INTRODUCTION

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The French novelist Albert Camus once remarked that 'naming things badly adds to the misfortunes of the world.' By calling for a 'war on terrorism', the United States has initiated an open-ended and global conflict – one that can be directed against any adversary, anywhere in the world. How this war is framed and represented in the media thus becomes a crucial area of inquiry for both academics and professionals.

The post-Cold War period was hailed as an era of global peace and economic prosperity; a triumph of market capitalism and of 'globalization' of Western democracy (Hoge and Rose (eds) (2002). This promised peace dividend has not materialized. The 'majority world' – full of zones of conflict and host to many a 'failed' and 'rogue' state – has largely failed to benefit from globalization. Apart from the wars in the former Yugoslavia, most of the post-Cold War conflicts – intra rather than inter-state – have taken place in the global South (see Table I.1), with Africa witnessing 19 major armed conflicts. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, of the 57 major armed conflicts in 45 countries during 1990-2001, only three were inter-state – Iraq/Kuwait, India/ Pakistan and Eritrea/Ethiopia – the rest were internal conflicts over territory or resources (SIPRI, 2002).

The types of post-Cold War conflicts can be divided into three categories: where genuine geo-strategic and economic interests are involved (a key example being the war over Iraq which many see as being fought for control of oil); conflicts emanating out of ethnic and nationalistic politics, as witnessed in the wars in former Yugoslavia and in parts of central Asia. Then there are the 'invisible' conflicts, which may have claimed millions of lives – war in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are prime examples – but rarely register on international media radars, which tend to cover only the conflicts where the West, led by the United States, is seen to be a peace-maker.

Table I.1   Continuing conflict – top ten by number of deaths

Country	Since	Main parties to conflict	Deaths
Democratic Republic of Congo	1998–	Govt. vs. RCD; RCD-ML1	2.5 million
Sudan	1983–	Govt. vs. NDA2	2 million
Angola	1975–	Govt. vs. UNITA3	0.5 million
Algeria	1992–	Govt. vs. FIS and GIA4	up to 150,000
Russia	1991–	Govt. vs. Chechen rebels	up to 70,000
Sri Lanka	1983–	Govt. vs. LTTE5	62,000
Sierra Leone	1990–	Govt. vs. RUF6	43,000
Columbia	1960–	Govt. vs. FARC7	35,000
India	1989–	Govt. vs. Kashmiri rebels8	35,000
Israel/Palestine	1948–	Govt. vs. Palestinian groups	13,000

1. Rassemblement Congolais pour la democratie and Rassemblement Congolais pour la democratie-Mouvement de liberation.
2. National Democratic Alliance
3. Uniao Nacional Para a Independencia Total de Angola
4. Front Islamique du Salut; Groupe Islamique Arme
5. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
6. Revolutionary United Front
7. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
8. Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Toyeba

Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2002 and press reports

Radical Islam as the new global 'enemy'?

One major political development of the post-Cold War era has been the replacement of communism as the pre-eminent threat to Western interests with a radicalized Islam. In this version of international politics, influenced by the discourse of the 'clash of civilizations' and strengthened by the events of 11 September 2001, militant Islam represents characteristics that are inimical to a modern, secular and rational market-democracy (Karim, 2002). Militant Islam is projected as a transnational threat, exemplified by shadowy networks such as Al-Qaeda, with its alleged links with 'rogue' states like Iraq. An undifferentiated view of Islamic militancy seems to dominate the discourse, in which Lebanon's Hizbullah, Palestinian Hamas, Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah, Abu Sayyaf group in the Philippines and Chechen rebels, are all linked as part of a seamless transnational terror network. The fear that the weapons of mass destruction may fall in the hands of such networks is at the heart of the US security agenda (*International Security*, 2001).

   Resentment against the West, and particularly the US, is profound in the Arab world, largely because it is seen as controlling the region's energy resources, being unjust to the Palestinians and propping up corrupt regimes (Ali, 2001). The globalization of a market economy and,

Table I.2   Major US post-Cold War military interventions

Year	Country	Name of operation	Type of operation
1989	Panama	Just Cause	Aerial bombing, ground troops
1991	Iraq	Desert Storm	Aerial bombing, ground troops
1992	Somalia	Restore Hope	Aerial bombing, ground troops
1994	Haiti	Uphold Democracy	Naval, ground troops
1995	Bosnia	Joint Endeavour	Aerial bombing
1998	Iraq	Desert Fox	Aerial bombing, missiles
1999	Yugoslavia	Allied Force	Aerial bombing
2001	Afghanistan	Enduring Freedom	Aerial bombing, special force

with it, Western consumer culture is further weakening the traditional Arab way of life – 9/11 was arguably the most extreme reaction against the excesses of globalization.

