Indian media and war maturity media essay

Indian media has been performing its role as one of the pillars of democracy, by generating public awareness and voicing opinions on security matters in the overall national interest. The public opinion on the legitimacy of an operation plays an important role in the formation and sustenance if the national will in addition to giving strength to the political leadership. Although security of information is a vital issue while conducting military operations, the civil population has to be made aware of the details a appropriate time. Public support is a great morale booster for the soldier. It is therefore important that the civil society is well informed about the truth rather than be fed with rumours.

2. On the other hand, the armed forces must understand the working, compulsions and restrictions of the media, to ensure interaction leading to synergy. It is not possible in the current world for the military to exclude the media and yet expect it to project an encouraging image. The organisational structure of the military is hierarchical in which professional pride and regimental loyalties are intricately interwoven. It does not go in line with democracy and adopts authoritarianism so as to be effective in warlike situations. Since it is battle- oriented, it does not entertain any interference from outsiders. Certain legitimately activities done by the military does not make any sense to civilians who have little awareness about military matters. The military likes to be focussed and left alone to carry out its allotted task.

3. All over the world media- military interaction in order to achieve the national objectives has undergone significant change. There are permanent institutions and clear cut policies on the manner in which the military

operations are covered. However the Indian military media policies are obsolete and need a fresh look in order to be contemporary.

4. The involvement of armed forces in internal security operations and Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC) has been increasing in the recent past. Such operations are against insurgents/militants who are intermingled with the civil population. There have been cases in which different versions of the case from the military and the civil population have led to controversies. These controversies are lapped up by the media and are covered so widely that the truth is never amply revealed. Media has to be aware of the sensitivity of the situation and exercise self restraint in order to deal with the issue with maturity.

5. The Gulf War showed the world the magnitude to which media can penetrate the war theatre. Millions around the globe watched the launch bombs and missiles destroying targets in Baghdad. Kargil and Afghanistan showed the details of each offensive in real-time. The coverage was much more than what was available during the previous wars. It is now debated whether what was shown and reported was real or rigged. The core issue is that the advancements in the field of information technology have enabled the media to cover and influence the operations to a greater degree. [1]Therefore it is necessary to analyse the intricate relationship between the Indian military and the media, and to understand the whether the Indian media is mature or is still adolescent.

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the problem

6. To study the maturity level of Indian media coverage during the Kargil war and terrorist attack in Mumbai on 26 Nov 08 in the light of media coverage by the global media in the recent wars.

Hypothesis

7. The level of maturity shown by the media of developed nations far exceeds the maturity of the Indian media in reporting war or war like scenarios. There is an urgent need in synchronise the operations of the military with the Indian media so that both can work towards the achievement of the national objectives.

Justification of the study

8. In spite of being free form government control since a long time, the maturity that is desired form the Indian media has not been visible. Trivial issues are being given wide coverage and important issues are being overlooked. Indian media has shown in the recent past that the coverage has been irresponsible in reporting military operations.

9. Media being a major instrument of formulation of public opinion, it is necessary that matters relating to military operations are covered judiciously. This entails proper training of media personnel so as to operate in the war zone and, their sensitisation on the issues like secrecy of plans, deployment and mobility.

10. Developed nations have embedded media in their fighting formations after necessary training. The national media policy is laid down so that what is covered by the media is in concert with the overall national plan.

11. Indian media needs to be brought to the same level if not to a higher level so that Indian military interests are not compromised by sloppy reporting by the media.

Scope

12. The scope of this study is restricted to the role of international and Indian media in covering the military operations during the Gulf war, Afghan war Kargil war and 26/11 terrorist attack on Mumbai. The scope has been kept narrow because the media revolution has happened in the recent past and therefore the role of the media in future will be dictated by the usage of the newer forms of mass communication.

Method of data collection

13. Data used for this dissertation has been collected from a large number of books, periodicals, magazines, journals that are available in the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) Library and the internet.

