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CONFLICT AND CONFLICTING CULTURES: THE MILITARY AND THE MEDIA

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CONFLICT AND CONFLICTING CULTURES: THE MILITARY AND THE MEDIA¹

Philip M. Taylor

Synopsis

Military-media relations, especially in Britain, the United States and Australia, have come under increasing academic scrutiny in recent years.² There are signs that this is also happening in Spain, Italy, Germany and France. This growing body of research tends to concentrate on when the relationship breaks down, on points of friction rather than of collaboration. In times of war, however, the historical record is in fact far more one of co-operation than conflict, at least in 'our wars' when 'our troops' are involved in fighting, perhaps alongside 'our allies' against a clearly identified enemy and its allies. This is perhaps entirely understandable in wars of national survival, but in the conflicts since the end of the Cold War that have demanded military interventions – other peoples' wars - the phenomenon has tended to stay the same. In more recent times and in some countries, there are signs that this relationship may be breaking down, and the reasons for and ramifications of this will be examined here.

Introduction

There is, of course, an enormous danger in over-generalization. Just as it is unwise to talk about 'the military' as a single, homogeneous entity, the same is true when discussing 'the media'. Here we will be concentrating on the news media, rather than the representation of the military, say, in feature films or television documentaries. But here again, if we break down the news media into print, radio and television, we need to recognise that each of these media have different operational requirements. Television news, for example, is picture-led and picture-driven. For most people in the developed world, and increasingly so in countries such as India, television news

¹This research was partly supported by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council as part of their 'Domestic Management of Terrorist Attacks' programme led by King's College, London.

² See Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War* (Manchester University Press, 1997), Susan Carruthers, *The Media and War* (Macmillan, 2000) and P. Jesser & P. Young, *The Media and the Military: from the Crimea to Desert Strike* (Macmillan, 1997); M. Hudson and J. Stainer, *War and the Media* (Sutton Publishing, 1997)

is their primary source of information about the workings of the world, and it is the most trusted.³ Yet 'seeing is believing' is an axiom that needs to be balanced by the biblical phrase that 'in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king'. Without an understanding of how the medium actually operates in practice, we face the danger of accusing it of things it simply cannot do. This is even more apposite since the emergence of 24 hour live (or 'real-time') rolling news services such as CNN, BBC World, Sky News and Fox News. These organisations have introduced a different kind of news service to that of the traditional evening TV news bulletins, and this important development will also command some scrutiny here.

It also has to be remembered that even a term like 'broadcasting' is increasingly redundant in a world where viewers now have so much choice through cable and satellite access to multi-channel, interactive and digital 'narrowcasting'. Only fifteen years ago, a family could expect to sit down for an evening's viewing from a choice of three or four terrestrial domestic television services that all broadly followed the same format: the evening news, followed by a local magazine programme, then a game show, a soap opera perhaps, then a documentary or current affairs programme, then the late evening news followed by a movie or by a football match. Today, there are dedicated cable and satellite channels for all of those genres, plus access to international programming, from the three or four television sets in each household: niche programming for increasingly niche audiences.

Moreover, even the 24/7 real-time news services are now a little old-fashioned. Since the arrival in 1992 of the World Wide Web as the accessible front page of the Internet, we need to distinguish between 'old media' and 'new media'. Internet journalism is in the ascendancy, and it is often staffed by a new breed of journalist who has little respect for the old media reporters who are believed to have bought into the system, a system in which the mass media have become part of the problem – as they see it – broadly defined as the 'manufacture of consent' by a government-media nexus.⁴ Traditional media have successful websites – the BBC is a prime example – but they tend to treat their content in much the same way as their conventional output. There are different news sites which adopt a different

³ This was confirmed most recently by the Pew Research Centre's report on 'What the world thinks in 2002' released on 4 December 2002, which stated that 'in the 44 nations surveyed, nearly everyone cited television news as their predominant source of information about national and international affairs'. <http://people-press.org/reports>.

