ACRPS International Winter School

Sixth Round: "Media in Wartime"

11 -16 January 2025

Concept Note

The relationship between media and war is complex, multifaceted, and influential. Earlier research suggests that how the media portrays war can dramatically impact both public opinion and the way governments execute wars on the ground.[1] Media coverage can generate support or opposition to war, and recent research suggests that the media has become more inclined to support wars in the twenty-first century.[2] Importantly, the news media can act as both a target and an accomplice in wars, either subjected to control, censorship, and violence, or used as instruments of military power. Key developments, including photography, live technologies, artificial intelligence, social media, and embedded journalism, have often transformed wars into media spectacles.

An early example of war journalism is presented by the Crimean War (1854-1856), whereby journalists and artists were sent to the battlefield on behalf of newspapers to deliver unprecedented witness testimony of the conflict as it unfolded. War, which had once been a remote event, was suddenly opened to public scrutiny. The Second Gulf War (1990-1991) is regarded notable because it ushered in an era of satellite television and cable news. New technologies allowed for a new type of war coverage that enabled people all over the world to watch missiles hitting their targets live. During the 2003 Iraq War, the US Department of Defense introduced "embedded journalism" as a strategic response to criticism about the limited access granted to reporters during previous wars. This controversial practice involves placing journalists within and under the control of one side's military during armed conflict.

Interaction between the military and the media has evolved over time, with a myriad of examples based on both cooperation and antagonism. Governments often seek to harness the power of the media during wartime to garner national and international support, shape narratives, maintain legitimacy, and boost troop morale. As prior research suggests, these government media relations efforts have often succeeded in winning over key publics. However, media outlets have also sometimes played critical, watchdog roles, exposing acts of military transgression, including war crimes.[3]

The Vietnam War presents an interesting example of both cooperation and antagonism. During the early years of the war, US news media dutifully supported the official government line, serving mostly as tools of military propaganda. However, multiple studies suggest that US news media flipped positions in the late 1960s, ultimately helping to turn public opinion against the war. According to this narrative, US media helped bring the Vietnam war to an end.[4]

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1   S. S. Gartner and G. M. Segura, "War, casualties, and public opinion." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (1998): 278–300. Sean Aday, "Leading the Charge: Media, Elites, and the Use of Emotion in Stimulating Rally Effects in Wartime." *Journal of Communication* 60 (2010): 440–465.

2   Lloyd Klein and Donal Malone, "The War of the Words: Mass Media Depictions of Government Justification for Wartime Engagement." Conference Papers - American Sociological Association, 2003 Annual Meeting, Atlanta. Seth C. Lewis and Stephen D. Reese, "What is the War on Terror? Framing through the Eyes of Journalists." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2009).
Stephen D. Cooper, "Press Controls in Wartime: The Legal, Historical, and Institutional Context." *The American Communication Journal,* Summer 2003, Volume 6, Issue 4.

3   Maria Rae, "Trial by media: Why victims and activists seek a parallel justice forum for war crimes." *Crime, Media, Culture* 16, no. 3 (2020): 359 - 374.

4   Andrew J. Huebner, "Rethinking American press coverage of the Vietnam War, 1965–68." *Journalism History* 31, no. 3 (2005): 150 - 161. Rick Berg, "Losing Vietnam: Covering the War in an Age of Technology" In *The Vietnam War and American Culture* edited by John Carlos Rowe and Rick Berg, 115 - 147. New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1991. https://doi.org/10.7312/rowe94322-008

The ubiquity of smartphones, internet access, and social media platforms has transported the experience and complexity of war directly into our lives. Although cyberspace has provided greater access to information, it has also armed states, organizations, and different groups with powerful new tools for information dissemination, disinformation, deception, recruitment, and crowdsourcing. The Russian-Ukrainian war (2022-) is a prime example of how governments can militarize social media platforms, open-source intelligence, and surveillance technologies, using them to disseminate competing strategic narratives and disinformation. In the digital age, therefore, the line between propaganda and public information has become increasingly blurred. Diplomacy, public affairs, and militarily framed information operations have intertwined in a more ambiguous manner.[5]

Arguably, though, the ongoing Israeli war on Gaza (2023-) is the first to see embedded journalism and the militarization of media utilized to their fullest extents. According to preliminary research on media coverage of the war, mainstream Western news media has exhibited strong pro-Israel ideological and cultural biases. Evidence suggests that prominent news outlets have downplayed and justified Israeli violence, often framing it as legitimate self-defense, while highlighting Palestinian violence as uniquely cruel. Moreover, Western news has tended to humanize Israeli victims and de-personalize Palestinian victims. As has often been the case in Western reportage of Israel-Palestine, context has been offered minimally and only to serve Israeli narratives.

