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THE EFFECTS OF REAL-TIME NEWS COVERAGE ON

MILITARY DECISION-MAKING

A Research Paper

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by

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The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US government or the Department of Defense.

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Preface

Classical war theorists could never have imagined the impact of real-time media on public opinion and its dramatic effect on decision-making. Now that the public gets credible, current information with commentary from news analysts during military operations the psychology of war has changed. The media has become a new instrument of power that can transcend national boundaries and government influence. Instantaneous news makes leaders react faster than ever before to the nuances of public opinion. The increased availability of open source real-time news information could cause on-site commanders to delay or suspend decisions. Decision-makers may be prone to wait for the latest intelligence update while national strategists respond to media influenced public reaction.

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Abstract

Today combat is news before it concludes. The conditions which effect battlefield commanders and their soldiers, airmen, sailors and marines are broadcast real-time into the living rooms of the world. One of the strengths of America's military is the initiative displayed by its combat leaders. Will real-time news coverage stifle initiative in our combat leaders and encourage micro-management by the NCA? If so, what could be done to mitigate this before it negatively impacts the military leader's decision-making process?

Information technology is affecting military decision-making in a way never before experienced. In a sterile environment our political leaders form opinions and second guess decisions at nearly the same time commanders are required to make them. At the strategic and operational level, a political leader has the ability to make decisions affecting the battlefield from their office. The uniqueness of the media coverage of the Somalia operation and the Gulf War establishes a strategic and operational perspective for real-time news impacts on military decision-makers.

While the public has a right to know, do they need to know instantaneously? Commanders should prepare for, understand and exploit the capabilities of real-time news coverage during military operations. This research explores the risks commanders are confronted with due to the availability of real-time news and discusses how real-time media coverage can be used to a commander's advantage.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Real-time global television transforms remote military operations into lead news stories instantly. Before battlefield engagements conclude they can be watched by world audiences. Friends and foes are able to watch the news from battle zones via real-time technology that greatly alters the dynamics and strategies of war. Civilian communications satellites provide decision-makers and the public immediate information which virtually assures real-time coverage in future conflicts. During the Gulf War, communications technology could process approximately 192,000 bits of information per minute. By the year 2010, futurists predict advancements in technology will permit 1.5 trillion bits of information per minute.[1] Decision-makers should design new management systems for handling this volume of information.

The news media provides vital linkages between the public, the government and military operations in the field.[2] The instant and increasing flow of television news can set the national agenda.[3] There is increasing political sensitivity towards public opinion polls and media coverage of military operations. US security strategy, and by default the national military strategy, is responsive to national will and commitment to a particular cause.

It would be prudent for military leaders to recognize that public opinion is a *center of gravity* for all military operations because of its importance to the political well-being of any administration. Joint doctrine defines a center of gravity as: "That characteristic, capability, or locality from which a military force, nation or alliance derives its freedom of action, physical strength, or will to fight."[4] This paper explores the influence of the media on public opinion and with it the national *will to fight*. Decision-makers must prepare for the vulnerabilities real-time media creates during operations. The current trend toward nontraditional military missions coupled with multiple avenues to real-time news, increases public awareness of military operations.

The "spin" the media puts on the news influences public opinion almost immediately. While the public has a right to know, does it need to know instantaneously? The author can find no public benefit to real-time news coverage of military operations other than its entertainment value. Instantaneous intelligence information only benefits military decision-makers and the enemy. And, information is becoming a center of gravity for future operations.

As stated in *Joint Vision 2010,* "Real-time information drives parallel, not sequential, planning and real-time, not prearranged, decision-making," which suggests decision-makers must adjust information processing procedures. Awareness of the role news media plays in formulating and executing US military policy is crucial for planners and decision-makers. Now military commanders must try to influence public opinion as well as counter the enemy. Commanders should prepare for, understand and exploit real-time news coverage during military operations. This paper contributes to the notion that

understanding the power of real-time news media on future operations is vital to military decision-makers.

Research Overview

The Gulf War ushered in many new aspects to military conflict. One of the biggest differences between the Gulf War and other conflicts was the early information dominance coalition forces enjoyed leading up to and during the war. In future conflicts, the commercial expansion of global satellite communications creates the potential for adversaries to collapse this advantage. If television is the most effective tool for shaping the thoughts of masses of people,[5] then it could be used as a weapon system in future information wars. Television could be the weapon of choice in deception and psychological warfare in the future. The full spectrum of information dominance is discussed in other articles. This analysis focuses on one component of the information dominance spectrum, real-time media reporting.

The union of two meaningful technological capacities affecting future conflict occurs during the Gulf War. The novel employment of precision guided munitions (PGM) and the technical capability to cover combat real-time via the media had previously not been possible in war. This was the first conflict extensively covered "live." The combination of these two factors highlights air power on television because of the video cameras on PGMs. However, the psychological impact of the media is evident in any military operation including ground, sea and air combat. If strategists identify national will or an alliance as a center of gravity (COG) then news media may affect its strength. The *Strategic Assessment for 1996,* put it this way:

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> Should Washington react passively, its agenda will be set by what is on the television screen, but if Washington changes with the times, it can use its direct access to world publics to influence events more quickly and surely than ever. Similarly, if the revolution in military technology from the information explosion is integrated into a new way of conducting warfare—a revolution in military affairs—then the US can increase its domination of the battlefield.[6]

Decision-makers are prone to look at future military operations through the lens of the most recent conflict. The uniqueness of the media coverage of the Somalia operation and the Gulf War establishes a strategic and operational perspective for real-time news impacts on military decision-makers.

