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FROM:

The Executive Director of the Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC)

SUBJECT:

Mitigating Disinformation Campaigns Against Air Power

DISTRIBUTION:

All NATO Commands, Nations, Ministries of Defence, and Relevant Organisations

Air power has repeatedly proven to be NATO's great asymmetric advantage. To challenge this advantage and limit the use of air power, opponents try to influence public opinion against NATO. To achieve this, adversaries use disinformation and misinformation as tools of information warfare to undermine the credibility of air power, often finding a ready audience among certain sectors of the public. For example, air power is frequently discredited by accusations of illegal air strikes, e.g. causing excessive collateral damage or indiscriminately targeting civilians, regardless of the facts of the matter.

The 2015 Joint Air Power Conference provided the foundation for this academic study by exploring the broad themes of Strategic Communications in NATO, the use of information warfare against air power and how public opinion has been affected through deliberate disinformation campaigns by our adversaries. This study reviews the historical use of air power throughout the recent history of the Alliance and highlights the rise of opposition information warfare specifically targeting NATO Air Power. The study also explores a national perspective of individual Alliance members who represent the majority of NATO's air forces (France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States) to capture the dynamics and impact of national public opinion on the use of air power and how that translates to maintaining (or not) an effective strategic communication campaign. Interestingly enough, these studies reveal similarities but also notable differences between these five nations with regard to the susceptibility and vulnerability to information campaigns.

The study discusses the nature of disinformation campaigns against air operations and how they affect NATO's use of air power. It identifies NATO's vulnerabilities in this respect and provides doctrinal and policy recommendations of how to best counter enemy information campaigns and inaccurate media characterisations of air power. Further, it provides specific recommendations on developing Strategic Communications and information strategies with regard to the application of air power.

I invite you and your staff to read through this study. We welcome any comments you may have with regard to this document or future issues it identifies.

Joachim Wundrak

Lieutenant General, DEU AF
Executive Director, JAPCC

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BIOGRAPHIES



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Dr Corum is a retired US Army Lieutenant Colonel with 28 years of service including a deployment to Iraq as a strategic planner in 2004. He has had a career in higher military education, serving as a professor at the USAF School of Advanced Air and Space Power Studies (1991–2005), professor at the US Army Command and General Staff College (2005–2008), and

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Dr Matthieu Chillaud joined the University of Tartu upon receiving his PhD in political science from the Université de Bordeaux, where his doctoral dissertation focused on the Baltic States and European defense. In addition to his work on the strategic balance in Northern Europe, he is currently examining the history of French strategic military thought since 1958

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Dr Conrad C. Crane is currently Chief of Historical Services for the Army Heritage and Education Center at Carlisle Barracks. For the previous ten years, he was Director of the US Army Military History Institute. Before accepting that position, Dr Crane served with the Strategic Studies Institute at the US Army War College from September 2000 to January 2003, where he held the General Douglas MacArthur Chair of Research. He also has held the General Hoyt S. Vandenberg Chair of Aerospace Studies at the War College.

He joined SSI after his retirement from a 26-year active military career that concluded with 9 years as Professor of History at the U.S. Military Academy. He holds a B.S. from USMA and an M.A. and PhD from Stanford University. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Com-

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Before leaving SSI he coauthored a prewar study on Reconstructing Iraq that influenced Army planners and has attracted much attention from the media. He was the lead author for the ground breaking Army-USMC counterinsurgency manual which was released in December, 2006. He visited Iraq in November 2007 at General Petraeus' request to evaluate the new doctrine in action. In November 2008, he was named the international Archivist of the Year by the Scone Foundation.



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Dr Eugenio Cusumano is an assistant professor in International Relations and European Union studies at the University of Leiden. He obtained his PhD in 2012 from the European University Institute and was previously a Fulbright Scholar at the Korbel School of International Studies in Denver and a lecturer at the Baltic Defence College.

His research concentrates on the role of non-state actors in military operations and humanitarian crises both on land and at sea, with a focus on the increasing privatisation of military support. He has also conducted various studies on the latest developments in Italian foreign policy and security policies, such as the

use of military personnel aboard vessels to combat piracy and the conduct of maritime law enforcement and search and rescue operations offshore Libya. His work has been published in leading international relations and security studies journals such as the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *International Relations*, *Armed Forces & Society*, *International Peacekeeping*, and *Marine Policy*.