⁴ After the work of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky.

approach.⁵ Freed from traditional editorial constraints and corporate interests, these new media reporters have capitalised upon increasingly affordable technology combined with the information explosion in order to transmit 'alternative voices' to a global audience via the internet. These people are a new generation whose size and credibility is bound to increase over time and yet they have been barely noticed by military public information policy planners.

Part of the problem is one of scale. There were almost 450 reporters covering the D-Day landings – a pretty big story – but there were 1500 accredited reporters in Saudi Arabia at the time of the 1991 Gulf War. When the Kosovo crisis erupted in 1999, there were almost 4000 journalists at the scene, many of them independent freelancers. A new development also made Kosovo the first internet war. Beyond the battle area, anyone with a computer could broadcast their views to a global audience from the comfort of their bedrooms. There is a need to place this development in some historical context since there were television cameras in Korea during the 1950-53 war, but very few people had television sets at that time. Vietnam, often erroneously labelled the 'first television war', was only ten years later. The Gulf War was the first real-time war. By the time of Kosovo, around 8% of the world's population had logged on to the world wide web, mainly in Europe and North America. The internet was to Kosovo, therefore, what television was to Korea. Although ultimately the internet was less significant than the traditional mass media during the Kosovo conflict, to repeat: Vietnam was only ten years after Korea. But there is no doubt that the numbers of people who wish to mediate the doings of the few to the many are on the increase.

A slice of history

That the military struggle to keep up with these developments is no surprise given the rapidity of change within the journalistic profession in recent years. That they often try to fight the next war by learning from the lessons of the last one, therefore, may no longer be an appropriate strategy. Technology available to the media moves much more quickly than the notorious problems associated with military procurement.

⁵ One of the best is <http://www.alternet.org> which states as part of its mission that 'The media marketplace is increasingly dominated by commercial messages, or focused on entertainment at the expense of insightful information. The results of this trend are large gaps in news coverage and diminished public confidence in the media. Although thousands of issue-oriented websites offer outstanding public interest content, too many remain hidden to experienced researchers and casual Internet users.'

For example, in Afghanistan recently journalists were not allowed to accompany special forces from Britain and the United States because that is the policy with such troops. Yet journalists were able to capture some footage of them in action and John Simpson of the BBC was even able to broadcast live from the fighting front via his videophone.⁶ Having said that, the campaign in Afghanistan was probably the most under-reported conflict involving 'our troops' in recent history. It certainly stands in stark contrast to the Gulf War of 1991, when several hundred reporters were allowed in Media Reporting Teams, or 'pools', to accompany the ground forces when they moved into Kuwait and southern Iraq.

This pool system was devised in the 1980s partly as a response to what is often termed the 'Vietnam Syndrome'. This is the erroneous belief, once deeply felt in the US military, that the war in south east Asia was lost not on the battlefields of Vietnam but in the living rooms of middle America. Hostile television coverage, especially after the 1968 Tet offensive, is alleged to have turned American public opinion against the war effort and caused the only defeat in American military history. No one who adheres to this view has yet been able to explain how the United States was able to continue waging the war without public support for another five years – longer than American involvement in World War Two. But the widespread belief that television coverage lost the war in Vietnam did prompt veteran British broadcaster, Robin Day, to ask whether democracies would ever be able to wage war in the television age. The answer was clearly that they could, but the reasons for the war – and its continuation – needed to be seen as just and justified. The real issue was whether democratic publics were prepared to sustain support as the casualties mounted and the body bags came home. Ever since then, there has taken root the belief that the public was not going to tolerate large casualties – on either side. This has given rise to the development of high-technology weapons designed to hit their targets with an accuracy unprecedented in military history alongside a public relations strategy designed to explain why things go wrong through 'collateral damage'.

The British were said to have found the solution during the Falklands conflict of 1982, when only 29 reporters and crew – all British – were allowed to accompany the Task Force, and they became heavily dependant upon the military for communicating their copy back to London. The reporters bonded with the soldiers and 'our boys' enjoyed highly favourable coverage, even when things went wrong.

