

MEDIA IMPACT ON NATIONAL SECURITY POLICIES

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Abstract: *The mechanism of national security policy is an issue of increasing interests in post cold war era. But what is the impact of the media upon national security policy decision making? New world wide events show us that more than ever national policy is often at the mercy of the media. The Wiki leaks, the Murdoch inquiry, the impact of new social media on Arab democratic movements are just some examples regarding the effect of nearly simultaneous presentation of information around the world.*

The world is changing, and the processes by which national policy is developed may also be changing. This study employs a relatively narrow definition of national security issues as only those which are concerned with national survival and preservation of our way of life. The media affects us as individuals and as a collective body. The main purpose of this article is to focus upon the impact of the media on national security.

Keywords: *national security, media, decision making, liberty vs. security*

It is no doubt among specialists that national security policies issues can be included in foreign policy preoccupation.

The main argument for this assertion is that as foreign policies are influenced by a multitude of dependent and independent variables, either external or domestic by nature, so is nowadays homeland security policy more and more influenced by changes in the international system, by specific changes in the information age both nationally and internationally. The most important sources [1] in the statecraft machinery, especially in new age of information revolution, is public opinion. The nature of public opinion affects one nation's conduct beyond the national border and the nation perception of security issues. A potentially important component in the public opinion-foreign policy linkage is the role played by the mass media. The value of media increases its significance as an influential and instrumental tool about building confidence or promoting mistrust among people (the behaviour of policy makers themselves is affected by their own image in the media coverage or the image of the world conveyed by the mass media) on issues related to national security.

In Walter Lippmann's view, a nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by victory in such a war [2]. Unfortunately, the term “national security” has long been used as a symbolic concept of a policy objective. Like all others “national” concepts (national interests, national values), national security has a wide and ambiguous meaning.

National interest was for far too long a guiding star for national security and foreign policies. The cores of national interest are the national values. However, individuals, states, and other social actors have many values. Therefore, some well-known analysts plead for a new framework in analyzing national security. Security for whom? Security for what values? How much security? For what threats? By what means? Security at what costs? Security in what times? [3]

Media and security policies have a strong connection in the contemporary strategic environment and this connection is better understood by public opinion in times of war or internal/international crises.

In today's information age, asserting that the media has an important impact on national security decision making is almost as saying that military capabilities, geography or resources have an impact on national security decision making.

Political or military actors work in an environment shaped by the media. Media shapes the perception of decision-makers and people. In addition, based on these perceptions the political decision-makers formulate policies,

choose lines of actions. One of the most important effects of mass communication is the agenda setting.

Mass media influences the public agenda directly by weight of attention and media authority, the public agenda (opinion) influences the policy agenda that is directly influenced by media agenda.

It is extremely difficult to comprehend media's power and influence in the contemporary world, therefore this article has no intention to do so. The essence of this paper is represented by the idea of media's double utility. Media can be quite useful for security policies, can inform and educate the population regarding national and universal values, spread those values, and it can promote foreign and security policies. At the same time, through presenting controversial aspects of the society, media can be a weakness security wise. In security issues, media as well as population can be educated. This is what we would like to focus on, with the mention that we will do nothing else but advance and underline some points of view regarding the relationship between mass media and national security.

1. MEDIA AS A SOCIETAL SOURCE IN SHAPING NATIONAL SECURITY POLICIES.

In terms of perceptions, of popular and policy makers' images, the media have attributed “almost dictatorial powers.”[4] The dynamics of media impact are different, varying, and diversified in different countries: authoritarian system, libertarian system or social responsibility system [5]. A closed and dictatorial society can control the information and the messages that it wishes to convey to the rest of the world far more effectively than an open society. A democratic society becomes the victim of its own need for openness, transparency. The paradox of international affairs-public opinion relations is the absence of basic knowledge about foreign affairs, security, and the lack of interests on “alien” issues. The day-to-day lack of interests changes in times of trouble. The media may create new issues and new “trouble spots.” As McCombs and Shaw wrote in 1972, the media may not tell us what to think, but they do tell, us what to think about. The capacity to define what is significant, what comprises a problem what constitutes an issue, what poses a crisis and what alternatives are available resides with the media [6].

After the agenda is set (“news that fit to print,” news of public interests, information's considered common goods) the media functions as *gatekeepers* by filtering the news and shaping the way it is reported.[7] In other word, the public debate appears not because events occur but because the media coverage of events.

Unfortunately, in the international arena, the major actors use media as a source of propaganda to promote some special and sometimes obscure interests in order to bring desired changes in the prevailing system. It is well known that

the media has become a tool of American global agenda to influence the rest of the world for promoting its strategic interests in the post 9/11 age. In addition, the post 9/11 age is an age of war, a different kind of war but, by no means, war. Considering the fact that in war, psychological operation is not the only function which media is called upon to perform in the content of national security, some specialists agree that in a globalize society media becomes a lethal weapon against the enemy, and the population as well [8].

