



The Media And The Operational Commander: A Shotgun Marriage

A Monograph
by

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Signal Corps



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ABSTRACT

THE MEDIA AND THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER: A SHOTGUN MARRIAGE by MAJ Susan P. Kellett-Forsyth, USA, 53 pages.

This monograph examines the media's influence on the operational commander's decision making. Understanding the media is key to the military commander's ability to function in today's complex environment.

The monograph begins by examining the relationship between the military and the media and provides some background on the basis for the inherent tension that exists between the two institutions.

Some applications and implications of media use and purpose are studied in order to illustrate how the media affects public opinion and decision making at both the strategic and operational level. During this section of the monograph, the unique implications of television media and the power of the transmitted image are also discussed.

Following the examination of the applications and implications of the media, the monograph analyzes several case studies in order to better understand the influence and effects of the media. The media's influence on the political and military leaders' decision making and the corresponding effects on public opinion and policy during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm are analyzed in greater depth.

This monograph concludes by giving the operational commander an awareness of the media environment and the impact that this environment has on his ability to make decisions. The commander should realize that he has little influence on the media or the corresponding effects it causes on the battlefield. With such scant command influence, the military commander needs to understand that an antagonistic relationship with the media does not serve his or his superior's ability to accomplish the mission. A military commander who thoroughly understands the media's influence on his area of operations has the capability of better employing his resources and accomplishing his mission.

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I. Introduction

Some of the most important combat of tomorrow will take place on the media battlefield.¹

Once you've got all forces moving and everything's being taken care of by the commanders, turn your attention to television because you can win the battle or lose the war if you don't handle the story right. General Colin Powell
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff²

The media's influence on how a nation wages war has become more prevalent as demonstrated during the most recent conflicts in Southwest Asia and Somalia. While the media has always been present and considered an important factor to the decisions made by political and military leaders, its effects today are immediate. Communications expert Alan Campen described Operation Desert Storm as "the first war to be televised live."³ With the advent of new technology that provides direct and real-time reporting and the ability for real-time distribution of images from the battlefield, the time allotted for decision making has become seriously compressed.

The public expects and requires its leadership to make decisions in response to the media that is generated by a crisis or event. Since the leaders and the public may be receiving their information simultaneously, leaders are under greater pressure to make rapid decisions. This requirement is exacerbated by the media's immediate coverage of the event. Following the Somalia incident of 3-4 October, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake spoke with Newsweek magazine on how television had muddled sensible foreign policy making by causing the demand for an instant response to crises. Lake told Newsweek "that the reporting of the disaster

in Somalia was so quick that there was a public and Congressional reaction before the administration had a chance to explain itself."⁴

The Vietnam War clearly demonstrated the power and the influence of the media. The nightly images of distant battles broadcast into the majority of American homes had a significant impact on national will which affected the actions of the commander in the field. The power, or even the perceived power, of the media during the Vietnam War was clearly demonstrated in a television commentary delivered by legendary newsmen, Walter Cronkite. In his CBS-TV commentary on the conduct of the Vietnam War, titled "Report from Vietnam: Who, What, When, Where, Why," delivered on 27 February 1968, Cronkite stated,

it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could.⁵

Following Cronkite's broadcast, President Johnson confided that if he had lost Walter Cronkite's support, then he had lost the support of the country as well. In an analysis of Cronkite's commentary, authors Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman wrote, "Rarely has there been a more clearcut case of a news broadcast influencing military policy."⁶ In this example, President Johnson demonstrated his belief that the loss of support from this preeminent media spokesman would seriously affect the public support he needed in order to continue waging the Vietnam War. This belief clearly illustrated the power that President Johnson attributed to

the media. He shaped policy in order to make it more palatable to the public once disseminated by the media.

Most of the public affairs problems that confronted the United States in South Vietnam stemmed from the contradictions implicit in Lyndon Johnson's strategy for the war. The president was convinced that the conflict was necessary but believed that the American public and Congress lacked the will, without very careful handling, to carry it to a successful conclusion.⁷

In retrospect, the media's influence on President Johnson seems obvious. Less obvious are the cascading effects of this influence. The media's impact on the political decision maker has an important corresponding effect on the military leader who is subordinate to his political boss. To fully realize the potential effects of the media, it is necessary to comprehend the senior-subordinate relationship between the political leader and the military leader.

The United States Constitution clearly implies the precept of civilian control. Article II designates the President as the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States. "The central feature of the Constitution with respect to the nation's military force was the establishment of civilian control in government over the military branches."⁸ This precept is reinforced by the officer's commissioning oath which has the officer swear "to support and defend the Constitution of the United States."

The works of German military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz also reinforce this precept of civilian control over the military. Clausewitz defined war as a continuation of policy carried out by other means. In Book One of his edifice On War, he wrote, "War

should never be thought of as something autonomous but always as an instrument of policy."⁹ Clausewitz stressed the supremacy of politics over war and military action in his work, Two Letters on Strategy.

We must not allow ourselves to be misled into regarding war as a pure act of force and of destruction. . . . We must recognize that war is a political act, which is not wholly independent, that it is a true political instrument, which does not act on its own but is controlled by something else: by the hand of politics.¹⁰

It becomes evident that if a political decision maker changes his mind regarding policy or even develops a new or different policy as a result of the media, this change in decision making will have a corresponding effect on the military commander and his ability to make decisions as well.

This corresponding effect was most recently seen during Operation Restore Hope in Somalia when the American public was horrified by the frequently televised scene of the dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. The power of this image was a key factor in changing public opinion which ultimately influenced policy. When asked in a poll, conducted by The Independent and published in the December 1993 World Press Review, "whether U.S. troops should withdraw immediately, 33% of those who had not seen the picture answered yes, compared with 50% of those who had seen it."¹¹ This vivid image ultimately contributed to a change in U.S. policy. This change in policy was described by Robert Oakley, former ambassador to Somalia and later U.S. special envoy to that country who wrote about the invaluable lessons learned by the U.S. and the U.N. in a recent Army Times. He wrote about the

period following the United Nations establishment of UNOSOM II on 4 May 1993.

The United States, strongly supporting the new concepts of U.N. peace enforcement and nation building, used its forces with their heavy firepower and sophisticated equipment to pursue Gen. Mohammed Farah Aidid and his outlaw band. There were thousands of Somali casualties, many of them civilians. As in Lebanon in 1983, despite vastly inferior weaponry, the object of U.S. pursuit found a way to strike back. The black day of Oct. 3 was a result.