⁶ John Simpson, *News from No Man's Land: Reporting the World* (Macmillan 2002).

Having shared the same facilities, food, toilets and dangers as the troops, the journalists developed an empathy for what the soldiers were about to experience as the Task Force sailed south to meet the Argentinian forces. The reporters also relied upon the military for communicating copy back to London, so working with the military was again the order of the day. The historical co-operation duly restored, the reality was that the media had become part of the official propaganda machine. Never was this more apparent than in 1991 during the Gulf War when the military's desired view of the conflict as a clean, 'smart' war with minimal casualties – on both sides – was reflected by the media. This was despite the Baghdad loophole when, for the first time in one of our wars, our journalists reported from the enemy capital under fire. This was regarded as an act of treachery in some quarters, and the *Daily Mail* even accused the BBC of being the 'Baghdad Broadcasting Organisation' when a coalition bombing raid on the Al Firdos installation in the Amiriya suburb of Baghdad resulted in the deaths of around 400 people, mainly women and children. So alarmed at the resultant images were the coalition planners that there is some evidence that they altered their bombing schedule of Baghdad. And when journalists at the end of the 100 hour ground war came across a bombed out convoy on the so-called 'Highway of Death' out of Kuwait City, there is again some evidence that these pictures contributed towards the decision to halt the war.

Official fear of the potential power of the media to transform pro-war public opinion into an anti-war stance is an interesting phenomenon, not least because it has never really happened. Such is the potency of the Vietnam Syndrome. But it also dates back to the very origins of the war correspondent, when civilians first turned up on the battlefield to witness soldiers going about their brutal business. This was when William Howard Russell of *The Times* covered the Crimean War in the mid nineteenth century. He was appalled at much of what he saw and his newspaper thundered against the military leadership for the poor conditions, supplies and decisions it was making. The military knee jerk response was to introduce military censorship, and thus began the strained relationship about which so much has now come to be written at the expense of the degree of co-operation which in fact existed through the First and Second World Wars and, until recently, most of the smaller wars fought ever since.

A tale of two (or three) cultures

There are certainly institutional or even cultural differences between the institutions of the military and the media. At first glance, these differences seem irreconcilable. The military value authority, order, hierarchy, co-operation, teamwork, traditions, togetherness. They respect loyalty, duty, honour, courage, obedience and fitness. The media on the other hand distrust authority, while reporters are highly individualistic and competitive. When the military make a mistake, people die. When the media make a mistake, they publish a correction. The media believe that war is too nasty a business to be left solely to the generals, although enlightened generals understand the need to include the media as part of their democratic responsibility and accountability. It is far better to have the media on board than to have them hostile, and in wars of national survival this tends to happen anyway. Even in the different kinds of conflicts that have been occurring since the Gulf War – sometimes called ‘operations other than war’ – the media have been broadly supportive of the international interventions that took place in Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, East Timor and Afghanistan. So why all the mutual suspicion?

Part of the problem derives from the peacetime relationship. It may trite to state it, but the media thrive on bad news. When something bad happens in the peacetime military – a rape in Okinawa or Cyprus, a murder enquiry on a military base – it attracts headlines, as do such issues as women at sea or homosexuals in the armed forces. Moreover, until the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11th 2001, there had been a marked decline in the number of specialised defence correspondents working in the media. When the nation is at peace, the military therefore do not normally attract sustained media attention, except when things go wrong. This irritates the military and it makes them even more prickly when the nation goes to war and all sorts of reporters turn up without sufficient knowledge, experience or expertise to understand fully the intricacies of military activities. The Pentagon and the British Ministry of Defence issue guidelines on what reporters can and cannot say. In Britain, this is known as the Green Book.⁷ This requires reporters to gain accreditation but limits the numbers of reporters who will be allowed access to the front line. During the Gulf War, General Dugan said of the media corps: ‘Now 1500 is not an unmanageable number, but it is a number that

⁷ A copy of this can be found at www.mod.uk/news/green_book/maintext.htm

cries out for management'.⁸ But the problem with this news management system revolving around the pools is that journalists resent having to either share their reports with other reporters or resent being dependent on other reporters for their material.