The Impact Of Television News

Americans born anytime after the 1950's represent the first generation weaned on television. In most households, television is a major form of entertainment as well as a convenient way to keep up with daily news. With the advent of the Cable News Network (CNN) and its 24-hour news coverage the world receives the news with a rapidity and repetitiveness which quickly shapes public opinion. The *Wall Street Journal* noted, "TV has become more significant than any other single factor in shaping the way most of us view the world…more than religion or politics."[7]

Communications technology is shrinking the globe with news reports delivering the images of battle into offices and living rooms while events are happening. Governments no longer have an opportunity to put their spin on events before they are viewed and analyzed by the world. Governments need to change with the times and get more aggressive in how they use this new capability. Public perception is introduced into

military operations almost simultaneously with the operations itself. This puts diplomats and military officials in tenuous positions at times.[8]

The media itself became an *actor* in the Gulf War. Major General Perry Smith, USAF (retired), a military analyst for CNN noted, "Over the six weeks of the war more people watched more hours of television per day than at any time in history." The media creates a surreal world to which governments, military forces, and nations must respond as though it were real. The actions of these "actors" are processed by the news media and turned into the fictional electronic images that manipulate our behavior.[9] For coverage of military operations, television has surpassed all other forms of news because it is visual and has instantaneous capability.

An odd new phenomenon occurs with real-time capability. The public now gets credible, current information with commentary from analysts during military operations. In all but the most recent conflicts, this type of information was only available to government and military decision-makers. Now the public gets enough immediate information to form opinions and make decisions of its own. Also, since global commercial television shows no partiality, the enemy has access to the same analyses and intelligence information. And, at a speed which compels political and military authorities to respond quicker and at a frequency with which they formerly never had to cope. Real-time news compresses the decision-cycle.

Notes

[1] Hayden, Major General Mike, Commander, Air Intelligence Agency, USAF. Lecture on "War in the Information Age." Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 21 September 1996.
[2] Summers, Colonel Harry G. Jr. (Ret.), *The New World Strategy.* Touchstone, Simon and Schuster: New York, 1995, p. 51.

Notes

[3] *Strategic Assessment 1996: Elements of US Power.* National Defense University Press: 1996, p. 214.

[4] Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the US Armed Forces.* National Defense University Press: 1995, p. III-8.

[5] Campen, Colonel Alan B. *The First Information War.* AFCEA International Press: Fairfax, VA., 1992, p. 69.

[6] *Strategic Assessment 1996: Elements of US Power.* National Defense University Press: 1996, p. 215.

[7] Campen, Colonel Alan B., *The First Information War.* AFCEA International Press: Fairfax, VA., 1992, p. 69.

[8] Gordon, Michael R. and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War.* Back Bay Books: Boston, 1995, p. 463.

[9] Toffler, Alvin and Heide, *War and Anti-war.* Little, Brown and Company: Boston, 1993, p. 170.

Chapter 2

The Importance of News Coverage to Military Leaders

The day of the hard-shelled military leader who never bothered to understand civilians is over...and the day of the leader who never bothered to think internationally. They must know how to exercise the other legitimate forms of power—the power of the media and of public opinion, the power that accrues to those who understand how various systems work

—John W. Gardner
On Leadership

Military decision-makers at the higher echelons of command are more likely to experience the impact of news coverage.[1] General Colin Powell spoke at length about the responsibility of the modern military officer to understand the political and media components of their jobs. "Turn your attention to television because you can win the battle or lose the war if you don't handle the story right."[2] One of the strengths of America's military is the initiative displayed by its combat leaders. Will real-time news coverage stifle initiative in our leaders? If so, what could be done to mitigate it before it negatively impacts the leader's decision-making process?

The conditions which effect battlefield commanders and their soldiers, airmen, sailors and Marines are broadcast real-time into the living rooms of the world. The television networks use retired military officers like ex-football players doing color commentary during televised football games. These military analysts serve as arm-chair quarterbacks dissecting military operations and reviewing the options available to commanders. While

this may be great entertainment for the US public, the information and opinions offered by these analysts can, and has been, used by our adversaries to formulate plans against the US.

Establishing restrictions on this type of analysis during on-going military operations would enhance the safety and security of US personnel. Congress should enact legislation that suspends current and former DOD employees from providing analysis of on-going military operations for a period of time following their service. There is a precedent for this reasoning. Military contracting officers are subject to a legally binding five-year moratorium following retirement on involvement in contracts for which they were formerly responsible. This restriction promotes fair business practices on federal acquisition and procurement contracts. Surely the safety and security of military operations deserve equal consideration.

At the strategic and operational level, a political leader has the ability to make decisions affecting the battlefield from the office. Real-time coverage amplifies the political leadership's ability to influence military decisions at a speed, and with a frequency, as never before. "Policy-makers are likely to get their first news on fast-breaking developments from CNN."[3] This acceleration of news coverage means that hot-spots materialize for military leaders almost overnight. Politicians, and therefore military leaders at the scene, must respond quicker, make decisions faster and do so on issues they know less and less about. Given the information age is here to stay, military decision-makers must train at dealing with media situations and understand how to mitigate its impact on operations.

The Friction Of News Coverage

The combination of real-time visual imagery on television coupled with a public conditioned to film of bombs going down ventilator shafts has the public expecting perfection in war—which can never be perfect. This perception, and the media and telecommunications capabilities that helped create it, has the potential to affect significantly the future use of US military force.[4] To attain political objectives military leaders must understand and exploit the power of the media to promote public support for military operations.

> The Cable News Network (CNN) now appears to be more pertinent than the CIA for current White House intelligence. The significance of CNN to the White House is that it represents the information which is in the hands of the public and which must be reckoned with by the political elites. CNN can, by default, set the political agenda.[5]

Creating processes with which decision-makers can take advantage of news coverage is important. Should decision-makers try to control public information? It is clear this has been done in the past. This was relatively easy during the Vietnam and Gulf Wars through classical means of censorship. This direct control of the news-media can have unpredictable effects, however. Public response to censorship and other controls could increase political sensitivity and have unforeseen affects on military decision-makers. Public awareness will increase as multiple access to real-time news becomes more available. A censorship decision might not lead to the desired effect and could easily achieve the opposite outcome with the US public.