President Clinton resisted powerful congressional pressure to pull out at once, as the Reagan administration had from Lebanon after the destruction of the Marine barracks. He succeeded in getting a five-month period to pursue a corrected policy course. [Emphasis added.]¹²

The fact that former Ambassador Oakley believed that President Clinton had to pursue a corrected policy illustrates how an event, the raid of 3 October and the ensuing media coverage, affected policy. In fact, many believe the United States' initial involvement in Somalia was caused by selective media exposure and the graphic presentation of starving women and children. Occurring almost immediately following the actions of 3-4 October in Somalia was the aborted landing of US soldiers in Haiti. Memory of the events in Somalia played a distinct, corresponding role to the actions in Haiti as the military commander aboard the USS Harlan County decided not to land troops in Haiti. "A few hundred lightly armed demonstrators prevented about 200 soldiers from the world's leading army from setting foot on Haitian soil to pave the way for President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's return."¹³ A German newspaper reinforced the idea about the media's affect on policy and referred to the failed landing in Haiti as "CNN Diplomacy."

The US ~~l~~ed itself into the media trap. . . . Those in power in Haiti have also seen the pictures of Somalia. They have learned quickly: In the CNN era, it only takes a revolver held close enough to a camera lens to force a superpower to back down.¹⁴

Today, public opinion has demonstrated the ability to influence and define policy. The media, in turn, has the ability to influence public opinion and has reinforced this ability with real-time distribution of information. The military commander, especially at the operational and strategic level, must understand this complex relationship between the media, the public, and the policy maker. Inherent in this understanding is his recognition of how this relationship will affect his own decision making. This monograph examines how the media influences the operational commander's decision making.

The effects of the media in Somalia and Haiti highlights this complex environment in which the operational commander must execute military operations. In order to make the best use of his available assets and to achieve mission success, it is essential for the commander to understand the effect certain decisions will have on the media and how the media will affect his decision making as well. Ideally, the commander who understands the power of the media and his relationship to this exercised power, can harness that power and make it work for him in the accomplishment of his mission. The latest FM 100-5, Operations, addresses the impact of the media in this manner.

The importance of understanding the immediacy of the impact of raw television coverage is not so that commanders can control it, but so they can anticipate adjustments to their operations and plans.¹⁵

This monograph begins by examining the relationship between the military and the media and provides some background on the basis for the inherent tension that exists between the two institutions. This examination includes a discussion on the implications of the First Amendment. Also studied in this section is the impact of the Vietnam War on the military-media relationship. The reader gains an awareness of how the Vietnam War affected and shaped the future military-media relationship and how this relationship evolved during Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada and Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Southwest Asia.

The next section examines some applications and implications of media use and purpose. This examination includes the thesis that the media's agenda is primarily in concert with the agenda of the government elite. It considers several types of media effects and the impact these effects have on public opinion. Finally, the section concludes by studying the unique implications of television media and the power of the transmitted image. Included in this analysis is an examination of the impact and use of the visual media on today's modern battlefield. The focus of this monograph is at the operational level of war. The US Army's keystone manual, FM 100-5, Operations, states

at the operational level of war, joint and combined operational forces within a theater of operations perform subordinate campaigns and major operations and plan, conduct and sustain to accomplish the strategic objectives of the unified commander or higher military authority. . . . The intended purpose, not the level of command, determines whether an army functions at the operational level.¹⁶

Following this examination of the applications and implications of the media, the monograph analyzes several case studies in order to better understand the influence and effects of the media. The media's influence on the political and military leaders' decision making and the corresponding effects on public opinion and policy during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Southwest Asia are analyzed in greater depth.

The primary purpose of this monograph is to show how the media influences and interacts with the operational commander's actions and decision making. The military-media relationship operates in a very complex environment. The monograph concludes by giving the operational commander an awareness of the media environment and the impact that this environment has on his abilities to make decisions and to ultimately accomplish his mission. The conclusions of this monograph should help the operational commander to better understand his relationship with the media. This understanding should enable him to work with and use the media to his advantage.

II. The Military-Media Relationship: Some Background

The basis of our government is the opinion of the people.

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter.¹⁷

Thomas Jefferson

And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter.¹⁸

John Milton, *Areopagitica*

The military and the media, one institution pledged to uphold the constitution, the other operating under its protection for the public weal.¹⁹

To clearly understand the influence of the media on military actions, it is necessary to explore the relationship between the military and the media. There is an inherent tension that exists between the military and the media which springs from the opposing objectives of each institution. In short, the media's pursuit to uphold the First Amendment in order to ensure the public's right to know versus the military's demand for secrecy to ensure operational security, force protection, and mission accomplishment. The roots of tension are in the nature of the institutions. The military is seemingly the antithesis of a democracy and must be so if it is to be effective. In contrast, a free press is an institution that views a concentration of power as a danger and avoids a hierarchical organization that breeds obedience and often, blind loyalty.²⁰

These two institutions represent two opposing requirements. The first is the requirement for the government to be able to conduct effective military operations. These operations are

conducted by the military which is serving as a tool for the government. The second requirement is for the public, via a free press, to be independently informed about the actions of its government. The military, in this case, represents the government.²¹ It is the First Amendment of the United States Constitution which guarantees that "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."²² The First Amendment gives the media the responsibility to provide information and access to this information to the public. The First Amendment supports the premise that a free flow of information and ideas provides protection against a government's ability to control an individual's thoughts and, consequently, his mind. "The main purpose of the First Amendment- the creation of free thought and the stimulation of public discussion."²³

Clearly, the military-media relationship is nested in a larger relationship between the government and the public. In fact, the military-media relationship becomes more complex when viewed as part of a larger function, because of the potential of having to react to more players and external actions. When a free press accompanies its nation's soldiers into battle, it "provides one of the checks and balances that sustains the confidence of the American people in their political system and armed forces."²⁴

Although a free press serves to sustain the confidence of the public in its political system and armed forces, this sustainment has not been accomplished without friction and controversy. Historically, the military and the media have always

interacted on a range between extremes. This relationship has operated on a continuum of conflict, ranging from being at extreme odds on one end, to the maintenance of a symbiotic relationship on the other.

