Image

The Media and the Image of Defence Policy:

Europe

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The Press has always sought to remark on the remarkable and to find fault with official explanations of the ordinary. The control that the Press (and in later days, the electronic media of mass communications) can exercise over the political process is that of an outsider and thus bound to be provocative. Without provocation, without the revelation of hidden facts and unorthodox or at least unconventional explanation of these facts the media cannot fulfill their purpose which is to satisfy curiosity, to arouse interest and to draw attention to issues that would otherwise go unremarked. Yet some ask more: they would wish the media at the same time to clarify issues and to respect their real proportions in order not to distort their meaning. This, however, is to ask too much for the Press has never been able to show things as they are without a measure of arbitrary distortion. Distortion is the price that has to be paid for bringing into focus complex and ambiguous issues.

Since war and peace, foreign and defence policy, international security, armaments and arms control are all highly complex and ambiguous matters, the media rarely manage to do justice to the issues involved. This difficulty is increased by the media's own business interests: they must try to win the public and that often means limiting the public's exposure to issues which are both unfamiliar and difficult to understand, otherwise the public will desert the media.

In former times, war and the military were taken for granted: every generation in most countries of Europe was expected to have to fight at least one war and preparation for war was part of national policy. If a generation was spared a war, they were considered lucky. War reporting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the Press emerged as a permanent phenomenon in Western Europe, was no different from reporting a fire or an earthquake. Everyone expected such calamities. Moreover, war was widely seen as a means of policy. War reporting, therefore, was nothing more than observing and analysing the use of armed force. The legitimacy of that use was rarely questioned. War correspondents accompanied armies and navies in order simply to tell a story.

Three of the bloodiest wars of the last century and early in this were widely reported in the Press, albeit with a considerable measure of compassion for the ordeals of soldiers and victims: the Crimean War, the American Civil War and the Russo-Japanese War. War was identified with the noble image of 'Nations in Arms' and national feelings had generally accepted war as a national duty once national interest seemed to be at stake and the war 'just'.

This 'alliance' held more or less until the end of the First World War, despite the growth of Christian, liberal and socialist philosophy strongly condemning war and postulating general disarmament. However, the European Press reflected this unease and, when World War I broke out in 1914, there was articulate opposition to the general popular surge towards war. The traumatic experience of the war itself reinforced the moves towards disarmament and pacifism, and this was reflected in the European Press. Scepticism and criticism of the military establishments, defence and armaments blossomed in the liberal, democratic and socialist newspapers.

World War II again appealed to patriotism, and the 'just war'. Mass mobilization and mass suffering demanded that the war effort be identified with the highest national and humanitarian purpose. Fascism and Hitler made it easier to make that identification among the Allies. In the Soviet Union, Poland, Yugoslavia and Greece, it was not much different whereas in Germany war and national defence had been discredited.

In the post-war period a strong initial impetus for peace and disarmament was finally overcome by fear of a new aggression, this time from the East. For almost three decades, public discussion of security affairs was reduced to general expressions of reservation and the democratic left of Europe (and in the churches) and by technical descriptions of deterrence and defence on the centre and right. The European Press dealt with these matters in a strangely ambiguous and veiled manner. Latent scepticism combined with enthusiastic reporting on the new arms technologies, on the modern armed forces, on alliance politics, and on the strategy of deterrence by controlled escalation and flexible response – all highly abstract and complex subjects, difficult to deal with in the pages of the smaller newspapers in the 1960s and 1970s and almost impossible to present with any claim to reality and objectivity on television. There were some brave attempts to explain nuclear deterrence, escalation and conventional defence but more often the tone was one of breathless admiration for technical mastery.

In 1970, Helmut Schmidt, then Defence Minister, called the Bundeswehr an industrial organization that 'produces security' and the media accepted, by and large, the official explanations of deterrence. There was not much controversy until the late 1970s and criticism was confined to compulsory military service, where it existed, to the high cost of armaments and to the absurdity of armed East-West confrontation. The era of negotiations tended to deflect criticism of the military but such debate as took place was a privileged communication between a few specialists in the media and within the bureaucracies and legislatures. The central issues were not debated. They were insulated and widely misunderstood by the general public – like modern works of art: complex, ambiguous, awesome, and, at times, awful. The media employed few specialists and had little interest in defence, armaments and arms-control policies, strategy and security. Editorial staffs were therefore ill-prepared when the old controversies of the 1950s over the rearmament of West Germany, nuclear arms in Europe and deterrence exploded again in the late 1970s and swiftly engulfed significant parts of the educated public – in churches, at universities and in high schools with many teachers leading the opposition against nuclear arms and NATO policies.

This lack of preparation was due mainly to the latent opposition within the media against military security and nuclear weapons. Since the late 1960s, many former participants in the student revolt against the Vietnam War and American policies had joined the editorial offices of television and radio stations, newspapers and the wire services. In West Germany many of them had invoked the constitutional privilege of declaring themselves conscientious objectors to conscription and had carried on a propaganda campaign against military service. The ground was prepared for the setting up of organized resistance to the State's laws on military service and to the politics of military security in Europe.

The Impact of Detente

The years of detente after 1966–67 had changed the perceptions of the 'potential enemy' or 'potential aggressor' in the East. The Harmel Report on the Future Tasks of the Alliance had declared that the relaxation of tensions with the East was compatible with and even complimentary to defence and deterrence. But this combination, while entirely rational as a policy, was ambiguous as to precisely how the Soviet Union and the other Communist-governed countries of Eastern Europe were to be approached for limited co-operation and a security partnership. The central proposition of the Harmel Report was neither understood nor accepted by large segments of West European Society. Detente had been looked upon by many politicians, academics and journalists as an alternative to East-West confrontation in Europe – much as arms control had been understood as a substitute for armaments and defence. If the Soviet Union and her allies in Eastern Europe were to be considered as prospective partners, why should they then be looked upon as 'potential aggressors' to be countered by NATO with new arms and defence measures? The basic concept remained that of qualitative superiority of the West over the East in military forces and arms technology. The West European Governments relied on this assumed qualitative superiority in order to limit defence efforts and, in particular, military expenditures beyond an agreed and rather modest level. NATO relied on stabilizing security by mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) and the Vienna Negotiations encouraged expectations for arms control in Europe as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) had done since 1973. Detente policies were invoked to justify opposition to conscription, to armed security and to defence expenditures. The democratic left in Europe was particularly impatient with the East-West confrontation and NATO programmes and its many supporters within the media transmitted this impatience to the public, as did many teachers in schools and the proponents of peace research at academic institutions. Social-democratic Governments in Western Europe came under relentless criticism from within their own parties, from trade unions, from their youth organizations and from the churches for their alleged lack of awareness of the risks of confrontation and the dangers of war resulting from armaments programmes and the high levels of military forces. The traditional pacifism of the European left, embedded in all the Socialist and Social-Democratic Parties of Western Europe (and in large segments of the Liberal Parties as well) was revived by the hopes of the detente period and the aim of detente was anticipated as reality long before the process had time to develop and arms control to be established. The 'Spirit of Helsinki' was often taken for a fact, whereas in reality it still remained simply a promise of better times to come.

The media, never well-equipped for dealing with complex matters of international relations and by tradition emotional rather than capable of detached examination of unpleasant facts, had left reporting and commenting on military and security affairs to a very few specialists. These were considered by the editors with a mixture of awe, condescension, suspicion and mild neglect yet they held a near monopoly. Privileged they may have been but their impact was sharply limited by the space and time the editors made available for them. Thus a strange situation had emerged: a small number of professional journalists of varying quality virtually controlled all information and commentary on defence and security affairs but they did little to shape editorial policies. This became evident when the first epic controversy arose over 'the neutron bomb'.

As far as personnel were concerned, many of the correspondents who had covered World War II survived into the post-war period. These professional journalists specialized in war and military affairs but the interest shown by their editors has varied sharply. For example, the last war the French press really covered in depth was the Algerian War of Independence 1954–62.

The Vietnam Legacy

The war in Vietnam changed things. It became a permanent subject of newspaper and television interest in most of Western Europe with ideological and political factors tending to dominate both the reporting and the evaluation. This led observers generally to wrong conclusions about the nature and the eventual outcome of this war. By 1965 it was generally proclaimed that this Second Indochinese War could not be ended by a military victory and that therefore only a political solution could end the struggle. Reporting and comment tended to reflect this dominant conviction in Western Europe, in particular in the French media but also in Germany, Scandinavia, Italy and the Netherlands. The effect of this general conviction was to underestimate the significance of the strategic equation, the balance of military forces after the withdrawal of US forces in 1973, the impact of the arms support given to North Vietnam by the USSR and China, and the strain of combat on the forces of South Vietnam and the population. Last not least, reporting underestimated the political significance of armed combat in the strategy and psychology of the Vietnamese Communists. When South Vietnam collapsed this belied the forecasts of ten years of reporting in the Western press. The interdependence of political and military factors had been wrongly interpreted in favour of an assumed permanent military stalemate that left only a negotiated settlement as an outcome. European public opinion, however, shaped by the media and by the elite in universities, churches, humanitarian institutions and political parties, did not correctly perceive the lessons of the event, namely that it was the physical and moral exhaustion of the forces of resistance in the South that had finally led to collapse under military pressure.

