War and Media: the emergence of diffused war – published by Polity Press
A book review by Thomas Spencer, UK Defence Forum Researcher
In their book, Hoskins and O'Loughlin discuss the eminence of modern media and its effect on war.

In the two weeks preceding the invasion of Iraq, Tony Blair, contacted the media mogul Rupert Murdock on no fewer than three occasions.

Whatever power the media may wield in government, clearly policy makers appreciate its significance in an era of constant digital communications: In their literary work; "War and Media: the emergence of Diffused War," Hoskins and O'Loughlin endeavour to explain how the media has developed in its coverage of conflict. Over time they argue that it has grown to the extent that it now exercises subtle influence over the political instrument of war.

They suggest, war has become diffused as a consequence of a new "media ecology" that has coincided with modern technology. This ecology pervades government in a sublime sense; now it far harder to predict the public's response to war reportage. The eminence of media in society amplifies the uncertainty of popular reaction to developments, which invariably are reported en masse and instantaneously.

In the wake of battlefield developments that hit the deadlines in real time, policy makers find it far harder to anticipate public reaction and prepare policy for mass consumption. This is the beginnings of a rich discussion on the complex lattice through which war diffuses and loses its coherence as an exclusive instrument of policy makers. Oddly, despite outlining how Clausewitz's trinity of government, the military and the public is in flux, no reference is credited to him in this instance. That aside, Hoskins and O'loughlin effectively characterise their overriding argument as, the "mediatization of war." This allows the reader to progress through a narrative that distinguishes three principle dynamics that factor in "diffused war."

"Mediatization" (US spelling used here as in the book), whereby public perceptions, government perceived justification and even the military's viewpoint on battlefield developments are considered through the optic of media. As the authors sum up, "the battle is for how things are seen and perceived." Whilst pertinent, this idea confounds the second factor of "causality"; cause and effect. For example, they aptly highlight how a Taliban attack on Serena Hotel Kabul had no military importance yet its symbolic significance targeted the perceptions of the International community, local Afghans and NATO.

Conversely the following "causality" case discussion underlines how Al-Qaeda belligerents might not necessarily have "specific effects they wish to achieve." Whilst only one aspect of the causality synopsis, it is at a tangent with the former mediatization example, which identifies the deliberate targeting of perceptions and therefore, calculated cause and effect. Further

clarification in this instance could qualify an example that might otherwise form part of what remains, a convincing discussion on "cause without effect."

Exploring the view that there is "greater uncertainty in decision-making in war" gives credence to Hoskins and O'Loughlin's overarching notion of an instrumental media ecology. Every effort is made to consider varying interpretations of how decision making concerning war is subject to greater uncertainty. Thankfully, a consensus is drawn by Hoskins and O'Loughlin – whilst elites endeavour to exercise political and economic interests through media apparatuses, they are likely to encounter a less predictable, unwieldy policy tool: Indeed, many British political associates of the media mogul Rupert Murdock have discovered this.

Of course the fact that Blair endeavoured to play down a perceived Iraq-war decision making-media relationship, emphasises the pertinence of this book. Political manipulation aside, the explanation for "greater uncertainty" is developed as the book explains "the impact of economic, political and ideological and technological factors on communications processes."

More broadly, the quality of inclusive debate characterises consecutive chapters in which the authors go to great lengths to consider, all perspectives on media's ubiquitous influence, without deviating from their own. There in, the surrounding debate is intertwined with what stands a comprehensive and flowing narrative:
However, it is fair to suggest that this begins as an overly dry narrative that progressively becomes more accessible, particularly as it talks in context with iconic images and events that convey deeper meaning. Notably, Eddie Adam's photo that captured the execution of a Vietcong typifies an engagement with the reader, which steadily excels as the book develops.

This book targets those wishing to critique this subject within academic parameters, and for this it delivers. Those looking for a direct literary tone and the pull of a humble history book might find the jargon a little too dry. It remains a pertinent and enlightening read nonetheless.

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