

To what extent was the Western media manipulated by the military during the Gulf War? Give examples.

*The essence of the military is secrecy; the essence of journalism is publicity.*¹

In March 1991, the United States (US) Secretary of State James Baker told the press:

The Gulf War was quite a victory. But who could not be moved by the sight of that poor demoralised rabble – outwitted, outflanked, outmanoeuvred by the US military. But I think, given time, the press will bounce back.²

Baker's opinion emphasises the ostensible zero-sum nature of the military-media relationship: victory for the military + secrecy = defeat for the media + publicity. Arguably, this perspective has persisted since William Russell provided press coverage of the Crimean War (1853-56). Certainly, a highly romanticised view suggests Russell's correspondence was responsible for the collapse of the British government and subsequent reform of the armed forces.³ Similarly, many officers within the US military hold the press responsible for defeat in the Vietnam War: 'we won the battles with the Viet Cong, but lost them with the media.'⁴ During the Gulf War senior US figures constantly reiterated the conflict would not be another Vietnam.⁵ The Gulf War, unlike Vietnam, would be won, would be short, and would

¹ Pimlott, J. & Badsey, S. (eds). *The Gulf War Assessed*, Arms and Armour, London, 1992, p.220.

² Bennett, W.L. & Paletz, D.L. (eds). *Taken by Storm The Media, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, pp.282-83.

³ Knightley, P. *The First Casualty From the Crimea to the Falklands: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth Maker*, Pan Books, London, 1989, pp.3-18 notes Russell was not the first war correspondent. He was preceded by the *Morning Post* correspondent, G.L. Grureisen. However, Russell's coverage marked the start of a concerted effort to provide reports on war to the home public through an independent civilian source. Previously, editors either used articles from foreign newspapers or employed junior officers to send letters from the battlefield.

⁴ Salmeen, E. 'The Media and the Military: Is it Censorship or National Security? Media portrayal of combat in the Gulf War', a paper, See http://www.wvu.edu/~journal2/jr1304/papers/salmeen_e.htm of 9 Oct 2002, p.4; Schanberg, S.H. 'A Muzzle for the Press', in Sifry, M.L. & Cerf, C. (eds). *The Gulf War Reader History, Documents, Opinions*, Random House, New York, 1991, p.368; Cronkite, W. 'What is There to Hide?', in Sifry, M.L. & Cerf, C. (eds). *The Gulf War Reader History, Documents, Opinions*, Random House, New York, 1991, pp.381-82; O'Mara, R. 'In a gulf of darkness', *Index on Censorship*, Vol 20, No 4 & 5, 1991, p.30 all report the existence of this belief among senior military officers. Also Venable, B.E. *The Army and the Media*, *US Command & General Staff College Military Review*.

See <http://www.cgsc.army.mil/MilRev/English/JanFeb02/venable.asp> of 8 Oct 2002, p.1 for a study by Aukofer-Lawrence revealing 64% of US military officers agree that news media coverage of events in Vietnam harmed the war effort.

⁵ Greenberg, B.S. & Gantz, W. *Desert Storm and the Mass Media*, Hampton Press, New Jersey, 1993, p.77 contains a Freedom Forum study of news media coverage from 1 August 1990 – 28 February 1991. The study reveals the word 'Vietnam' appeared 7,299 times during this period. This was over three times the runner-up. The specific term 'another Vietnam' made up nearly two thirds of the 'Vietnam' total. Clearly, the scars of Vietnam remain in the psyche of the United States.

require support from all facets of US society. The Pentagon military press officer during the Gulf War noted, ‘anybody who doesn’t recognise that the support of the American people is a critical element of combat power is pretty dumb.’⁶

The fourth estate or press provides an independent voice from official views within modern democratic nations. Independence from government imbues the press with a degree of authority to inform public opinion.⁷ Independence and press freedom within the US relies on the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The ideas of free speech and free press have grown through the interpretation of the courts.⁸ Therefore, the US military rely on the media to assist in recruiting public opinion and enhancing combat power.

The media provide a ‘system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace.’⁹ In the Gulf War, this system was both global and live. Indeed, the Coalition forces fired the opening shots of the war during US prime-time television and CNN broadcast these images to a global audience spanning 138 nations.

This global, live, and independent media represent another variable the military must deal with on the modern battlefield. The complexities of the modern media contest the stark polarity of a zero-sum relationship military-media relationship. Traditional military public relations tactics, such as censorship, offer an insufficient answer to these challenges. Consequently, the Pentagon devised a strategic communication or news management strategy to win the media war.¹⁰

The strategy sought media support to mobilise public opinion behind military action. Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, identified the targets of this campaign as the US public, foreign nations, the enemy, and Coalition troops.¹¹ The campaign objectives conveyed key themes or messages to these targets. Some of these messages include the idea of a clean, just war, and the concept of community. How successful was the strategy? Did the media become either a fourth service or a fifth column? Firstly, though, what exactly is the ‘Western media?’

⁶ Bennett & Paletz, op.cit., p.17.