The image of the Vietnam War on television has shaped the ideas relating to military security, the use of armed force, national defence and the role of violence in politics of an entire generation. Although the reporting of European television and the higher quality press was by and large correct, preconceived notions were not shattered by the evidence on the ground. Even the advance of the columns of North Vietnamese tanks into the city of Saigon did not dissipate the false impression that South Vietnam had been smashed by its own people in revolt, helped, but not led by the North. The subsequent annexation of the South by the North and the later military invasion of Cambodia by the Vietnamese have been treated only with cursory interest. The War was over and that was what counted in European perceptions.

Since the Vietnam War, the problems of peace and military security in the East-West context and in Europe itself have been overshadowed by the reporting of more distant wars. Nevertheless the constant reference to war has affected public attitudes to nuclear deterrence and military defence in Europe. The continuous reporting of human suffering and damage impresses the horror of war on peoples' minds and tends to identify defence and military security with war in Europe. The emotional reaction of the media to armed conflict elsewhere, irrespective of the causes and the course of events, has reduced the determination to defend even one's own country and Western Europe against a possible threat from the East. The reporting on all wars since Vietnam has followed the same pattern: war is senseless; it can serve no rational purpose; it must end in catastrophe; and there is no legitimacy in using the military instrument for any political end including the defence of freedom and independence. One can observe this 'anti-war' reporting in the case of the Gulf War between Iran and Iraq, in the Lebanese War and in the conflict between Britain and Argentina over the Falklands. Reporting has tended to concentrate on the cruelty and senselessness of war, which can be expressed visually or written about descriptively. While this is to be commended from a humanitarian and philosophical point of view, it does not help to distinguish the causes of war and hence between defence and aggression and between deterrence and war-fighting. The European media seem to have the most serious difficulties in this respect. There is an exception: the British media coverage of the conflict in the South Atlantic. The reporting here reminded one of traditional war reporting: confidence that the cause of their country was right and pride in performance. While interesting in itself, that may not be an attitude that is helpful in explaining the need to defend Western Europe against a superior military force.

Erratic Coverage

Coverage, then, tends towards the spectacular and the spectacular dominates not only the television screen and the headline but also the understanding of defence and security, often equating them with war and insecurity. Second, only very few media organizations employ professional journalists specializing in military and security affairs. For many years in West Germany only two nationally-distributed daily newspapers – the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Welt* – published articles and reports on defence and security issues. Even today regular, systematic reporting and comments on these subjects can be found only in these two newspapers, while others, such as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of Munich and the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, tend to keep up their reader's interest by a certain amount of copy dealing with security, arms control and defence. The weekly press is represented especially by *Die Zeit* of Hamburg and, with some qualifications, by *Der Spiegel*.

Third is the question of regularity. Only the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* offers substantial continuous coverage of security and defence matters. The bulk of the press and the radio programmes address defence and security if and when there is a public debate, usually a controversial one, and when the issue can be easily defined. This was the case with the 'neutron bomb'. It is also the case with such issues as chemical weapons, nuclear arms, NATO strategy or when there is discussion of the possibility of a limited war in Europe or limited use of nuclear arms in Europe. Television on the other hand has screened a number of informative and explanatory films on nuclear arms and strategy, on the balance of forces, on arms control and on the military threat to Western security.

West Germany may not be typical of all Western European countries. Others probably do less since national defence is unlikely to have the same degree of urgency and the same controversial character as in a frontier country, where destruction would first occur in the case of conventional or limited nuclear war. Moreover in Germany the traumatic experience of a lost war dominates whenever the use of military force is discussed. Responsibility for war and for preparations for war weigh heavily on the consciences of many politicians, churchmen, journalists, and academics. It is the main theme of any discussion of the ethics and morality of national defence and deterrence, since the nuclear fact, as Professor Kurt Biedenkopf has pointed out, imposes on people a state of extreme psychological tension bordering on the unbearable.

For this reason alone arms-control proposals are followed closely in public once the issues have been clearly shaped and recognized by the media. However, the public attention span is short and this is why the media have not consistently featured long drawn out negotiations like MBFR or SALT very prominently; the subjects are too complex and detailed knowledge indispensable if one is to understand what these discussions are all about. Occupation with such themes is even less in evidence in such countries as Britain, France, Italy and Spain. The Nordic countries, the Netherlands and Switzerland, on the other hand, seem to resemble the situation in West Germany. Great occasions in international politics, such as summit meetings, can confer some sudden interest on the subjects under discussion but the treatment given usually consists of a resumé of the record prior to the event and of the problems encountered. The British and West German media generally do quite well on such occasions. The MBFR and SALT negotiations, for example, have been rather well reported since they began and CSCE has been adequately reported. On the other hand, French, Italian and Dutch reporting has been less frequent and continuous during the last ten years or so, although the NATO 'dual track' decision of 1979 and the problems of its implementation related to the INF (Intermediate Nuclear Force) negotiation have received considerable attention in the media of nearly all West European countries.

Influence in Concrete Cases

One can single out four particularly critical and significant cases of media influence on the political decision-making process during the last few years:

- the 'neutron bomb' decision;
- the storage of chemical warheads;
- the storage of nuclear warheads;
- the *Pershing* II and GLCM deployment decision of 1979.

These and other related issues (such as 'no first use') have much to do with the perception of the East-West theatre balance in Europe, the perception of threat from the East, the concept of extended deterrence and the Alliance strategy of flexible response by controlled escalation. In other words, the issues are complex and highly technical. They are not easy to understand and to discuss.

Public debate lives on simplification and hence the media have simplified and often oversimplified the issues as have many politicians taking part in the debates. The peace movement in Europe has generally adopted a clearcut and summary formulation of the issues and has largely falsified the original propositions as they did in the case of the 'dual track' decision. Soviet propaganda has seized the opportunity offered and its disinformation campaign has been and is being manipulated by internal communist agitation within the peace movement in several West European countries. The media, of course, have acted as media tend to do: they support or at least record the opposition to Government policies and strategy. In this respect the affiliation of a certain number of journalists with parties of the Democratic Left, with the labour movement, with churches and with student groups tends to reinforce the position taken by those organizations or groups. In such cases the media no longer act independently but rather under external influence.

One can argue, of course, that this is how most information or at least most elements of opinion are reported. However, there have been examples of rather biased programmes produced with the help of those in opposition to government policies and dominated by the 'counter-experts' of the peace movement without government or independent contributions arguing a genuine case in objective terms. Spokesmen for the Soviet Government have been granted easy and generous access to programmes for interviews and lengthy statements where spokesmen for the Government have been excluded or not been offered the same conditions. In fairness such manipulation has by and large remained the exception. On the whole the media have represented both sides in the debate even if they have tended to lean towards emotional explanations and to be critical of official policy and they have mostly featured the danger and the horrors of nuclear war where the issue was, and remains, one of deterrence and arms control.

The most spectacular case is that of the Reduced Blast/Enhanced Radiation (RB/ER) weapon or 'neutron bomb'. The coining of the label 'neutron bomb' decided the shape of the issue and the explanation offered first in the *Washington Post*, according to which this weapon would kill humans but would spare property, decided the terms of the debate. Europe rejected the 'neutron bomb' almost out of hand with public statements by politicians, churchmen, academics and journalists, few of whom had more than the vaguest idea of what this weapon was intended to do. The debate has since been clarified and broadened but not entirely in favour of NATO policies. In 1977–78 public opinion in Western Europe, in particular in West Germany and the Netherlands, had suffered a shock when first confronted with the neutron weapon. Discussion of its characteristics and significance for deterrence and defence brought out a clearer picture of its purpose but did not lead to the desired quietening of public opinion. The neutron weapon remains a highly sensitive and divisive political issue, invariably spoken of in press reports and on television in the context of its use by NATO in the early stages of a war in Europe.

During that first phase of public discussion, the 'neutron bomb' overshadowed all other nuclear weapons and the entire issue of Theatre Nuclear Force (TNF) modernization. However, no sooner was the neutron issue taken off the political agenda as a result of President Carter's decision in the Spring of 1978 to defer production when public attention turned to TNF. From 1979 that issue was fuelled by the 'dual track' decision on the modernization of long-range TNF (or INF – Intermediate Nuclear Forces). Soviet propaganda paired the neutron weapon with the ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) and later also with the *Pershing* II. The press and television generally questioned the usefulness or desirability of new TNF systems. Press and other media commentary together with the arguments of the opponents to these NATO options in public debate created an unfavourable environment for the implementation of NATO plans. In 1981 – 82 the neutron weapon issue was revived by US procurement decisions. On this occasion it became clear that no West European government or parliament would accept deployment in their countries. In retrospect, it can be seen that the neutron weapon issue changed the entire psychological climate for TNF modernization.