In the United States, the Civil War represented the first major conflict where the military and the media were clearly at odds. Part of the reason for this antagonistic relationship can be attributed to the rapid expansion of the telegraph which allowed newspapers to rapidly distribute their news stories from the battlefields to their readers. "By 1860, more than 50,000 miles of telegraph wire spanned the country, and newspapers were in daily, sometimes bitter competition for the latest word on anything of importance that happened anywhere."²⁵ The rapid communications provided by the telegraph system allowed the media to report information to the public in such a timely manner that the information was often still relevant to the current situation. This information could then be successfully applied by an opposing commander to defeat an enemy's force on the battlefield. The press was often accused of giving away an Army's disposition and immediate war plans.

Many generals were critical in their evaluation of the press. One of these was Union general William Tecumseh Sherman who was especially vitriolic in his dislike for the press. During the Vicksburg Campaign, the anti-administration press, while writing about the incompetence and instability of the West Point leadership, wrote about Sherman specifically, "He hates reporters, foams at the

mouth when he sees them, snaps at them; sure symptoms of a deep-seated mania."²⁶ When President Lincoln wanted to publish Sherman's opinions on the reconstruction in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas, "Sherman declined, preferring 'not to be drawn into any newspaper controversy' such as the one two years ago, in which he had been pronounced insane."²⁷

The Civil War manifested the inherent tension that existed between the public's right to know versus the military's need to maintain operational security to protect its fighting force. In an attempt to control the media's transmission of sensitive information, President Abraham Lincoln gave the military control of the telegraph lines and used the War Department to censor the press.²⁸ In the prologue of his book, The Military and the Media: The US Army in Vietnam, William Hammond wrote "The history of warfare in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus became at times as much a history of governmental attempts to control the press as a chronicle of battles. Throughout, America's warfighting history, different levels of censorship have been applied in an attempt to maintain a balance between society's right to be informed and the military's need to control information in order to win the country's wars.

Although, the military-media relationship used different methods of censorship during most of the major conflicts following the Civil War, this relationship seemed able to weather most of the differences that occurred. All differences, that is, until the war in Vietnam. There is a prevailing perception that existing problems

between the media and the military were largely able to be resolved until the Vietnam War. "No U.S. conflict since the Civil War was to stir so much hostility among the military toward the media as the drawn out conflict in Vietnam."²⁹ It is the Vietnam conflict that many believed "transformed the fundamentals of the media-military relationship and profoundly influenced practice in subsequent limited conflict."³⁰

An understanding of this transformation is essential for today's military commander. He should thoroughly comprehend the antecedents of the current military-media relationship in order to help him effectively operate in this environment. The war in Vietnam set the stage for the military-media relationship that would exist during military operations in the future. Following the Vietnam War, there was immense distrust between the military and the media. There were specific reasons for this behavior, and it is incumbent upon today's commander to understand these reasons in order to evaluate the military-media relationship objectively.

Essentially, the military majority believed the media misrepresented the Vietnam War effort to the public, which resulted in a deterioration of the national will. On the other hand, the press believed that the military, representative of the President's policy, was not forthright in its depiction of what was actually occurring in Vietnam. While both arguments have validity, William Hammond, author of the seminal work on the military-media relationship in Vietnam, qualified the debate. In Public Affairs: The Military and the Media in Vietnam, he wrote, "it is undeniable,

however, that press reports were still often more accurate than the public statements of the administration in portraying the situation in Vietnam.³¹

After exhaustive study and analysis, there continues to be a debate on the amount of influence the media had on the outcome of the Vietnam War. In his article, "The Military and the Media: A Troubled Embrace," retired military officer and scholar, Bernard Trainor cited a misguided policy as the reason for the failed war, not the media.³² Peter Braestrup, a reporter in Vietnam during the war and author of several studies on the media in Vietnam, also cited poor policy and held three presidents responsible for the failure in Vietnam. "The core of the military press problems in Washington and Saigon lay in the central contradictions of the policies pursued by Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon."³³ President Johnson postponed unpopular decisions and made other decisions based on how he felt the press and public might react. These actions caused many inconsistencies.³⁴

The military commanders were caught between their political masters and the public. During Operation Rolling Thunder, a campaign of air attacks against targets within a ten mile radius of Hanoi, the military leadership understood the potential for civilian casualties and recognized the press's corresponding interest in these casualties. In light of these factors, General Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed the MACV Commander, General Westmoreland, "to refrain from depicting the strikes as a substantial increase in the level of the air campaign against North

Vietnam."³⁵ He also instructed the Pacific Commander in Chief to exercise extreme caution in order to avoid civilian casualties. Here is an example of the military commander making decisions with the media's influence in mind.

Although the military felt betrayed by the media, both Bernard Trainor and authors Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman refer to the press's initial support of the war. They also noted, however, that as casualties mounted, the press became more critical and public support diminished. In their article, "The Media and National Defense", Lichter and Rothman illustrated how public support for the Vietnam and Korean Wars followed a similar pattern of decline. "Support for the Vietnam War dropped below the levels found during the Korean War only after the war had gone on considerably longer and far more casualties had been sustained."³⁶ William Hammond cited John Mueller's book, War, Presidents, and Public Opinion, and wrote, "public support for each war dropped inexorably by 15 percentage points whenever total US casualties increased by a factor of ten."³⁷

While the military often presented its actions from an ever optimistic and unrealistic perspective, it was not the only organization at fault. The media was not immune from this problem of misrepresenting information. A critical example is the media's presentation of the Tet offensive as a serious defeat for the United States in spite of it actually being a military success. Tet is the name given by the Vietnamese for their New Year Festival, and the Tet Offensive was timed to coincide with the New Year festival of

1968. It began with surprise attacks by the North Vietnamese against most of the major cities and towns in South Vietnam. Hanoi had not undertaken such an ambitious military effort against the South Vietnamese since 1965. These attacks also called for a popular uprising against the current South Vietnamese government as well as against its American allies.³⁸ The Tet Offensive decimated the ranks of the Vietcong, the South Vietnamese government did not collapse, and a popular uprising failed to materialize.