Organisation of the study

14. The study is divided in the following chapters:

1. Chapter- I: Introduction & Methodology. This chapter introduces the subject ' Indian media and war : maturity or adolescence.' It also lays down the ' Statement of Problem' providing a justification for the study and defines the scope of dissertation. The chapter also amplifies the

importance of media in today's world. The focus is on understanding the effect the media has on military operations.

2. Chapter-II: Interdependence of military and the media for war coverage. This chapter brings out the interrelationship between the media and the military as they have forces working towards clash and also towards co-operation.

3. Chapter- III: International media and war. This chapter brings out the role played by the American and global media during the gulf war. The facts that were covered and the arguments used by the global media will be covered in detail.

4. Chapter- IV: Indian media and war. This chapter studies the role of Indian nedia during the reporting of Kargil war and 26/11 terrorist attacks on Mumbai.

5. Chapter- V: Contentious issues and suggested solutions. This chapter deals with the issues that are contentious and deal with the control of the media. Certain solutions are also suggested.

6. Chapter- VI: Conclusion. This chapter summarises the dissertation.

21

CHAPTER II

INTERDEPENDENCE OF MILITARY AND MEDIA FOR WAR COVERAGE.

1. The question is often raised as to who needs whom? Does the media need the military or does the military need the media? The answer is, however, not that simple. Throughout history both institutions have been at odds with each other. The military is perennially popular, but is at its best in battle and functions like a conditioned athlete. However, it too, has its share of

incompetence. So when the military makes mistakes, they can be monumental. Besides territory, a large number of lives can be lost.

2. The military are disciplined, hierarchical and live within a homogenous, closed culture that can be and often is hostile to outsiders.

3. The news media, are often unpopular with the brass, for they function independently, without rules, regulations, or even a Code of Conduct except for some that are self-imposed. The media's Newspapers, Radio, TV and Cable have a variety of interests of their own and set goals to be achieved. They have their fulsome share of rogues, incompetents and avaricious vultures. Yet at their best, the media provide the nation with a vital service it can get nowhere else. It is one of the pillars of the state.

4. When the two institutions meet during a conflict, clashes are inevitable. The media wants to tell the story, and the military wants to win the war and keep casualties to a minimum. The media wants freedom, no censorship, total access and the capability to get their stories out to their audiences quickly. The military on the other hand, wants control. The greatest fear of a military commander in a pre-invasion scenario is that something might leak out that would tip off the enemy. Otherwise, too, surprise is the most potent weapon in the Commander's armoury. On the other hand, the media fears that the military might stifle news coverage for enhancing their public image or cover up their mistakes. Those are fundamental differences that will never change. At times the military and the patriotic media also have worked together in harmony but usually animosity tarnishes their relationship. There is definitely a need for better understanding between the two. A perfect co-

operative union of the media and the military is likely impossible, given the differences in missions and personalities but there are wise heads in both institutions who recognize the mutual need. The media is hungry for stories while the military need to tell their story. Above all they need public support. The media can tell their story and if there is a rapport and understanding, they can tell it well and effectively. Both institutions will work better during the tension and the fog of war if they learn to get along in peacetime.

5. During the wartime when there is a life and death struggle for the military, personally as well as institutionally, patriotism comes to their rescue instinctively and through their long training. Civil media totally lacks such training and has nothing personal at stake. Self-aggrandizement seems to be the raison d'etre of most. War is good for the media business. Despite the excessive costs of sending correspondents for coverage, using expensive satellite equipment and airtime, armed conflict is precisely the type of event on which the media thrives. This is an alarming situation and something must be done during peacetime to remove this dichotomy.

7. It is for the civil media to come forward with the remedy. And for the military to provide its own media to fill the gap and, more importantly to serve as the role model.

Media As A Force Multiplier
8. Many military leaders have become aware that news media coverage of their operations can be a force multiplier. Impressed by Gen. Walt Boomer's example of encouraging favourable news media coverage of the US Marines in the Gulf War – to the point where most observers agree that the Marines

received more credit than they deserved, mostly at the expense of the US Army – many military leaders have come to the conclusion that media coverage not only develops public awareness and the support of military units, it has the side benefit of enhancing their morale by informing their families and friends of the activities of the troops. If used prudently, media is indeed a Force Multiplier as it builds public opinion. In the words of Abraham Lincoln:

" Public opinion is everything. With it nothing can fail, Without it nothing can succeed."