The debate on the 'dual track' decision and hence on LRTNF modernization has also changed since the end of 1979. While there has been no general rejection of GLCM and *Pershing* II deployment in some parts of Western Europe, the issue has become dominant in domestic politics in West Germany and in the Netherlands and is a latent problem for any Belgian Government. The situation in Italy and in Britain seems less critical. In West Germany it is expected that the public debate in 1983, the year in which first deployment of with new arms and defence measures? The basic concept remained that of qualitative superiority of the West over the East in military forces and arms technology. The West European Governments relied on this assumed qualitative superiority in order to limit defence efforts and, in particular, military expenditures beyond an agreed and rather modest level. NATO relied on stabilizing security by mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) and the Vienna Negotiations encouraged expectations for arms control in Europe as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) had done since 1973. Detente policies were invoked to justify opposition to conscription, to armed security and to defence expenditures. The democratic left in Europe was particularly impatient with the East-West confrontation and NATO programmes and its many supporters within the media transmitted this impatience to the public, as did many teachers in schools and the proponents of peace research at academic institutions. Social-democratic Governments in Western Europe came under relentless criticism from within their own parties, from trade unions, from their youth organizations and from the churches for their alleged lack of awareness of the risks of confrontation and the dangers of war resulting from armaments programmes and the high levels of military forces. The traditional pacifism of the European left, embedded in all the Socialist and Social-Democratic Parties of Western Europe (and in large segments of the Liberal Parties as well) was revived by the hopes of the detente period and the aim of detente was anticipated as reality long before the process had time to develop and arms control to be established. The 'Spirit of Helsinki' was often taken for a fact, whereas in reality it still remained simply a promise of better times to come.

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Public debate lives on simplification and hence the media have simplified and often oversimplified the issues as have many politicians taking part in the debates. The peace movement in Europe has generally adopted a clearcut and summary formulation of the issues and has largely falsified the original propositions as they did in the case of the 'dual track' decision. Soviet propaganda has seized the opportunity offered and its disinformation campaign has been and is being manipulated by internal communist agitation within the peace movement in several West European countries. The media, of course, have acted as media tend to do: they support or at least record the opposition to Government policies and strategy. In this respect the affiliation of a certain number of journalists with parties of the Democratic Left, with the labour movement, with churches and with student groups tends to reinforce the position taken by those organizations or groups. In such cases the media no longer act independently but rather under external influence.

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The most spectacular case is that of the Reduced Blast/Enhanced Radiation (RB/ER) weapon or 'neutron bomb'. The coining of the label 'neutron bomb' decided the shape of the issue and the explanation offered first in the *Washington Post*, according to which this weapon would kill humans but would spare property, decided the terms of the debate. Europe rejected the 'neutron bomb' almost out of hand with public statements by politicians, churchmen, academics and journalists, few of whom had more than the vaguest idea of what this weapon was intended to do. The debate has since been clarified and broadened but not entirely in favour of NATO policies. In 1977–78 public opinion in Western Europe, in particular in West Germany and the Netherlands, had suffered a shock when first confronted with the neutron weapon. Discussion of its characteristics and significance for deterrence and defence brought out a clearer picture of its purpose but did not lead to the desired quietening of public opinion. The neutron weapon remains a highly sensitive and divisive political issue, invariably spoken of in press reports and on television in the context of its use by NATO in the early stages of a war in Europe.

During that first phase of public discussion, the 'neutron bomb' overshadowed all other nuclear weapons and the entire issue of Theatre Nuclear Force (TNF) modernization. However, no sooner was the neutron issue taken off the political agenda as a result of President Carter's decision in the Spring of 1978 to defer production when public attention turned to TNF. From 1979 that issue was fuelled by the 'dual track' decision on the modernization of long-range TNF (or INF – Intermediate Nuclear Forces). Soviet propaganda paired the neutron weapon with the ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) and later also with the *Pershing* II. The press and television generally questioned the usefulness or desirability of new TNF systems. Press and other media commentary together with the arguments of the opponents to these NATO options in public debate created an unfavourable environment for the implementation of NATO plans. In 1981 – 82 the neutron weapon issue was revived by US procurement decisions. On this occasion it became clear that no West European government or parliament would accept deployment in their countries. In retrospect, it can be seen that the neutron weapon issue changed the entire psychological climate for TNF modernization.

The debate on the 'dual track' decision and hence on LRTNF modernization has also changed since the end of 1979. While there has been no general rejection of GLCM and *Pershing* II deployment in some parts of Western Europe, the issue has become dominant in domestic politics in West Germany and in the Netherlands and is a latent problem for any Belgian Government. The situation in Italy and in Britain seems less critical. In West Germany it is expected that the public debate in 1983, the year in which first deployment of both missile systems is envisaged, will be conducted in an emotionally charged atmosphere. The arguments have already been formulated, political parties have taken positions (some of them only provisional) conditional on the expected results of the Geneva INF negotiations. The press is in possession of more facts and figures than ever before and the Government has given more information and more political guidance for the understanding of the problem than in any other matter on public debate concerning security. In the press at least this is still an open issue – while the case of the 'neutron bomb' is politically closed.

Attention has turned also to nuclear and chemical weapons stockpiled in Europe. Some magazines, like *Der Stern* in Germany, have featured articles on these stockpiles prominently for some time and thus created an issue, seized upon by the peace movement. The stockpile issue has come up again and again in political debate at regional and local levels. The peace movement and, in particular, action groups of the extreme left (such as the Communist Party and other persuasions of the radical ecologist factions) have prepared 'peaceful sieges' of US and German nuclear weapons sites and have placed obstacles on the roads. *Der Stern* published a map of such sites in West Germany in 1981, although the sites marked were partly wrong and markedly in excess of the real number. *Der Stern* had pictured West German territory as a nuclear weapons launching pad and this bellicose picture of West Germany has been taken up both by the Communist and left-wing radicals and by official propaganda and information media in East Germany.

In this way all the issues mentioned above have been linked in order to present a kind of deadly network covering West Germany likely to attract pre-emptive strikes on a territory already overburdened with nuclear arms and delivery systems even without additional deployments. The fact that 1,000 nuclear warheads have been withdrawn since 1979 as part of the 'dual track' decision and that the replacement of *Honest John* by *Lance* has resulted in a reduction of systems and operational warheads has hardly been mentioned in media reports.

While Soviet propaganda did strongly influence part of the press and the electronic media it appears on the strength of current evidence, that this influence is reducing.

One must conclude that the media in Western Europe and particularly in West Germany have played a considerable role in determining public opinion on the issues in question. The interplay between the media, the peace movement, certain politicians and academics as well as 'counter-experts' opposing official policies and NATO programmes has been remarkable and certainly not without impact on the public, as the mass demonstrations of October 1981 and June 1982 showed.

Conclusions

Defence and security, foreign policy and military policy have become the object of closer if not always serious scrutiny by the media. The nature of the media offers easy access to dissenting opinion, all the more so since it can present itself as non-conformist and can call official policy into question. The opposition groups can raise artificial or irrelevant issues through the media and make unrealistic arguments without proper correction since those working in the media have only general knowledge and experience. Unless debates are arranged with competent representatives of Governments or advocates for the official policy, 'counter-experts' go unanswered. Since radical minorities are committed to agitation and organized to carry it through, entire audiences can – and on occasions have been – seen or heard to support the most extravagant arguments and alternative policies, such as the replacement of military defence by 'social defence', by which is meant passive resistance to a foreign occupier instead of fighting a defensive war. Deterrence is being systematically attacked as counter-productive and as leading to a general war without any evidence offered other than historical 'lessons' that 'armies will always wage war in the end'. The Press is less exposed to organized manipulation by dedicated groups than the television and radio networks but the press remains particularly wary of official explanations and statements of fact. Both have to be scrupulously correct and at the same time plausible to be accepted. Since to divulge military secrets no longer deters indiscretion among officials or investigative reporting by journalists, the debate can be dominated by selective reporting and by artificial constructs of strategy, arms programmes and defence.

The general lesson for official information policy is clear: Governments and NATO must cope with the new realities of the political process. Neither the media nor the general public can handle or absorb the information on which decisions must be based. The result is confusion and polarization on artificial, irrelevant or falsified issues whether these are nuclear policies, NATO's strategy of deterrence or the military requirements for effective defence. Governments must recognize that the media suffer great difficulties in explaining the background to political decisions to the people. The necessary clarity is often submerged by abundant or even overabundant flows of news, the relevance of which cannot always be recognized and the quantity of which can no longer be absorbed.

This makes selection paramount and confers on the media the privilege of choosing between items and arguments, entirely at their own discretion. The selection of news has always been the major editorial task but guidance when needed could be obtained by reference to established opinion, to the accepted authorities and by reference to debate between differing opinions in appropriate fora. Today the concept of national interest is no longer accepted as a matter of fact, nor can Alliance decisions be translated into national policy simply after a debate in Parliament and government decision. Nor do the media have the space or time necessary for explanation since the subjects of defence, security, arms control, and strategy do not appeal to the larger public. Hence proper selection and formulation, presentation and research become all the more important for correct reporting and balanced argumentation.