Television news has become an instrument of power in a new kind of warfare. The "CNN factor" has the potential to influence policy because of its ability to broadcast events live.[6] Reporters assess attack results in real-time, inform and misinform the public

and bring viewers into the decision cycle of military leaders. This coverage can affect the conduct of battle because of the information it provides adversaries. News reports amplify the importance of events by the repetitious nature of broadcasts. The multitude of story angles frames the seriousness of events. In many cases, story angles sustain an event's commercial value, that is ratings. "Dramatic visual presentations can rapidly influence public—and therefore political—opinion so that the political underpinnings of war and operations other than war suddenly change with no prior indication,"[7] suggests that commanders and planners should pay greater attention to media driven public opinion contingencies.

The essence of quality real-time reporting is in its timeliness, accuracy and perspective. The best way the press can responsibly cover military operations without endangering personnel or operational security is by negotiating press rules of engagement on real-time reporting with the military.

Notes

[1] FM 100-5, *Operations.* HQ, Department of the Army: Washington D.C., 1993, p. 1-3.

[2] Woodward, Bob, *The Commanders.* Simon and Schuster: New York, 1991, p. 155.

[3] *Strategic Assessment 1996: Elements of US Power.* National Defense University Press, 1996, p. 217.

[4] Head, William and Earl H. Tilford, Jr., *The Eagle in the Desert.* Praeger: London, 1996, pp. 117-118.

[5] Builder, Carl H., *The Icarus Syndrome.* 3rd ed., Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick, 1996, p. 249.

[6] Papp, Daniel S., Professor of International Affairs, Georgia Institute of Technology. Lecture on "The Strategic Environment." Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, Ala., 7 October 1996.

[7] FM 100-5, *Operations.* HQ, Department of the Army: Washington D.C., 1993, p. 1-3.

Chapter 3

The Role of the News Media

TV Guide printed a poll of the public's perception on the effects of instant television reporting. In its May 28, 1994 edition, dedicated to the 50th anniversary of D-Day, they asked, what would be the effect if the D-Day invasion had been beamed into their living rooms? Most thought live coverage would have had little effect on the will of the public because of the nation's commitment to stopping Hitler and Nazism. These findings highlight the need for democratic governments to use the military on missions that support clearly defined national security objectives with which the public understands and agrees.

It seems the media, and especially the real-time news coverage the media provides, would be a component worth exploiting for its military potential. Most television coverage feeds on the violence of war to keep public attention. The electronic revolution permits coverage of military operations at a speed and with an intimacy previously impossible. Television coverage focuses on the spectacular, the maimed child, the fire-fight, the exploding bombs.[1] Military leaders must be conversant with the implications the media brings to military operations.

The USAF intelligence community recognizes the utility of television coverage in aiding the indications and warning (I&W) process. At about $30 per month, the basic subscription fee, it does it more economically than the $20-30 million a year the US

spends on the I&W network.[2] Some estimates claim the intelligence community gets as much as 80% of its information from open sources.[3] "Over the past generation humanity has been saturated with print media, radios and televisions that have sharpened and focused hate. The 'information revolution' has done everything but pacify the hearts of men."[4]

Journalists should develop a responsible code of conduct for covering tactical events which would maintain operational security. The military uses security classifications to maintain operational security, enhance surprise and protect lives. An icon for a generation of television news journalists, Walter Cronkite, proposed no live telecasts from the battlefield. He felt there was too much emphasis on real-time reporting and advocates a delay of 24 to 48 hours.[5]

Censoring US news coverage alone would not benefit the military. Censorship does not apply to international news crews so the stories would get out anyway. However, it is a bit disconcerting to military leaders in the field to know the coverage is being beamed all over the world. This concern led one general officer to state under terms of non-attribution, "People in the States know what's going on before you do in the task force CP." He told a story about an overseas reconnaissance mission where he was greeted by three hundred reporters. Camera crews cut down trees so they could get better film footage and reporters demanded interviews. It seems the press performs their own form of reconnaissance before the military has a chance to deploy.

Critics of the press view the military-media relationship as a zero-sum game. If military credibility is up, then the press credibility is down.[6] Cooperation between journalists and the military will help preserve the safety and security of military personnel

while allowing adequate reporting for the public's right to know. In fact, the US Army recognizes that during force-projection stages early and continuous press coverage is an asset for developing public support.[7] It is the obligation of military public affairs officers to get reporters out with the action, to record history.[8]

Notes

[1] Snow, Donald M. and Dennis M. Drew, *From Lexington to Desert Storm.* M.E. Sharpe: New York, 1994, p. 22.

[2] Hayden, Major General Mike, Commander, Air Intelligence Agency, USAF. Lecture on "War in the Information Age." Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 21 September 1996.

[3] *Strategic Assessment 1996: Elements of US Power,* National Defense University Press: 1996, p. 217.

[4] Seabury, Paul and Angelo Codevilla, *War: Ends & Means.* Basic Books Inc.: New York, 1989, p. 15.

[5] Williams, Pete, "A Gulf War Military-Media Review," *Defense Issues*, March 14, 1991, p. 9.

[6] ibid., p. 1.

[7] FM 100-5, *Operations.* HQ, Department of the Army: Washington D.C., 1993, p. 3-7.

[8] Williams, Pete, "The Press and the Persian Gulf War," *Parameters*, US Army War College Quarterly: Carlisle, PA., Autumn, 1991, p. 8.

Chapter 4

News Media's Impact During the Gulf War

Several case studies during the Gulf War serve to represent how real-time news biases decision-makers at the strategic and operational level. News also contributes to changes in political objectives, and therefore military strategy and objectives may be vulnerable to its influence. It also contributes to public sensitivity towards the military as an institution.