In the introduction to his book, Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet, Peter Braestrup wrote, "the Vietcong lost the best of a generation of resistance fighters, and after Tet, increasing numbers of North Vietnamese had to be sent south to fill the ranks."³⁹ In spite of these factors, the majority of the media portrayed the Tet Offensive as a critical defeat for the United States. "Tet provides the clearest instance of television's impact on both mass and elite opinion toward the Vietnam War. Military victory was covered as a psychological defeat and this had major implications for American policy and public opinion."⁴⁰

The news coverage of the Tet Offensive from Vietnam had a tremendous impact on the perceptions and reactions of the political leadership in Washington. In his analysis of the Tet experience, Braestrup concluded

the dominant media "image" of a major foreign-policy crisis, given the proper circumstances, may contribute hugely to a set of perceptions in Washington that variously alters, hastens, or delays decisions by both the President and his chief political opponents.⁴¹

The belief that the press was only interested in reporting on the negative aspects of the conflict may have initially been caused by the strong reactions emanating from the White House and the Pentagon against the press. These strong reactions came down the chain of command and "tended to convey the impression to many senior military men in Vietnam that the press and television were reporting home only 'negatives' unfair to U.S. troops--and overblown negatives at that."⁴² In his analysis of the military-media relationship during Vietnam, Peter Braestrup made the point that ultimately the President, who is also the commander in chief, is the key figure in the relationship.

The military and the media will better understand and execute their requisite roles when provided with a clear presidential strategy and a political leader with the ability to present unseamy facts without distortion. "It is the president and his generals not the journalists who win or lose America's limited wars."⁴³ President Johnson failed to craft a strategy that adequately defined the employment of United States forces during the Vietnam War. Prior to the Tet Offensive, he had presented an optimistic view of a limited war of attrition in Vietnam. Following Tet, he failed to respond decisively to the sudden change of events. In the absence of a strong response, the media and others filled the vacuum with their own analysis and decisions.⁴⁴

The events in Vietnam clearly illustrate the complexity of the relationship between the military, the media, the public, and the political leadership. One of the legacies of Vietnam for the

military leader has been the resultant relationship with the media. This relationship was characterized by an apparent lack of trust and understanding that was shared by both the military and the media. This mutual suspicion and antagonism clearly had long term effects on the military-media relationship, and influenced the way the military and the media conducted later operations following the Vietnam War.

The extreme distrust between the media and the military manifested itself during Operation Urgent Fury when the administration and the military made the decision to prevent the media from having initial access during the invasion of Grenada in October of 1983. In accordance with the Joint Chiefs of Staff's execute order, military forces were to

conduct military operations to protect and evacuate US and designated foreign nationals from Grenada, neutralize Grenadian forces, stabilize the internal situation, and maintain the peace. In conjunction with Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)/friendly government participants assist in the restoration of a democratic government on Grenada.⁴⁵

Citing operational security and the need for absolute surprise, the Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Vessey, banned the press from Grenada until three days following the invasion. Even when granted access to Grenada, the media's freedom of movement was limited.

The constraints for Grenada reflected a wide spread post Vietnam suspicion of the news media among both military and civilian officials. They feared the media-especially television would adopt an automatic bias against the operation, highlighting the inevitable losses and difficulties, fueling criticism back home, and in effect,

as Vice Admiral Metcalf noted forcing the field commanders to think about public relations instead of military operations.⁴⁶

The exclusion of the media during the Grenada operation caused considerable consternation among the media and public sector. This, in turn, precipitated the formation of a media panel to discuss alternative ways to ease the age-old tension between the media's right to inform the public and the military's right to maintain operational security. Major General Winant Sidle, the Army's Public Affairs Officer was selected to form and lead the panel. The Sidle Panel reviewed the military-media relations and determined the feasibility of institutionalizing media participation in future training and contingency deployments of United States forces. As a result of the panel's recommendations, the military developed the Department of Defense National Media Pool Program.⁴⁷

Although not the perfect solution, the introduction of the media pool program forced some changes in the military-media relationship to occur. However, the relationship remains tenuous at best. Despite the animosity caused by the Vietnam War, the inherent tension caused by disparate institutional goals, access to information versus the need for operational security, always keeps the military and the media at odds, providing an armed peace of sorts.

III. Applications and Implications of the Media

By defining what is news, the fourth estate is often decisive in reshaping the priorities of government itself.⁴⁸

I think that there's a superficiality in both the media and the public. They're feeding each other's touch and go outlook on the world. There's a lot of information but not a lot of understanding. We're almost being overcommunicated at, not communicated with. Walter Cronkite⁴⁹

People don't listen to the words. They see images.⁵⁰

Both the military and political leadership understand the power of the media and how the real time ability of the media can directly affect decision making at the highest levels. To understand the complexity of today's media environment, it is essential to understand some of the underlying principles and theories of the media.

In his book, The Press and Foreign Policy, Bernard Cohen wrote, "the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling people what to think about."⁵¹ Linked to this idea of telling people what to "think about" is the prevailing opinion that media grants the government the right to define what is news. Allan Nairn asserts in his article, "When Casualties Don't Count," that "the job of the President is to set the agenda, and the job of the press is to follow the agenda the leadership sets."⁵² When writing about the lack of presidential guidance following the Tet Offensive, Peter Braestrup noted that "although Washington newsmen do not like

to admit it, their dependence on the White House for a 'news agenda' and a 'frame of reference,' especially in crisis, is considerable."⁵³

Part of this agenda setting is attributed to a belief in the democratic process. The democratic process selects leaders to represent the public. Therefore, the assumption made is that the opinions or agendas of the political leadership are representative of public opinion. When the media follows these agendas, it is covering what it believes to be the public's interest. "Journalists structure news around elite cues and public opinion forms in response to these cues."⁵⁴

In his article, "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States," communications theorist W. Lance Bennett wrote about the idea that news is "indexed" within the range of the governmental debate, but not in relation to expressed public opinion.⁵⁵ This restriction of the range of opinions in the news, while not overt censorship, is the result of routine decisions made about how the media should apply their limited resources. "It is within this necessary professional decision making that the corporate values and the central aims of owners are imbedded."⁵⁶ One should not forget that the media is a business that is also driven by its desire to show profit and an effort to assume the majority of the market share.