How The Media Gathers Information
9. The media gathers its information from various sources:-

(a) Overt sources :-

1. Press briefings.

2. Press releases/handouts.

3. Supervised visit/tour of battle area.

(b) Covert sources :-

1. Own contacts.

2. Electronic Eaves dropping.

3. Clandestine visits to battle area.

10. With communication networks now blanketing the globe and news organisations developing their capability to report from almost anywhere, with new technology such as satellite telephones, laptop computers, digital cameras and other inventions, transmission of news is possible in real time.

Soon commercial, high-resolution photographic satellites will be available to news organizations. The capability of the news media to photograph a battle area during time of war and thereby reveal the location of one's own ground units, ships and airbases could be very detrimental to the national security. This makes censorship virtually impossible.

21

CHAPTER III

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AND WAR

Information Security and the Military Culture

1. Traditionally, information security implies the military practice of reviewing a reporter's newscopy prior to his filing to ensure that no information of value to the enemy was released. This system was effectively used during the Second World War but now technological innovations have called into question the whole concept.

2. The " Vietnam Syndrome" leads most Americans to believe that they lost the war due to the total freedom given to the media in their coverage of the war. Their pessimistic reports tipped the public opinion against the conflict. The tales of atrocities of US troops on My Lai and Iwo Jima and, Jane Fonda's radio speeches from North Vietnam and media reports of US casualties stirred public opinion in USA against the War in Vietnam.

3. In Desert Storm the Pentagon decided to use information security to avoid a Vietnam-like situation. The imperative for secrecy was great, because if Iraqi commanders had had even an inkling of the US attack plan, they could

have repositioned their forces, jeopardizing the success of the operation and inflicting significantly higher casualties on Allied Forces.

4. The US Government demonstrated the means to blackout the battlefield anytime it so chose, even in the presence of hundreds of representatives of the World Media. When a television reporter watching the take off of US fighters from a Saudi base began to report that one of the fighter aircraft appeared to be experiencing mechanical trouble, his satellite link was shut down by military electronic counter measures.[2]

5. A British television crew tried to transmit news to London without the knowledge of the PR specialists. Their transmission was intercepted by an airborne AWACs electronic warfare aircraft and they were promptly arrested for this breach of security.[3]

6. The news organizations later challenged this approach. When the Press was kept away from operations at Grenada and Panama, the media actually went to court.

7. Thus in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo, better sense prevailed on the military culture of clamping down news information. This has led to an improved arrangement of security at the source .

Security At The Source
8. " Security at the source", a preferred approach, is a relatively new concept in which the military strives to develop a plan as far in advance of the operation as possible in order to allow the news media to have broad access to the total action. Where feasible, journalists may be accommodated

with the combat forces. Each reporter is first accredited and then given the ground rules with which he/she is expected to comply. Because they will be located shoulder-to-shoulder with the troops, reporters who had questions about the security aspects of the operation could find someone to respond readily without actually turning in their news copy for review. If the Security at the source concept is to work, certain understanding with the media must be reached:-

(a) They must accept that the military can only effectively accommodate a finite number of journalists in combat operations. A mechanism must be developed in peacetime to establish the strength of reporters.

(b) News organizations need to more diligently train their reporters in the area of military operations. The best way to do this is to invite the media for the coverage of peacetime military exercises.

The Fog Of War

9. In wartime, the media serve a variety of roles. With information, they can convey a sense of the fighting to a public divorced from its actual horrors or, with entertainment, they can provide a sense of relief or escape to a public more directly involved such as in a blockade or bombing campaign.