In the global era, the US has laid claim to be the world's 'policeman', intervening to uphold its version of human rights and liberal democracy (Haass, 1999; Von Hippel, 2000; *Orbis*, 2001; Price and Thompson (eds) 2002). The pattern of US involvement has varied vastly – from no military intervention at all (Rwanda) to transfer of power to a pro-US regime (Afghanistan), to the creation of a protectorate (Kosovo) (see Table I.2).

However, non-intervention in situations where human rights have been grossly violated, such as Angola, Rwanda, Sudan, DRC or Chechnya, indicates that interventions are not solely or even largely dictated by such lofty ideals and have been influenced by geo-strategic and political interests (Mermin, 1999).

The contours of a global empire

In the twenty-first century version of imperialism, one can detect echoes of the 'informal empires' of the nineteenth century, when economic control and military coercion masked overt foreign rule. An example of this is China during the nineteenth century when extraterritorial legal privileges for European colonial powers and a free trade regime imposed by them severely stunted China's growth. Does the overwhelming US power – both coercive and of the 'soft' variety – justify the label of an informal empire?

One plank of this is the notion of 'global governance,' particularly through the United Nations Security Council, which, nearly 60 years after its inception still does not have any veto-wielding representation from Latin America, Africa or the Arab world. The undermining of state sovereignty coupled with increasing powers to new Western-sponsored international legal and human rights regimes and the globalization of

the discourse of market democracy, are the main features of this trend (Chesterman, 2001; *International Organization*, 2000). One manifestation of such indirect governance is that the 'international community' (the US) has the right to 'regime-change' and the burden of 'nation-building' in failed states (Ikenberry, 2002; Ajami, 2003).

Economically, the triumvirate of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization has created a global system that tends to serve the interests of transnational corporations, most of which are based in the West. Their fundamentalist neo-liberal economic prescriptions, handed down by the 'ayatollahs of the IMF and World Bank' have restructured the economies of the developing world in a fashion that suits primarily the interests of transnational capital (Ali, 2001: 195).

The third plank of this informal empire is the US military domination of the globe. US supremacy in the skies has become increasingly important in the post-Cold War world. As Table I.2 shows, aerial bombing is the most common form of US military intervention and the bombing of Kosovo was the first conflict in history where victory was achieved solely on the basis of airpower. The Kosovo conflict also transformed NATO, whose rapid reaction units can be airlifted anywhere on the globe to defend imperial interests.

With the deployment of increasingly sophisticated and militarized space systems, the US is all set to have 'full-spectrum dominance,' for the collection of intelligence, communication and transmission of information, navigation and weapons delivery. In 2001, the US had nearly 110 operational military-related satellites, accounting for more than 60 per cent of all military satellites orbiting the earth. In addition, the US decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and its plans for a ballistic missile defence system makes the 'weaponization' of outer space a major concern (Pike, 2002). A new 'space cadre' is being created with the purpose of establishing global vigilance and the ability to strike anywhere in the world (US Government, 2002).

A fourth plank of the informal empire is US superiority in the field of global entertainment and information networks (Herman and McChesney, 1997; Thussu (ed.) 1998; Thussu, 2000). The US-dominated mass media play a central role in the legitimization of the imperial discourse, especially significant during the time of a conflict (Metzl, 1997; Price and Thompson (eds) 2002; Kaufman, 2002).

Reporting conflict – the role of the media

Three key narratives concerning the role of mainstream media in communicating conflict can be identified: as critical observer, publicist and, most recently, as battleground, the surface upon which war is

imagined and executed. The idea that journalists are impartial and independent monitors of military conduct is cherished by many media professionals and liberal commentators. It assumes that correspondents are able and willing to shrug off ideological and organizational restrictions to keep a watchful eye on the activities of military combatants. It also implies that journalists are prepared to confront the arguments of powerful voices in government and the military who are responsible for both strategic and tactical decisions in a time of war.