Modern journalism in Europe is not exactly conducive to such an approach, since it tends to focus on the expression of personal opinion and to side with minorities. The minorities in question claim the role of a legitimate opposition. They stake their claim in the name of non-conformism and as representatives of the citizens, who do not feel properly represented in parliaments. This claim alone makes them interesting and attractive to the media. They also make good journalism by promising spectacular scenes and lively debates which make for good political entertainment. In this way the reasons behind official decisions can be overburdened with controversy. The public begins by being confused and is then exposed to their distinct propaganda message: opposition to official policy in the guise of 'struggle for peace' and 'peace festivals' are arranged by popular 'artists for peace'. Political propaganda programmes are shown on television or broadcast on the radio carrying a message against NATO's 'dual track' decision or the 'neutron bomb' or nuclear stockpiles and usually against all of them at the same time. The Press reports favourably on such happenings, unable to see through false appearances. Part of their public, in particular the younger generation, feel in any case sympathy for the cause propagated. The media in turn follow what they perceive to be a general feeling or preference. In this way the media tend to neutralize themselves and to lose influence. In short, they are being manipulated in their desire to follow what they take to be the fashion. Governments and defence establishments that have long dominated the news and impressed the public with their authority must now make greater efforts to get across their part of the news and the truth. Education of journalists is both necessary and difficult because of concern in the media that journalists might be manipulated by Governments. The establishment of independent fora for the education of media representatives which would help to draw them into discussions on security, defence, arms control, strategy and military policy generally would seem to be the most promising approach. Media representatives must be trusted to perform the role of watchdogs. To do that effectively they should not be left alone with the committed agitators. Yet it is not easy for the media fully to explain matters, for the need to restrict classified information often results in counter-productive denial of news or lack of explanation. This has been the case with the Soviet SS–20 deployment. Not only are there differences of opinion within the community about the number but even simple counting difficulties contribute to the confusion. They cannot, therefore, be held entirely responsible for the programmes or articles they produce. It has to be recognized that the media can neither be used to justify nor to explain Government decisions. Governments must explain and defend their policies themselves and compete with those who would oppose these policies. It is not possible or desirable in a democracy to attempt to exercise control over the media even in the cause of national security. On the other hand, media sympathy for the cause of disarmament can be easily obtained since this is a natural sentiment and a sensible attitude towards war and peace. Governments must see to it that this inclination is not exploited by those who think only of disarmament without due regard for security and who are in no position to influence the policies of those powers on the other side of the East-West divide with whom they seek security through adaptation.

The Media and the Image of Defence Policy:

Japan

MASASHI NISHIHARA

In every mass society, the press and television have become major actors in the political arena and Japan is no exception. The media exerts an important political influence, first by disseminating facts or selecting from facts those that it chooses to disseminate and, second, by encouraging the public to adopt certain political values through editorials, commentaries, and even through the tone given to the headlines of news articles. Much of the credit for the successful anti-nuclear campaigns in Japan during the first half of 1982, aimed at influencing the UN Special Conference on Disarmament, should go to the mass media.

Political leaders, while utilizing the media to disseminate their views, often run the risk of being exaggerated or distorted by the media. Opponents and critics readily use the views reported to attack them and, on occasion, even to force their resignation. Because of newspaper *exposés*, many Japanese Government leaders, including several Heads of the Defence Agency (equivalent to a Defence Minister) and of the Joint Staff Council, have experienced political difficulty. Press coverage may relate to views on the Constitution, on the Japan–US Security Treaty, on nuclear issues, on the Self-Defence Forces and other defence issues, not to mention occasional political scandals. Successive Cabinets have made their defence policies deliberately ambiguous, hoping thereby to minimize the effects of media criticism.

While the mass media's political role is thus unquestionably important, there are very few cases, at least in postwar Japanese politics, in which the mass media have clearly influenced the public views on defence issues and led the public to demand that the Government shift its policy. For the past thirty years, some major newspapers have persistently criticized the Liberal Democratic (Conservative) Government for its conventional rearmament programmes, begun in 1954, and pressed their pacifist or 'dovish' views. But that has not prevented the Liberal Democrats from forming the Government for the entire postwar period, except for the sixteen months after June 1947. The Government survived in 1951 over the issue of the Peace Treaty with the Allied Powers, in 1960 over the problem of a revised Japan–US Security Treaty, and in 1972 over the matter of regaining control of Okinawa from the US. Despite the bitter attacks by the press of a government policy that has steadily increased defence spending in spite of an economic recession, Prime Minister Suzuki's Government retained much popular support for its policy during its lifetime.

There are therefore clear limits to the political influence of the Japanese media and this raises questions of how the media, particularly the press and television, function, why they have tended to be 'dovish', and how they have presented certain specific issues.

The Big Five

More than half of some 120 daily commercial newspapers, national and local, have morning and evening editions. This may be an additional factor contributing to their influence although, since they have to compete with television news programmes in the evening, the evening editions have substantially smaller circulations. Nevertheless the total circulation, counting morning and evening editions as two, amounted to some 66.3 million copies a day in 1980.[1] If morning and evening editions are counted as one set, the total circulation was still 46.4 million copies and, if this latter figure is adopted, there were some 400 copies for every 1,000 people in Japan. This compares well with other countries such as the Soviet Union (397 copies per 1,000 population), Great Britain (388), West Germany (312), the United States (287), France (214) and Italy (113).[2]

Five daily newspapers with nationwide circulation enjoy uniquely dominant positions in the world of Japanese news media. None of them support any particular political party nor are they supported by any party. The 'big five' are *Asahi* (7.5 million copies for morning editions in 1980), *Mainichi* (4.6 million), *Yomiuri* (8.4 million), *Nihon Keizai* (1.8 million), and *Sankei* (1.9 million). Between them they have 53 per cent of the total newspaper circulation, national and local. Although *Yomiuri* has now become more centrist, it used to carry, together with *Asahi* and *Mainichi*, almost uniform layouts and similar 'dovish' editorial views and reporting preferences but the fact that *Yomiuri*'s circulation now outnumbers those of *Asahi* and *Mainichi* has much less to do with its editorial policy shift than with its aggressive sales and promotion policy. *Nihon Keizai*, equivalent to *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Financial Times*, emphasizes the reporting and analysis of economic affairs, but still treats major political events at great length. It is considered to be a well-balanced, high-quality paper. *Sankei* is the most 'hawkish', stressing the importance of a stronger defence posture and closer ties with the United States. It also tends to be alarmist about Soviet military power and Communist ideology.

In the Tokyo area there are seven television stations (two public and five commercial) running programmes continuously from six in the morning until midnight or later. Although 98.2 per cent of Japanese households own colour television sets, the television news programmes appear to have a very limited impact on the public. Television networks in the Tokyo area, for instance, allocated in 1980 only 10 per cent of their time for news reporting and commentaries, in contrast to 60 per cent allowed for entertainment.[3] Only 7 to 10 per cent of those polled watched news and commentary programmes. In contrast, over 70 per cent of the adult population read a newspaper every day, and about 92 per cent read newspapers with varying degrees of frequency.[4] Also relatively high are the percentages of those who always read the 'serious' pages: editorials (25.6 per cent); politics (46.0 per cent); and foreign news (22.3 per cent).[5] A survey conducted in Tokyo in 1975 produced some interesting statistics: asked why they made use of different types of media, about 60 per cent of those surveyed said that they read newspapers 'to learn of trends in public opinion and acquire their own basis for judgements and opinions', while only 30 per cent relied upon television for such purposes.[6] This is because television, while providing news analysis, rarely gives strong opinions. The exceptions are a few popular commentators such as Ken'ichi Takemura and Ryūgen Hosokawa. Both happen to put over conservative views. One media survey showed that there was 'substantial public support to make Takemura Prime Minister'.[7]

Why is the Press 'Dovish'?

The 'dovish' editorial policies of *Asahi, Mainichi* and *Yomiuri* can to a considerable extent be explained by their history. Founded at the time of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, they established the role of government critic and believed that they should enlighten the public on how Japan should be modernized. They did not see their role to be that of reporting events and analyzing them in a balanced manner.[8] Papers which supported particular governments tended to be damaged when that government fell. On the other hand, the government often attempted to control a critical press by using the security police to harass editors and writers and by controlling the amounts of paper available. Clashes between the government and the press continued until the 1930s when the government adopted strict censorship and intervened directly by interfering with press personnel management.

The journalists' failure to fight the government's control of the press in the pre-war years left them with a sense of guilt. They felt that if only they had fought harder, they might have prevented Japan from getting involved in an unwinnable war. This feeling persists today.

A constant point of reference in post-war Japanese debates on defence policy is Article 9 of the Constitution, originally drafted by the Occupation Authorities in February 1946 and put into effect in May 1947. This Article renounces Japan's right to belligerence 'as a means of settling international disputes'. When, in 1947, General Douglas MacArthur, then Head of the US-dominated Allied Occupation Forces, talked about Japan becoming a neutral, peaceful country like 'a Switzerland of the Orient', the majority of Japanese endorsed his views. The Government, the press and the public all agreed. However, when the Cold War developed, Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, often referred to as the 'Adenauer of Japan', took a more realistic view of Japan's security by approving US foreign policies. The press immediately suspected that this was the beginning of the road to Japan's rearmament and began to warn the public of the danger. For the Socialists and Communists, as well as for most journalists, pacifism became an ideology, and they failed to give pragmatic consideration to Japan's national interests. All security issues, including Article 9 itself, have been debated between the idealists (or, as Masamichi Inoki has called them, the 'utopian pacifists') and the realists.