Social media, however, has arguably leveled the playing field. Accounts on TikTok, Instagram, X, and other social media platforms have offered a consistent stream of counter-narratives. These platforms have highlighted Israeli atrocities and offered a platform for Palestinian victims to tell their stories. Early, preliminary evidence suggests that the impact on public opinion has been powerful. Young people in the West – those who are more likely to be plugged into social media – have consistently registered views that are more sympathetic to Palestinians.

In the twenty-first century, wartime journalists have faced increased targeting, danger, and risk of fatality, prompting a reassessment of safety and security measures for journalists. Journalists with a critical approach and a commitment to uncovering the truth often find themselves persecuted, discredited, or even murdered. This is evidenced by the significant rise in the number of war correspondents who have lost their lives in the past two decades[6].

The Sixth International Winter School Topic

Research on the interaction between media and war, exploring how conflicts and the media mutually influence each other, and examining how war coverage is shaped by ideological and cultural biases, is the central theme of the Sixth ACRPS International Winter School. The school invites submissions

5 Luke Justin Heemsbergen, and Simon Lindgren. "The power of precision air strikes and social media feeds in the 2012 Israel–Hamas conflict: 'targeting transparency'." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 5 (2014): 569 - 591.

6 Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer, eds. *Reporting war: Journalism in wartime*. Routledge, 2004.

from advanced PhD students and early career scholars specializing in various social science disciplines worldwide. Potential topics for discussion could include:

- Media framing of war

- War coverage and agenda setting

- Artificial intelligence and crowdsourcing in the visualization of war

- Ideology, culture, and ethnocentrism in war coverage

- Theoretical frameworks for understanding media coverage in wartime

- Propaganda and war

- Disinformation in war and conflicts

- Embedded journalism and media-military relations.

- Visuality in wars and conflicts

- Media-elites, social media corporations and their impact on conflicts

- Competing alternative sources of information

- Military communications and media strategies

- Media in conflict resolution

- The media and peace building

- Media and cyberwars

- Social media, crowdsourcing, and war

- Grassroots challenges to official narratives of war

- Journalists as casualties of war

- The ethics of explicit war imagery

- Rethinking propaganda and psychological warfare

- Security and safety for journalists in new wars

- Trust in journalism and the news industry in wartime.

- Censorship and surveillance in wartime.

- Journalistic ethnography of war

- De-professionalization of journalism at wartime.

- Media under fire

Participation Procedures

Eligibility:

- PhD candidates in social sciences and humanities.

- Recent PhD graduates and early career academics.

Application Procedures:

Eligible candidates interested in applying should submit the following no later than **20 August 2024**:

Online application form. This should be accompanied by an up-to-date CV, an abstract of the proposed paper (maximum 500 words). The abstract should outline the research questions, the context, theoretical framework, and the proposed methodology.

At least one academic reference. The referee should fill out the recommendation form available on this link and send it directly to the IWS email (winter.school@dohainstitute.org).

Optional: a writing sample (a previous research paper or published article).

The school will notify all applicants about the status of their applications by email.

Please note:

- Accepted applicants should submit a research project in the form of a paper (maximum 6000 words – excluding footnotes and reference) by **30 September 2024**. Published papers will not be accepted.

- The approval of the abstract does not automatically guarantee participation in the school.

- The paper will be reviewed. The school will notify you whether your research project is accepted or not.

- Accommodation is provided for all accepted applicants for the duration of the program.

- Funding for travel expenses is available on a competitive basis.

For inquires related to the conference, please contact: winter.school@dohainstitute.org

General Information:

Date: 11 - 16 January 2025.

Location: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Qatar.

Language of the IWS: English.