

Media and War Now Even "Embedding " of Journalists

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The war in Iraq and its coverage by CNN, BBC, AP and Reuters has once again highlighted the importance of media in modern warfare. As the armies all over the world must be analyzing use of various weapons and strategies in this war, it is essential to look at the media angle.

In fact, the use of mass media as an additional weapon of war assumed significance during the First World War and it reached a level of higher sophistication in the Second World War. The use of radio in particular and news agencies for management of information and disinformation became very significant in the Second World War period. The word propaganda assumed its current negative meaning during that period, as it was a positive word before that.

War by media is categorized as low intensity warfare alongside subversion, insurgency and psychological sabotage. Propaganda theorists say that in effect the human being should be considered the priority objective in a political war. And conceived as the military target of a guerrilla war, the human being has his most critical point in his mind. Once his mind has been reached the "political animal" has been defeated, without necessarily receiving bullets. In Central America, the US doctrine of low intensity warfare against Nicaragua was based on the accumulated experience of Germans in World War-II, British in Malaya, Kenya and Ireland, the French in Algeria and specially U.S. in Vietnam. Andrew Messing of the National Defense Council of the United States called the region an "accessible laboratory" for the study of low intensity conflict. However, the use of media in Gulf War, Yugoslav War, Afghan War and now Iraq War appears to be that of a force multiplier.

C.P.Scott, the legendary editor of the Manchester *Guardian* said at the end of World War One, "If people knew the truth the war would be stopped tomorrow. But of course they don't know, and they can't know." During that war, the Chief of the British Military Intelligence was asked to describe the ideal war correspondent. "He is a man", said the general, who writes what he is told is true, or even what he thinks to be true, but never what he knows to be true." A well-known correspondent of that war, Sir Phillip Gibbs, described the situation even better, "There was no need of censorship, for we were our own censors...The problem was nobody believed us."

A legendary news-agency man, Kent Cooper, wrote in his autobiography how the Associated Press was used by the U.S. Government, "President Wilson and Secretary of State Lansing gave the AP an exclusive, which was a propaganda `plant'. A German coded message was intercepted by the British intelligence service, which gave it to President Wilson. It asked Mexico to seek adherence and military support from Japan for a Mexican-Japanese attack on the U.S. from the

Southwest if America went to war against Germany. Lancing in his memoirs written several years later, confirmed that he and Wilson secretly schemed to use the AP solely to incite public demand for a declaration of war. The 'cold-blooded proposition' of Germany's Secretary of Foreign Affairs in one day accomplished a change in sentiment and public opinion that would have required months to accomplish. From the time that telegram was published, the United States entry into the war was assured since it could no longer be doubted that it was desired by the American people from Maine to California and from Michigan to Texas."

Kent Cooper's comment on this episode is also revealing, "I never thought that American Government would ever secretly scheme to plant propaganda for war in the news here at home. I was wrong. In 1912, our own Government followed the German lead (Kaiser's Government used the Wolff Bureau, its national news agency, by turning news into propaganda to create a jealous rage against anything not German). It was done so effectively that for the first time in history a Government incited its people by propaganda to ask for a declaration of war before they were ordered headlong into it and became the second in the history successfully to use news to incite the people to demand war." Another important fact about this episode is that the AP agreed not to disclose the source and thus the AP and not the U.S. Government stood sponsor for the accuracy of the fake German message. Since then technology and sophistication in news manipulation has increased many fold.

