



Media-Military Relations in the Media Era

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Outline of Presentation

First principles – why is this worth talking about?

What is the national military establishment for?

What does the national military establishment stand for?

What do the news media want?

What are the media's corporate and particular interests?

Is there room for military-media mutual understanding?



Why Talk about MEDIA-MILITARY Relations?

News media: Reflections from the world's largest media-
markets

Where the press is free...all is safe

Thomas Jefferson, drafter of the Declaration of
Independence, 3rd US President (1801-09)

Media publicity is the “oxygen” of terrorism

Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the UK (1979-90)



Why Talk about Media-military Relations? (Contd.)

I am not good at dealing with the modern media...I have not felt I have been as effective as I should be, or as effective as you need me to be

UK Education Secretary Estelle Morris, letter of resignation,
23 October 2002

We need to work toward a world in which access to networks and information brings people closer together and expands the definition of the global community

Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State, 21 January 2010

The 'Media Era': all-pervasive, multi-platform, 24/7 global news-cycle and implications for consumers' understanding of their world



Why talk about Media-military Relations (Contd.)

Military: Home of the world's most expansive, expensive, sophisticated and powerful military

Our Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Coast Guardsmen constitute our most critical strategic and most treasured resource. They deserve the unflinching support of a nation that clearly understands, from the outset, why the all-volunteer force has been placed in harm's way and what risks and costs come with the use of military force.

Dr. Robert Gates, US Secretary of Defense, QDR, February 2010

To all our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen – I have no greater honor than serving as your Commander-in-Chief. I've been awed by your selfless spirit, your eagerness to serve...I've been energized by your dedication to duty.

Barack Obama, 44th US President, Christmas Message to the nation, 24 December 2009



Military-Media Relations Institutional Tensions

There is a tension characteristic of all wars, operations, and conflicts fought by democracies:

- ❑ The **military** has an operational requirement for information to be made available only on a need to know basis in the interest of safety of combatants, security of the operation, and success of the mission;
- ❑ The **citizens** of a democracy have a **right to know** about and judge what operations are being planned and conducted in their name.
- ❑ This tension characterising the relationship between the military and the media is not unique to any one country or society – it is structural, institutional and professional.



Institutional Tensions (Contd.)

- ❑ The crucial need is to understand and appreciate the key role the other institution plays in maintaining the health and security of the nation-state, and conduct one's own business with professional respect informing and moderating understandable skepticism.
- ❑ An absence of understanding, appreciation, professional respect – and a focus on unbalanced mutual skepticism – impose avoidable opportunity costs on both pillars of the national establishment, weakening the overall organic health of the state-actor.
- ❑ Example – news coverage of the BDR Mutiny in February 2009; hence this exercise.



Military-Media Relations

What is the National Military Establishment For? A Functional Summary

- ❑ Usual constitutional purpose – defence of the state - territorial integrity, independence from foreign aggression, sovereignty from internal threats to national authority

- ❑ Military services – uniformed and armed element of permanent state bureaucracies; final deterrent and ultimate guarantor of sovereignty and independence

- ❑ Structural purpose: ‘Anarchic system’ – might is usually right (military part of CNP); regional backdrop – CNP imbalance & conflicting interests – e.g. maritime boundary; national circumstance – polarised polity, diametric policy shifts, stable core needed




What is the National Military Establishment For? **(Contd.)**

- ❑ Deterrence by demonstration – policy backstop; defence when deterrence fails; conventional, sub-conventional, hybrid operations, IS Duty; in-aid-of-civil-power
- ❑ More recent additions – MOOTW; PKO/PSO; humanitarian/post-disaster relief
- ❑ Key element: organised, multi-disciplinary trained and equipped force ready to carry out orders in threatening circumstances in which civilians may be ineffective
- ❑ Constitutional-institutional ‘grand bargain’: society/state provide legitimacy, manpower, other resources, and an exceptional framework of lethal use of force – in return, the military defends and promotes the status quo




What does the National Military Establishment Stand For? An Ideational-institutional Overview

- ❑ Defend and protect nation-state/citizenry with lethal force and at the risk of one's life
- ❑ All other citizens are entitled to pursue personal/family gains, material assets, self-expression, fulfillment and 'happiness' – soldiers only function as parts of the group
- ❑ The collective subsumes the individual – combatants carry out orders - using lethal force and risking their own lives – in collective, not individual interest. This is interpreted and internalised as 'noble selflessness' – a trait/value distinguishing soldiers from civilians



What Does the National Military Establishment Stand For? (Contd.)