The occupation authorities naturally encouraged a free press, although they did censor press coverage of the occupation policies. They also encouraged the formation of labour unions in the newspaper companies' work force. Workers, now led by the Socialists or Communists, began to criticize their newspapers' editorial policies and to demand the removal of all those in positions of authority who were suspected of having supported the Government during World War II. The *Yomiuri* Company in particular had a series of serious labour disputes starting late in 1945. The disputes ended in victory for the Company in the following year, but only with the help of the occupation authorities. Many other newspapers also encountered the same difficulty, and their editorial policies have tended ever since to be affected by the ideological leanings of their workers. *Asahi*, for example, is often labelled 'red' partly at least because of its strong leftist unions.

The Pacifist Argument

Issues related to defence are naturally wide-ranging, and they are often compounded with problems of international security, foreign policies, and budgetary priorities. What is unique to the Japanese press is that their analyses of major East-West tensions treat American policies much more critically than Soviet policies. Moreover almost all defence issues are debated on legal grounds, the basis of which is Article 9 of the Constitution, rather than on pragmatic assessments of security needs. At the risk of over-simplification, typical press arguments on current issues may be summed up as follows:

1. The Reagan Administration's military programme intensifies East-West tensions and demonstrates a lack of seriousness about arms talks with Moscow. The road to peace lies through positive reductions of forces, including unilateral reductions. Japanese defence build-up is against the wishes of peace-loving peoples.
2. The USSR 'military threat' in the Western Pacific has been exaggerated by the US, which plays down Soviet internal weaknesses such as low economic productivity and ethnic tensions. The Japanese defence build-up provokes the USSR.
3. The Polish crisis has been aggravated by the Administration's policies of sanctions against General Jaruzelski's Poland and the Soviet Union. Japan should not support President Reagan's policies.
4. The Suzuki Government's policy of increasing defence was a step to military power. It was against the Constitution. Spending over one per cent of GNP for defence will lead Japan down a dangerous road.
5. Japan's economic power should be used for peace, not for war. Japan's security can be maintained externally by friendly relations with all major powers and internally by solid welfare and education programmes.
6. The Self-Defence Forces (SDF) should be placed under strong civilian control, to avoid any resurgence of their political power. Japan has to be set an example of anti-militarism. The Falkland War showed how silly the military of both Great Britain and Argentina were in fighting over such a useless, unpopulated island.
7. For Japan's SDF to participate in UN international peace-keeping forces

would be a dangerous step towards involvement in international conflicts. It too is against the Constitution. Japan has to show the world its strong, sincere desire for peace.

8. Japan should not possess any 'offensive' weapons. It also is against the Constitution. The Government should not give in to American pressure for greater defence efforts. Siding with the US is a dangerous course.
9. The American military presence in Okinawa can easily involve Japan in regional and global conflicts. It should thus be reduced to a minimum. Japan should have tighter control over the movement of US troops and arms in and out of the island.
10. Japan is the only victim of an atomic explosion. This should be the basis of Japanese peace diplomacy. The introduction of US nuclear weapons, including transit through Japanese waters of US ships carrying nuclear arms, should never be allowed.

In short, the leading daily newspapers attempt to present two views: that the Japanese should wish to see a militarily weak Japan contributing to world peace by not siding with major powers and by using its economic power constructively; and that successive Conservative Governments, being reactionary, are driving the nation along a wrong and dangerous road. These arguments are not just made over editorial pages but also in columns (Op-Ed pages) to which selected writers are invited to contribute and through the somewhat sensational wording used in news article headlines. *Asahi*, for instance, often carries a series of special reports, such as 'Japan Turning to the Right', 'Is the "Soviet Threat" Real?' and 'The Tilt to Military Expansion'. Every Summer, most newspapers run a series of anti-nuclear articles to commemorate the Hiroshima and Nagasaki disasters in August 1945. Every Autumn (and particularly in the last two years) the news media have paid special attention to how new budget allocations are decided for defence items.

The press also seems to have been 'outraged' by President Reagan's military programmes and alarmed by the neo-conservative political trends in Britain, Canada and Japan (and, should one also add, in Mitterrand's France?). In 1982, journalists of pacifist inclination have been encouraged by the success of the peace movements in Europe. Disproportionate coverage has been given to anti-nuclear campaigns. During the Spring of 1982, *Asahi*, for instance, had almost daily news articles, columns and editorials about the 'grassroots' anti-nuclear movements in Japan. They reported how many local communities had declared themselves to be 'nuclear-free' communities and that groups such as writers, theatrical performers, academicians, religious believers and housewives had taken part in joint petitions against nuclear weapons. As a climax to these campaigns, some 27 million signatures were collected on a petition to be presented to the UN Secretary General in early June 1982.[9] Yet *Asahi*'s headline read: 'One Hundred Million People's Petitions Submitted to UN'.[10]

Limits of Influence

Despite this activity, an examination of Japan's post-war political history clearly demonstrates the limits to the actual impact of such pacifist editorial policies upon the defence policy of the country. While raising the controversial issues (such as 'Will the Japan-US Security Treaty Endanger Japan?') and enlightening the public about such issues, most national newspapers have failed to weaken Conservative Governments or to force them to adopt more pacifist foreign and security policies. Several examples may be cited.

The constitutionality of a proposed Self-Defence Force (SDF) began to be debated soon after the Korean War broke out in 1950. The media and the opposition parties criticized the Government and maintained that the Constitution prohibited the Japanese from exercising the right to self-defence. The Government interpretation was that the Constitution did not prohibit self-defence, and they went on to establish the SDF in 1954. Despite press editorials critical of the SDF, a *Mainichi* poll taken in September 1953 showed that 48 per cent supported rearmament, while only 33 per cent opposed it.[11] This issue of constitutionality subsequently came up on countless occasions, notably in a number of well-known court cases. Major newspapers have pointed to the ambiguous constitutional basis of the SDF but popular support for it has gradually increased over the years and, by 1978, as many as 86 per cent of those polled recognized the SDF as necessary for the country.[12]

The Japanese-US security relations have also caused anxiety with the major newspapers. The issues involve nuclear deployment, US military bases, defence co-operation, joint exercises, and military technology co-operation. They often pertain to legalistic arguments as to what is or what is not possible under the existing legal framework. There have been several occasions for tension. For instance, US sources, whether intentionally or unintentionally, have claimed that US warships have visited Japanese ports with nuclear weapons on board, despite the Japanese Government's persistent denials and its policy of not allowing such visits. The latest such incident was a casual claim to that effect made in May 1981 by Edwin Reischauer, who was US Ambassador to Tokyo during the 1960s. As it was printed in *Mainichi*, it became a political bombshell.[13] The major daily newspapers implied that the successive Japanese Governments had been intentionally hiding the facts from the people who, they claimed, totally opposed the visits of nuclear-armed US warships to Japan. However, a subsequent poll by *Asahi* revealed that 33 per cent of those polled supported such transit visits and 10 per cent even favoured US-sponsored nuclear deployments on Japanese soil.[14]

Perhaps the greatest impact that the Japanese press has had on the public has been its constant opposition to the revised Security Treaty between the two countries, signed in January 1960 and ratified in June of that year. Opposition groups, primarily Socialist and Communist Parties, left-wing labour unions and student organizations, were able to make their presence felt to the point that President Eisenhower had to cancel his visit to Tokyo at the last minute, causing him considerable embarrassment. This climate of opposition to the Treaty was certainly fostered by the mass media, which maintained that, if the new Treaty were ratified, Japan would be drawn into dangerous Cold War conflicts. In a pre-ratification *Mainichi* opinion survey of March 1960, 22 per cent favoured the Treaty; in a post-ratification *Mainichi* survey (August 1960), only 15 per cent favoured it, although 34 per cent thought they could not avoid accepting it.[15] Despite the opposition, despite such luke-warm support and despite the resignation of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, he was in fact replaced by Hayato Ikeda, from the same ruling party, who carried on basically the same defence policy. This demonstrates the limits to the impact of the media.

Defence expenditure is currently one of the most contentious security issues in Japanese politics. The ratio of the defence expenditure to GNP is treated by the opposition parties and in the pacifist newspapers as a symbolic criterion for the Government's defence posture. Until 1965 the ratio was over 1 per cent and in 1955 it was as high as 1.8 per cent. As GNP increased sharply, the ratio went below 1 per cent, although the defence expenditure itself still increased in real terms. Late in December 1981, the Suzuki Cabinet increased its defence budget from 0.91 per cent of GNP for FY 1981 to 0.93 per cent for FY 1982. *Asahi*'s headlines included, 'Another Step Toward a Military Power', 'A New Era of Military Expansion', and 'Suzuki Selling Out to US'. It also criticized the fact that the planned rate of increase for the welfare budget over the previous year was lower than for the defence budget. The same newspaper invited liberal sceptics and opposition party leaders to give their comments, which were naturally critical.[16] Yet the public has basically accepted the government's policy for gradual defence improvement. All polls taken during the recent years of defence increases have revealed that the majority of respondents accept 'the present level' of SDF strength. The people appear generally to recognize that Japan cannot forever depend upon another power for her survival.