10. Just because they mediate information about the progress of a war to the public, the media can serve not just as providers of ' straight' news and information but also as agents of propaganda and disinformation. This is because the very processes by which war reports are gathered at source, packaged by journalists and disseminated to a wider audience are subject to a wide spectrum of influences ranging from battlefield censorship to

broadcasting standards, deception and disinformation campaigns, official information policy and propaganda. These are indeed the pollutants which constitute that overworked idiom: " The Fog of War".

11. Journalists have a front seat at the making of history and it is tragic that by the time the historians become involved ' that first rough draft of history' provided by the journalists has been so widely disseminated by the mass media that it becomes extremely difficult to dislodge the pollutants that caused the fog of war.

Truth : The First Casualty Of War
12. A rule of thumb in both the world wars was to only show pictures of the enemy dead. Own casualty figures have often been minimized and those of the enemy exaggerated. Defeats have simply been omitted or delayed in reporting. Or explained as " strategic retreats".

13. While still the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, refused to release news that HMS Nelson and HMS Barham had sustained serious damage. In 1971, the news of the surrender of Dhaka was considerably delayed and was relayed only after the pep-talk of PTV programmes. The sinking of HMS Sheffield by an Exocet missile fired by an Argentine Mirage aircraft during the Falkland War was omitted till it became inevitable to be declared. The fall and recapture of Khafji in the Gulf War was constantly misreported. The famous ITN footage of emaciated Muslim prisoners-of-war, which caused an international outrage in 1992, was banned on Serbian TV. Zee TV played hell with the truth during the Kargil crisis.

Operation " Desert Cloud"

14. In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. In the six-month period prior to the commencement of hostilities, the Pentagon, military and media worked together to develop plans that would make the Gulf War coverage the most comprehensive wartime news coverage in history. It was also the most massive cover-up in history to date.

15. On the opening night of the US attack on Iraq, ABC anchorperson Peter Jennings made what was perhaps a Freudian slip, mistakenly referring to the start of " Operation Desert Cloud" rather than " Operation Desert Storm"[4]. In the light of the fact that many of the US military's most spectacular claims in the Gulf War have since proven to be false, Jenning's slip appears to have been no slip at all.

16. The problem was not simply that the Pentagon and US administration misled the media, but that the media generally swallowed without question whatever the military and the US Government dished out to them. They were reduced to the level of stenographers. By the time the truth began to dribble out in the war's wake, it was too late to erase the dominant image of an inevitable, clean, bloodless, high-tech war.

Some Cover-ups and myths

17. USA beckoned Iraq to Invade Kuwait. A little-noted poll in February, 1991 revealed striking gaps in people's knowledge about the Gulf Crisis. Only 13 percent Americans knew that when Saddam signalled he might use force against Kuwait, the United States through its charming Ambassador in Baghdad had indicated in July, 1990 that it would take no action,[5]which it certainly had none.

18. Saddam offered to withdraw from Kuwait. As early as August, 1990, Saddam had sent messages through diplomatic channels offering to withdraw from Kuwait and release all foreigners in exchange for the lifting of the sanctions, guaranteed access to the Gulf, and sole control of the contested Rumailah oil field.[6]

19. Iraq had no intention of attacking Saudi Arabia. Defence and intelligence officials informed the US administration shortly after the Kuwaiti invasion that Iraq had no intention of invading Saudi Arabia.[7]

20. Iraq posed a major nuclear and chemical weapons threat. Prior to the start of the Gulf crisis, US intelligence officials estimated that Iraq would not be capable of producing an atomic bomb for at least five years. But in November, 1990, President George Bush started claiming that Baghdad will be able to build an atomic bomb in just six months time insisting that the time to attack Iraq was now.[8]

21. Iraqi soldiers did not remove Kuwaiti babies from incubators. Despite scant evidence, the allied media propagated that Iraqi soldiers removed hundreds of Kuwaiti babies from their incubators, leaving them to die on hospital floors of Kuwait City. Seven US Senators invoked the event in their speeches while backing the January 12, 1991 resolution authorizing war.[9]