Gulf War Prelude

General Colin Powell realized, that if war came it would be on television instantly, bringing home the action, death, consequences and emotions even more graphically than during Vietnam. The reporters and the cameras would be there to record each step, vastly complicating all military tasks. Powell was sure of one thing, "A prolonged war on television could be impossible, unsupportable at home." [1]

At the outbreak of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Lieutenant General Thomas Kelly, the JCS J-3, was called to the Crisis Situation Room. He tuned a television to "CNN's 24-hour news coverage because Kelly wanted to know what was going out publicly. He knew if it wasn't correct, Powell would want to take steps to fix the impression."[2]

On August 8, 1990, General Powell addressed the media shortly after President Bush had addressed the nation about the mission for sending US troops to Kuwait. Powell

made a direct appeal to reporters. "I also would ask for some restraint on your part as you find out information, if you would always measure it against the need for operational security to protect our troops. That should be uppermost, I think, in all our minds." [3] The following table lists the media incidents considered in this research.

Table 1. Gulf War Press Coverage Cases

Date	Event
14 November 1990	CINC press guidance to commanders
17 January 1991	Initial bombing of Baghdad (live, CNN)
10 February 1991	Al Firdos bunker air strike (live)
15 February 1991	82nd Abn. Artillery duel (live)
21 February 1991	Marine Corps amphibious assault plan
27 February 1991	"Highway of Death" (live)

CINC Issues Press Guidance

Operational level concern over the media is important when preparing units and their commanders for battle. During times of war, news coverage is magnified because lives are at stake. General Schwartzkopf provided this terse, one-sided guidance to his subordinate commanders because he was convinced Saddam Hussein's best intelligence was coming from our newspapers and television reports:

> You are going to be bombarded with questions from the press. I don't want you to discuss military operations. Period. I don't want you to discuss your capabilities. Period. And you should teach everyone of your officers the same thing. I don't care what Pfc. Snuffy says, but I do care when some officer gets so enamored with the press that he has to shoot off his mouth. I am telling you I am going to deal absolutely brutally, *brutally,*

[italics in the original] with anyone I feel compromises classified information.[4]

During the Gulf War there were more than 1,400 reporters in the theater. There were as many as 180 pool reporters constantly searching for a story on the front lines. There were incidents in which reporters jeopardized the security of US personnel and the military mission due to their coverage. One such example presented later in this paper demonstrates how "live" coverage of an artillery duel could have compromised the ground campaign.

"Clearly I've Never Been There But Surely This Must Be Hell"

For the first time, CNN correspondent Bernard Shaw, describes "live via satellite" the psychological atmosphere and physical destruction of modern war. On the opening night of the Gulf War, Baghdad was struck by two kinds of precision munitions: ship launched cruise missiles and air launched laser-guided bombs.[5] News crews in Baghdad covered these attacks. These were some of the most memorable images of the war. This event sets the tone for the remainder of the strategic bombing campaign. The next few days' news reports highlight two very rare perspectives. News correspondents mingling with the Iraqi population among the devastation of the air strikes and the view from the PGM's on-board video camera on its trajectory toward a target. The public grows accustomed to images of precision combat with commentary as it happens. The convergence of strategic precision bombardment and television media's ability to cover it real-time highlight air power during the Gulf War.

The air campaign targets leadership nerve centers through a strategy termed, *strategic paralysis.*[6] The strategy follows the concept of British armor theorist, J.F.C. Fuller, who

advocates attack with a, "Shot to the brain."[7]   The value of space-based systems for targeting leadership centers of gravity (COG) was revolutionary and applied for the first time in the Gulf War.

One such leadership COG turned out to be the Al Rashid Hotel, where Western journalists covered the attacks. Under the hotel, was an Iraqi C^3I command post including an important fiber-optic network node. However, one of the planning considerations for the air campaign was not to target civilian facilities, so this critical node was spared.[8]

News Coverage Of Air Strike On The Al Fidros Bunker Modifies Air Campaign.

Events can force changes in an operational plan or to strategic objectives when media covers the aftermath. The intent of the strategic air campaign in the Gulf War was to inflict strategic paralysis of Iraqi leadership.[9] This would sever the Iraqi leadership's ability to communicate with the people of Iraq as well as their military in the field. However, media coverage quickly transforms the "fog and friction" of war into major incidents for planners and commanders. An incident occurred on 10 February 1991 leading to intense media scrutiny and ultimately modifying the air campaign.

Unknown to Coalition planners, the Al Firdos leadership bunker in Baghdad was used by civilians as an air raid shelter. Hundreds of civilians were killed when the bunker was destroyed. Iraqi authorities quickly escorted news crews to the scene while fires were burning and the wounded were being extricated from the ruins. Cable News Network (CNN) broadcast the images real-time to the world. The Iraqi's took full advantage of these unfortunate casualties to play on the sympathy of the public. Realizing the tenuous status of several Arab nations in the Coalition, Iraq created a media incident to drive a

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wedge between the Coalition partners. Additionally, the Iraqi's felt the American public did not have the stomach for war and sought to capitalize on the civilian casualties.

The impact on air planners was immediate. General Powell needed to hold the Allies together and any further attacks like Al Firdos could jeopardize the Coalition. Worried about the political fallout, Washington imposed itself and shut-down the air campaign against Baghdad for ten days. Fearing the intense media interest would increase the sensitivities of Coalition partners, Powell ordered Schwartzkopf to scrub all target lists personally and insisted targets in Baghdad would be approved in Washington.[10]

When you analyze this incident it becomes clear that inadequate intelligence reports contributed to target selection causing the unfortunate death of civilians. The Iraqis, by manipulating the press, magnified the effects of the incident for the Coalition. This led decision-makers in Washington to restrict the field commander, and his staff, in the prosecution of their air campaign. Public perception and diplomatic sensitivity put reins on the initiative of the CINC. The "fog of war" broadcast around the world significantly altered the targeting authority of the field commander.