Indeed, this system contains within it the potential for chaos. Such is the degree of resentment that, during Operation Desert Storm, many journalists decided to break away from the pool system and report on events for themselves without the watchful eyes of military 'minders'. Dubbed the 'unilaterals', these reporters displayed all the characteristics so feared by the military. There may have been many more of them if it had not been for a CBS crew being arrested by the Iraqis on the Kuwaiti border at the start of the war, thus deterring others from following suite. But the fragmented nature of the media corps was also illustrated at Ras al-Khafji when US marines engaged with Iraqi ground forces for the first time. The accredited correspondents accompanying coalition forces displayed considerable resentment at the unilaterals who also turned up to report on events for themselves, claiming they could ruin things for all of them. This reveals that many journalists are happy to buy into 'the deal' that is the pool system: a trade off of access and safety for restrictions on what can or cannot be said. This may be of some comfort to the military, but disquiet remains about those who are not prepared to play along with the system.

For such reporters, wars are very dangerous places. Many die in search of this alternative – or quasi-independent – 'truth'. One has to question, however, just how many pieces they actually add to the jigsaw puzzle of war. For, as several Gulf War polls revealed, the public trust the military more much than they trust journalists. It was disquieting for liberals to learn that the public was prepared to accept military censorship if that speeded up victory and saved lives. The American public was happy to suspend knowledge about what was going on until after the war was won. The reputation of journalists during Desert Storm was not helped by a brilliant military decision to allow their press conferences to be televised live. This allowed the coalition to speak directly to the publics in whose name they were operating without the normal mediating role of journalism. When reporters asked questions, they seemed far less competent than the military spokesmen trying to reply to them in terms that could be easily understood. For the 24/7 real-time stations such as CNN, these press conferences filled valuable airtime, but 24 hours is still a long-time.

⁸ General M. Dugan, 'Generals versus Journalists' in H. Smith (ed.), *The Media and the Gulf War: the press and democracy in wartime* (Washington, 1992) p. 60.

Expert talking heads – retired generals or experienced reporters - were recruited to fill in, and this resulted in massive amounts of speculation about, for example, when and how the ground war would take place. And this merely compounded the military's irritability with the media.

One suspects from talking to many serving officers that they would be far happier fighting within a media vacuum. To some extent, this was what happened in Afghanistan, but there can be few observers who are happy with the sketchy war coverage of that conflict. Moreover, during the Kosovo conflict of 1999, very few journalists went into Kosovo itself once the NATO bombing began; if NATO's bombs didn't kill them, then the Serbs allegedly committing acts of genocide may well have done to avoid being captured on film. The consequence of this, however, was intense media speculation on the scale of the alleged genocide. After the war, it emerged that this had not taken place on anything like the scale portrayed by the media at the time. Again, during the Israeli Defence Force's operation in Jenin during 2002, the decision was made to exclude the media altogether. The result was world-wide media speculation that a 'massacre' of the Palestinians was taken place, which was subsequently unsubstantiated by a United Nations enquiry. In other words, the dangers of excluding the media from a military operation can be greater than the risks of including them. It is, quite simply, not an option for democratic military establishments.