The most celebrated example of this 'adversarial' conception of the journalist's role is US coverage of the Vietnam War where the uncensored and brutal portrayal of American casualties undermined public support and effectively 'lost the war'. One of the key turning points of the war was the transmission of a special report by the country's most celebrated news anchor, Walter Cronkite of CBS. Having just returned from a visit to Vietnam, he argued that the war was a 'bloody stalemate' and that outright military victory was virtually impossible. Upon watching this, President Johnson is alleged to have remarked to his aides that 'it is all over' (Ranney, 1983: 5). Broadcast coverage of (US) corpses and critical comments about US involvement were argued to have transformed public opinion. Television pictures of Vietnam, according to President Nixon, 'showed the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war. . .the result was a serious demoralization of the home front, raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home' (quoted in Hallin, 1986: 3).

The 'adversarial' model suggests that the prying eyes and investigative reports of committed journalists force governments to be more open in their justifications for war and more transparent in their conduct of military operations. According to this logic, the recent expansion in the number of media outlets and volume of news has simply fuelled the 'watchdog' role of the media. Increased competition forces reporters to go beyond the handouts and briefings to discover an original story that their rivals may not have discovered. 'Truth' therefore becomes an important commodity in the era of rolling news.

This account of the media's 'fourth estate' role has been subjected to extensive critique, most urgently in coverage of conflict. Celebrated studies of war reporters, notably Philip Knightley's *The First Casualty* (1989) emphasize the public relations value of most reportage that legitimates government perspectives and narratives. Knightley describes how British correspondents covering World War One blurred the distinction between military and civilian personnel by wearing army uniforms and consenting to being accompanied by official army 'guides'. Far from adopting a critical or oppositional viewpoint, this model suggests that correspondents are more likely to publicize and reinforce official sources on which reporters choose to depend.

   This approach has been applied to even the most hallowed example of media independence: Vietnam. In his detailed account of media coverage of the war, Daniel Hallin (1986) challenges the myth that a proactive and critical media corps deliberately sabotaged US military involvement. In the early days of the war, the US temporarily halted its bombing of North Vietnam in a move designed more to win domestic and international favour than to secure peace. Hallin concludes that reporters abandoned any notion of 'objective journalism' in disseminating the administration's view of events: the 'television journalist presented himself, in this case, not as a disinterested observer, but as a patriot, a partisan of what he frequently referred to as "our" peace offensive' (1986: 116). Even by the end of the war when US society was split over the question of Vietnam, 'for the most part television was a follower rather than a leader: it was not until the collapse of consensus was well under way that television's coverage began to turn around; and when it did turn, it only turned so far' (1986: 163).

   This chimes with the claim by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) that media reporting of the Vietnam War was defined by what it *excluded*: the voices of the anti-war movement in the US, the motives of the Vietnamese people and the 'inexpressible' notion that the US, not North Vietnam, was the aggressor in the conflict. This argument 'is not present even to be refuted. Rather, the idea is unthinkable' (1988: 252). According to Herman and Chomsky, media coverage of war is notable for the way in which views that run counter to official sources are deemed unacceptable, ideological alternatives are ignored and discussion is 'bounded'. Mainstream media reproduce the frameworks of political and military leaders and in so doing provide propaganda rather than 'disinterested' journalism.

   There are a significant number of examples that appear to bear out the argument that, for all the occasional tensions, the relationship between media and military remains a close one that impinges on reporters' ability to speak independently. In March 2000, Alexander Cockburn reported that a handful of military personnel, based in the psychological operations unit at Fort Bragg, were working as 'regular employees' for CNN and that, according to a US Army spokesman, they 'would have worked on stories during the Kosovo war. They helped in the production of news' (quoted in Cockburn, 2000). In the run-up to the planned invasion of Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003, hundreds of US reporters participated in Pentagon-organized programmes that taught journalists basic battlefield survival, military policy and weapons-handling skills (Strupp, 2003). One of the most controversial examples of the convergence between military and media networks was the revelation in November 2002 that Roger Ailes, chairman of the conservative Fox News Channel in the US, had sent a note to President Bush shortly after 9/11 advising him to take 'the harshest measures possible' (quoted in Deans, 2002) in retaliation for the attacks. The intimate relationship between

the entertainment industry and the defence establishment is further explored by Jonathan Burston in his chapter in this volume.