22. Smart Bombs Won the War. The world was mesmerized by Pentagon-produced videos of Stealth bombers neatly dropping sophisticated laser-guided bombs down the airshafts of designated military targets while mercifully sparing nearby schools, hospitals, homes and mosques. Fewer than 8% of the bombs used by Allied Forces were " Smart" ones and of the

88, 500 tons of munitions dropped on Kuwait and Iraq, an estimated 70% missed their targets and caused massive destruction to civilian life and property.[10]

23. The Patriot Missile Performed Flawlessly. Despite tall claims, experts testified before the US Congress in spring 1991 that the much-vaunted Patriot missile may have destroyed only one of the 90 Iraqi Scud missiles fired at Saudi Arabia and Israel. The Patriots actually increased the amount of ground damage as they crashed into of all places! Israeli streets.[11]

24. Muzzling Negative Reports. There was definite attempt to muzzle negative reports. Some examples were quoted earlier. There were numerous other examples. Associated Press (AP) photographer Scott Apple White was handcuffed, beaten, and had one of his cameras smashed when 15 US and Saudi military police officers descended on him as he attempted to photograph the Dhahran barracks where an Iraqi Scud killed 27 G. Is.[12]

25. Iraqi Casualties. There was widespread silence about Iraqi casualties, Greenpeace has calculated that 57, 000 to 75, 000 members of Iraqi military died during the Gulf War while 3, 000 Iraqi civilians were killed in the air war. Tapes of attacks by Apache helicopter pilots which were not released, revealed Iraqi soldiers being killed mercilessly as they were fleeing their bunkers while thousands were gunned down during their retreat on the open highway to Iraq.[13]

26. Saddam Learns from " Vietnam Syndrome". Saddam Hussein learned his own lessons from the " Vietnam Syndrome". CNN's Peter Arnett, was permitted to remain in Iraq to report on the other side of the war. He was

accused by the White House of " Speaking for the Iraqi Government", by Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf of " aiding and abetting an enemy" and by Col. Harry Summers, Public Affairs advisor of " treason".[14]

27. Saddam Hussein used Peter Arnett to his own advantage by trying to create a public outcry in the allied nations by allowing CNN to transmit pictures of the destruction of a Chemical Weapons Complex with freshly scrawled " Baby Milk Factory" in English, parading captured Allied pilots on Iraqi TV, declaring their disapproval of the war and displaying the charred bodies of hundreds of civilians killed by Allied air attacks on air-raid shelters. Unfortunately for Saddam, his ploy did not work. It was merely a drop in the Allied scum tide. Perhaps it helped the Allied propaganda machine by providing a posture of objectivity.

21

CHAPTER IV
INDIAN MEDIA AND WAR
Kargil – A Watershed For Indian Media
1. We must draw important lessons from the recent crisis in our own backyard, Kargil. We must take cognisance of the brilliant use of media by India to salvage some pride from the mauling it received on the snowy peaks of Kargil. Kargil became one of the worst nightmares for India. It not only caught them napping, but also exposed their extreme vulnerabilities and resulted in very high casualties. Having said that, we must credit the Indians for their resilience and for their highly successful media and diplomatic campaign.

2. The way Indian media responded to the crisis, mobilized its resources and organized Television programmes, newspaper reports, analyses, discussions, features, the famous " rogue army" posters and a wide array of coverage convinced the world that Pakistan was on the wrong foot and the Indians were the aggrieved party. The Chanakyan principles of deceit and lies were fully exploited to dupe their own countrymen. To enhance their lies and sanitize the Indian public from the truth, PTV was banned from Cable networks in India and Pakistani newspapers were blocked on the Internet.