The rise of 'Perception Management'

The alternative has seen the rise of military Public Information (PI) in NATO parlance. In the United States, they call it Public Affairs (PA) and in the UK it is termed Media Operations (Media Ops). Because of the proliferation of military deployments by these countries since the end of the Cold War, PI has attempted to become highly professionalized. One would expect modern organisations to devote considerable attention to their public image but in the military of the past this was largely confined to recruitment campaigns. Also, because the media had been largely supportive, there was little need to promote military activity as anything other than a heroic activity. Perhaps the change came during the First World War, or rather afterwards when the sheer scale of the slaughter became known and fuelled the rise of pacifist movements. There were more conscientious objectors in the Second World War than in the First. And with the advent of nuclear technology and the threat of mutual

assured destruction, the need to justify even low intensity conflict against the backdrop of such a threat grew. With this need came the recognition, in democracies at least, that taxpayers' money being diverted into large defence budgets would require some justification or what we would now call public accountability and this, in turn, gave rise to what was effectively propaganda, although given another name.

Now, largely as a response to the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), the military look at ways of 'shaping the information space'. New or emerging doctrines, such as Information Operations (IO) embrace the notion of information as a weapon in wartime or as a tool in pre- and post-conflict environments. The increasing dependence of the military upon communications technology has also increased its vulnerability to what has been described as 'an electronic Pearl Harbour'. But this also brings new opportunities for helping to shape the information 'space' in order to reduce casualties, on all sides, in dangerous environments. In the early 1990s, the emphasis in this thinking was more on systems – computer and electronic networks – than on people. But since 19 hijackers flew civilian aircraft into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11th September 2001, there has been a discernible shift back on to people in what is now being termed 'Perception Management'.⁹

Perception Management is an ugly phrase, the latest in a long line of euphemisms devised by western democracies to detract from them being in the business of propaganda. This propaganda is invariably overt and falls within tried and tested techniques developed during the course of the twentieth century. It is based upon western value systems which place great emphasis on truth-telling and avoiding deliberate lies. But such terminology is not very sophisticated when we are discussing propaganda. Yet it helps to explain the media's misunderstanding of the most celebrated propaganda scandal of most recent times. This was when, as part of its declared 'war' on terrorism, the Pentagon announced in early 2002 that it had established an Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) to conduct a global campaign for hearts and minds to portray the United States as a 'force for good in the world'. The problem arose when it was also admitted that deception would be part of the OSI's remit. The media immediately assumed that the Pentagon was going to use it as a vehicle for deception, when this would not only have belied all the lessons learned from earlier conflicts but it also displayed considerable misunderstanding of the doctrinal distinctions between deception as an ancient weapon of war and other

⁹ See the special issue of *The Journal of Information Warfare*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2002).

forms of influence operations. Nor did the Pentagon, itself engaged in a turf war about this issue with the State Department, explain this clearly. The OSI debacle revealed the gap which had opened up between the military and the media in terms of the one being unable to explain itself properly to a suspicious media corps only too able and willing to believe the worst.

Why had the historical tradition of trust and mutual co-operation broken down so seriously? Part of the problem lay within an expanding media corps which, since 1963 in Britain and 1973 in the United States, had seen fewer and fewer journalists having served in the armed forces with the abandonment of national military service. Anglo-American journalists have subsequently come to regard the military as somehow separate from the rest of society, with its own rules and customs – and language – that are unfathomable to the uninitiated. This is less of a problem in most European countries where conscription for at least a year remains an expected part of a citizen's duty to the state. In Britain, the decades long struggle with IRA made soldiers in uniform a terrorist target and the British public accordingly became less used to seeing soldiers in military dress on the streets, increasing still further the degree of mutual separation. The military obsession with Operational Security (OPSEC) was matched in the United States because American forces, in Lebanon for example or on the *USS Cole*, became primary targets of anti-American terrorist attacks. This, matched with the Vietnam-inspired fear of body bags returning home, created a parallel obsession in the US military with Force Protection. These policies, while understandably designed to protect the lives of soldiers on deployment at home and abroad, tended towards a philosophy of operational security that owed more to its effectiveness with secrecy rather than publicity.