The results of numerous media studies show that opinions covered in the news are overwhelmingly from government officials. A 1991 interview with David Gergen, former Reagan aide who currently serves as the Communications Director in the Clinton administration,

also reinforced this idea of governmental influence. In this interview, he referred specifically to the Gulf War and talked about how the common understanding the public had of the war was increasingly from sources within the government. His central argument was his belief that in a crisis, "the more television voices there are, the more power the government has."⁵⁷

Gergen's argument raises the issue of the dynamics of agenda change. The operating premise is the government normally sets the agenda for the media and establishes the parameters that bound the range of public opinion. If that is indeed the case, when and how does an opposing public opinion assert and prevail over governmental policy to force a change in policy? In response to this issue, W. Lance Bennett responded,

a strong adversarial press must be ready to raise its own and other grass-roots voices against governmental officials who would exclude those voices from deliberations about the national interest. The press is regarded as the key to attaining the desired level of public accountability.⁵⁸

The concept that public opinion is primarily an indexed reflection of the institutional voices depicted in the mass media is important to a better understanding of the media's influence. It is essential for the political leadership, as well as the subordinate military leadership, to be able to comprehend the threshold of what the public will accept before it rejects the "party line." In order to find this threshold, one must understand how the media may affect public opinion.

The public is exposed to the media's influence on a daily basis. While many people may assume they are just being informed by

the many varieties of media, often, information is presented in a way that shapes their viewpoint and causes them to arrive at rather specific conclusions. Although there are many ways the media can affect public opinion, this monograph focuses on three types of media effects that operate on public opinion: agenda setting, priming, and framing.

Agenda setting is defined as the "ability of news media to define significant issues of the day."⁵⁹ It is measured by the frequency of news coverage on a specific issue. By focusing its efforts on limited issues, the media sets the agenda for the public. The amount of news coverage determines the degree of importance the public attaches to a particular issue. "In effect, intensive news coverage generated by a crisis issue not only elevates the prominence of the target issue but also removes other issues from public attention."⁶⁰ Research has also shown that events in the media are often referred to and have "set the agenda" for individuals when discussing current social and political problems.

An example of agenda setting was seen during the Gulf War. During the war, "more than 1/3, by elapsed time, of all prime-time network newscasts between August 1990 and March 1991 were devoted to the conflict."⁶¹ At its peak the Gulf War had a greater share of public attention and surpassed the combined coverage of the economy, the deficit, and drugs.

Priming is a continuation of agenda setting and considers how news coverage affects the importance of an issue and evaluates how the political leadership deals with this important issue. "In

general, the more prominent an issue in the national information stream, the greater its weight on political judgments."⁶² An example of priming was former President George Bush's increased ratings in foreign policy performance during the Gulf War.

Finally, framing is defined as the "studied effects of alternative news frames on the public's attributions of responsibility for issues and events." Framing creates a connection between the qualitative features of the news and public opinion.

An example of how framing affects public opinion is seen in a study that contrasts the Korean Airline (KAL) and Iran Air incidents. The study examined the different news frames used by different media organizations that covered both tragic incidents. For the KAL incident, the study found "the frame emphasized the moral bankruptcy and guilt of the perpetrating nation [the Soviet Union]; for the second [Iran Air], the frame de-emphasized guilt and focused on the complex problems of operating military high technology."⁶³

Although the KAL incident may have resulted from inadequate technology, the Soviet fighter pilots not knowing that the airliner was a commercial aircraft in their restricted air space, the predominant frame cast the Soviets as part of a corrupt and powerful empire. Conversely, the Iran Air incident was largely portrayed as a technical problem with little emphasis placed on the victims of the downed aircraft. "The mental representations that result from the contact with a news frame can be conceived as an 'event-specific schema,' an understanding of the reported happening that guides

individuals' interpretation of initial information and their processing of all succeeding information about it."⁶⁴

The KAL incident affected public opinion more predominantly since it received twice as much coverage as the Iran Air incident.⁶⁵ A frame analysis of these two events identified what was politically important, given the on-going policy agendas and debates, during the time of the incidents. The analysis found that the political frame was made up of those messages that were likely to promote a majority response to the news event, that coincided with and supported current government policy. The specific way these media events are framed clearly illustrates the resulting influence of these frames. In terms of the KAL and Iran Air incidents,

the high degree of mass awareness of KAL pressured potential elite opponents to the Reagan administration to remain silent or hop on the 'evil empire' bandwagon. While lower mass awareness of the Iran incident diminished a political resource that White House foes could have used to abandon support for the administration's Persian Gulf policy.⁶⁶

The analysis of the KAL and Iran Air incidents offer some interesting conclusions concerning the impact of framing on an incumbent administration's ability to influence public opinion. Most individuals' thinking and beliefs tend to go along with those of the most prevalent frame presented.

Members of the mass audience are theoretically free to draw their own varied meanings from media messages. But the cases [KAL and Iran Air] indicate that when newsmaking elites offer scant challenge to a dominant frame, an authorized position tends to permeate the news text. Such dominant frames tend to obscure rather than highlight opposing information.⁶⁷

Normally, the news is framed in either thematic or episodic terms. An episodic frame depicts issues in terms of discrete events while a thematic frame provides background on the issue and places it in some kind of context, either general or abstract.⁶⁸ Given the nature of most news today, especially television news which provides headline service and hourly news updates, issues are more frequently framed in episodic terms. "Episodic framing is visually appealing and consists of on-the-scene, live coverage."⁶⁹

With the primacy of episodic framing, viewers form opinions without the benefit of any background or analysis of the antecedents of the issue.

With episodic framing, viewers attribute responsibility not to societal or structural forces but to the actions of particular individuals or groups. Episodic framing encourages reasoning by resemblance-people settle upon causes and treatments that 'fit' the observed problem.⁷⁰

Researchers Raymond Gozzi and Lance Haynes presented this idea of knowledge derived from an image without context in their study, "Electric Media and Electric Epistemology: Empathy at a Distance." They wrote that in electric epistemology, the knower experiences a distant presence. This presence is a simulation that has been re-created electrically and presented in a decontextualized situation. The knowledge comes from an evoked empathy that is advantaged by the lack of context. The evoked empathy deals more with the question of how one feels versus the question of what one actually knows. The context for this evaluation of how one "feels" is the "isolated re-creation." This empathetic response to isolated re-creations will continue to grow as people spend less time reading

and more time watching television. The scope of knowledge will become wider, but the depth of this knowledge will be shallower and more superficial.⁷¹ This growth in empathetic responses implies that individuals will make decisions more on how they feel rather than on what they know. Decisions that result from an individual's emotional response can never match those that are a result of careful analysis of more than superficial or shallow information. The more knowledge one obtains on a subject, the more able he is to make a balanced, well-informed decision.