“The camera and the computer have become weapons of war... This new and awesome technology enabled journalists to bring the ugly reality of war to both the belligerents and others around the world, serving as a powerful influence on public opinion and governmental attitudes and actions.”[9] The new media power in the globalize world is well analyzed in George Packer article *Knowing the Enemy* [10] “if bin Laden didn’t have access to global media, satellite communications and the Internet, he’d just be a cranky guy in a cave.”

As a conclusion, literature is full of studies about mass media’s influence during wars. We will briefly present some of the most up-to-date preoccupations below:

- ✓ Media’s role in perception management in conflict situations
- ✓ Media as a force multiplier in war situations-media management awareness should be brought about in the armed forces. “Dealing with the media in an insurgent environment has its own pitfalls so the media policy of the establishment during terrorist activities, militancy, and low intensity conflicts should be especially well defined.”[11]
- ✓ Media as initiator and sustainer of mass motivation – the basis of policies and actions associated to different stages of on-going conflicts.
- ✓ Inability of some international actors to admit and counterattack the actions of the media, actions that may endanger military tactical and strategic objectives; media campaigns that increase the actors’ vulnerability on an international level.

On the other hand, in peacetime the media is viewed as an amplifier, as policy change agents. Media serves as a checkpoint by ensuring that the policy-makers are taking the right decisions.

There can be little doubt that the media have the power to influence events in national security issues on international and national scene, sometimes by its design as a societal source, sometimes by accident.

The ways in which the dynamics of mass communication influence the military and national security leadership are countless and as complex as the influences of geography, politics, logistics, or any number of other factors beyond the balance of forces at the scene of conflict. Each situation in which media dynamics plays a role in the development, execution, and outcome of military strategies must be regarded as unique.”[12]

2. SOCIAL MEDIA. OPPORTUNITY OR VULNERABILITY?

Another complex issue in the media-national security connection is the new media or the so-called social media [13] considered by some specialists [14] a challenge for democracies. Why is that? Because social media channels such as social networks and blogs present powerful tools to spread information to the masses. Just remember the Moldavian twitter riot, the Iran elections [15], the WikiLeaks disclosures, or the new Arab freedom movements. Social media is about sharing information, is by its nature permission based. Debates on how social media may jeopardize national security began with the case of a former Israeli soldier who posted pictures of herself while on military duty.

According to media experts [16], what is scary about social media is what has been happening in terms of social media affecting national security. Besides its social positive

effect, sharing the common goods (what are common goods in terms of classified information is another controversial debate), social media appears to be adding a whole new set of factors to be considered in relation with negative effects on national security and military or political interests. The debate on how far the freedom of expression should extend is old but the power to instantly disseminate information in a real time viral fashion is new. In addition, it is not only about instantly dissemination. The classical deontological obligation to over verify the information you share it is no longer possible in the Blogosphere. What source is credible? The indicated source it is really the source of the message? Who is the good guy and who is the bad guy? Denial and Deception are more than ever difficult to counter on World Wide Web. The efficient use of the tools provided by the new media is the new military power because electronic media and social media are the most effective and powerful means of mass motivation. Motivation is essential for both aggressor and victim. Motivation and will are in fact important elements in the Clausewitz war equation: $E = C \times W$, where E is efficacy on the battlefield, C military capabilities and W is the will, desire to use all the available capacities.

Andrew Mack, one of the first asymmetric conflict theoretician wrote in *Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars* [Mack, 1975, 175-200], that W is in fact the interest. The weak actor interest for victory is sometimes more important than huge capabilities. So motivation, willingness, interest are important variables in modern wars; media is a force multiplier in perception management, psychological warfare and eventually is an instrument of war. [17]

3. SECRECY VS. LIBERTY

“The role of press in democratic society is not to take national security into consideration, it is not to implement national policy, and it is not to be patriotic. It is to be aggressive, it is to be suspicious, it is to be skeptical, and it is to be hostile to the government.” In our opinion that kind of remarks, even if a media anchor like Ilana Dayan makes them [18], are nothing more than media extremism. Nevertheless, the years since the 9/11 events have been years of extremes in national security journalism. Today a journalist, (classic journalism, or new-media journalism) is not just an observer but also an action player in the national security enterprise. As any over player in this special enterprise media must well aware of its responsibilities especially in an era, in which the tradeoff between liberty and security is one of the crucial issues. “In virtually every society, individuals and groups seek security against the state, just as they ask the state to protect them against harm from other state. Human rights and state security are thus intimately related. The most profound choice relating to national security is, therefore, the tradeoff with liberty.” [19]

We live in a different world today than 100 years ago, so in our opinion Benjamin Franklin’s words “Those who would sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither” are no longer correct. We have to make some difficult choices between liberty and security.