But developments within news media organisations have not helped either. Modern journalism requires a different type of recruit than in the past. Because of the sheer expense of maintaining or sending teams of correspondents to the numerous trouble spots of the world, the number of residential reporters on full-time contracts is a luxury only the major news organisations like CNN or the BBC can afford. Most of the smaller newspapers, radio or television stations tend to rely either on these big Anglo-American players or upon the wire services, of which Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France Presse remain the main players. While this means that the same pictures can be seen around the world by a global audience, because the wire services provide different media with the same copy which, in turn,

is converted into copy appropriate to the audience of the media outlet, the illusion of plurality is given when a near monopoly actually exists. Moreover, the reporters themselves are changing. Fewer and fewer specialised defence correspondents are being replaced by multi-purpose 'all rounders'. The cynic might term them jacks-of-all-trades and masters of none.

When a news organisation does decide to send a reporter to a particular trouble spot, it is usually when things have gone wrong. If the reporter is inexperienced, then it may be that the subsequent 'parachute journalism' lacks context about where the crisis has come from. If the pictures available are shocking – genocide, miles of refugees, starving children - it may make for excellent television with a human interest angle but some politicians have suggested that these type of pictures have come increasingly to put them under a pressure to 'do something' to stop the horror. In Somalia 1992, for example, it is often asserted that 'television got us in and television got us out'. This, however, does not stand up to academic analysis, as some research has shown.¹⁰ To summarise this work into the so-called 'CNN Effect' (a term much resented in the BBC), the pictures of starving Somalis mainly began to appear once the decision had been made to send in US troops on its 'humanitarian intervention' while the notorious images of the dead US Ranger being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu post-dated the Clinton administration's decision to withdraw. The alleged impact of dramatic television footage of human suffering in far off lands has therefore been exaggerated. The findings are that when there is a firm foreign policy – such as the determination of Washington not to intervene in Bosnia until 1995, or not to get involved in the Rwandan genocide of the previous year – then the pictures can, and indeed have, been resisted. But where there is no policy, or when the policy is either forming or changing, such as was the case in Northern Iraq after the Gulf War or with the fall of the safe havens in Bosnia in 1995, then the pictures can act as a driver on the foreign policy-making process.

This recognition has acted as an impetus on the perceived official need to control the media output. As such, it is an act of insecurity on the part of a generation of politicians weaned on television and obsessed with 'spin doctors'. The word here within a democratic context is not so much 'control' but 'influence'. Drawing upon corporate experience, the real word is 'management'. Whereas ten years ago, most public relations experts working within the corporate sector devised

¹⁰ See in particular Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: the myth of news, foreign policy and intervention* (Routledge, 2001).

strategies for keeping their bosses out of the news, this has now completely turned around into a more proactive strategy designed to pre-empt bad news by setting the media agenda. The dangers of this have been exposed by the Enron and Worldcom scandals in the United States, but the influence of the thinking has permeated government and the military alike. It may have worked exceptionally well during the Gulf War, but when the Department of Defence released pictures from Guantanamo Bay of the captured Al-Qaida prisoners, it backfired outside the United States because it appeared that the prisoners were being ill-treated or at best insensitively. That some British newspapers expressed outrage was indicative of the lack of sensitivity on the part of US Public Affairs officers that what might have played well to an American domestic audience would have an opposite reaction in the media of even its strongest ally.

The Pacific and Atlantic oceans thus remain as much as a gigantic perceptual chasm as they have always been, despite all the talk of globalization. And this is the real propaganda challenge for Washington in the 'war' against terrorism. For the moment, the US media are happy to stay 'on message', although one has to ask, subsequent to Robin Day, for how long? It is outside the United States that the real perception management challenge remains. And, despite the growth of the internet, the main 'front' in the global battle for hearts and minds remains the international mass media. What is so interesting is that the most advanced communications society in the world often gets this so badly wrong. For example, once the bombing of Afghanistan began in October 2001, Taliban spokesmen - who understood the potential influence of television so much that they banned it within their own country - also seemed to understand the global news cycle far better than Washington. Eight hours ahead in terms of time zones, they were able to set the day's news agenda about the course of the war. They were able to make claims about collateral damage caused by the American bombing, about downed helicopters and about Taliban successes, that forced American spokesmen onto the defensive, always having to respond to claims made to the media earlier that day. It was not until the creation of Coalition Information Centres in Washington, London and – crucially – in Islamabad several weeks later that this situation was reversed.