Conclusion

The news media certainly play a vital role in drawing the public attention to the issues, but, at least in Japan, they have failed to persuade the public to adopt their editorial views. For some 20 years after 1945, the majority of Japanese were attracted to 'utopian pacifism', but, since about 1965, they have outgrown pacificism much faster than the press and appear to accept the world as it is with a mixture of cynicism and sophistication. Perhaps the Japanese people have been impressed that, despite the newspapers' constant warnings about the dangerous consequences of having a Security Treaty with the United States, Japan did manage to stay clear of the Vietnam debacle. Japan has not been involved in conflict since 1945. What is more, Japan has successfully overcome economic difficulties including the the two oil shocks of 1973 and 1979. The public seems to have been convinced that much of the credit for this should go to the distinctly conservative leadership of the Liberal Democratic party. *Yomiuri*'s gradual shift to editorial moderation is considered to be an attempt to conform to this change in popular climate. The fact that Takemura, the popular television commentator mentioned earlier, publicly criticizes *Asahi*'s views and expresses his own pro-Government views, emphasizes this conservative political climate. The people are opposed to nuclear weapons, but they seem to sense that demonstrations alone do not bring peace.

Japanese politicians and officials are extremely cautious in their remarks and in their conduct for they know that they will be extensively reported in the press and that any press criticism may be used by the opposition parties to attack them. Consensual decision-making, characteristic of Japanese political practice, requires a minimum level of co-operation from the opposition parties. The Government and the governing party, while enjoying a clear majority in the Diet, have still to move slowly on defence issues. It is in this sense that the role of the press in forcing a slow change in defence policy implementation is likely to remain important in the future.

NOTES

[1] *The Japanese Press 1981* (Tokyo: Japanese Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association, 1981), p.62.

[2] *Ibid.*, p.15. This publication actually cites '570 copies per 1,000 Japanese people', based on the figure of 66.3 million copies rather than 46.4 million copies. The writer feels that the figure of 46.4 million should be used because morning and evening issues should be counted as one newspaper copy rather than two. That would be more comparable internationally.

[3] *Japan 1981: An International Comparison:* (Tokyo: Keizai Koho Centre), p.68; and *Asahi nenkan 1979, bessatsu*, p.437.

[4] Young Kim, *Japanese Journalists and Their World* (Charlottesville, Va: University Press of Virginia, 1981), p.18. This is based on the 1969 survey, conducted by the Japan Broadcasting Association (NZK).

[5] *Ibid.*, p.19. This is based on the 1974 survey.

[6] *Ibid.*, p.21.

[7] John Marcom, Jr., 'Japan's Leading Pundit Gains Fame with Tidal Wave of Gab on the Airwaves', *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 May, 1982.

[8] *Asahi* started in 1879, *Mainichi* in 1872, *Yomiuri* in 1874, *Nihon Keizai* in 1876 and *Sankei* in 1933.

[9] *Asahi*, 1 May, 1982, morning edition. Buddhist groups claimed that they would collect 70 million petitions. *Asahi*, 1 June 1982, morning edition.

[10] *Asahi*, 11 June 1982, evening edition.

[11] *Mainichi nenkan 1979, bessatsu*, p.114.

[12] *Bōei Handobukku 1981*, p.391.

[13] The circumstances under which this incident occurred are well described by a *Mainichi* journalist, Yoshihisa Komori, who interviewed Reischauer. See his *Kaku wa mochikomareta ka* (Have nuclear arms ever been brought into Japan?) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū Sha, 1982).

[14] *Asahi*, 14 June, 1981, morning edition.

[15] *Mainichi nenkan 1979, bessatsu*, p.114. For the 1960 incident see, for example, George Packard, III, *Protest in Tokyo; The Security Treaty Crisis of 1960* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[16] E.g. *Asahi*, 27 December, 1981, morning edition.

The Management of Defence Expenditure

SIR FRANK COOPER

This Paper is intended as a basis for international discussion – no more, no less – not least because of the variations from country to country of government institutions, procedures and attitudes. Inevitably the Paper reflects to a significant degree experience within the British system but it deliberately covers a wide area of ground.

Defence is – amongst other things – a major enterprise. In many countries defence ranks high on the list of public spending agencies; it is frequently the largest single management authority, particularly if account is taken of both military and civilian personnel; it often stands at the forefront of purchasing organizations both nationally and even more so within Government where it accounts for a very high proportion of central Government purchases of supplies and services; and it frequently operates large industrial undertakings of its own and has a significant impact on the fortunes of defence-related industries and on employment prospects in them.

The management of defence expenditure is superficially akin to that of a large, international conglomerate. Many of the same kind of characteristics exist – for example, international issues, major investment questions, and the deployment of a wide variety of personal professional skills. It is also true that the difference between 'policy' and 'management' is frequently incapable of disentanglement except in the most arid sense. Yet there is one overriding difference – there is no profit and loss account. The defence tests are either success through the preservation of peace coupled with the maintenance of a successful foreign policy or failure through the outbreak of war due either to inadequate force structure, which represents a failure in the management of defence expenditure, or to a political failure to convince a potential adversary that what may be an adequate structure will be brought to action. Beyond these lie the ultimate test of the success or failure of arms in battle.

There are many constraints on defence and its management. It is worth identifying some of them.

Constraints on Management

It would be as well to say a brief word first about the old question of whether the allocation of resources to defence should be determined by the threat and commitments or by what nations believe they can afford. Historically it is difficult to dispute the proposition that the threat only dominates when national interests – almost national survival – are perceived to be at serious risk. This is not to approve or applaud such a stance but to recognize that, particularly in Western democracies (not least in time of economic recession), there is a strong tendency for the electorate and Government to go down the road of what can apparently be afforded without disturbing too much the general tenor of national life. This path is arrived at by some alchemic process of subjective judgement rather than by logical argument. There is no objective way of deciding the size of a defence budget. Total resource allocation is neither a science nor an art.

The essence of democracy is choice. There is a constant interplay between external and domestic factors and within the domestic economy. Two of the most important choices that democracies have to make are the size of the public sector in relation to the private sector and the distribution of resources and expenditure between the various programmes that make up the public sector. Most public programmes have a definite and clearly desirable output – for example, schools, hospitals and roads. Defence expenditure is seen as more akin in the public eye to expenditure on insurance. It differs, however, very significantly from the payment of an insurance

NOTES

[1] See Edward N. Muller, *Aggressive Political Participation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (London: Sage Publications, 1979).

[2] 1968: Wildenmann *et al*: 1972: Kaltefleiter/Wildenmann et al; 1981: Wildenmann/Kaase *et al.* In each case the sample consisted of top positional holders across society; in 1981 there were 1,750 respondents from a total of 3,150 top position holders.

[3] Schössler/Schmitt/Jung, Mannheim: SIPLA 1978-1981, three studies on 'Sicherheitspolitische Planung' carried out on about 600 'experts' participating in security policies.

[4] Regular yearly surveys 1976–1980, partially published.

[5] Muller and Barnes/Kaase *op. cit.* in note 1.

The Media and the Making of Defence Policy: The US Example

JOSEPH FROMM

Over the past decade the media in the United States have acquired a reputation as a major force in shaping national policy, credited with bringing down one President in the Watergate affair and forcing another to end American combat involvement in a war in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, the tangible influence of the American press and television on the decisions of government today is a subject of widespread and continuing controversy. There is no doubt that the spread of television into virtually every home has transformed the communication of news, information and ideas, with results that have yet to be accurately measured. It is a vehicle that has been utilized by the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam war movement successfully to proselytize a nation and ultimately to bring about a radical change of course. Conversely, it also has been exploited by Presidents, with varying degrees of success and most notably by Ronald Reagan, to win support for their policies.

In some areas of government affairs, it is possible to cite specific examples of the direct impact of the media on political decision-making or behaviour.

The 'supply-side economics' policy pursued by the Reagan Administration is a classic example. This controversial and unconventional theory of economic management was embraced by Reagan, as a candidate, largely as a result of the proselytzing endeavours of Robert Bartley, editorial page editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, and Jude Wanniski, his deputy.

On a different level, David Gergen, the President's Aide in charge of communications, told the *National Journal* that the press was responsible for the Reagan Administration's quick retreat from a plan to grant tax-exempt status to racially-segregated schools. The White House, he said, had responded to 'the warning flags . . . first published in the columns, opinion pieces and editorials'.

In foreign policy, Presidential Counsellor Edwin Meese told a group of journalists earlier in 1982 that the impact of the media is especially noticeable. 'The press', he said, 'acts as intermediary between the public and the government as a national interpreter of events'. He pointed to El Salvador to illustrate the practical effects of this.

'The very fact', he said, 'that the press keeps asking if the President is going to send troops to El Salvador makes it an issue even though Mr Reagan has stated he is not planning such action'. The upshot, said Meese, was that Senate Minority Leader Robert Byrd sought to 'tie the President's hands'.