There is considerable evidence that television also plays a role in the construction of social reality. "Television events stored relatively automatically in episodic memory are used to make judgments about the construction of social reality."⁷² These studies are important not because they show that television can shape reality but rather because they reveal how television shapes public opinion. Images from the battlefield will evoke an emotional or empathetic reaction instead of an objective opinion. Instead of dealing with the background and analysis that went into the decision made on the battlefield, empathetic reactions could cause a quick decline in public support which is, of course, ultimately essential for success on the battlefield. "The will to endure is sorely tried, whatever one's faith in cause and country when confronted with graphic evidence of the horror of modern war."⁷³

This dangerous trend may have cascading effects for the operational commander. If public opinion can be shaped by the episodic framing of an issue and its resultant empathetic response,

it may cause the political leader to make a decision that lacks the requisite comprehension and analysis. While individuals react viscerally to images, it is important to remember the background that underlays that image. The problem is somewhat of a "Catch 22". The leadership must shape public opinion using episodic framing and one-dimensional images because that is the way they are most likely to reach the public since most Americans rely on television and radio to get their first news. While this may be true, the leadership has to understand the dangers of employing the one-dimensional image to conjure up support since that support may quickly dissipate if the image causes a particular empathetic reaction. David Gergen, in his interview with Richard Valeriani, said "television had an enormous impact on our policy in Lebanon. The Marines were withdrawn in part because of television."⁷⁴ Television tends to engulf the viewer, giving him the sensation of presence at the scene of events. Policy analyst Lloyd Cutler wrote,

television simplifies its subject matter. TV is quintessentially a medium that transmits simple surface impressions, while national policy issues are infinitely complex and many-sided. The ugliness of military combat or economic deprivation can be graphically conveyed in a few pictures and sounds; the complex policy considerations that usually lie behind a decision to risk these consequences are more difficult to explain.⁷⁵

Perhaps the understanding of the image processing of television viewers will help the leadership, both military and political, to shape or contribute to what images are transmitted. The paradox is that the transmitted image from the battlefield can evoke this empathetic response that may cause public support to rapidly dwindle. Understanding the power of the image is not as

essential as being able to control which images are transmitted. The problem is determining how to best control or temper what is transmitted back to the public, and this control is not really within the military's purview. Understanding and controlling are two very different issues. The issue of controlling the flow or type of information from the battlefield highlights the problem of the inherent tension that exists between the military and the media.

The root problem is that in a war zone one sees only the part of the truth that makes rational men and women abhor war—the awful fact of humans preparing to kill, killing, and being killed. Excluded from the picture is the chain of events that has persuaded the nation to resort to force.⁷⁶

New developments in technology exacerbate these problems of "image control." Technological advances allow the distribution of information, both written and visual, in real time. The public has the ability to see the action unfolding as it is actually occurring on the ground. They are seeing what the operational commanders and political leaders see at the same time. More importantly, they are seeing the transmitted images from a limited number of cameras, and therefore, forming opinions based on a relatively limited point of view. Live television and instant reporting by satellite removes the cushion of time and can directly insinuate viewers directly into the planning and decision making cycle of political leaders and military commanders.⁷⁷

This ability to involve viewers compresses the time the political and subsequently, the military leadership have to make decisions. Leaders have always had to consider the impact of their decisions on public opinion, as well as the effects these decisions

have had on public support. The effect of their decisions have been critical especially in light of the belief that the media is the most powerful source in forming this public opinion and support. In turn, the military leader relies on this public support which is viewed as essential to the prosecution of the war. The problem becomes even more complex when the public is receiving nearly the same information the leadership is receiving at the same time. Now, leaders must anticipate the public's response to certain information and must craft their decisions with these implications in mind. They must also be aware that their decisions and resulting actions will become public. The audience assumes a new, more interactive role in the events occurring on the battlefield and in government.

There are several lessons to be learned from this discussion of the implications and applications of the media. Foremost is the assertion that the operational commander has little influence on the media or the corresponding effects it causes on the battlefield. With such scant influence, it is most essential that the military commander has a complete awareness of how the media may affect his ability to operate on the battlefield. These effects are largely seen in terms of how public support is affected and how the political leadership's decision making is affected. As discussed earlier, the media can build or diminish public support in the way it portrays the events on the battlefield. At the strategic level, the political leadership can make decisions that have been directly affected by the media's coverage of these events or in response to how public opinion and support has been affected. A military

commander who thoroughly understands the media's influence on his area of operations has the capability of better employing his resources and accomplishing his mission.

IV. Case Study Analysis

We cannot tolerate the Pentagon dictating the words and images the public is allowed to receive. . . . If this dangerous PR [public relations] campaign is not stopped, truth could end up as another casualty of the Persian Gulf War.⁷⁸ Representative Bruce Yento (D, Minnesota)

If the media and therefore the public didn't feel they were getting the facts, there was no chance of maintaining public support.⁷⁹ Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney

The media aspects of military operations are important, will get national attention, and warrant your personal attention.⁸⁰ General Colin Powell, Message to Operation Desert Shield Commanders, 1990

The leaders, both political and military, who were responsible for the conduct of the Gulf War clearly understood the power of the media. This war provides an excellent situation that can be used to evaluate the media's influence on the operational commander. In order to discern the media's effects, the case study analysis examined the military-media relationship and the application and implications of the media on public opinion. The study then considered the media's influence on the operational commander and his ability to make decisions. Finally, this case study concluded by categorizing the nature of the conflict in an attempt to better predict the media's effects during future conflicts.

On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard Forces attacked and invaded Kuwait. His invasion "unleashed an extraordinary series of events that culminated seven months later in the victory of American and coalition forces over the Iraqi Army and the liberation of Kuwait."⁸¹ President George Bush condemned the

invasion and set the following U.S. National policy objectives: immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait; restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government; security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf; and the safety and protection of the lives of American citizens abroad. The Gulf War was divided into two parts: Operation Desert Shield which was defensive in nature and Operation Desert Storm which departed from the defensive mode and concentrated on forcing Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.⁶² All eyes were focused on the war in the Gulf and news agencies flocked to the region to cover the war. At the height of military operations during the war, there were 1400 journalists in the region. When the ground war commenced, 131 reporters moved with various ground units. In contrast to this number of reporters in the 1991 conflict, only 27 reporters went ashore with the first wave at Normandy on D-Day during World War II.⁶³

At the outset of Operation Desert Shield, there was dissatisfaction with the military's accommodation of the media. In his book, Free Speech in an Open Society, Rodney Smolla attributed this dissatisfaction to the press's memory of official manipulation of the truth during Vietnam and which made the press reflexively antagonistic to the restrictions imposed.⁶⁴ The media believed that the Department of Defense's press pool requirements were too restrictive and did not allow them the necessary latitude to accomplish their mission of keeping the public informed.