Apart from conducting academic research, he has collaborated with several Italian newspapers and has been frequently cited in international media like *The Guardian*, *the Independent*, *the Daily Mail*, *Le Parisien* and *France24*.



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Dr Mark Hilborne is based at the UK's Defence Academy, as part of the Defence Studies Department of King's College London (KCL). Dr Hilborne's research centres upon arms control and disarmament, with a focus on nuclear weapons and space; and with an interest in related areas of BMD and future aerospace capabilities such as Prompt Global Strike. Dr Hilborne is the convenor of the Space Security Research Group, and also runs the Air Power Studies courses, which are part of the KCL War in the Modern World program.

Prior to coming to KCL, Dr Hilborne worked at Birmingham University and the United Nations Institute of Disarmament (UNIDIR). He holds a BA from University of British Columbia in Vancouver, and an MPhil and PhD from Cambridge University.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JAPCC Study Mitigating Disinformation Campaigns Against Air Power

In military operations over the last twenty years, air power has repeatedly proven to be NATO's great asymmetric advantage. Air power's ability to accurately strike targets, support troops on the ground, provide accurate and timely intelligence, and transport troops, equipment and supplies over vast distances give NATO an incomparable advantage against its enemies. Moreover, in a crisis, it is air power that is the first responder due to its ability to react quickly and with precision. Yet, it is air power's very success that makes it the main target for information warfare waged against NATO. In this information battle waged by NATO's opponents, disinformation is a primary weapon and air power is a primary target.

Information warfare is a method by which NATO's opponents seek to influence public opinion against NATO and to force NATO to limit or renounce the use of air power in campaigns against both state and non-state actors. If NATO's enemies can accomplish through a propaganda war what they cannot win on the battlefield, their strategic aim is still achieved – NATO's major advantage is nullified. The loss of the full use of NATO's air power advantage would be a serious blow to NATO's ability to respond effectively to threats.

This Study documents the use of disinformation and misinformation and their role as major weapons in the information war against NATO and Western nations. The Study authors seek to identify and understand this major threat to NATO and to examine how the public opinion of NATO and allied nations can be affected through deliberate disinformation campaigns by adversaries. If NATO can understand the threat of disinformation and can anticipate future disinformation campaigns, it can develop the

appropriate doctrine and resources to counter the threat. One broad lesson that can be taken from recent conflicts is that strategic communications plays a critical role in meeting strategic objectives. The JAPCC team that wrote this Study firmly believes that the threat posed by enemy disinformation operations can be answered and overcome through the right strategic communications organization, doctrine and resources.

The Concept of the Study on Air Power and Disinformation

This Study on Air power and Disinformation was commissioned by the Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC) in Kalkar, Germany with the following objectives:

- To identify how air power in the strike role, and Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) in particular, are understood in the Western nations and the best way to educate audiences about the realities of air power as a continuing effort.
- To understand the nature of disinformation campaigns and misinformation about air operations and how these factors affect NATO's use of air power.
- To understand the ethics of airstrikes as a legitimate subject of public debate and how willing (and successful) nations have been to engage and educate their publics both outside and during operations.
- To understand the strengths and weaknesses of NATO Strategic Communication and information strategies in specific relation to air power, including weaponized RPA.
- To identify and recommend systems and processes to allow rapid rebuttal and damage assessments that can be put into the unclassified arena to support information campaigns.
- To understand how air power and RPA are portrayed in the public views in selected countries in order to better understand the dynamics of public

perceptions of air power in those nations and, thus, across the Alliance.

- To provide specific recommendations as to the likely vulnerabilities of air power to disinformation in future operations and develop doctrinal and policy recommendations to best counter the expected enemy information campaigns and media characterizations of air power.
- To provide specific recommendations on developing StratCom and information strategies with regard to the application of air power.

As part of the Study, the team of academics (6 PhDs) and researchers compiled a data base of more than 2,000 media stories concerning air power and NATO in operations over the last two decades. This data base will enable further study and provides core documentation for NATO training courses to be developed.

Air Campaigns and Strategic Communications Issues

To establish a context for this study, the team of scholars looked at the development of Western air power over the last two decades in terms of Strategic Communication and developed historical data to identify the main disinformation themes employed by NATO's adversaries. The study establishes that there are two major themes in anti-NATO and anti-air power propaganda: first, that air power is used indiscriminately to target civilians and, even if carefully used, still causes inordinate civilian collateral damage; second, that certain aircraft and weapons and tactics are inherently illegal. This approach, commonly called 'lawfare', aims to see the use of RPA in the strike role as well as various munitions outlawed for their indiscriminate nature and for causing civilian casualties. The lawfare movement looks to supersede traditional international law to insist any civilian casualties caused by air attack be considered a war crime.

