War sells, so it is said. In her book the Media at War, Susan Carruthers considers the media's conduct during the recourse to, and waging of war.

Carruthers examines the media's role as a watchdog institution of democracy, duty-bound to scrutinise political reasoning in war. Her rich exploration of past conflicts underlines the circumstances that confound this prescription:

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Carruthers pulls no punches; she argues that the advent of television is misrepresented as "the principal agent of America's defeat in Vietnam." Readers inclined to disagree should, at the very least, be impressed by her detailed account of the war in later chapters. Nevertheless her prologue closes in recognition that Vietnam has exercised the minds of successive policy makers, who have since endeavoured to manage public perceptions, during the Falklands, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Carruthers make a compelling argument that, in the end, "a strategy of truth" prevailed in the USA and Britain, whilst Joseph Gobbel's propaganda swan song offered subliminal instruction in German
cinema: Ever objective, a balanced debate rich with primary sources empowers readers to make their own judgement.

Moving succinctly from Vietnam to the digital age, a progressive and cohesive narrative allows the reader to "join up the thematic dots" between the Falklands, the Gulf War, Somalia and Former Yugoslavia. A study of Iraq and Afghanistan is well oiled with satire and explores in depth how "opinion management" has been fashioned by the digital age. This exploration makes way for a perfect epilogue on conflict.

A highly recommended read offering a great many insights and an enthralling historiography.

Thomas Spencer has MSc in International Security from the University of Bristol.