- ❑ Only soldiers are formally trained and required to kill other humans, and risk their own lives as a part of 'the job'; professional proficiency is judged on that basis
- ❑ The military institution is an integral – and last-resort – part of the national establishment, and is yet distinct from all other parts of the state – both necessary and problematic
- ❑ Society is founded on belief in the sanctity of the citizens' rights to life, limb and property, and to various freedoms; the military is the ultimate defender of these rights – but has no rights itself other than what is specifically given, and is trained to kill, destroy and disrupt



What Does the National Military establishment stand for? (Contd.)

- ❑ The distinction in mindset, priorities and preferences between soldiers and civilians is significant, and necessary for professional performance of the latter's task
- ❑ Instinctively, society must respond to environmental stimuli, adapt and change; institutionally, the military is designed to conserve the *status quo*. If this tension threatens corporate capacity to adapt, such threats can trigger revolutionary (rapid, radical) change



What are the News Media For?

An Overview of Corporate Interests

- ❑ By definition, the news media provide news – inform and ‘educate’ the citizenry, and empower society with the capacity to make informed judgment – the Jeffersonian precept
- ❑ In reality, the news media shape and colour public opinion, sway popular attitudes and generate support for or against particular policies, actions, views, groups or individuals
- ❑ Theoretically, the media are an instrument of civic empowerment, intermediating between state and society; in reality, media not only provide news – they decide what is news, which news merits priority in coverage and urgency, and attribute meaning/significance



What Are the News Media For? (Contd.)

- ❑ News media, therefore, are not a detached mirror of the universe – they determine the shape of the universe consumers unwittingly, voluntarily or inadvertently inhabit
- ❑ News media, therefore, are a powerful actor within society – hence Margaret Thatcher’s anxiety over media providing the ‘oxygen of publicity’ to terrorists
- ❑ Financially, it is a business and must be a successful commercial proposition to last in a competitive environment; these interests may impose political/professional constraints



What Do News Media Want? A Professional Perspective

- ❑ News media are differentiated – ideological, party-political, commercial interests vary
- ❑ Within the profession, publishers, editors, share-holders, stakeholders, sub-editors, journalists/reporters – may have specific interests, preferences and priorities
- ❑ Core demand -to break/scoop the story – be first with reports, audio/stills/video/interviews – old news is no news; insatiable demands of the 24/7 news cycle – quality-quantity issue



What Do News Media Want? (Contd.)

- ❑ Coverage as live, lively and dramatic as possible – to beat competition (ABC staged photo shoot of hijacker holding pistol to pilot's head in June 1985 TWA Flt.847 hijacking)
- ❑ Demonstrate professionalism and accuracy; difficult in a stressful milieu, with players seeking competitive gains and manipulating messages
- ❑ Protect society's 'right to know' – interpreted liberally to allow 'exciting' and emotive coverage with sensational and graphic imagery – voices of victims and perpetrators



What Do News Media Want?

- ❑ 'Right' to divulge 'protected' information sought to be controlled by state organs
- ❑ Enjoy both legal and physical protection, freedom and safety to operate newsgathering, publishing and broadcasting operations without threat or coercion (RSF/CPJ data)
- ❑ RSF press freedom index 2009: Bangladesh - 121 out of 175 (Angola-119; Nepal-118; Cambodia-117; Congo-116; Sierra Leone-115; Moldova-114; Tajikistan-113)



What Do News Media Want? (Contd.)

- ❑ Play a constructive role in maintaining society's democratic ambience by challenging and questioning state power, representing 'popular rights' vis-à-vis state's authority, thereby maintain a civic balance
- ❑ Tension in the contrary position – challenging state's claimed right to confidentiality and secrecy; demanding state's protection for operating safely under difficult circumstances
- ❑ Semi-symbiotic relationship – media need state's indulgence and aid in breaking 'official' news; state needs media for propaganda/strategic communication purposes
- ❑ Question: who is using whom? To what effect? Who gains most?



Media-Military Relations

Any Room for Mutual Understanding?

- News media and national military are segments of the national elite structure; the military is part of the permanent state establishment – both have critically important functions
- Some of these functions – especially where confidential/classified information is concerned – may be contrary; but there is no fundamental dispute
- All major media organizations incorporate national security/defence expertise to comprehend and explain national security and defence-related issues to society



Any Room for Mutual Understanding? (Contd.)

- ❑ All sophisticated military forces maintain 'Public Affairs' organs (DOD, PACOM, Pacific Fleet, USS Nimitz) to provide information and material to media outlets
- ❑ Mutual recognition of each other's important role in national life, professional respect for each other's functions, and efforts to develop expertise will strengthen both institutions
- ❑ Make use of the creative tensions between the two institutions as an enabling force so that each is better able to operate in an environment which is shaped by both



Thank you

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