While one must resist the temptation to draw unwarranted general conclusions from these examples, they do illustrate the sensitivity of the government – particularly in the White House – to popular opinion as reflected by the press and television. One authority on the subject has concluded that the 'news media have become such pervasive forces that from a public affairs viewpoint, many events don't really take place unless they are covered by television, newspapers or news magazines'.

Nothing could illustrate the point more vividly than the emergence of the 'nuclear freeze movement' as a political force. It was only when television and the press 'discovered' the movement early in 1982, many months after it had established itself at grass-roots level across the country, that the political leadership in Washington took note and reacted by displaying greater enthusiasm for renewed strategic arms negotiations with the Soviet Union.

Marginal Direct Impact

Against this background, it might seem logical to assume that defence policy is influenced as much if not more by the news media than policy in other areas – given the vast sums of money devoted to the armed forces and the implications not only for the nation's security but for the economy as well. In fact, defence appears to be something of a special case.

Systematic analysis of the subject is almost totally lacking. In attempting to calculate the influence of the media in the shaping of defence policy one must rely on personal experience, random interviews with representative journalists covering defence affairs and officials involved in the decision-making process and an examination of some of the more controversial national security issues.

A paradoxical conclusion emerges from such an inquiry. The direct impact of press and television on weapons decisions and strategy is marginal: yet the evidence indicates that the media may exercise a critical influence on the ultimate issue – the use of the armed forces to engage in war.

First then, it is necessary to examine the limited impact of the media on routine decisions – those involving the choice of weapons, manpower policies and strategic planning. One of the most respected television journalists assigned to the Pentagon offers this explanation: 'Strategic issues are too esoteric, weapons systems too complex and public understanding inadequate for the media to play a significant role. On high priced weapons systems, the press and television may force greater accountability but cannot force a change in the decision itself'.

James Reston, the distinguished *New York Times* columnist, provided another explanation for the limited impact of the media on specific policy decisions. 'When you talk about the media's impact', he said, 'you have to define what you mean. For example, the impact of ideas and criticism in the daily and periodical press is indirect. The criticism may bubble over policy on defence or policy on El Salvador and be argued in the press. But it is only when the other branch of government, in Congress, picks up that criticism that the press begins to have an influence since we do not have the power to subpoena'.

Among Pentagon correspondents and academic specialists in the defence field there is agreement only on a single weapons decision in recent years that may have been decisively influenced by the media – President Carter's April 1978 decision to defer production of the neutron warhead. Details of this episode bear recalling briefly.

On 6 June 1977, the *Washington Post* published a front page article by Walter Pincus under the headline 'Neutron Warhead Buried in ERDA Budget' with this opening paragraph: 'The United States is about to begin production of its first nuclear battlefield weapon specifically designed to kill people through the release of neutrons rather than to destroy military installations through heat and blast'.

Even though funds for neutron warhead development had been budgeted previously for some years without stirring controversy or even attracting notice, the Pincus article triggered an international furore that took the Carter Administration by surprise. Whether intended or not, the article set the tone of the controversy not only with the inference that there was something especially sinister about a weapon that killed people without destroying property but also with the hint that the Administration may have been guilty of deception by 'burying' the funding for the project in the budget for Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA). The controversy was sustained by the American press as well as European media and, of course, Soviet propagandists.

The upshot was doubtless the most lamentable chapter in the four-year history of the Carter Administration's conduct of alliance diplomacy. After his top national security aides had negotiated what was considered an acceptable compromise with the European Allies on production and deployment of the neutron warhead, the President could not bring himself to make the final decision. On 7 April 1978, to the consternation of all concerned – and especially his closest advisers – he announced that manufacture of the weapon would be deferred.

What is noteworthy is not that a newspaper may have contributed significantly to the derailing of the neutron warhead but rather that the incident is generally regarded as unusual if not unique. This is not to suggest that the press and television do not play a role – indeed, a most significant one – in the formulation of defence policy in the United States.

Shaping Popular Perceptions

Their influence can be defined in two ways. First the media, while not among the major players in the national security debate, serve as a conveyor-belt of information – and possibly misinformation – ideas and arguments calculated to influence the principal participants. Second the press and television contribute materially to popular perceptions that have a critical bearing on defence policy.

Taking the question of perceptions first, it is probably a safe generalization to assert that in determining the broad thrust of American defence policy – whether the budget should be greatly increased or curtailed, whether more super-carriers should be built or troops withdrawn from South Korea – nothing is more important than the popular perception of the Soviet threat and of the nation's preparedness to cope with it.

How radically and quickly American attitudes on these issues of national security can oscillate has been amply demonstrated in the past few years. In November 1976, the electorate, disillusioned by the failure of American military power in Vietnam, chose as President an obscure former Georgia Governor, Jimmy Carter, who pledged to reduce defence spending, withdraw American ground troops from Korea and – as he spelled it out later – to end 'the inordinate fear of communism'.

Four years later Ronald Reagan was elected, in a landslide, to replace Carter as President with a campaign that promised a massive increase in defence spending to finance modernization and expansion of the armed forces and held the Soviet Union responsible for all major international troubles.

Needless to say, the choice in both elections was influenced primarily by domestic affairs and, to some extent, personalities. But not to be discounted was the drastic change in the electorate's perception of the Soviet threat and American defence needs. Opinion polls show that, whereas in 1977 a large majority of Americans perceived the US ahead of the Soviet Union in military power, in 1981 the ratio was reversed. And while 63 per cent in 1977 felt that military spending should be maintained at the current level or reduced, in 1981 89 per cent favoured the current level or an increase – with no fewer than 61 per cent supporting higher defence outlays.

What accounted for this extraordinary turnaround – and what part did the media play? While disenchantment with super-power detente was apparent early in the Carter Administration as the result of Soviet-Cuban adventures in Angola and Ethiopia, the radical transformation in attitudes toward military readiness is widely ascribed to four events which occurred in 1979:

- The Senate debate on the SALT II Treaty which focused national attention more on the shortcomings of America's defence posture than on the virtues of arms control.
- The fall of the Shah of Iran which brought home to Americans the vulnerability of Persian Gulf oil supplies and the failure of US policy designed to guarantee the security of the region with a surrogate power.
- The Iran hostage crisis seen by most Americans as humiliating evidence of the impotence of US military power – a perception that was powerfully reinforced by the rescue fiasco and the spectacle of a burnt-out helicopter in the Iranian desert.
- The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan viewed as the first conclusive demonstration of Soviet willingness to use her armed forces overtly outside the Soviet bloc.

These events – the overthrow of the Shah and the marathon hostage crisis above all – had a profound impact on the public consciousness in the United States, thanks in large part to the manner in which they were projected by the media. The torrent of news reports, commentaries, photographs and film concerning developments in Iran throughout 1979 and 1980 was overpowering.

The perception that became pervasive was that of the United States as 'a helpless giant' – powerless to save her most valued ally in the

Persian Gulf, to protect her diplomats imprisoned by Moslem revolutionaries in the American Embassy in Tehran or to rescue the hostages.

The cumulative impact of the events of 1979 as projected by the media produced a striking increase in popular support for additional defence spending and for action to overcome what was widely perceived as a position of military inferiority. The change was signalled most vividly in the Senate late in the Summer of 1979 by a revolt against the Carter Administration's defence budget and a vote allocating billions more for the military than requested by the Pentagon.

That this mood persists today is evidenced by continued Congressional support for high levels of defence spending and the Administration's success in resisting significant cuts in its Pentagon budget at a time when social welfare funding is being reduced sharply in an effort to narrow a $100-billion-plus federal government deficit.

Thus, while no methodical study has yet been undertaken to ascertain the impact of the media on the perceptions of the American public and Congress with respect to national security, it seems safe to conclude that it is critical. But a qualification is required: the influence of the press and television is exerted not as a result of deliberate positions they take on issues of defence but primarily through their normal activities in covering the news and through the pervasive role of television that brings news in its most graphic form into almost every home.

Transmission-Belt for Leaks

Similarly, in their role as transmission-belt of information, the media rarely exert influence in an overt or direct fashion but rather as a vehicle that is used by the actual players engaged in the game of formulating defence policy. To grasp what this means, it is important to understand the unique US system of decision-making in the national security field.

In contrast with most other countries – including most democracies – where defence policy is a virtual monopoly of the defence establishment and the Executive branch with little if any input by the Legislative branch, in the United States the role of Congress is important and has expanded greatly in recent years. The defence budget and programme are debated and approved by the Appropriations and Armed Services Committees in both Houses of Congress and certain specific aspects of national security – such as arms sales and aid – are scrutinized by other committees. This protracted and open process of examining defence issues obviously encourages efforts to influence the judgment of Members of Congress.

Another feature of the American policy-making process is the proclivity of the several branches of the armed forces and other competing forces in the defence community to utilize the media aggressively to advance their arguments and influence decisions. Finally, there is probably greater willingness by the media in the United States to publish 'secrets' than in any other country.

In this system, those who shape defence policy – in the Pentagon as well as in the Congress – look to the press to a remarkable extent to keep them informed about what is happening inside their own bureaucracies. The Air Force publishes twice daily a comprehensive reprint of virtually all articles related to defence and summaries of television comment. The first edition of this *Current News* is printed on yellow paper and is appropriately dubbed 'the yellow peril' because it often brings bad news to top officials at the Pentagon.