Live Coverage Of Artillery Duel Jeopardizes Offensive Plan

After the war Pete Williams claimed, "There was a television crew on the average with every Army and Marine division."[11] An example of how a television news crew covering a tactical event could have changed the campaign plan follows. General Schwartzkopf watched in amazement, a live report on a major artillery duel between the 82nd Airborne Division and Iraqi troops. Since this coverage was real-time, and the reporter gave the name of the unit involved, Iraqi intelligence could communicate with their artillery units and ascertain the location of the 82nd Airborne Division. At the time,

the 82nd was in a flanking position just prior to the commencement of the Coalition ground offensive.[12]

Real-time coverage could have compromised the element of surprise as well as the operational plan for the Coalition in the ground offensive. "This was, after all, an enemy that had virtually as much access to American news reporting as our people had here and at home...for the sake of the flanking movement of the XVIII Corps and the lives of those troops we absolutely could not let the enemy learn that."

Press Coverage Concern Contributes To Disapproval Of Marine Amphibious Assault

Operational planning is also affected by concern over news coverage. Targeting decisions and schemes of maneuver were adjusted due to concern over how the media will depict an operation. During the planning of a possible Marine Corps amphibious assault of Kuwait, General Schwartzkopf worried, and so did the Marines, about the possibility of the Iraqis blowing up a liquid natural gas plant. The destruction of the plant would not sit well with the Kuwaitis and the media were sure to cover the attack. "That was the sort of political consideration the Marines did not have to worry about, but which Schwartzkopf had to deal with everyday." [13]

Schwartzkopf had been careful to promote the image of the military and did not want to create a situation which could potentially generate negative press. After listening to the Marine Corps briefing, which Schwartzkopf agreed with, USMC Major General Harry Jenkins, discussed the plan with Schwartzkopf. He felt if the American press knew about the purpose of the amphibious raid prior to the attack, they would accurately report the purpose of the operation. His comment was, "Our press beats their press to the punch,"

referring to the pool reporters from the US versus the Iraqi press.[14] The amphibious invasion was never approved, partially due to concern over press coverage.

Highway Of Death Coverage Expedites War Termination

About two weeks later, on 27 February 1991, and only three days into the ground offensive the Iraqi military was already psychologically defeated. Along a two-mile stretch of highway along the Mutlah Ridge Iraqi units were retreating out of Kuwait. Journalists interviewed Air Force pilots who strafed Iraqi convoys on what later became known as the "Highway of Death". These reports may have contributed to a decision to abruptly halt the Gulf War. The footage which aired on television was a scene of complete annihilation and the report tended to exaggerate the loss of life. Intelligence reports reveal over 1,400 burned out vehicles, mostly stolen civilian cars and trucks, but only 28 military vehicles. Approximately three hundred Iraqis were killed. This imagery, coupled with a pilot's interview describing the bombing like, "shooting fish in a barrel," caused some politicians in Washington to complain about the damage the Coalition was doing. Put into context with the previous days of reports highlighting literally ten of thousands of Iraqi troops surrendering to the Coalition the atmosphere was ripe for moral outrage. The White House through General Powell said, "The reports made it sound like wanton killing."[15]

This case depicts the psychological impacts the media brings into the strategic decision for conflict termination.[16] Clearly, political objectives must be satisfied prior to terminating military conflict. Air power applied to the battle of Khafji had similar results but the press had not been in Kuwait to cover the action.[17]

Review Of Gulf War Cases

All these cases attest to news coverage affecting some decision-maker. There were many more stories which provide similar perspective. The Scud attacks on Tel Aviv became sensitive to the Israelis because they knew CNN was monitored by Baghdad. The Israeli censors worried that CNN coverage showing where the missiles impacted would help the Iraqis with targeting.[18] Other significant examples include the coverage of POWs and hostages used as human shields and the Scud attack of a US barracks. The list is still not complete.

The sheer acceleration of news has increased its significance to decision-makers. It is important to note that the cumulative impacts of the news over time and through repetitive broadcasts wear on the publics' sensitivity. This may, ultimately, impact a decision-maker's initiative as well as the ability to choose a course of action.

Notes

[1] Woodward, Bob, *The Commanders.* Simon and Schuster: New York, 1991, p. 315.

[2] ibid., p. 222.

[3] ibid., pp. 277-278.

[4] Schwartzkopf, General H. Norman, *It Doesn't Take a Hero.* Bantam Books: New York, 1992, p. 443.

[5] Hallion, Richard P., vol. 43, number 3, "Precision Guided Munitions and the New Era of Warfare." *Air Power History.* Fall 1996, p. 8.

[6] Mann III, Col. Edward C., *Thunder and Lightning.* AU Press: Maxwell AFB, Ala., 1995, p. 35.

[7] Fuller, J.F.C., "Tank Warfare." In *The Art of War in World History.* edited by Gerard Chaliand, The University of California Press: Berkeley, p. 923.

[8] Williams, Pete, "A Gulf War Military-Media Review." *Defense Issues*, March 14, 1991.

[9] Mann III, Col. Edward C., *Thunder and Lightning.* AU Press: Maxwell AFB, Ala., 1995, p. 35.

[10] Gordon, Michael R. and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War.* Back Bay Books: Boston, 1995, p. 326.

Notes

[11] Williams, Pete, "A Gulf War Military-Media Review," *Defense Issues*, March 14, 1991, p. 9.

[12] Schwartzkopf, General H. Norman, *It Doesn't Take a Hero.* Bantam Books: New York, 1992, p. 510.

[13] Gordon, Michael R. and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War.* Back Bay Books: Boston, 1995, p. 293.

[14] ibid., p. 339.

[15] Schwartzkopf, General H. Norman, *It Doesn't Take a Hero.* Bantam Books: New York, 1992, p. 542.

[16] Gordon, Michael R. and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War.* Back Bay Books: Boston, 1995, p. 370.

[17] ibid., p. 404.

[18] Toffler, Alvin and Heide, *War and Anti-war.* Little, Brown and Company: Boston, 1993, p. 172.

