

The Media and Peace Operations

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Strobel, Warren P. *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Medias Influence On Peace Operations*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997.

Minear, Larry, Colin Scott and Thomas G. Weiss. *The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996.

Late-Breaking Foreign Policy is an incisive account of the relationship between the media, policy makers and the military in recent United States involvement in world hotspots, and the author draws some interesting conclusions concerning the role of each in such a situation. There is a widespread assumption that in todays media conscious world the impact that the media has on all our lives is dynamic and delineating, even to the extent of influencing policy decisions in a country such as the United States. Warren Strobel presents a case that this is not so, and that although the methods of the media might have altered, due to factors such as enhanced technology, its impact on decision-making is limited in scope.

His main evidence for such an argument revolves around case studies of peace operations since the ending of the Cold War, such as Somalia, Rwanda and Haiti, and he includes fascinating journalistic insights into events in all these operations. He gives us glimpses of the vivid interaction between the media and military in an operation such as Somalia, the importance placed on certain pieces of video footage that appeared to contradict what the military was claiming and the urgency that some of the media felt for obtaining evidence. But he does not jump to the conclusion that all this must mean that the media was dictating policy throughout; rather that the effect was threefold. Pervasiveness and speed led to an influence on US military tactics in Somalia (and Haiti), occasionally reports pressured US leaders to expand the scope of the mission, but it was the medias images of October 1993 in Somalia which seem to have influenced the president in developing a new policy in this particular situation. A consensus of opinion has long held this view concerning Somalia, and it is reassuring that Strobel does not discount such a conclusion.

He goes on to argue that the media has two main effects in a peace operation; in the early days as the nation responds to a crisis the media can have a push effect, and during deployment it can have a pull effect. This implies that if independent media pressure drives a decision to intervene then this is a push (or push on?) effect, and if media coverage contributes to a decision to withdraw then there is a pull (or pull out?) effect on decision makers. Strobel concedes that this is what occurred in Somalia.

Evidence is drawn from hundreds of interviews, and the authors association with the media is apparent since it plays a large part in forming the general tone of the piece. The reader needs to be conscious that this triangular relationship is being reviewed in terms of the United States only, and may not be reflective of the mechanics that take place in other peacekeeping deployments with international media and military personnel present. But the book presents novel arguments against the too readily accepted concept of the CNN

factor, with the author stressing the more likely melding of media/military and public affairs objectives within peace operations. It is an intriguing analysis of what happens when the camera focuses on the rifle.

The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action is a visually appealing book that aims to assess and review a proposed idea of a modern crisis triangle of media/government/humanitarian organizations which exists in a world where suffering is becoming commonplace. The authors then reflect upon how these agencies relate and cooperate during such crisis situations, and how effective such cooperation tends to be.

Based on independent policy research by the Humanitarian War Project and using over 2,000 interviews, it is a response to the numerous emergencies we have witnessed over the last few years. The authors attempt to quantify existing working relations between these three influential factors in order to recommend future tactics and ploys to use in inevitable future crises. As they themselves state their objective is to suggest ideas for bettering future media coverage/policy-making/humanitarian action.

A fundamental question asked is Is policy media-led? and the book returns repeatedly to this dilemma, though it is not obvious if the answer is either in the affirmative or negative. Rather the role and impact of these three influential organizations is assessed and re-assessed on both an independent and comparative basis, and the findings are reflective of what may be described as accepted and recognized commonsense practice and awareness. By reviewing case studies of recent newsworthy crises such as Northern Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Liberia and the former Yugoslavia, conclusions are drawn concerning the impact of the media with regard to policy-making. The authors suggest that these situations go through phases that include the levels of media effects on policy, operational courses of action, decision-making within a war zone and on humanitarian aid action.

At this point it may strike the reader that one other element is missing from the crisis triangle: the military. Maybe it would be more appropriate to have a crisis square rather than a triangle, since reference to interaction with the military is made frequently in the book, and, as the case studies cited reveal, the presence of the military is inevitable and influential in most crisis situations. It is pertinent for the three organizations of the media, the policy makers and the aid agencies to be made aware of the best ways of working together and with the military as well, and vice versa of course.

The issues and themes within this book are set out in a logical sequence which allow for easy recognition of a development in thought from the generalized to the specific. Particularly appealing is the inclusion of eye-catching quotations at key stages that reinforce the points made.

This book should be useful for anyone seeking a quick analysis of main influences in modern crises. It will appeal to students and practitioners in media studies and humanitarian issues alike, since it delivers a balanced review of interconnective issues. It

is a snapshot of a pressing concern which delineates modern conflict situations, and stresses the need for future reflection and analysis in this area also.

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