

Badsey, Stephen, ed. *The Media and International Security*. London, UK and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000.

If truth is indeed the proverbial first casualty of war, how is it faring in the so-called low-intensity conflicts and peacekeeping operations that have marked the post-Cold War era? That question lies at the heart of *The Media and International Security*, edited by Stephen Badsey, a senior lecturer at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. Badsey has compiled an interesting collection of essays from military leaders, award-winning journalists and academic specialists, who explore the new relationship between the media and the military. What clearly distinguishes the compilation is the sheer range of topics covered, with four subsections detailing: the media and military operations; the media view of the military; the military experience of the media; and the media and policy decision-making. While the focus is on the British media and military, the dynamics described are similar to those in other countries, perhaps none more so than the United States. Still, important differences between the two nations must be kept in mind, most notably the absence of any equivalent to the US Constitution's First Amendment and also the greater role played by public broadcasting, specifically the importance of the BBC, in Great Britain.

While ample attention is given to the Persian Gulf War and the United Nations' mission in Bosnia, space is also devoted to media-military relations during conflicts in Somalia, Northern Ireland and Rwanda. As would be expected, journalists and military officials attempt to describe their culture and defend their needs, some rightly pointing to improved levels of understanding between the two parties, others just as accurately highlighting immutable differences. Particularly revealing is the increasing degree of importance military planners are finding necessary to devote to promoting their efforts and handling the media. This, of course, is related to the much discussed "CNN factor," the perceived - but not conclusively proved - influence media coverage has in provoking reactions and directing policy decisions.

But this book also expands the usual boundaries of these types of studies. For example, one chapter by a television documentary maker explores how combatants in Northern Ireland have been portrayed on film. Also, there's an excellent chapter probing the important, but often overlooked, role of hate radio in inciting conflict, in this case its contribution to the genocide in Rwanda. An added strength of this piece is the background to the conflict itself, a missing element in other sections. Another chapter helps explain how Iraq's military strength was overrated and, in the process, well documents how the media can be led astray. Of course not every chapter is as significant and some, particularly from the military viewpoint, get mired in operational details. But these are worth mucking through, especially to get to the essential final chapters by Philip Taylor, television journalist Nik Gowing and Badsey.

But while the book's strength lies in its diversity, its weaknesses stem from that same trait. The reader is often challenged to find unifying themes and connect the associations amid the disparate chapters. Despite an excellent introduction by Badsey that seeks to provide background and make broader connections, following chapters skip from conflict to conflict and references are scattered back and forth. The most common reference point

is the Vietnam War, which is often depicted as the ultimate example of how the media harmed a military effort. Yet this myth has been more than adequately debunked by study after study revealing that far from serving as an adversarial force, the American media supported the overall US military effort. Only after other elite forces began to question US policy did media coverage take a more critical stance. Badsey and some of the contributors point this out, and one of the foremost researchers on Vietnam coverage, Daniel Hallin, is cited in two chapters, yet the deeper ramifications of his work and that of others are barely hinted at. Also, in other places readers are presented with references to the “lessons of Vietnam” without adequate explanations that those “lessons” that continue to influence military actions and media coverage are based on a lie.

In addition, the connections between Vietnam and Great Britain’s emphasis on restricting media access during its military campaign in the Falklands, and then that conflict’s influence on US military planners in Grenada and Panama are not sufficiently addressed. Thus, even the most discerning reading will be hard pressed to understand how the stage was set for military-media relations in the 1990s. Granted, the focus is on the post-Cold War era, but this framework is vital to understanding the subject.

The book also gives short shrift to the institutional factors that shape the relationship between the media and military. While it’s true that their goals often are in conflict (the media covets information while the military wants secrecy), it’s also true that the two share nationalistic values and ideological biases. The conservative nature of the military is often depicted but it’s less commonly noted that the media comprise elite institutions with vested interests in the status quo. Furthermore, in their overwhelming reliance on “official” sources, the media often do little more than present elite opinions. Such a practice is tied closely to the doctrines of balance and objectivity, the foundations of modern journalism. How these principles, which translate to providing only the limited range of debate offered by establishment figures, affect news coverage is mentioned but not nearly in proportion to their role.

Most glaringly, the dominant commercial realities that truly drive news coverage are almost totally ignored. Only Gowing even discusses how budgetary decisions have nearly eliminated most foreign coverage and how profit interests are increasingly transforming news into infotainment. And no author delves into the pressures from corporate executives to avoid offending powerful interests. With the continuing concentration of large media firms, especially in the United States, such trends will only be accentuated and will likely sabotage the promise of new technologies and their ability to increase the flow of the information.

Despite the aforementioned flaws, this book provides a useful addition to scholars aware of such details. It is unfortunate, though, that the project was evidently completed before detailed perspectives could be gathered on perhaps the most significant military action since the Gulf War, the 1999 NATO military campaign in former Yugoslavia. The struggle over Kosovo well illustrated the use of high-powered press conferences and news briefings, while it also featured the largest use of the Internet for war reporting. The study of such a pivotal crisis could have further helped shine the light on the constantly

evolving relationship between the military and the media. But, from the evidence put forth it remains easy to conclude that, despite changes in many aspects of the media-military relationship, the modern battles for the hearts and minds of people often still leave truth a casualty of the conflict.

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