The rise of Perception Management in itself is bound to raise media suspicion. The media need official spokes people to provide them with information, but if that information is blatantly skewed it defeats its own purpose. Public

Information officers are keen to emphasise that, if for no other reason than this, they are not in the business of influencing the media, and that they are merely providers of 'facts'. Although slightly disingenuous in its argument because they are rarely in a position to give out all the 'facts' perhaps on OPSEC grounds, one can see their point. One problem they face is the old secrecy vs. publicity dilemma in an age of instant global communications. They hit this wall in the Kosovo conflict because the Serbs were much quicker to provide television coverage of NATO collateral damage on convoys and trains than PI officers were able to offer explanations of such accidents. Caught on the defensive again, NATO was not able to put this right until Tony Blair's communications officer, Alistair Campbell, was brought in to overhaul the NATO information/media campaign. It was Campbell again who was behind the Coalition Information Centres created for the 'war' against terrorism.

Information Operations doctrine does recognise PI as part of its 'influence operations', alongside PSYOPS, Public Diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and other 'soft' elements of persuasion. And this is perhaps where the main danger to harmonious military-media relations lies. The free media do not see themselves as propaganda instruments for state propaganda or military IO. That is why they reacted so badly to the OSI, especially once it was realised that deception forms part of IO doctrine. Although many of the unspecialised reporters might not have realised it at the time, the media are being seen in some military circles as part of the problem rather than the solution. When, for example, during the Kosovo conflict, NATO bombed the Serb official television station RTS, this was part of the attempt to 'shape the information space' by denying the Serb population access to domestic 'information' sources. NATO claimed, not without justification, that RTS was a blatant propaganda channel and was thus a legitimate target. The world's media rallied round the cause of 'freedom of speech' and were highly critical of the bombing, not realising that IO doctrine had advanced to the point where factories and shipyards were no longer primary targets, as in the industrialised warfare of the past, but rather radio towers, TV stations and power stations were now in the front line of information warfare.

Conclusions

However much they protest, the media are not simple observers of conflict. Their very presence as observers, rather like the Heisenberg principle in physics, changes the nature of conflict. The military have come to understand this and, despite their

institutional instinctive reaction to exclude the media's prying gaze, they recognize that media reporting is part of their responsibilities to democratic accountability. The media management arrangements they have devised, however, are often better suited to military imperatives than to media requirements. In the past, this has not been a problem for the most part, despite some friction over field censorship. Today, the changing nature of military interventions and the emerging doctrines to meet the new environments do not suit a mass media that has changed out of all recognition from the press corps once referred to by General Eisenhower as 'my friends'. As recently as the Gulf War, a major report into the military-media relationship described the co-operation in terms of being 'America's team: the odd couple'.¹¹ Wars are more difficult to justify to democratic publics which prefer peace and prosperity to conflict and who have greater access to media coverage to promote their dissenting views. Caught in the crossfire between political decisions about war and peace, the military have had to devise operational systems for dealing with an increasingly sceptical press corps who are looking for trouble in the form of bad news. Because no news is worse still – if you say 'no comment' to a journalist, they think you are trying to hide something – proactive PI lays the military open to charges of propaganda. Yet if the doctrines for waging conflict in the information age accept as a central weapon (or tool) the need to conduct 'influence operations', then such charges are inevitable. This accelerates the spiral of mutual suspicion. When all is said and done, perhaps this is a far healthier situation for democracies than the somewhat snug mutual co-operation and dependency of the past.

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¹¹ Frank Aukofer and William P. Lawrence, *America's team; the odd couple, a report on the relationship between the media and the military*. (The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, [Nashville] 1995)



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