



**MIKLÓS ZRÍNYI NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY
PHD SCHOOL OF MILITARY SCIENCE**

JUDIT OSZTI

**THE ROLE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL
ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT WARS AND IN SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION**

**PhD Thesis
Author's resume**

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Reasons for selecting the theme, an outline of the scientific problem

Media played a decisive role in each and every important social, political, or military event and change of both the 20th Century and the turn of the millennium. The development of communication, information technology, and telecommunication created new structures in social life. Social, cultural time and space have been shaped through modern technologies, and new media increasingly converging into each other due to digitalisation. Through their specific characteristics mass media and electronic media have grown into a political power which does not only inform, respond, but also prepare the social acceptance of political and military decisions. Although it shapes and occasionally manipulates public opinion it is a tool itself which is increasingly used by politicians, political powers, and military leaders. The central institutions of media have always been under tight political control in dictatorships while in democracies the pluralism of information sources and the freedom of information belong to fundamental rights. However, in emergency situations – wars or other armed conflicts – media have been regarded as extremely significant means of propaganda by certain governments. For the warring parties it is of determining significance to have the means and objectives of their military actions accepted by their citizens. Mass media have a determining role in this process: on the one hand it airs the opinion of public and on the other hand it shapes and channels that. By presenting, selecting, or controlling the events mass media can influence the acceptance or refusal by social players. In current wars struggle is not confined to the battlefield but it spread over onto various media interfaces too: for the public legitimacy is as important as military success.

Research objectives and techniques

On the basis of the above outlined points I wished to prove that the role of electronic media has fundamentally changed in modern wars and other armed conflicts. My primary efforts were aimed at analysing military actions and events whose media interpretation brought about significant changes either in the field of technological or content-wise interpretation. My objective was, after the necessary theoretical ground-laying and outlining a historical background, to provide an overview of the history of development of roles played by media in waging wars.

I wished to prove the presumption that apart from simple fact-finding modern media is able to influence the social responses to and opinions about military actions, including their handling by political players. My objective was to examine what role the imagery of modern media plays in coming to the fore by ethical aspects, military law, and moral considerations during modern wars. I wished to analyse what risks and dangers can be presented by the technological development in the field of mass communication if used and exploited by terrorist organisations for achieving their objectives; what relations can be detected between the actions of electronic media and the shaping of security perception.

The global spread of media culture presents a tremendous social challenge. This fact comprised a justification for beginning the discussion of the present dissertation with laying theoretic grounds, an overview of the special literature, and finishing it with pointing out a few issues in the field of press ethics. I regarded the exploration of special literature an extremely important objective after identifying the theme and before writing my dissertation. The printed special literature, including books and military-related references of articles and study papers published by military periodicals proved to be a significant source of information. (Material was collected from special literature in Hungarian, English, Russian, and Ukrainian languages and from literature translated into Hungarian.) Electronic media comprised another important source of research material, that is contents, data bases, and archives of news television and radio channels accessible on the internet. It was the internet that helped me with orientation in the mass of catalogues and bibliographies. This opportunity proved to be a great chance not only to explore retrospective materials but also to overview current materials. Personal interviews of both military personnel and civilians who could give me an account of their own impressions proved to be very useful and a lot of impulses, lessons learned, and experiences based on their own missions.

A brief summary of the chapters

In Chapter One of the dissertation I analyse the role of media in modern communities, including the works of the most outstanding domestic and international experts. I present the impact of technological development ranging from the printing of books to the broadband digital data transfer, opening new perspectives in the flow of information on the changes in the notion of publicity, and policy making. I examine the role of mass communication in the

control over power and in thematisation of common talk. I outline the interrelations between technological convergence and information society. I point out the changes in social space and time as a consequence of the globalisation of media, and the disappearance of national state borders influenced by the development in the field of telecommunication and virtual space. I lay out the specific opportunities of our medium, the internet, in the field of mass communication, in the new dimensions of publicity, including the threats involved too. I examine the new structure of knowledge, the access to information, the knowledge gap, and the problems of credibility and trust in the information society of our age. Because of its importance I pay special attention to the issues of changed functions, ethics, and responsibility of media.