The third model of communicating conflict assumes that military and media networks have converged to the point where they are now virtually indistinguishable: that media constitute the spaces in which wars are fought and are the main ways through which populations (or audiences) experience war. The argument here is not whether media promote or oppose particular conflicts but that they are the means by which contemporary conflicts are literally played out. This idea of the media as battleground is related to two somewhat disconnected developments: the postmodernist critique of reality that foregrounds the importance of the spectacle; and technological innovations that have led to a 'revolution in military affairs' (RMA), in which war is increasingly technologized, informatized and mediated. While it is true that the wilder claims of postmodernism – best epitomized by Jean Baudrillard's polemical claim (1995) that the Gulf War was a gigantic simulation in which we were bombarded by TV images rather than missiles – have been discredited following empirical evidence of the existence of thousands of material (not textual) bombs and human (not symbolic) casualties, some of its conclusions are reflected in more mainstream military discourse.

The Pentagon boasts of the 'smart' bombs, computerized surveillance systems and digital simulations that coalesce around the notion of a 'future combat system' (FCS) (Hambling, 2003), a 'network-centric' model of warfare. This is designed to de-humanize war and complements the US military's strategy in recent conflicts to rely on aerial bombing campaigns in which, not surprisingly, there are few American casualties (and, ideally, minimal media interest in civilian casualties). Major innovations in information and communications technology have been eagerly embraced by the military establishment in their PR efforts to present a new and 'bloodless' view of war that looks good on domestic television screens. James Der Derian has described this as 'virtuous war' which combines virtual technologies with a claim to embrace humanitarian motives. This US-led imperial initiative 'relies on computer simulation, media manipulation, global surveillance and networked warfare to deter, discipline and, if need be, destroy potential enemies' (2002: 105).

Underlying these theories of 'virtuous war', FCS and RMA is the notion that something fundamental has changed in the conduct of war: that there are fewer bodies to observe and less mess to clean up. Yet modern conflicts are not 'media wars' or 'screen battles' but encounters in which there are plenty of civilian casualties, horrendous destruction and unimaginable misery for the victims. Reflecting on one of the main soundbites of the 1991 Gulf War, Philip Taylor concludes that, although the war will 'undoubtedly be remembered as CNN's war or television's war, it was no such thing. The conflict belonged to the

coalition's armed forces, and to the victors went the spoils of the information war' (1992: 278).

Many of the contributions to this book proceed on the basis of the second model: that, in general, the media are likely to privilege and publicize official versions of conflict. The chapters from both academics and professional journalists attempt to identify the range of constraints – both organizational and ideological – that prevent the media from reporting conflict in a truly critical or independent way.

The conception of a partisan, cheerleading media in Western liberal democracies has been articulated with great clarity and influence by scholars like Robert McChesney, John Nichols and Noam Chomsky. They argue that an increasingly market-led media largely ignores dissenting voices in favour of corporate and government tunes. This has led to a situation today where mainstream media accepts and reproduces dominant definitions of, for example, 'terrorism' (what others do to us) and 'self-defence' (what we do to others) in order to mobilize popular consent for military action against 'rogue states'. Populations have been 'effectively depoliticized with daily infusions of nonsense news' (McChesney and Nichols, 2002: 32) by a media hell-bent on securing maximum profits. Chomsky accuses the media of indoctrinating the public with 'what amounts to a form of self-imposed totalitarianism, with the bewildered herd marginalized, directed elsewhere, terrified, screaming patriotic slogans, fearing for their lives and admiring with awe the leader who saved them from destruction' (Chomsky, 2002: 65).

However, it is important not to exaggerate the ideological grip that the corporate media exert over citizens. In the two countries with perhaps the most extensive 'propaganda' systems, public opinion has proved to be reluctant to endorse the bombing of Iraq. In January 2003, British opposition to war was running at 47 per cent compared to 30 per cent in favour (Travis, 2003) while in the US, despite an overwhelmingly sympathetic media, only a small majority (52 per cent) were prepared to support George Bush's war drive with 43 per cent against (Gallup News Service, 2003).

