speculation is that the media campaign or particularly the live reporting has affected the decision-making process on all the lines of work; militarily and governmentally speaking. In this light, it is important for military leaders to include among their leadership training media literacy. This takes place so personnel are better able to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the media reports of military operations, and therefore address more effectively both hostile and friendly media reports. Policy and strategic communication activities are central in order to avoid mistakes and conspiracies and allow frontline soldiers to feel that the media coverage of the military operations does not involve stepped-off and operational information.

Furthermore, it is imperative that varying perspectives - expert analysis and real-time media coverage directly from the battlefield, for instance - be a part of the decision-making process, as the military actions are broadcast throughout

the world, real-time. Being able to analyze and interpret the media portrayal gives military strategists the opportunity to change tactics or strategy quickly if the public mood changes or diplomacy on the international stage changes. Up-to-the-minute media analysis can give military commanders a keen sense of how their words and visible actions play with the public as well as with foreign governments, and therefore the conduct of operations and strategic aims.

Ultimately, the manipulation of media is not so much about controlling the narrative and propagating favourable views as understanding media's ability to shape the nature of politics, society and indeed warfare. Full comprehension of the way that media coverage influences military planning, public view and foreign policy is important to ensure that military actions are consistent with larger national interests and security goals. Those who can effectively navigate these media dynamics will be able to more successfully balance operational effectiveness with the need to secure public trust.

Finally, this realization will allow military commanders to operate with relatively few operational obligations, improvising under strategic constraints if need be so as to satisfy the tactical and political markets. Transparency, responsiveness to the media, and utilizing diverse viewpoints in decision making are the keys to becoming able to realize strategic aims while living by the fundamental values of accountability and public support. Truth- the role of the media in public perception Memory is presented by the media and it plays a decisive role in military conflict and then changes over the course of the conflict.

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