Chapter 5

News Coverage During The Somalia Operation

Beyond the environment of war, military operations other than war (MOOTW) experience a similar media scrutiny, most notably the UN mission to Somalia. Consensus building in a multi-national setting, like that in Somalia, is dependent on the images and stories the news media portray on television. *TV Guide* editorialized the Somalia operation as, "A military operation launched by the evening news." The news media also provides public accountability for the well-being of troops put at risk under the auspices of international cooperation.[1]

The atmosphere military leaders experience during MOOTW, while not as physically threatening as war, is potentially more precarious diplomatically. There are unique challenges to military leaders in MOOTW because of dynamic rules of engagement (ROE) and a lack of clarity in combined force objectives. Additionally, junior leaders lack training and familiarity on the diplomatic issues involved with some of these missions. They often find themselves in time-sensitive, decision-making roles which could quickly impact national policy. Many times their actions are broadcast real-time across the globe. Lieutenant General R. Johnston, USMC, Commander JTF Unified Task Force Somalia states, "CNN had great implications. It allowed us to focus on what had to be done by portraying the situations and conditions as they were."[2]

Operations Restore Hope And UNOSOM II

At the outset of the UN humanitarian assistance (HA), *Operation Provide Relief,* the US military's mission was, "To provide military assistance in support of emergency humanitarian relief." After the frustrations of this effort, the President initiated Operation *Restore Hope* in which the US military would lead a multinational coalition to establish a, "Secure environment for uninterrupted relief operations."[3]

When US forces arrived in Somalia real-time media coverage was everywhere. Cameras and flood-lights greeted Navy SEAL teams as they infiltrated onto the beaches. Due to the nature of their mission this seemed absurd. Watching a television set it was easy to see the temperament of the SEALs. They were concerned with accomplishing their mission as microphones were being shoved in their faces. They had no intention of giving a cordial interview to a news correspondent in the middle of an amphibious infiltration.

Following an ambush which killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, the UN passed yet another resolution which established United Nations Operation Somali (*UNOSOM).* The Somali situation reached its apex on October 3, 1993, after the UN objectives for the operation escalate to nation-building. US Army Rangers conducted a raid to capture a warlord, Mohammed Aideed. Eighteen Americans were killed, 77 wounded and one captured. The Somali's celebration was broadcast to the world highlighted with the graphic abuse of a dead soldier's body.

US news organizations did not film this event. They had left Mogadishu two weeks prior for fear of their safety. An international reporter from *The Toronto Star* photographed the scene and a home video camera was used to film the event which was

aired later on American television. Bernard Kalb, an ex-reporter and now director of the

Harvard Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy thought, "The picture was a

symbol of American power being dragged through the Third World, unable to master the

challenges of the post-Cold War era."[4]

This sequence of events, broadcast daily over several months, was the last straw for

Congress and the public. Senator Robert Byrd's amendment to cut-off funding for the

Somalia operation was a result of this reporting.[5] Politically, the cost-benefit ratio of

continuing our involvement in Somalia was too great. The psychological effect on the

American public, created by television, raised the risk to the Administration. President

Clinton ordered the troops home. Later, Anthony Lake, the US National Security Advisor

stated, "American foreign policy is increasingly driven by where CNN points its cameras."

Notes

[1] Allard, Kenneth, *Somalia Operations: Lessons Learned.* National Defense University Press: Washington D.C., 1995, p. 87.

[2] *JTF Commanders Handbook for Peace Operations*. Joint Warfare Center: VA, 1995, p. EX 4.

[3] ibid., p. 13-14.

[4] Summers, Colonel Harry G. Jr. (Ret.), *The New World Strategy.* Touchstone, Simon and Schuster: New York, 1995, p. 54.

[5] ibid., p. 52.

Chapter 6

What Can Military Leaders Do?

Risks to military operations from instant reporting are not contrived. Communications satellite technology has eliminated a principle means by which the military was able to monitor and control the flow of news from the battlefield. Civilian-based reconnaissance systems will soon give the media unencumbered access to the battlefield. Any controls over what journalists report from future war zones must be self-imposed.

—Colonel Alan B. Campen
The First Information War

General Schwartzkopf's Four Points For Dealing With The Press

Just prior to his first press briefing in theater, Schwartzkopf established four personal rules of engagement for himself when answering press questions. Because of his Vietnam experience he was concerned about projecting a positive military image to the public. Additionally, he knew operational security was paramount in a campaign of this magnitude. His four rules became:

1. Don't let them intimidate you.
2. There is no law that says you have to answer all their questions.
3. Don't answer any question that in your judgment would help the enemy.
4. Don't ever lie to the American public.[1]

Schwartzkopf reasoned press briefings were viewed by the Iraqi's because they were being transmitted via satellite to world-wide audiences. He wanted to send a message not only to the public but to Saddam Hussein and his military leaders as well.

General Powell's Cultivation Of Media Relations

Powell felt the success of the entire military depended on a mature understanding of public relations and politics, and how to use them. He took time to establish rapport with reporters so they would develop trust in him and accept his explanations of events. He felt in order for a general to be successful in Washington he had to be political. A great deal of Powell's time, and any general in Washington, is spent sensing the political environment and the media plays a big role in that arena. Powell put it this way, "It's the way in which we formulate our foreign policy. It's the way in which we get approval for our policy."[2]

Establishing Press Rules Of Engagement During Military Operations

The few relevant incidents previously discussed underscore the need for tighter controls on the media when operating near the front lines. Unlike the combat cameramen of WW II who were given the freedom to go where they wanted and when they wanted, real-time coverage creates problems for the military. The images the combat crewman captured were subject to censorship by a centralized military office because this was the only authorized way to get the stories out to the public. Satellite communication negates this capability for the military. Clearly, commanders must establish ground rules for reporters to ensure safety of their personnel and security of operations in the event of hostilities. Colonel Alan Campen, notes that this ability, "Transform reporters from dispassionate observers to unwitting, even unwilling, direct participants in war."[3] Commanders must be concerned about what is reported as well as addressing the logistics and operational problems of protecting and controlling large numbers of reporters. In August 1990, 17 journalists initially went to the Gulf, this swelled to 800 by December

and 1,400 by the start of the ground offensive.[4] During the Gulf War there were several restrictions covering twelve areas. DOD banned, limited or restricted:

- Publication or broadcast of specific information DOD wanted kept secret, including numbers of troops, type of aircraft, weapons, equipment and supplies;
- Future plans and operations; locations of forces; and tactics.
- All combat reporting was done using pools or groups of reporters, whose work was subject to security review before it was released.
- No reporters were allowed to rove freely in combat zones as they had in Vietnam.[5]

Ground rules for the Gulf War were intended to prevent publication of details that could jeopardize an operation or endanger troops.[6] With these types of restrictions the public and the world witness an antiseptic version of the war.

Following the Gulf War the military agreed to cease the practice of using pooled coverage and escort officers to ease interference in reporting. The press and the military did not agree on military review and censorship of articles and pictures. Reporters covering the front lines via real-time media become unsuspecting participants in battle because the images they transmit are broadcast to the world as the battle unfolds. This capability has the potential to affect tactical and operational plans if our adversaries monitor commercial news sources like Iraq did in the Gulf. The lop-sided technical advantages the Coalition possessed against Iraq are unlikely to be repeated in the future as emerging technologies become readily available on the commercial market.

Using The Media For Psychological Operations

Many believe, "Commercial television is an important tool in informing as well as deceiving."[7] Commanders could exploit the potential of televised media for its applicability in psychological operations (PSYOPS). In order for military PSYOPS

broadcasts to be effective they must be believable, not obvious propaganda. Using commercial broadcasts would provide a heightened level of credibility with the enemy because its third party stature provides some assurance of truth, over military broadcasts. Using commercial television for PSYOPS would have to be covertly subtle, done on a subliminal level, and would require special authorization.

Global news coverage is broadcast to friend and foe alike so its effects are impartial. The public cannot use real-time news coverage for any tactical, operational or strategic advantage. This immediate information can only benefit the enemy. Using television broadcasts is nothing new for the PSYOPS community, but commercial global satellite coverage would put a slightly different spin on the current practice. Efforts are underway within the PSYOPS community to use emerging technologies as nonlethal weapons to enhance PSYOPS effectiveness; the challenge will be to develop it in the most cost effective way.[8]

World television audiences are already subject to product marketing strategies employing subliminal advertising and other forms of business propaganda. Advertising campaigns' use psychological techniques to persuade consumers, which is essentially all we are proposing. Iraqi television manipulated and edited broadcasts within Iraq during the war so as not to excite the fear of the public by showing the success of the Coalition offensive.

Is it possible for US policy-makers to purposefully arrange news coverage to exploit its affect on international sensitivities or the will of the enemy? Was it purely coincidence the beach landing in Somalia was covered live, or did strategists coerce the media into covering it? The situation seems so bizarre that it may have been prearranged. Or, was

this simply a poor decision by a military commander? It seems preferable to use psychological persuasion instead of the prolonged physical destruction which is routine in traditional warfare. However, the American Constitution guarantees press freedom and limits the authority of the Department of Defense to involve itself in the media.[9]

Reporters can also provide valuable intelligence and background information on people, terrain and facilities in a region. Many networks assign reporters to a geographic region to gain an intimate knowledge of the society and the culture. Military leaders should exploit this intelligence asset when entering a new theater. This is common practice for Special Operation Force teams when they perform missions in unfamiliar nations, or just as a way of maintaining rapport with contacts in their area of operations.

Recommendations For Future Operations

The impact of real-time news coverage is significant enough that military planners should incorporate media operations into operations orders (OPORDs). Branches and sequels could cover media driven contingencies. This goes beyond the logistical and operational considerations resulting from having a high density of civilian reporters moving throughout the theater. Public opinion is a potential vulnerable center of gravity for US military operations. Strategic and operational level commanders should war game military options based on possible variations due to public opinion.

Additionally, commanders should restrict live broadcasts from tactical locations during on-going operations. Broadcast information may unintentionally jeopardize the lives of personnel or the operation. The media and the military should jointly design a mechanism for implementing a broadcast delay to preserve operational security. Delaying

broadcasts allows operations to proceed without affording the enemy the benefit of tactical information but still permits adequate news coverage for the public. The US public expects no less from military leaders in protecting the lives of its sons and daughters.

Recognizing international reporters are not bound by any US derived restrictions means military leaders must design comprehensive press rules of engagement. Allowing reporters to cover operations is vital to developing trust and confidence in the policy motives of using the military instrument of power. However, preventing reporters from taking satellite transmission equipment with them when covering tactical operations may be prudent in some situations. The press should agree that sanitized procedures for broadcast coverage, as depicted in Table 2, serves US military interests while preserving the public's right to know.

Table 2. Recommended Media Guidelines

- Delay or restrict live broadcasts of combat operations.

- Institute black-out periods to preserve surprise when initiating combat operations.

- Restrict satellite transmission equipment from the battlefield during on-going tactical engagements.

- Implement a moratorium on former DOD employees from providing military analyses during on-going operations.

- Ensure planners war-game media effects during course of action development.

Notes

[1] Schwartzkopf, General H. Norman *It Doesn't Take a Hero.* Bantam Books: New York, 1992, p. 399.

[2] Woodward, Bob, *The Commanders.* Simon and Schuster: New York, 1991, p. 155.

[3] Campen, Colonel Alan D., *The First Information War.* AFCEA International Press: Fairfax, VA. 1992, p. 87.

[4] Williams, Pete, "A Gulf War Military-Media Review." *Defense Issues*, March 14, 1991, p. 2-3.