Unfortunately, among other negative effects on the Romanian contemporary society, the communist tragedy made us unable to find a balance between freedom and security. Traumatized by the importance of the secret and secret services from the communist period, we often forget that keeping a nation’s secrets ultimately influences its very own existence and even its well-being on the international stage. Romanians often forget that in a democratic society, intelligence services’ role, either civil or military, is to protect the state and its citizens. This statement might seem a display of false patriotism that is why we have other arguments at our disposal: civil controlling over services, the partnerships between Romanian and western services, alliances, multi and bilateral relations on informative line. However, such

undertaking concerning both the maturity of the Romanian society and that of the media's is quite complex when it comes to the secrecy issue and the economy of the presented material does not allow such a discussion.

In authoritarian regimes the power of secret was accepted (since there was no other option), and preserved (most of the time through coercion). However, free societies and free press strove for the revelation of the secret, creating a contest between how much should be revealed and how much should be kept secret in the nation's interest. Only in times of great danger for the nation, secrets were respected. The issues, which appear in this situation, are dangerous for the very existence of a nation: to what extent is the public aware of this danger? What secrets are important in such a situation? It is well known that secrets have their own "unit of measure." When media should get involved (that means we should have an informed media regarding security issues) and objectively distinguish between sensitive information of national security and mere news whose publication does not necessary provide a better understanding of the society. Who could be an authority that could decide, beyond any doubt, what information can harm national security?

Difficult questions with complex and divergent answers. What we can emphasize is that, generally national security policy deals with life and death issues. Moreover, those issues apply not of "expendable" proportions of societies and these resources -but in the contemporary world with the very life and death of whole societies and their cultures. [20]

Generally, the issues regarding freedom-security is widely analyzed in literature by media experts and human rights fighters. This is why, most of the time opinions are not entirely objective. At the same time, experts in national security cannot be considered objective either. Most of the time they are purposely ambiguous so they are not accused of infringing human rights. [21]

From our point of view, both media scoops and secret keeping are of outmost importance in a society that considers itself truly democratic. The secret is not compatible with free societies. We have to understand the difference between classified information regarding national security and information, which is mere news for the public. Understating such differences should be doubled by proper laws.

For a brief explanation of the difference between news and sensitive information just remember the Wikileaks case. The public debate starts in July 2010 with the online posting of 92.000 classified U.S. government documents relating to the war in Afghanistan. For a better confirmation of the disclosed materials, Wikileaks allowed three huge media organizations The New York Times, The Guardian, and the

German Der Spiegel, access to the material in order to analyze and fix the information puzzle. Even if the leaked information proved to be already known the specialists drew many comparison to the leak of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 [22]. The Wikileaks disclosures renewed an old dilemma – what kind of news is good, and what kind of news are bad for the citizens and for the nation's sake?

The U.S. Admiral Mullen in a Pentagon briefing comments: "Mr. Assange can say whatever he likes about the greater good he and his source are doing, but the truth is they might already have on their hands the blood of some young soldier or that of an Afghan family. Disagree with the war all you want, take issue with the policy, challenge me or our ground commanders on the decisions we make to accomplish the mission we've been given, but don't put those who willingly go into harm's way even further in harm's way just to satisfy your need to make a point." On the other side of the liberty-security barricade is the freedom of speech fighters. Let us remember the reactions of the Anonymous [23] group in the Wikileaks case.

The sensitivity of sources and information is another complex and delicate debate. Sometimes even professional journalists may not fully understand the reasons why some information is considered sensitive without being classified. On the other hand, public officials have good reasons in demanding secrecy. Government officials rightly fear that the disclosure of secret information would undermine the national security. Sometimes, they are concerned that the disclosure would betray the confidence of intelligence partners.

The most vexing conflicts arise when the public disclosure of a government secret is both harmful to the national security and extremely important to public debate. Therefore, it is a matter of costs and benefits in terms of liberty security dyad.

United States authorities established policies and procedures and assigned responsibilities for identifying unauthorized disclosures of classified information appearing in the media. As US document specifies it is addressed only to unauthorized disclosure of classified information that appear in the media and does not address to unauthorized disclosure that do not meet the criteria for significant disclosures. On this subject Gabriel Schoenfeld, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute Necessary Secrets, offers us a masterpiece: National Security, the Media, and the Rule of Law. Schoenfeld discovers a growing rift between a press that sees itself as a freedom of speech guardian, a "heroic" force promoting the public's "right to know" and a government that needs to safeguard information or even intelligence vital to the successful conduct of national defense.

NOTES

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23. A short search online will reveal the power of this world wide organization. Anonymous members have only virtual identity, they are web wizards and they always try to protect on line freedom .

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