Built on the Sidle Commission model, the military's rules in the Middle East put heavy and burdensome restrictions on members of the press. Even before the massive air offensive began on January 16, Pentagon rules issued to

the Washington bureaus of news organizations required that all reports not disclose sensitive military information, that access to combat units would be limited to preselected pools of reporters, and that reports from members within a pool would have to be submitted to 'security review.'⁸⁵

Although there was no official censorship, the lack of access to people and places hampered the media's ability to get the story and to subsequently transmit it in a timely manner. The "security review process" also had the same effect as censorship since it took time for a story to be reviewed. This time delay caused the news to lose its immediacy and pertinence and caused it to be of little use to the journalists or their parent organizations. Although the media felt extremely constrained by the Department of Defense's "press rules," the public believed that the restrictions placed on the media were appropriate. "Of people polled in a Times Mirror Center poll - 80% of the sample approved of military restrictions on the reporting of the war, and 60% thought the restrictions should be greater."⁸⁶

Besides the restrictive Department of Defense policy, the media had to deal with other problems that were unique to the region. Prior to the Gulf War, the American media had only maintained a limited presence in the Middle East. This limited presence was the result of two factors: the economic inability to maintain foreign correspondents abroad as well as the nature of Middle East culture which was opposed to the idea of a free press. "Even during the early weeks of the American military buildup that was ostensibly for the defense of the Saudis, the Saudi Government was extremely reluctant to issue visas to members of the foreign

press."⁸⁷ Another problem the media had to overcome was the inhospitable terrain and demographics of the region which placed a greater restriction on its movement than in any other ground war since World War I.⁸⁸ The hazards of a desert environment made it easier to control the reporters. Even if the media had not wanted to comply with the strict military press rules, they had to rely on the military to transport them to where the military units were located on the battlefield.

In an analysis of the media generated during the Gulf War, it is apparent that the war's media agenda was set by the government. In their report on the "News Coverage of the Gulf Crisis and Public Opinion," communications researchers Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon found that "in an analysis of network news reports in the Gulf crisis, more than 50 percent of all reports examined emanated directly from official spokespersons."⁸⁹ The Executive Summary of the Gannett Foundation Report on The Media at War reported

the military supplied much of the news that came out of the gulf through briefings and videotapes, therefore what Americans saw on their screens (and television was the main source of gulf news for the vast majority of Americans) reflected the government viewpoint.⁹⁰

In an interview with Richard Valeriani, David Gergen discussed the effects of television on the public's understanding of the Gulf War. He spoke about the diversity of the messages broadcast on television and concluded

the moments that bring us together as a people - the common understanding we have about war, the common images we have of what's happening in this war - are increasingly the releases of the government.⁹¹

David Gergen felt that the United States had been committed to the war without any serious debate and blamed the media for not effectively presenting both sides of the argument. The media was extremely supportive of President Bush's actions at the outset of the war which attributed to society's acquiescence of his plan. The Gannett Foundation's report on The Media at War validated Gergen's conclusions and found that the editorials on the Gulf War reflected the government's viewpoint and expressed little dissent.⁹² Professor Douglas Kellner in his book, The Persian Gulf TV War, asserted the television networks "tended to reproduce what they were told or shown by the U.S. Government and military."⁹³ Iyengar and Simon wrote that the use of episodic framing in the news coverage of the Gulf War strengthened a preference for punitive action as opposed to a diplomatic or economic solution. Since the Gulf conflict was analogous to an issue of law and order which called for punitive action, television coverage reinforced the viewers preference for a military versus a diplomatic response.⁹⁴

Since government sources were largely responsible for the release of available information on the Gulf War, they were able to control the type of information disseminated. In essence, they were able to more effectively control the images that shaped the perceptions of the American people at home. The media framed the war in a way that made the government's actions during the Gulf War more acceptable to the public. Iyengar and Simon wrote that news coverage emphasized themes that focused on the success of American technology such as the interception of scuds, the use of smart

bombs, and themes that targeted the malevolence of the Iraqis. It ignored contrary themes that focused on the destruction of a Third World Nation and the scale of civilian casualties and collateral damage.⁹⁶ Smolla wrote "the autonomy of information control in the Persian Gulf for the most part followed the Grenada and Panama patterns: bad news sugarcoated, ugly parts blacked out, delays in transmission."⁹⁶ In his article, "Hollywood at War in the Middle East," communications professor Stephen Prince believed the Gulf War was primarily portrayed "as an essentially bloodless affair." This was due, in part, to the relatively few American casualties and the media's inability to gain access to combat scenes. Furthermore, he wrote,

there were virtually no images of human death carried by the media. Instead, coverage tended to emphasize property damage - bridges blowing up, military bunkers exploding - and other forms of non-human destruction.⁹⁷

The coverage of the Gulf War emphasized the use and accuracy of smart weapons technology which reinforced the notion of a bloodless war. Prince asserted that "these weapons were presented to the public as an essential means for achieving the military's stated objective of avoiding civilian targets."⁹⁸ This emphasis on the technological capabilities of weapons systems used during the Gulf War is reminiscent of the emphasis on the frame used to define the Iran Air incident discussed earlier in the monograph.

The overwhelmingly positive portrayal by the media of the Gulf War allowed the political leadership the latitude to make decisions without the immediate worry that public opinion would be affected by potentially negative images disseminated from the

battlefield. Both the political leadership, in this case President George Bush, and the military leadership at both the strategic and operational levels, Generals Colin Powell and Norman Schwarzkopf, understood the power of the transmitted image and worked concertedly to avoid the effects of another Vietnam. President Bush wanted to ensure the Gulf War was fought in a manner that allowed the United States to overcome the "Vietnam Syndrome."⁹⁹ In his article "Public Relations as a Weapon of Modern Warfare," public relations expert Ray Hiebert wrote,

What was new about 'Desert Storm' was the extent to which the American Government and its military concerned itself with fighting the war for public support at home by using all the classic practices of public relations, including political strategies, media relations, community relations, and crisis management.¹⁰⁰

This support, however, was not entirely constant or without controversy, and there were several events that caused the leadership, both political and military, to react and make decisions to counter the potential of negative imagery. Two examples of media influence that caused an evaluation of ongoing operations, and that forced decisions that changed policy, were the bombing of the bunker on the outskirts of Baghdad and the killing of the Iraqis fleeing from Kuwait to Basrah on the infamous "Highway of Death." These examples also illustrate the cascading effects these political decisions had on the operational commander's decision making.