In Chapter Two I recall a few episodes from the past in order to illustrate that media have always paid special attention to wars, military activities, and armed conflicts. I highlighted primarily military events whose media coverage constituted a milestone in the history of press. I also presented the typical tools representing that particular age. The chapter also focuses on the relationship between power and publicity, on the use of propaganda and censorship including their impact on the public during the Spanish Civil War, World Wars I and II, and the Cold War. In the end of the chapter I analyse the media coverage of the first “televised” war, the Vietnam War, including its consequences with the use of several conclusions from various study papers and include a brief account of armed conflicts of the late last century.

In Chapter Three I evaluate the role of electronic media in the conflicts of the turn of the millennium. I examine what structural and qualitative changes were brought about by modernisation in electronic communications and mass communications with special regard to military sphere. I include statements on the lessons learned by the USA military command from the information management mistakes during the Vietnam War and the impact of these on the relations between the military and the media in armed conflicts with American involvement. The first Gulf War, often referred to as the first “real time” war, introduced a great number of changes in the field of military reports, the information of the public, therefore I give a detailed analysis of several studies on the impact of media, its unusually large influence on the values and political mentality of the public. I analyse the role of electronic media during the armed conflicts in the Balkans, including the moral aspects of this role. When presenting the relationship between terrorist organisations regarding the electronic

media as the most important means of raising fear, and the media providing publicity to such groupings I also refer to emerging ethnic problems too. Eventually, I summarise the media coverage of the second Gulf War, including the thorough planning of information provision and its impact on the public opinion.

In Chapter Four I evaluate the publicity of current armed conflicts and point out the dramatically differing roles of pro-war and anti-war media in the case of dictatorships and democracies at war. I examine the extreme moral responsibility of the mass media in shaping public opinion stemming inter alia from the fact that the freedom of press must be compared with security and strategic interests. I point out that today political and military leadership should pay much more attention to information and that media-factor is also a component of operation plans like the enemy, allied troops, or environment. The deployment of communication weapon is a significant momentum and mass communication has become a part of the weaponry.

Summarised conclusions

The development of mass communication tools has revolutionised the transmission of information both in space and time. Today any important event and phenomenon can get to opinion-shaping communities nearly in real time and in a very expressive way. It is a fact even though there is a significant difference in the field of civilisation-technology and the system of requirements towards media in the world.

The relationship between media and politics has become very complex. Public life communication is based on the cooperation between various interest groups while their complex system of relationships remains hidden from the public. The organisation of media-conform events, the political marketing – as a major tool in policy of making programs of competition – makes the structure of publicity even more impenetrable thus influencing the political agenda too.

Not only do news agencies present and interpret events but they also influence and shape them. The role of media in shaping social processes and in shaping public thinking has grown indispensable by now. It has a lion's share in the fact that foreign- or domestic political

events, such as conflicts and wars, often trigger popular movements, mass movements with objectives different from those of the central power or even opposite to them. Moral considerations, refusal of violence, strive and longing for truth, freedom, and liberty. A large number of examples in the history of near past prove that power had to pull back from the force of public and the influence of competent electronic media had a crucial role in it.

With its multifaceted tools electronic media has also presented what words and writing cannot reflect, however expressive they are. That makes the impressive presentation of shocking and deterring world events including armed conflicts of particular significance the responsibility of electronic media. However, their role is not just that: they developed into a tool of communication which can take up significant role in conflict management, the dialogue between parties, and in guaranteeing security.

Organisations and persons committed to universal values pay an increased attention to issues of military ethics which determine the military code of conduct particularly in relation to civil population under the unique circumstances of modern wars. The weight and responsibility of media, including electronic media, have jumped in this field too: the need to provide impartial objective information and standing out for genuine values have become a determining moral requirement.

The military media strategy should be in harmony with the national security strategy and the coordinated representation of European and national interests, which present military and politico-military events and representing the values of transatlantic commitment. It is not against the declared freedom of media if their positions are in line with this system of values.