⁷ ibid., p.1-36 constructs a propaganda model of the free press suggesting the press serve to mobilise support for elite interests and, therefore, are less independent than generally assumed. Press and media are used interchangeably in this essay.

⁸ Mordan, J. ‘Press, Pools, Prior Restraint and the Persian Gulf War’, *Air & Space Power Chronicles – Contributor’s Corner*, 6 June 1999,
See <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/cc/mordan.html> of 8 October 2002., pp.7-10 discusses the development of press freedoms within the US.

⁹ Herman, E.S. & Chomsky, N. *Manufacturing Consent The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1988, p.1.

¹⁰ Bennett & Paletz, op.cit., p.134 Manheim describes this as the creation, distribution, control, use, processing, and effects of information as a resource to benefit either the government, organisation, or individual.

¹¹ Powell, C. & Persico, J.E. *A Soldier’s Way An Autobiography*, Hutchinson, London, 1995, p.529.

The first newspapers appeared in Europe over three hundred years ago as either political broadsheets or advertising circulars. This early press has evolved into the media. The latter term refers to the current, electronically based international news agencies of television, radio, the wire services, and the major newspapers.¹²

‘Western’ is a narrow, ideological, and geographical construct. The term originally referred to the countries of Western Europe and the Americas exempt from communist control. A broader definition encompasses countries adopting Western institutions and culture, regardless of location. Australia and New Zealand, are representative of this wider definition.

US-United Kingdom (UK) newsagencies dominate the ‘Western media.’ Only Agence France Presse (France) and the Bertelsmann Group (Germany) challenge US-UK hegemony. Nonetheless, Western agencies set the international media agenda.¹³ Media coverage of the Gulf War affirms this claim. For example, the Indian media did not gain access to Saudi Arabia, likewise none of the prestige Swedish papers was issued visas, and only one Finnish journalist was accredited.

Television provides instantaneous access to the images of conflict. In 1989, 65% of US adults used television as their main source of news. US television agencies transmitted 2658 minutes of Gulf War coverage; the next most covered story received 56 minutes.¹⁴ These images supplied television stations across the globe. Consequently, this dominance of the media theatre by the Western press meant it was imperative for the US military to have their support to frame the media images of the conflict. The habitual tension between the US military and the media did not augur well for receiving this support.

Indeed, the relationship between the media and the military shifts across the spectrum of conflict: from temporary cease-fire to outright war. The two World Wars witnessed the conscription of the press to support the national war effort. Legislation, such as the Espionage Act (1917), the Seditions Act (1918), and the Code of Wartime Practices (1942), enacted a range of restrictive measures on press freedom. Nonetheless, press censorship remained a largely voluntary activity. This uneasy truce contrasts with media policies during the Vietnam War.

During the Vietnam War, the US military was unable to control civilian movement into or within the war zone. Technology enabled the rapid transformation of information and images. These two differences disabled the viability of mandatory

¹² This definition excludes a range of periodicals, magazines and other news to focus on the major mainstream news gathering organisations that dominate the international media. Moreover, while the media and the press are slightly different in meaning, the terms are used interchangeably throughout the essay.

¹³ This is the ‘Western’ international media which often saturates the broader international agenda.

¹⁴ Mueller, J. *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994, p.XIV.

ensorship. Arguably, this impunity of the press contributed to Robin Day's assessment that, 'the war was lost on the television screens of America.'¹⁵

US military operations in Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989) afforded the military an opportunity to regain the initiative. The military blocked journalist access to Grenada and deliberately delayed the call-out of the National Media Pool (NMP) to Panama. The NMP is a press pool system providing a select group of journalists' early access to military operations.¹⁶ The press pool formed the basis of the US military response to the influx into Saudi Arabia for approximately 1600 journalists.¹⁷ These actions prevented any press coverage and, therefore, independent corroboration of military actions during these operations.

This brief and, somewhat, acrimonious history of between the US military and media, size of the Gulf War press contingent, and examination of the 'Western' and international media give context to the analysis of the US military media strategy and its effectiveness during the Gulf War.

The contest over the news media is a critical component of political conflict. Success in this contest provides an opportunity to shape the national and/or international agenda. The contest has two dimensions; structural and cultural. The former is a struggle for media access. The latter is a struggle for the delivery of meaning.¹⁸ This concept readily transfers to military conflict, especially a conflict covered live and presented to a global audience. Therefore, it is imperative for the military to succeed in this contest. This contest contains three components; the ability to initiate and control events, the ability to regulate the information flow, and the ability to mobilise elite support and public opinion.¹⁹

*'The war had to be sold.'*²⁰

In the first component, the media respond to and provide coverage of events. Military conflict is a contest for control through seizing the initiative and forcing the adversary to react to events. Likewise, the ability of the military to initiate and control events for

¹⁵ Pimlott & Badsey, op.cit., p.226.

¹⁶ The NMP derives from the Sidle Military-Media Relations Panel (1984). The panel sought to reconcile the media coverage of military operations with mission security and troop safety.