Vietnam War was the first to have the use of television and perhaps it could not be managed so well by the U.S. generals and is usually blamed for the US defeat in Vietnam. There had been lot of controversy about the coverage of Falkland War and also about the U.S. invasion of Grenada when the media was not allowed to go to the war theatre with the invading troops. In the war in the Gulf in 1991 the media management was much improved and perhaps played a major role in projecting mainly the story of the U.S. led forces. In fact, media have been turned into weapons of psychological warfare, which can justify a war and can continue the war of minds without even a formal declaration prior to, during and even after the actual war

During the Vietnam War, the propaganda was that it was a conflict of Vietnamese against Vietnamese into which the US threw their weight on the side of democracy and freedom. This assumption pervaded the media and was in fact quite false and dishonest like the Nazi propaganda when the Germans were overrunning the Czechoslovakia. But it was so insistent and so powerful and insidious that a great many people believed in the fundamental goodness of the US mission. There appeared to be saturation media coverage of Vietnam War but big story of the war was not reported until it was virtually over. In the Vietnam War atrocities were neither isolated, nor aberrations. But this was seldom judged to be news and therefore seldom told. With the assumption that the war was right, atrocities were reported as "mistakes" which were "blundered into".

The British term 'pacification', which they used in relation to Ireland gained currency in Vietnam and became familiar to newspaper readers and television viewers in the West, but whose real meaning was seldom understood. Pacification meant killing as many people as possible in a given area within a given period of time. In 1971 the U.S. Ninth Division killed 11,000 people in a pacification campaign named "Operation Speedy Express". Two diligent *Newsweek* reporters discovered that almost half of these were civilians and this was a mass slaughter

condoned and covered up. The reporters wrote the story but six months later a watered down version appeared and no one was made responsible. In this sense even in Vietnam the management of media was quite a success.

The ultimate failure of the Vietnam enterprise (1961-1975) became undeniable by April 1975 when Saigon fell to North Vietnamese troops. So painful was the Vietnam experience that both the U.S. Army and civilians seemed to want to put Vietnam out of memory. Many thought that journalists should not have been allowed at all and tried to put the blame of defeat on war coverage. Perhaps the Vietnam controversy led to the decision by the Reagan administration refusing permission for reporters to cover the US invasion of Grenada (October 25, 1983). Furious protests from the media led to a negotiated pool plan for coverage of future military actions. In the NBC Nightly News Commentary John Chancellor termed the invasion "a bureaucrats dream: Do anything. No one is watching." Gen. John W. Vessey Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chief's of Staff appointed a commission to consider future press-military relations headed by retired Gen. Winant Sidle. The result was the "combat-correspondent pool" under which a small handful of physically fit reporters would be taken to combat zones. During the 1989 Panama invasion the scheme failed miserably as the pool was flown to Panama late, then virtually barred from witnessing any fighting for fear that details of civilian casualties would be reported.

By the 1991 Gulf War lot more thought and preparation went in and twelve media combat pools were formed. Two of them, of 18 reporters each, specifically covered U.S. Army and Marine Corps' ground combat activities; eight others, of seven reporters each, split their coverage among the four U.S. armed services. There was a five-member pool to observe naval activities, and there was a "quick reaction" pool sent to areas of hostility on quick basis. Guidelines established by the Pentagon sought "to keep the public informed while protecting the safety of armed forces personnel in combat." Under these rules, reporters covered US combat activities as part of a group, or media "pool," and are escorted to those areas by a Department of Defense (DOD) official. The escort officer on the scene must approve any written or broadcast report before it was released to the other reporters covering the war. Most of the pool reporters covering U.S. forces were those who worked for the U.S. news organizations, although there was a slot for a Saudi reporter and another for a foreign journalist in each of the 18-member combat pools. If there was a disagreement about the contents of a pool report the report was sent immediately to public affairs officials at the JIB in Dhahran for review by them and the appropriate media organization. If no agreement was reached at that level, the disputed item was to be sent to Pentagon for review there by DOD officials in conjunction with the reporter's supervisor. The opportunity to impartially record what happened in the Gulf War was lost; since almost all news came from military sources, independent reporting was virtually impossible and some of the most respected war photographers, including Don McCullin, were not given pool credentials to cover frontline activities.