[5] Woodward, Bob, *The Commanders.* Simon and Schuster: New York, 1991, p. 368.

[6] Williams, Pete, "The Press and the Persian Gulf War." *Parameters,* US Army War College Quarterly: Carlisle, PA., Autumn, 1991, p. 5.

[7] Campen, Colonel Alan B., *The First Information War.* AFCEA International Press: Fairfax, VA., 1992, p. 89.

[8] *Strategic Assessment 1996: Elements of US Power.* National Defense University Press: 1996, p. 154.

[9] Toffler, Alvin and Heide, *War and Anti-war.* Little, Brown and Company: Boston, 1993, p. 165.

Chapter 7

Future Implications of Real-time News Coverage

The people thinking hardest about warfare in the future know that some of the most important combat of tomorrow will take place on the media battlefield.

—Alvin Toffler
War and Anti-war

Can strategic paralysis lead to mass psychological paralysis? Why not exploit the same technology which permits a lethal, precise form of air campaign for its potential in PSYOPS? This technology may create a means to inflict mass psychological paralysis through media induced persuasion. Television could become the weapon of choice in deception and psychological warfare in the future.

The designers of the air campaign focus on the physical destruction of the enemy's COG and minimize the psychological and social implications of applying military force. The physical destruction of an enemy's war capability may be harder to achieve than the effort required to simply convince him, through psychological persuasion, to surrender. Even with today's high technology advances, war remains a human enterprise with psychological factors affecting decisions individuals must make. British theorist, Captain Basil Liddel Hart, believed that, "In studying the physical aspect we must never lose sight of the psychological," citing the *line of least expectation*.[1] One tool technology now

provides to attack by the line of least expectation is real-time news and the media in general.

Suppose we can preclude the violent physical destruction of enemy command and control facilities as practiced in the Gulf, by developing nonlethal technology with a soft-kill capability. Reducing the knowledge of a future opponent through nonlethal information warfare may achieve the same strategic advantage. Real-time news coverage can assist in this aim, if the enemy becomes reliant on civilian intelligence information. The leadership confusion and public panic could affect the enemy's moral will to resist.

A plausible US strategy proposed by the Institute for National Strategic Studies uses new information technologies in a deterrent role. Assuming heightened sensitivity to casualties on either side, the US could locate a first set of targets, broadcast their location via information media, strike them, and then broadcast the destruction.[2] Real-time news reporting could be valuable covering these demonstrations assuming the enemy continues to trust the legitimacy of the news media. Strategists should consider this approach if deterrence or suppression of major regional conflicts is an objective. Given the competing demands for dwindling defense dollars and a down-sized military this seems prudent.

The author can not explore the technological aspects of these concepts recognizing this requires a separate technical effort worthy of other research. It suffices to suggest the implications of such innovative techniques for their value to PSYOPS and proposes that other researchers expand on this notion.

Notes

[1] Hart, Basil Liddel, "The Strategy of the Indirect Approach." In *The Art of War in World History*. edited by Gerard Chaliand, The University of California Press: Berkeley, p. 929.

Notes

[2] *Strategic Assessment 1996: Elements of US Power.* National Defense University Press: 1996, p. 189

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Concern over how the media may portray military operations effects the planning of them. The media influenced important decisions such as when to end the Gulf War. The incidents reviewed attest to conditions for leaders at the strategic and operational level. The research indicates political and military decision-makers are, "compelled to make more and more decisions about things they know less and less about at a faster and faster rate."[1] This research has found that concern over coverage of tactical events, when covered real-time, has operational and strategic planning implications.

Commanders should use their public affairs professionals as insulators and advisors while instituting standard procedures for dealing with the media in various operational environments. Military members should receive awareness training on the potential impact of news coverage prior to deployments. Those leaders entrusted with authority to execute military operations on politically sensitive missions must develop diplomatic skills to be effective with reporters.

The public is likely to become more sophisticated in its understanding of the media—and more skeptical as well. First Amendment guarantees of press freedom cause "spin doctors" to be more subtle than those in countries in which governments control the media.[2] The author believes America's tradition of essentially open information is vital but

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that press freedom also creates a vulnerability for opponents to exploit. Real-time news could jeopardize operational security. Does the public's right to know include right to know immediately? The author presumes not, but space-based commercial communications assure the potential growth of real-time coverage.

Military leaders must either create innovative techniques to exploit the media to develop a military advantage or resign themselves to the power of the media and learn to mitigate its impact. Mitigating the impacts of instantaneous news is possible by instituting more restrictive rules of engagement covering the press.

One of the primary strategic objectives of any contemporary military campaign includes destruction of enemy C^3I nodes, and thereby, denying information to an opponent. It seems absurd to go to the effort of destroying an enemy's organic C^3I capability and then allow news coverage to give him this type of information anyhow. Eliminating news reporters' satellite transmission equipment from tactical locations has merit. Also, designing delays in coverage during on-going operations and restricting former DOD employees from serving as analysts for news programs during real-time operations serve to preserve the advantage over an adversary. Addressing media operations in OPORDs also permits planners and decision-makers to develop courses of action that are flexible to the potential impacts of news coverage.

Finally, putting a spin on J.F.C. Fuller's metaphor of a "shot through the brain," the news may sicken the enemy's stomach enough for the brain to reconsider its options. The technical limitations of television and other emerging technologies on the human senses may restrict the psychological power of media's current capability for military purposes. However, "Before long, one may assume, the spin doctors and knowledge warriors of

many nations, not to mention terrorists and religious fanatics, will begin thinking creatively about how to exploit the news media."[3] The author simply reaffirms the psychological component of war and suggests news media is worthy of further study for its effects on decision-making during military operations.

Notes

[1] Toffler, Alvin and Heide, *War and Anti-war.* Little, Brown and Company: Boston, 1993, p. 247.
[2] ibid., p. 175.
[3] ibid., p. 174.

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