The system places a high premium on 'leaks' and the deliberate planting of information as a device for influencing policy. Representative Les Aspin of Wisconsin, among the most knowledgeable Congressmen in the ways of the Pentagon, says that Defense Department officials plant stories in an effort to influence, not the public, but decision-makers. He explains: 'Leaks come through bureaucratic wars – somebody who doesn't like a plan thinks that by leaking the existence of it, he will kill it; somebody who does like the existence of a plan thinks by leaking it, he will encourage it. . . . There are lots of games going on in this town and the press is the conduit for a whole lot of them'.

One of the most striking recent examples of leaking to influence the decision-makers involved an embarrassing disclosure concerning the defence budget. The story that appeared on the front page of the *Washington Post* on 8 January 1982, reported that a secret session of the Defense Resources Board had been warned that the Reagan defence programme as translated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff 'could cost $570 million more than his administration had budgeted over the next five years . . . dramatic evidence that defence spending threatens to run out of control'.

The leak, in the midst of a battle over major cuts in federal spending, was apparently intended to strengthen the hand of those who were critical of misleading projections of the cost of the military build-up and advocating tighter control of the programme. Although the Administration succeeded in warding off attacks on Pentagon military spending, a full-scale investigation was mounted that subjected all participants in the Defense Resources Board meeting to lie-detector tests.

The final stage of the neutron warhead controversy in the Spring of 1978 was marked by an aggressive campaign of leaking that was calculated – unsuccessfully – to induce President Carter to reverse or modify his decision to defer production of the weapon. A more successful campaign of leaks was waged in the Autumn of 1981 at a critical juncture in the Senate debate over the sale of AWAC (Airborne Warning and Control Aircraft) to Saudi Arabia. In this case, officials – presumably with the blessing of the Administration – provided reporters with information designed to demonstrate the limitations of America's most advanced air-borne early-warning system. The purpose was to allay fears that the Saudis could use the plane to attack Israel. The Senate approved the sale.

With rare exceptions, students of government in the United States say that the Administration is able to utilize the media more effectively than its critics in any controversy over a defence issue. Through his news conferences or speeches, the President can convert the press and television into a platform to present his point of view. The Secretary of Defense and other ranking officials also have easy access to the media to argue their case, an advantage not so readily available to their opponents.

Navy Secretary John Lehman provided a classic demonstration of what one authority on national security termed 'the pre-emptive strike' in the controversy over the sinking of the British destroyer HMS *Sheffield* in the Falkland Islands war. Within hours of the ship going down, Lehman, cutting short a trip to Europe, flew back to Washington to seize the initiative in the debate. At a meeting with a hand-picked group of Pentagon reporters, he advanced the argument that the sinking of the *Sheffield* demonstrated the indispensability of big-deck aircraft carriers to provide adequate defence against long-range missile attacks. In so doing, he went far to seize the high ground in advance against critics claiming that the episode proved the vulnerability of surface vessels and super-carriers in particular.

Leslie Gelb, the *New York Times* National Security Correspondent, who has held positions in the Defense and State Departments, maintains that 'any half-way competent and disciplined Administration can get its story published pretty much the way it wants'. The fact is that American Administrations have almost invariably won endorsement of their major defence decisions, however controversial they may have been and whatever treatment they have received by the media. That was true of the Nixon Administration's proposal for an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system, the Carter Administration's decision to cancel the B-1 bomber, the Reagan Administration's decision four years later to revive the B-1, President Carter's 'race track' basing plan for the MX missile and the subsequent rejection by President Reagan of that scheme.

The Impact of Television

The role of television requires special attention. Upwards of 70 per cent of Americans rely on television as their principal source of news but the other 30 per cent include the best educated with the highest income in the population, and thus presumably the most effective in terms of influencing national policy.

Furthermore, of all forms of communications, television is probably the least suited for dealing with news and information on the complex questions of defence. Imagine the daunting challenge facing a reporter attempting to explain the 'dense pack' basing mode for MX in 90 seconds or two minutes. Dan

Rather, now anchorman on CBS Evening News, told an interviewer that television news 'tends to be a headline service, not an in-depth service'. He went on: 'Anybody who just watches TV news cannot be well informed. You have to read'.

The only systematic study available tends to underscore the inadequacy of television as a medium for informing the public about defence. On the basis of a survey of Walter Cronkite's CBS-TV Evening News programme in 1972 and 1973, Ernest W. Lefever concluded: 'An attentive American viewer relying wholly on the Cronkite show for 1972 and 1973 would have received a partial and highly distorted picture of the dangers confronting the country, the government's response, and the opposing views on national defence. The show carried almost no news on growing Soviet military might in missiles, aircraft, warships or manpower'. Lefever found also that the programme 'painted an overwhelmingly negative picture of US military developments' with 69 per cent of the stories casting the defence establishment in a negative light.

It should be noted that, if Cronkite struck an anti-military posture on his programme, he was doing little more than reflecting the mood of the day – with the nation still scarred by the Vietnam debacle and sentiment against the defence establishment running strong. How far the CBS programme stimulated or reinforced popular attitudes or influenced decision-making is another matter.

A better basis for judging the influence of television on defence policy is provided by a more recent series that CBS-TV screened in June 1981. The series of five, one-hour programmes at prime time – *The Defence of the United States* – was promoted as 'the most important documentary project of the decade'. The overall message questioned the seriousness of the Soviet military threat and raised doubts about the magnitude and direction of the massive defence build-up that the Reagan Administration was initiating. In short, it ran contrary to the mood of the nation in June 1981 – a mood characterized by profound concern about the Soviet military build-up and wide support for greatly increased Pentagon spending.

The avowed aim of the CBS series was to 'stimulate a debate' at the grassroots across the country on the Administration's rearmament programme. What is striking, given the extraordinary scale of the CBS-TV effort, was the apparently inconsequential impact. In fact, if this television blockbuster affected support for the Reagan defence programme among the public or in Congress it was not evident in opinion polls a year later and even less in the national security policy espoused by the Administration.

Negligible as the impact of television appears to be on the formulation of US defence policy generally, in one sense its influence may be crucial. The experience of Vietnam, the Iran hostage crisis and, more recently, the Lebanese War have raised serious questions as to whether, in the television age, the United States can use her armed forces in a foreign war – in particular, in undeclared wars – without tight censorship.

Although a subject of continuing controversy, there seems little doubt that the nation's attitude towards the Vietnam War and the decision to liquidate the US commitment to it was profoundly influenced by the fact that television brought it all into the American living room. To quote James Reston, the *New York Times* columnist: 'Maybe the historians will agree that the reporters and the cameras were decisive in the end. They brought the war to the people . . . and forced the withdrawal of American power from Vietnam'.

Similarly, live television coverage of the early months of the hostage crisis in Tehran – with the mobs chanting outside the beleagured American Embassy night after night – and Walter Cronkite's nightly reminding of viewers of the number of days the crisis had run – had a significant effect on the Carter Administration's policy, especially the decision to mount the doomed rescue operation. Hodding Carter, State Department spokesman at the time, said in an interview: 'That constant reminder of the failure to resolve the crisis had to have magnified the pressure. It had a definite effect on the process'.

More recently, television coverage of Israel's siege of West Beirut had a dramatic effect on public opinion in the United States – and apparently on President Reagan personally – with the result that traditional support for Israel was sharply eroded and pressure developed for sanctions to force Israel to call a halt to her attacks.

The extreme sensitivity of decision-makers to the potential impact of television in conflict situations was illustrated by deliberations within the Reagan Administration over the commitments of US troops to a peace-keeping force in Lebanon. A participant at a National Security Council meeting weighing the decision reported that much of the time was devoted to debating how the public would react if the Marines were caught up in hostilities that were screened live by TV.

The implications for future American policy of the prospect of televised warfare are a matter of concern among those responsible for national security and especially among military officials. General William C. Westmoreland, who commanded American forces in Vietnam, said recently: 'Vietnam was the first war ever fought without any censorship. Without censorship things can get terribly confused in the public mind. Television is an instrument which can paralyze the country'.

It might be argued that Westmoreland is a biased witness, given his unhappy Vietnam experience. But his concern is felt, too, in media circles. Roger Mudd, a prominent television commentator, reflected the anxiety by raising the question whether a 'democracy which has uncensored TV in every home will ever be able to fight a war, however moral or just'.

Conclusions

There appears to be an exaggerated perception overseas of the direct influence of the media on American defence policy. The impact of the press and television on concrete decisions involving weapons, strategy and manpower is limited but they do make a major contribution to the 'national atmospherics' – popular impressions about the Soviet threat and American readiness – that, in the final analysis, determines the amount of resources the country is willing to devote to defence.

A controversy over the role of television in conflict is likely to develop in view of the concern that the US – or any democracy – may be hamstrung in the use of its military power, even in pursuit of interests deemed vital by the government. The stringent censorship imposed by the British in the Falkland Islands campaign will in all probability be studied – and debated – as a possible model for future US policy.

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