¹⁷ There were 90 accredited journalists on the Allied side during World War I. During World War II, only 27 reporters went ashore with Allied troops on D-Day. Even the Vietnam War at its peak had 637 reporters within South Vietnam.

¹⁸ Wolfsfeld, op.cit., pp.13-55.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.25. Wolfsfeld argues that the third component only needs to mobilise elite support. The elites then lead public opinion. The relationship between the media, elites, and public opinion is interactive and complex.

²⁰ Macarthur, J.R. *Second Front Censorship and Propaganda in The Gulf War*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1992, p.42.

the media ensures the war can be sold. Bennett indicates there are three types of 'events' or news: fully controlled, partially controlled, and uncontrolled.²¹

Fully controlled news occurs when the organisation, individual, or agent can completely stage a media event. The media do not challenge the veracity of the event. Consequently, the media tacitly endorse and uncritically promote the frame presented to them.

The US military simultaneously dominated the battlefield and exerted control over events during the Gulf War. The US decided when the air war would begin, when the ground war would start, and when the war would end.²² The start of the air campaign was scheduled for US prime-time television. President Bush was reputedly delighted, 'when the raid on Baghdad came through live on television at the time he had ordered it.'²³ The end of the war was announced at 9 pm US EST 27 February 1991. The ground phase lasted exactly one hundred hours. This was not fortuitous but planned to maximise publicity. Commander of the Coalition forces, General Norman Schwarzkopf said, 'I had to hand it to them (the Pentagon and US administration): they really knew how to package an...event.'²⁴

This strategic control enabled detailed media planning at lower levels. Wolfsfeld claims the military planned, months in advance, the types of stories the press would cover during the different phases of the campaign. In the build-up phase, the focus was on personal interest stories about the deployed troops. Later, the focus during the air campaign became the success of hi-tech weapons systems.²⁵ Part of this planning included the Hometown News Program. In this program, the US military sponsored approximately 960 journalists from small US papers and television stations – especially ones located near military bases. The journalists were flown free on military aircraft to Saudi Arabia to spend time on the field with their hometown units. Reporters 'paid' for this gratuity by filing upbeat stories on their local heroes.

This stage management extended to the liberation of Kuwait City. US public relations officers organised the press to cover Arab forces from the Coalition 're-capture' Kuwait City. This event disguised US involvement in this action. This symbolic gesture was a political concession to the composition of the Coalition. Each of these events highlights the ability of the US military to translate battlefield supremacy into a

²¹ Wolfsfeld, op.cit., p.26.

²² Schwarzkopf, N. & Petre, P. *General H. Norman Schwarzkopf The Autobiography It Doesn't Take a Hero*, Bantam Books, New York, 1992, pp.458-60 states D-Day discussions started in mid-December. Powell, op.cit., p.502 recalls the final decision for the start of hostilities made on 6 January 1991. Woodward, B. *The Commanders*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1991, pp.351-53 confirm the detail of these deliberations.

²³ Taylor, P.M. *War and the Media Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992, p.32.

²⁴ Schwarzkopf, op.cit., p.545.

²⁵ Wolfsfeld, op.cit., p.133. What is unusual here is the level of detail rather than the actual planning.

successful media event. This superiority did not negate the existence of partially controlled events.

Partially controlled news occurs when neither the organisation nor the media can control the story. A good example of this type of news is a press conference. Authorities control who will be invited and the format of the session but journalists can challenge official assertions and produce unexpected stories. Arguably, the US military had full control over the majority of these conferences; particularly those conducted in Saudi Arabia.

The US military held two daily press conferences from the start of 'Desert Storm.' Brigadier-General Richard Neal hosted the CENTCOM briefing from Riyadh at 10 am US EST. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Peter Williams and Lieutenant-General Thomas Kelly directed the Pentagon briefing from Washington at 3 pm US EST.²⁶ During major events senior figures such as the Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, General Powell, and General Schwarzkopf supplemented regular staff. In an effort to control these conferences, Stephen Badsey claims Lieutenant-General Kelly and his staff worked eight hours a day on each briefing and on trying to predict likely questions.²⁷ Moreover, General Powell admits, 'we auditioned military spokespersons.'²⁸ The US top brass acknowledged effective management of the media was essential for success. Indeed, the two highest-ranking Coalition 'casualties' of the war both fell victim to the media.²⁹

A range of factors from restrictive media guidelines to geographical constraints ensured the majority of the press relied on the daily press conferences for information. Yet, these conferences curtailed information on operational security grounds and starved the press of stories. The success of the US military in controlling these conferences impelled many journalists to trade increased secrecy for increased information through off-the-record briefings from the Joint Information Bureau (JIB).³⁰

No plan survives first contact with the enemy. Likewise, the US military, despite its overwhelming superiority, could not control every event on the battlefield. Uncontrolled news provides opportunities to undermine the organisational or official

²⁶ Pimlott & Badsey, op.cit., p.233. U.K. forces conducted briefings central to these main conferences.