Only journalists who signed an agreement to abide by U.S. Defense Department restrictions on the coverage of the war were chosen to work in military pools; attempts to move independently were impeded by military roadblocks. Some of the correspondents have complained that they had been accompanied constantly even to the bath room when on a warship to prevent unsupervised conversation with marines or pilots. Most of the journalists were lodged in a hotel

in Riyadh from the outbreak of war and were entirely dependent on military personnel for transportation and access to news. The detention of a *New York Times* journalist and confiscation of his credentials demonstrated the imposed constraints of 'pool' coverage after he interviewed local residents in a small border town in Saudi Arabia.

The use of propaganda and the disinformation during the Gulf War was widespread and effective in achieving its purpose. The Coalition forces succeeded in giving and maintaining the impression that it was a "clean" war in which the use of high-tech weapons resulted in negligible human casualties. For this purpose wide use was made in press briefings of video films demonstrating the accuracy of the new weapons, military spokesmen avoided discussion on the human cost of the war and a new kind of jargon was introduced (using phrases such as 'collateral damage' for civilian casualties). In spite of the fact that up to 100,000 Iraqi soldiers and unknown number of civilians were killed in the war, there has been little coverage in the media of the unpalatable aspects of the war. There were other uses of media coverage of the Gulf war. It was serving as advertising to promote new weapons. The Patriot missile was advertised and was later sold to the South Koreans who had enough money to pay for the deployment of this new weapon system.

Another interesting feature which got consolidated during Yugoslav and Afghan wars and was also used to great success in Iraq war is multi-point briefings: official briefings from different centers of power. Central Command, Pentagon and White House gave briefings at different times so that television news channels could broadcast all these briefings live. CNN, BBC and Fox could take this one sided message around the world. During this war even British Parliament became such a center where Tony Blair and his defense minister could speak on the subject and get live coverage on news networks.

The "embedding" of media persons with U.S. forces is the latest in the use of media in the Iraq war. The public affairs guidance on embedding of media during possible future operations/ deployments in the US Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility were ready on February 03, 2003. The policy paragraph 2.A says, "The Department of Defense (DOD) policy on media coverage of future military operations is that media will have long-term, minimally restrictive access to U.S. air, ground and naval forces through embedding. Media coverage of any future operation will, to a large extent, shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead. This holds true of the U.S. public; the public in allied countries whose opinion can affect the durability of our coalition; and publics in countries where we conduct operations whose perceptions of us can affect the cost and duration of our involvement. Our ultimate strategic success in bringing peace and security to this region will come in our long-term commitment to supporting our democratic ideals. We need to tell the factual story - good or bad - before others seed the media with disinformation and distortions, as they most certainly will continue to do. Our people in the field need to tell our story - only commanders can ensure the media get to the story alongside the troops. We must organize for and facilitate access of national and international media to our forces, including those forces engaged in ground operations, with goal of doing so from the start. To accomplish this, we will embed media with our units. These embedded media will live, work and travel as part of the units with which they are embedded to facilitate maximum, in-depth coverage of the U.S. forces

in combat and related operations. Commanders and public affairs officers must work together to balance the need for media access with the need for operational security."

The media representative and the organization he or she represents before embedding sign an agreement. By paragraph 4(a) of this agreement the media employee agrees to "participate in the embedding process and to follow the direction and orders of the Government related to such participation. The media employee further agrees to follow Government regulations. The media employee acknowledges that failure to follow any directions, order, regulation, or ground rule may result in termination of the media employee's participation in the embedding process."

In the Iraq war there were about 500 embedded journalists giving out the U.S. version from different theaters of war and this gave additional support to already established media manipulation practices. It is clear that the news management effort is not to allow media to give the real picture of the war but to give the impression that enough is being told. However, many journalists also became tools of the authorities in making sure that media war was also won by the US led forces.

Because there is so much media today, we tend to believe that we are given more information and we can find the truth. This is not so. The media is managed to the disadvantage of the truth, particularly more so in times of war and to win the war at home and internationally. However, the war is fought in the name of high principles. Naturally media-haves have advantage over the have-nots in this area of modern warfare