The bombing of shelter in the Amiriya area of Baghdad, on 13 February 1991, caused tremendous turmoil in the American administration as it attempted to explain why the command and control bunker it had targeted and destroyed had been filled with

sleeping women and children. The incident raised doubts about the military's actual technological ability to carefully target areas in order to assure minimal civilian casualties. Cable Network News (CNN) ran a report from Baghdad that "contained the most graphic and horrific images so far of incinerated people, agonized families, dazed crowds, and upset journalists, powerful visual evidence that the shelter was undeniably used by civilians."¹⁰¹ These images had an equally powerful effect on the American public and on world opinion as well. Kellner reported,

there was a strong movement afoot in the UN to reconsider the Security Council resolution allowing force to resolve the crisis in the Gulf, and the United States was doing everything possible to head off further debate especially in public.¹⁰²

President Bush, with his reliance on the assembled coalition could little afford the potential loss of world support, and, along with his military leaders, spent considerable effort in justifying the destruction of the Amiriya bomb shelter/bunker. This catastrophe came at a time when the President was trying to decide on when to begin the ground offensive. The damaging results of the Air War's effects on civilians could have caused him to start the ground war earlier than was feasible. If the public response to the devastation wrought by the Air War had received greater play in the press and had caused a corresponding decline in public opinion, the president could have solved the problem by launching the ground offensive early. This premature requirement would have had a serious impact on the operational commander's time line and his ability to effectively coordinate his forces. The timing of the

ground war had tremendous implications for the operational commander.

Despite the graphic imagery transmitted from Baghdad, the mainstream media did not pursue the story and the effects of the incident received no special emphasis after a few days. Two days after the bombing occurred, an ABC News/Washington Post poll found that 67 percent of those polled believed Saddam Hussein was responsible for the Iraqi casualties, while 12 percent and 7 percent believed that Iraq and the United States were responsible, respectively. In his analysis of the media's coverage of the bombing, Kellner asserted that "the public seemed to have bought into the war aims and propaganda and was not going to be deterred in its desire for U.S. victory by mere Iraqi casualties."¹⁰³

While the coverage of the Amiriya bombing had greater potential implications on the leadership's decision making than actually occurred due to the short life of the media's coverage, the images of the "Highway of Death" had an enduring impact. In its discussion of the media's impact on the conduct of military operations, FM 100-5, Operations, stated that "news coverage of the destruction on the Kuwait City - to - Basrah road during Operation Desert Storm clearly had an impact on military commanders and policymakers."¹⁰⁴ In his analysis on the media coverage of this event, Kellner attributed the images of destruction as one of the reasons that caused President Bush to decide to end the ground offensive phase of the war. A 1992 Discovery documentary on the Gulf War, featuring Assistant Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz,

supported Kellner's assertion. During the documentary, Wolfowitz stated "that reports of the slaughter of the fleeing Iraqis had produced revulsion" and the decision was made to call the operation to a halt. While the leadership at the strategic level called an end to the conflict, the operational commander, General Norman Schwarzkopf believed that the war ended prematurely and should have continued. In a March 27, 1991 interview with television commentator David Frost, General Schwarzkopf said "that he personally wanted to continue fighting, to pursue a 'war of annihilation.'" ¹⁰⁵ In this situation, the media influenced a decision made at the strategic level which clearly affected the decision made at the operational level. In the case of the Gulf War, however, the media did not have a significant effect on the political leadership's ability to make decisions or policy because the media's coverage mainly supported the government's strategy and current policies. Since the political leaders did not have to drastically adjust policy to maintain public support, the operational commander did not have to react to any sudden changes either. Had the nature of the war been significantly different, however, the operational commander may have found himself inundated with requirements in response to a dynamic political situation.

The nature of the Gulf War contributed to the government's ability to control the media and the images that were disseminated from the desert. The Department of Defense press rules, the dangerous environment of the desert and area of operations, and the short duration of the war all played an integral role in the

political and military leadership's ability to maintain positive public support. The nature of the conflict is critical in the determination of how the media may effect decision making at all levels. The next war may not have the same characteristics.

V. Conclusions

The optimum solution to ensure proper coverage of military operations is to have the military - represented by competent professional public affairs personnel and commanders who understand media problems - working with the media - represented by competent, professional reporters and editors who understand military problems - in a nonantagonistic atmosphere.¹⁰⁶ CJCS Media-Military Relations Panel Conclusion

I feel commanders should take a more active role in dealing with media requests. I will be more aggressive in the future in providing media access to my people and making myself available for interviews if the media wants them.¹⁰⁷ MG Paul E. Funk

Understanding the media is key to the military commander's ability to function in today's complex environment. Central to this understanding is the commander's awareness of the inherent tension between the military and the media causing the two institutions to often pursue objectives that are diametrically opposed. These are the desire to maintain operational security of military operations until mission completion or conflict termination while maintaining public support, versus the right of access to information to keep the public informed about the actions of its armed forces.

A thorough awareness of the media's influence on military operations drives the commander to seek ways to achieve a better military - media relationship. Regardless of the media's desire to develop a better relationship between the institutions, it is incumbent upon the military commander to foster a mutual working relationship. In his keynote address during a conference that discussed the topic of the defense and the media in time of limited war, General Peter Gratton stated,

the central idea is to seek to build a solid relationship between the military and the media, established in peace but carrying over into war. The relationship relies on developing an understanding each other's special needs, and a confidence on the one hand that the media are hearing the truth, and on the other that it will be reported accurately, proportionately and without bias.¹⁰⁸

The media maintains a constant presence in the operational commander's battle space and the commander cannot afford to pay sporadic attention to the military - media relationship during the planning and conduct of his military operations.

The commander should realize that he has little influence on the media or the corresponding effects it causes on the battlefield. These media effects are seen in terms of how public support is affected and how the political decision making is affected. The media can build or diminish support in the way it portrays events. A change in policy may cause corresponding changes to occur in military operations. With such scant command influence, the military commander needs to understand that an antagonistic relationship with the media does not serve his own or his superior's ability to get the mission accomplished. A military commander who thoroughly understands the media's influence on his area of operations has the capability of better employing his resources and accomplishing his mission.

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