²⁷ loc.cit. Miller, J. & Schultz, F. 'Interview with LTGEN T.W. Kelly, USA (Ret)', *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute, September 1991, p.79. Lieutenant-General Kelly was also the Joint Chiefs of Staff Director of Operations during the Gulf War. During this interview, he indicates the preparation time for the brief included his duties as the Director of Operations.

²⁸ Powell, op.cit., p.529. Interestingly, Lieutenant-General Kelly believes he was selected because of his operational appointment rather than his media ability. Kelly has a degree in journalism.

²⁹ US Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael Dugan in September 1990 and the Italian Navy commander in the Gulf, Vice-Admiral Mario Buracchio, in February 1991 were sacked for indiscrete comments to the press.

³⁰ Sherman, M. 'Informing through the JIB', *Proceedings*, United States Naval Institute, August 1991, pp.59-61. The JIB were the operational military public affairs organisation. The JIB coordinated all press pool activity and visits on behalf of CENTCOM.

stance. The ability to impart spin control on such news is critical to limit the damage and maintain an effective media campaign. Ironically, US military superiority caused these uncontrolled events. Air Force Chief of Staff Merrill McPeak admitted, 'we made some mistakes about what we bombed.'³¹ The first of these incidents centres on the destruction of the baby milk plant.

Iraqi television first carried news of the bombing on 20 January 1991. CNN, through Peter Arnett, was the first to televise the news to a global audience. CNN images showed a severely damaged building and signs saying 'Baby Milk Plant' in English and Arabic. The Iraqi government for the first time permitted Arnett to report on damage to an allegedly civilian facility. Clearly, this was an opportunity for the Iraqis to undermine US claims to be controlling a hi-tech precision war. The US military launched spin control within hours of Arnett's report.

An official statement claimed the facility was associated with biological warfare. A barbed wire fence and military guards around the facility were the evidence supporting this claim. At the daily Pentagon press conference, General Powell stated 'it is not an infant formula factory...it was a biological weapons factory, of that we are sure.'³² Subsequent spokesmen suggested the Iraqis frequently doubled up on the military and civilian uses of their sites.

The Western media quickly found French contractors, who built the plant, and New Zealand technicians, who had visited the plant in May 1990. Both groups confirmed the facility was a purpose-built infant formula factory and could not have been transformed to produce biological weapons. A United Nations (UN) fact finding team later determined that no such capabilities existed at the plant.

A former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant-General Leonard Perrots, admits the bombing was a mistake.³³ Whether the bombing was an intelligence or targeting error is unknown. Nonetheless, the mistake undermined US claims of executing a surgical campaign. However, US reluctance to admit an error did not degrade US public support to the military.

The Amiriya incident on 13 February 1991 has striking similarities to the baby milk plant episode. Again, Peter Arnett provided the first report - this time on the destruction of an air raid shelter within the Baghdad neighbourhood of Amiriya. Initial reports estimated 500 people dead, mostly women and children. Television images showed a completely destroyed building with numerous bodies being extracted from the rubble. The Iraqis lifted censorship for the first time. These images exposed the brutal nature of 'collateral damage' and allowed the Iraqis to discredit the objectives of the Coalition air campaign.

An official statement claimed the only evidence of any bombing was Iraqi government cleared and censored film. Efforts to declare the event Iraqi propaganda

³¹ Taylor, op.cit., p.115.

³² ibid., p.113.

³³ ibid., p.116.

failed to gain traction against the images of death on television. Consequently, General Neal announced the air raid shelter was a command and control facility and, therefore, a legitimate target.³⁴ General Kelly argued the centre had a dual purpose as a headquarters and a shelter.³⁵ These were the first shots fired in a war to convince the audience that the strategic air campaign did not target Iraqi civilians.

Within three days, official sources privately revealed the bombing occurred because of an intelligence mistake. Nonetheless, the US military publicly promoted the illusion of infallibility and stressed the dual-purpose theory. Patrick Cockburn argued the real lesson for the US was ‘...the allied air forces have become victims of their own propaganda.’³⁶ Despite this lesson, US military spin control contained the damage as polls indicated 84% of people surveyed blamed Saddam Hussein for the deaths in the shelter.³⁷

Overall, the US military media strategy effectively packaged events and sold the war. An effective spin control operation reasserted control of events on the occasions uncontrolled news threatened to unhinge the news management plan. Such control provides organisations a better chance to regulate the information flow.

‘The press was held captive.’³⁸

Regulating the flow of information is the second component of the strategy. Information control enables authorities to dictate terms to both the media and the target audience. Indeed, the military aims to make the press a captive audience! There are three aspects to regulating information flows; controlling your own organisation, a degree of censorship, and geo-logistic factors. So, how effective and to what extent did the US military succeed in holding the press captive during the Gulf War.

Controlling your own organisation requires the presentation of a united front throughout the conflict. The Pentagon wanted all levels of the military conform to the plan. First, the Pentagon ‘tightened up like a ship at war.’³⁹ A direct line between the Pentagon and CENTCOM ensured the carefully selected military spokesmen sold the same message. Moreover, many officers were graduates of the Defense Information School – a centre for advanced training in journalism. This training improved the media awareness of officers. This control extended to the tactical level.