The spread of electronic media in our increasingly globalised world has become a new chapter, moreover a maker, of politico-military events of the near past, present, and future.

The scientific findings of the dissertation

On the basis of the above points I regard the scientific findings of the dissertation as follow:

- I have proved that the spread of electronic media generated fundamental changes in the publicity, content-wise and formal presentation of military events, resulting in its becoming paramount in shaping the public opinion and thinking.
- I have proved, that the role of electronic media has increased in modern warfare: its current function is manifested in the complexity of providing information, communication, and military technology use, therefore its impact on the social judgement of wars and armed conflicts cannot be disregarded by political and military decision makers.
- On the basis of my research I have pointed out that the presentation power of electronic media has a determining role in the increased importance of ethical, military law, and moral considerations of modern wars – upon societal pressure.
- On the basis of my analyses I identified that the rapid development of information technology and communications technologies have become a potential threat and counter-interested groups, such as terrorist organisations can use them against civilisation.
- I have proved that there are close and direct interrelations between the activities of electronic media and security perception.

Some potential areas to apply the research findings

The issues examined and analysed in the present dissertation and the conclusions drawn can be found important by experts dealing with media, particularly with the military role of electronic media, and by those interested in the theme. The findings can serve as a starting point, food for thought for analyses aimed at media coverage of military actions, or armed conflicts. The bibliography and rich list of sources can be used as reference for further research in this particular theme. The dissertation can be used as resource material or background information at training at the Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University.

Curriculum Vitae

I graduated from a Hungarian language secondary school in Munkács (Mukachevo). In 1980 I obtained a college degree in programming and mathematics at the Eötvös Lóránd University then in 1990 a university degree in program designing and mathematics at the ELTE

University. Since 1979 I have worked at the Zrínyi Miklós Military Academy and later at its legal successor at the Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University. At first I worked as a program designer at the REVA Department then as a senior administrator at the Centre of Information Technology. Since 2003 I have worked as Head of Information Technology Directorate then of the Department of System Development of the University Information Technology Service Providing Centre. Since 1990 I have been the system engineer of the central computer network of the university. For long years I have participated in the public life at the university, in the activities of the University Council, now Senate. From the beginning to its end I was one of the editors of the University Forum (Nemzetvédelmi Egyetemi Fórum). In 1975 I passed Russian language examination at advanced level, in 1984 I passed English language examination at intermediate level, then in 1997 at advanced level (in military English). I also speak Ukrainian. I am member of the Society of Military Science and Security Policy. At the PhD School of the Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University I passed my final examination on 1st September 2006.

List of publications

Paul Virilio Háború és televízió c. művének margójára. [Comments on *War and Television* by Paul Virilio] in Társadalom és Honvédelem Issue 1. 2003.

A keresztény és az iszlám kultúra viszonyának elemei a konfliktusokhoz és a háborúhoz. [The Elements of the Relationship of Christian and Islam Culture to Conflicts and War] in Kard és Toll Issue 3. 2006.

A tudománymetria eredményeinek alkalmazása a tudományos kutatómunkában. [The Use of the Findings of Scientific Taxonomy in Scientific Research] Nemzetvédelmi Egyetemi Fórum 2006. 3. szám

Rendhagyó fejtegetés korunk médiaszerepéről. [An Unusual Analysis of the Current Role of Media] to be published in Társadalom és Honvédelem

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Developing Network and Internet Services at the ZMNDU. Lecture. (Co-author: Mihály Molnár PhD)

Шуменски университет “Епископ Константин Преславски”. [Shumen University „Bishop Konstantin Preslavsky”] 2008. december.

Az elektronikus média egyes politikai-katonapolitikai aspektusai [Some Political and Politico-military Aspects of Electronic Media] Co-author Péter Láng PhD To be published in Honvédségi Szemle.

Az elektronikus média szerepe korunk háborúiban. [The Role of Electronic Media in Modern Wars] To be published by TIT HABE.