At a time when consensus starts to break down, sections of the media are forced to respond to major public debates. However, the critical stories that do emerge from mainstream media are not the result of an intrinsic pluralism or a deep-rooted commitment to 'objective journalism' but reflect shifts in consciousness amongst wider layers of the population. The decision, for example, by the mass-circulation newspaper, the British *Daily Mirror*, to campaign against a US/UK attack on Iraq reflects its desire to articulate the views of the anti-war constituency as well as to compete with its main tabloid rival, the *Sun*. It is about politics *and* product differentiation. The stakes in reporting conflict are high but they are far from independent of the tensions that arise out of the struggle of political elites to get their way and the determination of citizens to stop them.

Reporting Conflict – the book

Against this background why is there need for another book on war and the media? This collection aims to provide a framework for analysing the interplay between the media and its representations of war and conflict in an era of sophisticated information warfare and news management. In doing this it integrates both media theory and journalistic practice, with essays from leading scholars and observations from well-known journalists from the front-line of reporting conflict. The volume offers a range of critical perspectives and a transnational approach, with contributions from three continents.

The book is divided into five parts. The first part is context-setting, with Aijaz Ahmad, one of India's best-known critical scholars, providing a political framework for analysing the US 'war on terrorism'. Ted Magder examines the impact of 9/11 on communications in the US and globally, while Jean Seaton emphasises the importance of understanding the nature of the audience response to the tragedy of conflict presented in the news.

Part Two focuses on new dimensions of information warfare. Frank Webster discusses the shift from the industrial to information warfare and how the discourse of human rights has come to take the centre stage in describing conflict in terms of humanitarian interventions. John Downey and Graham Murdock critique the notions of 'new wars' and the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) and argue that hi-tech war has its own limitations and low-tech guerrilla actions, driven by political motives, may sometimes be more effective. Robin Brown looks at media management in the wake of 9/11, while Philip Taylor, one of Britain's leading authorities on propaganda, analyses the role of psychological operations (PSYOPS) during the war in Afghanistan, with examples from radio broadcasts and propaganda leaflets.

Chapters in Part Three focus on the impact of the move to rolling, 24/7 television news. Daya Kishan Thussu argues that the competition for ratings and profits is forcing television journalism towards infotainment, projecting war as a bloodless virtual conflict. This section also reports the findings of a study of television news conducted by the Glasgow University Media Group, on how the framing of the news on Israel/Palestine influences audience perceptions of one of the world's most protracted conflicts. Media researcher Noureddine Miladi examines the origins and evaluates the growing influence of the pan-Arabic news network, Al-Jazeera, whose coverage of the war in Afghanistan in 2001 received international attention.

Part Four is concerned with the representations of the 'war on terrorism.' Jonathan Burston explores the creative links between Hollywood and the Pentagon – the military-entertainment complex – and stresses the need to rethink media research agendas to incorporate a

hidden face of entertainment. The chapter by Bruce Williams is based on an ongoing project about the role of on-line communications in a conflict situation. Williams examines how internet chatrooms became sites of heated debates and contestation, only minutes after the destruction of the twin towers. In her contribution, Cynthia Weber juxtaposes the Pearl Harbor and Palm Harbor events to discuss the US response to external and internal security threats, while Jayne Rodgers makes a case for a more gender-sensitive analysis of conflict, taking her examples from the media portrayals of 9/11.

Contributors to the final part examine the changing cultures of journalism. In their chapter, Howard Tumber and Marina Prentoulis focus on the journalistic subculture of foreign corresponding. Following the events of September 11, they argue, an already occurring cultural shift in war reporting has been accelerated and amplified bringing the concept of attachment and emotional literacy to the centre of attention. The final four contributions are based on journalists writing about their first-hand experiences of covering conflict. Nik Gowing, who has extensive experience of television journalism having worked for both ITN and the BBC, enumerates the problems and challenges faced by television reporters operating under the pressure of 24/7 news cycle. Kieran Baker, who covered the war in Afghanistan in 2001 for CNN and now works for Fox News, discusses the perils of reporting from a country with little communication infrastructure. Yvonne Ridley, who herself became a story for the media when she was arrested by the Taliban in September 2001, recounts her experiences as a witness to news management during the war in Afghanistan, while the BBC's Gordon Corera emphasizes the need for journalists to provide context and to be more culturally sensitive in their overseas reporting.

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