Commanders ordered soldiers to prepare and dress appropriately for media visits. Military media escorts supervised press interviews and briefed soldiers on what was

³⁴ Freedman, L. & Karsh, E. *The Gulf Conflict 1990-1991 Diplomacy and War in the New World Order*, Faber and Faber, London, 1993, p.327.

³⁵ loc.cit.

³⁶ Taylor, op.cit., p.204.

³⁷ ibid., p.215.

³⁸ Wolfsfeld, op.cit., p.134.

³⁹ ibid., p.135.

acceptable to say.⁴⁰ Censorship extended to US military families. For instance, the military coached family members appearing on television in public relations. Kellner claims the military advised some military families critical comments would affect the careers of their service relation.⁴¹ Nonetheless, dissent surfaced. An article in the *Washington Post* suggested that the US troops held reservations over involvement in the region.⁴² The US military ordered one Air Force NCO to submit all correspondence via his base commander after letters he wrote home criticising the military was published in his local paper.⁴³ Therefore, control of their own troops was very effective; but what impact did US policies have on the press?

The history of US military-media relations suggests a degree of censorship over the press is likely during conflict. Generally, the press recognises the need for operational security. Assistant Secretary Williams claimed there was no military censorship system in 'Desert Storm.'⁴⁴ With the press pools in existence, 1351 pool reports were written. Five reports were reviewed, and four cleared. The reporter's editor-in-chief 'censored' the fifth report.⁴⁵ However, these figures do not provide the whole story.

Before the story got to print it was subject to an array of restrictions amounting to censorship. Military escorts accompanied pool journalists at all times. Escorts frequently finished sentences for interviewees.⁴⁶ Pool reporters signed declarations accepting military discipline and acknowledged their letters of accreditation would be withdrawn in the event they failed to abide by the rules. Pentagon restrictions banned journalists from reporting that might compromise operational security and troop safety. However, the majority of changes the US military insisted on appeared more concerned with the image of the military than operational requirements. For example, such news management included the prohibition of pictures of the air-conditioned limousine General Schwarzkopf used, a security classification on his weight,⁴⁷ and the editing of words in pool reports such as the deleting references to fighter pilots watching x-rated videos to relax before a mission.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Fialka, J.J. *Hotel Warriors Covering the Gulf War*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, 1991, p.17.

⁴¹ Kellner, D. *The Persian Gulf TV War*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, p.142.

⁴² *ibid.*, p.82.

⁴³ Macarthur, *op.cit.*, pp.167-69 contains excerpts from SGT Dick Runel's letters published in *The Voice*, of New Baltimore, Michigan.

⁴⁴ Williams, P. The Press and the Persian Gulf War, *Parameters*, Vol 21, No 3, Autumn 1991, p.6.

⁴⁵ This story dealt with methods of intelligence operations on the battlefield.

⁴⁶ Gottschalk, M. 'Operation Desert Cloud: The Media and the Gulf War', *World Policy Journal*, New York, Vol 9, No 3, Summer 1999, p.455.

⁴⁷ Condry, J. 'TV: live from the battlefield', *IEEE Spectrum*, Vol 28, No 9, September 1991, p.48.

⁴⁸ *loc.cit.*

The pools also limited the amount of journalists with the troops. Media representatives determined pool positions, although the US military often interceded on behalf of favoured reporters. General Walter Boomer allowed *Washington Post* reporter, Molly Moore, to travel with his mobile command post separate from the pool system.⁴⁹ Some reporters critical of the military were blacklisted. CENTCOM refused John Laurence, from the US television network ABC, access to troops after he detailed equipment problems and ammunition shortages.⁵⁰

The restrictive nature of these pools goaded some elements of the media into legally challenging the validity of the policies of the Pentagon. The first suit claimed that the pool system, escorts, and 'security review' violated the media's First and Fifth Amendments rights under the US constitution. AFP initiated the second suit against the US Defence Department on the grounds the pools were unconstitutional because they interfered with the agency's new gathering process. AFP were excluded from the pool as these were primarily US entities with US reporters.⁵¹ The case was dismissed because the war ended before sufficient information could be gathered to rule on the validity of the restrictions.

Control of the pool extended to control of copy. Reporters were banned from using their own vehicles, using cellular phones or any other independent transmission means including the Saudi phone system to deliver copy. One British television crew was arrested after their calls to London were monitored by an airborne AWACS aircraft⁵² Indeed, the military was responsible for the delivery of copy. Copy often took three to four days to make the eight-hour trip from the battlefield to Dhahran for transmission. This was despite the availability of modern technology from satellite telephones to faxes. Gottschalk points out these delays enabled US military officials the chance to break and thereby shape major news.⁵³

With the exception of unilateral reporters, the remaining non-pool reporters remained in hotels in Riyadh or Dhahran. These 'hotel warriors' relied on either the military briefings or pool reports. The JIB conducted a security review of all news stories and pictures even when the information came direct from a reviewed pool report or from the press conferences.⁵⁴ Control of the pool was, therefore, critical to controlling the flow of information. The effectiveness of the pool system led Andre Gunder Frank to

⁴⁹ Many commentators disagree as to the extent of the US military's involvement in the pool process. Condry asserts that the Pentagon allocated reporters to pools. John Fialka, who was a pool coordinator, refutes this allegation. What is clear is that senior US officers gave preferential treatment to individual reporters. See Kellner, *op.cit.*, p.83 for details.