3. They also made a very intelligent use of the Internet and dedicated an exclusive Website www. vijayinkargil. com to spread their propaganda. Trained PR officers manned chat sites on the web. We on the other hand, could not launch an adequate counter attack on the media front. Even their very obvious lies and claims of Vijay or victory could not be exposed. India did not permit media personnel to visit Kargil, Dras or Batalik sectors. Zee TV and the 32 Indian Channels continued to spew venom against Pakistan but we lacked the wherewithal and the will power to tackle them on this extremely volatile front. Obvious lies like Tiger Hill, the use of Mirage-2000 HUD displays with doctored information were continuously being telecast with serious TV News Channels like BBC and CNN re-transmitting them.[15]

Impact and influence of media

4. The Kargil War was significant for the impact and influence of the mass media on public opinion in both nations. Coming at a time of exploding growth in electronic journalism in India, the Kargil news stories and war footage were often telecast live on TV, and many websites provided in-depth analysis of the war. The conflict became the first " live" war in South Asia; it

was given such detailed media coverage that one effect was the drumming up of jingoistic feelings.[16]

5. The conflict soon turned into a news propaganda war, in which press briefings given by government officials of each nation produced conflicting claims and counterclaims. The Indian government placed a temporary news embargo on information from Pakistan, banning the telecast of the state-run Pakistani channel PTV and blocking access to online editions of the Dawn newspaper. The Pakistani media criticized this apparent curbing of freedom of the press in India, while India media claimed it was in the interest of national security. The Indian government ran advertisements in foreign publications including The Times and The Washington Post detailing Pakistan's role in supporting extremists in Kashmir in an attempt to garner political support for its position.

6. As the war progressed, media coverage of the conflict was more intense in India than in Pakistan. Many Indian channels showed images from the battle zone in a style reminiscent of CNN's coverage of the Gulf War (one of the shells fired by Pakistan troops even hit a Doordarshan transmission centre in Kargil while coverage continued). Reasons for India's increased coverage included the greater number of privately owned electronic media in India compared to Pakistan and relatively greater transparency in the Indian media. At a seminar in Karachi, Pakistani journalists agreed that while the Indian government had taken the press and the people into its confidence, Pakistan had not.

7. The print media in India and abroad was largely sympathetic to the Indian cause, with editorials in newspapers based in the west and other neutral countries observing that Pakistan was largely responsible for the conflict. Some analysts believe that Indian media, which was both larger in number and more credible, may have acted as a force multiplier for the Indian military operation in Kargil and served as a morale booster. As the fighting intensified, the Pakistani version of events found little backing on the world stage. This helped India gain valuable diplomatic recognition for its position.

MUMBAI TERRORIST ATTACKS ON 26/11

8. Today when no country is left untouched by terrorism, media's coverage of terrorist activities is fast becoming critical. War on terrorism is a test for the Indian media. How much should be broadcast, whether broadcast of terrorist actions amounts to glorifying terrorism and violence and whether it incites people, creates new recruits and gives publicity to terrorists who seek to grab world attention are topics of debate across nations in the post 9/11 world. More so in India after 26/11 Mumbai attacks.[17]

9. Contrary to the authoritative statements of the revisionist historians of war journalism, press freedom and freedom of expression are an advantage, not a handicap, in emergencies. Lies and self-censorship – as the history of the wars of Vietnam or Iraq and back home in Kashmir demonstrate, are in most cases of poor counsel and contribute to the very national disasters we tried to avert. Just as a seafaring captain cannot test his vessel when the sea is calm, so freedom of the press needs to be tested in the heart of a storm, when our bearings are lost and anguish prevails. Media professionals and the media in general have paid a heavy toll to terrorism in recent years. Dozens

of journalists have been intimated, kidnapped and assassinated so that they could be silenced. The number of media professionals killed in conflict zones or individually targeted for assassination remains all too high. Some fall victim to crossfire or mine explosions. Most, however, are deliberately gunned down after identifying themselves as journalists.

Recently we witnessed a well coordinated terror attack on Mumbai. There is increasing questioning of the media's conduct in the face of such attacks and more so after the live telecast of the 60 hour long Mumbai attacks. Concerned over the way many aspects of its operations got " jeopardized" due to live images being broadcast by TV during the 6- hour siege, the national Security Guard (NSG) is now pushing for restrictions on media coverage wherever its commandos are engaged to combat. Having alrea