⁵⁰ *loc.cit.*

⁵¹ Mordan, *op.cit.*, p.10. Interestingly, none of the major mainstream US media joined the case.

⁵² Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.58.

⁵³ Gottschalk, *op.cit.*, p.455.

⁵⁴ Sherman, *op.cit.*, p.59. The claim of all stories is circumspect given both the volume of stories produced and the 'live' nature of some.

propose ‘the Pentagon managed press pool was the most successful military weapon used in the war’⁵⁵

Unilateral reporters represented a threat to both the pool system and the military control. These reporters operated independently of the pool system to gather news. Independent reporters broke the news that the fighting continued at Khafji when the US military declared the fighting over. Independent reporters also revealed the role of the US Marines in the battle, contrary to official reports of Saudi and Qatar force involvement⁵⁶ These isolated successes reinforce the difficulties of the geo-logistic environment.

Access to Saudi Arabia requires a visa and the kingdom do not recognise the notion of press freedom. However, after pressure from US government officials the kingdom accepted the arrival of the National Media Pool in August 1990. Where possible, the Saudis preferred not to grant visas to journalists. The journalists were difficult to stop and eventually 1600 arrived to cover the conflict. A lot of desert and a lack of transport further compounded the problem of accommodating the media. Reporters found travelling and gathering news in such an environment generally forbidding. With the exception of unilaterals, reporters became dependent on the military for transport, protection, accommodation, information, and transmission. In short, everything. The superiority of the US military in the geo-logistic area is underscored by General Schwarzkopf’s veto of a suggestion to give major news organisations more time in the field.⁵⁷

Overall, the US military was very successful at regulating the flow of information. Fialka suggests this success derived from ‘incompetence from the bottom up and resistance from the top down’⁵⁸. Primarily, however, the implementation of a well-planned and executed campaign to regulate the flow of information held the press captive during the Gulf War. This level of control provides the military an opportunity to mobilise all necessary support during conflict.

‘The medium is the event; the image is the reality; the spectacle is the substance.’⁵⁹

The final component of the strategy is the ability to mobilise elite support and public opinion. There is considerable debate over the relationship between elite opinion, the public, and the media. Wolfsfeld argues that the media and the public take their cue from elite opinions.⁶⁰ Chomsky adds that the media reflects the interests of powerful

⁵⁵ Mowlana, H. Gerbner, G & Schiller, H.I. *Triumph of the Image The Media’s War in the Persian Gulf – A Global Perspective*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992, p.15.

⁵⁶ Kellner, op.cit., pp.275-76, 281.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.82.

⁵⁸ Fialka, op.cit., p.24.

⁵⁹ Greenberg & Gantz, op.cit., p.73

⁶⁰ Wolfsfeld, op.cit., pp.28-29.

actors within the corporate world.⁶¹ Contrary to these opinions, Mueller offers the public ultimately determines the agenda.⁶² As Dandeker concludes, ‘the media might push a line but it is not certain that the public will buy it.’⁶³

What is certain is the Gulf War was the subject of extensive news coverage with CNN, for example, providing 24 hour a day coverage to a global audience. The complexities of the elite-public-media relationship and high level of interest in the Gulf War ensure media effects are critical to the antagonists. Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon highlight framing as a vital media effect.⁶⁴ Framing captures the relationship between the coverage and the public. Wolfsfeld explains media frames construct the world through making sense of events and suggesting what is at issue.⁶⁵ Essentially, frames provide meaning through words and images. Initially, none of the existing frames applied to the Gulf War.

Unlike the Cold War or Arab-Israeli, the US public lacked knowledge of the Gulf states and how the US might contribute to the area. Explaining the event of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait meant creating frames. The Bush administration used a law and order theme in response to Iraqi aggression. This meta-theme established a good versus evil frame with the US positioned as the sheriff’s holstered six shooter ready to deliver justice. However, the pentagon also promoted its own frames. Manheim argues the principal objective of the Pentagon was to preserve its political legitimacy and protect itself from the budget-cutting pressure likely to follow any military conflict.⁶⁶ Consequently, the US military presented three main frames; the Gulf War is ‘clean’, the Gulf war is just, and we are a community at war.

These frames were determined in relation to US military experience in Vietnam. A Freedom Forum analysis discovered the word ‘Vietnam’ appeared more than any other word during the Gulf conflict.⁶⁷ Senior military personnel were determined to banish the spectre of Vietnam and restore credibility in the military– the Gulf would be a ‘clean’ war.

Framing a clean war requires the presentation of a conflict where death is absent, where ‘operations’ are planned, and ‘surgical’ strikes selectively remove the target. The Pentagon launched a technowar against the Iraqi ‘war machine.’⁶⁸

⁶¹ Herman & Chomsky, op.cit., pp.28-29.

⁶² Mueller, op.cit., p.133.

⁶³ Dandeker, op.cit., p.133.

⁶⁴ Iyengar & Simon in Bennett & Paletz, op.cit., pp.167-185 discuss media effects.

⁶⁵ Wolfsfeld, op.cit., p.31.

⁶⁶ Mannheim in Bennett & Paletz, op.cit., p.137.

⁶⁷ See note 5.

⁶⁸ Technowar combines science, technology and comprehensive planning to control the battlefield and destroy the enemy. The concept was developed during the Vietnam War.

Simultaneously, the Pentagon marshalled support for the war through the discourses and images of a precision, hi-tech campaign minimising civilian casualties but destroying the enemy. “Warspeak” captures how language is debased to ‘sanitise’ the war.⁶⁹ For example, ‘collateral damage’ meant the destruction of civilian targets and civilian deaths as accidental damage. The US air campaign did not bomb targets rather it ‘serviced the target’. Euphemisms for killing included ‘eliminate’, ‘degrade’, ‘hurt’ and ‘attrit’. The ‘body bags’ from Vietnam became ‘human remains pouches’. Warspeak enlisted the media into concealing the lethal effects of a strategic bombing campaign and provided an illusion of a surgical, clean war.

The US military provided seductive images of this clean technowar supporting the message of its discourse. Video tapes of the high tech precision bombing made their debut on January 18, 1991. These initial videos included Stealth aircraft dropping bombs down the airshaft of an Iraqi air defence headquarters and destruction of the Iraqi air force headquarters.⁷⁰ The media, thirsty for images, replayed these tapes for days. This repetition reinforced the illusion of a bloodless war where only machines and not people were involved. Only military buildings and equipment, not people were destroyed. Eventually, the accuracy and effects of the bombing campaign proved different to the initial images. By then, however, the videos had successfully manipulated the media and seduced the audience. Technology, then, became the hero of this clean war and perhaps the biggest hero of all was the Patriot missile.

The Patriot missile was an anti-missile missile used in the Gulf War to intercept incoming Iraqi Scud missiles. The Scud-Patriot duel was emblematic of the overall conflict. The duel, caught live by NBC on 25 January, 1991, pitted defensive Patriots against offensive Scuds, protection versus aggression, precision high tech against indiscriminate low tech systems, and good versus evil. On 21 January, 1991, the Pentagon asserted the Patriot had intercepted nine out of ten Scud missiles.⁷¹ Overnight the Patriot became the ‘saviour of the skies’ and a potent symbol of the surgical nature of a clean war.⁷² Some reports highlighting, or at least questioning, the efficacy of the Patriot did surface. Generally, though, the Patriot was framed as the ultimate weapon in the hi-tech pantheon. Again, exposure of the Patriot’s performance did not occur until post-war, January 16 1992 in fact!⁷³ By this time it was too late – the image of precision had been sold and the media employed as the salesperson. Clearly, the images of the war did not provide the full picture.

In this respect, there was little if any references or images of death. The US military press conferences avoided the daily body counts symptomatic of the errors of Vietnam. Admittedly, the US military kept a tally of personnel missing in action but

⁶⁹ Kellner, *op.cit.*, pp.238-242.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p.159.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp.174-179 discusses the performance of Patriot during the conflict. ‘Official’ US figures assert that the Patriot knocked out 45 of the 47 Scuds targeted.

⁷² Taylor, *op.cit.*, p.70.

⁷³ Kellner, *op.cit.*, p. 179. The Pentagon admitted a high proportion of Patriots missed their targets or incorrectly homed onto the Scud motor instead of the warhead.

did not display a similar tally for troops killed in action. Instead, KIA referred to deaths from fighting with the Iraqis and discounted deaths from accidents or before conflict. Instead reports focussed on the number of sorties, planes shot down, mission effectiveness and equipment destroyed.⁷⁴ Although there was not an official policy against showing wounded or killed soldiers, very few pictures of such nature surfaced, mainly due to the lack of access to any real fighting scenes. Even images from the 'highway of death' revealed little toll on human life, as there were few bodies to film. The Pentagon closed Dover Airforce Base to the press. This prevented media coverage of the arrival of human remains pouches (body bags) from the conflict.⁷⁵ The US military strived to present a 'clean war' through managing the images and language of war. For Knightly, this marks 'a deliberate attempt by the authorities to alter public perception of the nature of war itself, particularly the fact that civilians die in war.'⁷⁶ Similarly, the US military wanted to highlight that 'Gulf War is just.'

Justness implies actions are lawful and legitimate. The concept also emphasises maintaining accepted standards of behaviour. The coalition emphasised the UN resolutions legitimised their actions against nations that had contravened acceptable international behaviour.

In these terms, a just war must abide by both UN resolutions and the rules for war. Therefore, a just war can only target the enemy and avoid the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Military discourse emphasised the justness of the coalition cause. US forces were 'precise', 'careful', and 'scrupulous'. Conversely, the enemy was 'ruthless', 'cruel', and 'wanton'. General Schwarzkopf even praised President Bush's decision to prolong the war for six hours as humane and compassionate.⁷⁷

Video images released to the press emphasised the careful and selective nature of the targeting campaign. Military briefers implied minimum effort and force was being used to achieve the desired effect. Inevitably, any imagery contrary to this discourse would undermine this picture. The bombing of the Amiriya shelter and Basra damaged the military claim. The latter incident ruined the infrastructure of the town. Moreover, the US military videos had previously shown the destruction of bridges within Iraq. US military spokesperson described each of these as a legitimate target; Amiriya was a command centre, Basra a military town and bridges were lines of

⁷⁴ Cordesman, A.H. 'Rushing to Judgment on the Gulf War', *Armed Forces Journal International*, June 1991, pp.66-72 reports the considerable confusion in the press over data from the Gulf War. He highlights that the inaccuracies of some estimates for Iraqi troop numbers, destruction of equipment and weapon effectiveness are neither lies nor deliberate disinformation but estimates. He acknowledges the inability of the Department of Defense to provide accurate definitions contributed to this confusion.

⁷⁵ Salmeen, op.cit., p.6. Mordan, op.cit., p.10 reveals the press challenged these restrictions on the grounds that the rights of the press to gather news was denied. The court ruled the base was not a public forum and also protected the privacy of the deceased members' families in dismissing the case.

⁷⁶ Knightly in Tiffen, R. 'Marching to whose drum? – Media battles in the Gulf War', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 46, No 1, May 1992, p.52.

⁷⁷ Schwarzkopf, op.cit., p.544.

communication. The mainstream media accepted these descriptions and, therefore, never questioned the ethics or justness of the bombing.

The final frame the US military promoted was of a 'community at war'. This community included the United Nations, nations of the Coalition, the public especially in the US, and selected media. The US military concentrated on the public and the media. Consequently, the audience was asked to identify with the qualities and quality of the US forces within the theatre of operations. US military censorship of words such as 'giddy' to describe fighter pilots after first night's action, the excising of an obscenity uttered by one pilot, and the censoring of the report on pilots watching pornographic movies before going on missions highlight an active involvement in image making.⁷⁸

The US press quickly identified with the military. Commentators frequently used 'we' and 'our' to describe US actions and assets. Moreover, the press pools socialised media into the military organisation. Press identification with the troops provided a rally round the flag effect, where patriotism outweighs press freedoms. Essentially, the US military wanted support for the troops to equate to support for its actions.

Overall, the US military tightly controlled the images and words of the conflict to produce a spectacle of a just and clean war became the reality in the absence of independent evidence. The ability of the US military to frame the Gulf War provided an unparalleled opportunity to influence and mobilise elite and public opinion.

In conclusion, the military-media relationship has contained a zero-sum element since a civilian reporter provided the first independent coverage of war. The military's need for secrecy conflicted with the press' need for publicity or news. Arguably, complexities of the modern battlefield challenge the Manichean duality of this relationship. These complexities include the global, live nature of the media, a public hunger for news, the destructive effect of hi-tech weapons. Some of these developments permitted the immediate coverage of events such as and within the Gulf War.

Modern democratic governments recruit support from the media, the elite and public opinion for their policies. Similarly, military forces within democracies cannot ignore the impact of these forces. Therefore, success on the modern battlefield for military forces within democracies must reconcile the traditional conflict between secrecy and publicity. For military forces from democratic nations derive legitimacy and support for their actions from the same support base as their governments. Consequently, the military must develop a suitable media plan.

Historically, the military imposed censorship on the press. This traditional approach does not effectively address the complexities and needs of the military on the modern battlefield. During the Gulf War, the Pentagon devised a news management strategy addressing these modern complexities. This strategy successfully framed messages to the target audience including the US public and decision-making elite. The manipulation of words, images, and information contributed to the success of this

⁷⁸ Kellner, op.cit., p.198.

framing. This regulation of the information flow imposed a range of restrictions on the freedom of the press. Assistant Secretary Williams believes these restrictions did not prevent the press from providing ‘...the American people the best war coverage they ever had.’⁷⁹ One anonymous journalist countered ‘never in the field of human conflict has so little been disclosed by so few to so many.’⁸⁰ These contradictory remarks highlight the difficulty of assessing the extent of the manipulation of the media by the US military in the Gulf War. One anonymous officer declared of the Vietnam War, ‘Next time I wouldn’t tell the people anything until the war is over and then I’d tell them who won.’⁸¹ And, that is precisely what the military did in a subtle but effective fashion during the Gulf War.

⁷⁹ Brown, J.B. ‘Media Access to the Battlefield’, *Military Review*, July 1992, p.15.

⁸⁰ Taylor, op.cit., p.13.

⁸¹ Pimlott & Badsey, op.cit., p.226.

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