Playing on these themes, NATO adversaries have found many allies and supporters among Western groups ranging from political movements to Non-

Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and to members of academia and the media. Active disinformation campaigns conducted by Middle Eastern groups and the Russian state relentlessly push themes designed to undermine the credibility of air power before the Western public. The anti-air power themes, which include exaggerations of civilian casualties, false claims, and disinformation about NATO tactics and operations, find a ready audience among certain sectors of the NATO public. These disinformation themes also work to incite anti-NATO feeling in the Middle East and developing nations and serve to spur recruitment for radical movements.

The study takes a historical approach, looking at how disinformation against Western air power has been applied over the last 25 years. The effectiveness of disinformation in the past has depended upon several key factors: the effectiveness of NATO's adversaries in mounting an information campaign, the view of the military held by the public, the media's presentation of air power to the public, and the ability of NATO and member nations to conduct their own information operations. A study of recent conflicts provides examples of highly effective disinformation campaigns by adversaries and of effective refutation of disinformation by NATO and Western nations. The study made a special examination of Russian information operations, as Russia places great emphasis on and expends considerable resources to wage information campaigns on several fronts.

Strategic Communication, Air power and Major NATO Nations

In order to understand the dynamics of air power and public opinion and to determine the vulnerability of Western nations to disinformation, the study included country studies of five major NATO members (The United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy), all of which are nations that have participated in NATO operations and operate RPA. The study found unique dynamics influencing public opinion in each country. The country studies highlight some of the key advantages and disadvantages that NATO has in communicating with the public. A central finding in

the country studies is that the media in major NATO nations does a mediocre job at covering air power and consequently the public in NATO nations lack good information on air power. Another aspect of the problem is that, in many cases, NATO and member states have not been effective at Strategic Communications, especially on air power issues. Consequently, there is a significant lack of understanding on key issues such as the employment of RPA, which are seen in a highly negative light in a great part of European and American media coverage.

Looking to the Future – Anticipating Future Disinformation Campaigns

NATO's recent non-state adversaries, such as the Taliban, ISIS and other radical movements, have developed their disinformation and information themes along some very predictable lines. Because of this, we can be fairly sure of how NATO's enemies will portray NATO air operations and can develop the right kind of Strategic Communications strategy to counter this.

As air power is a primary means and enabler of NATO's military operations, it will remain a primary target of disinformation campaigns. Enemies will claim status as victims and can be expected to use civilians as human shields to maximize civilian casualties and collateral damage. Civilian suffering, genuine or falsified will be used to gain sympathy and portray NATO air forces in a negative light. At every opportunity, NATO will be portrayed as the aggressor and accused of conducting warfare in an illegal manner. These themes will resonate with a relatively small fraction of the Western public but will find ready acceptance in less developed nations. Despite the lack of a short-term impact, these themes, if not effectively challenged, will have negative effects with the general public in Western nations over time.

Recommendations for Action

The study authors recommend that NATO place greater resources into Strategic Communication. At the strategic level, an essential requirement is for NATO and member forces participating in operations

have simple, clear and unified Strategic Communications themes to present to the public. The need for both NATO and major member states to rethink their Strategic Communications organization is clear. The United States, in particular, needs to think of reviving the US Information Agency to lead the StratCom effort. An effective Strategic Communications campaign requires top level command involvement.

At the operational level NATO StratCom doctrine needs to focus on a more proactive approach, emphasizing human rights in its information operations. NATO must focus on its positive human rights record. Likewise, NATO's opponents have horrible human rights records and specialist legal and media teams need to be organized and assigned to document and publicize the human rights violations of opposing forces. Special teams need to document enemy disinformation campaigns. The Study recommends better approaches to releasing graphics and imagery to preempt the expected enemy narrative. Lastly, better Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) is needed to refute the enemy disinformation.

At the practical level measures should be taken to better educate the public about air power and the realities of modern air power in warfare. The first step is to set up short orientation courses for the media to provide journalist with the basic context of air power. To deal with the negative public view of RPA, NATO needs to develop its own documentary films for the public.



Anti-vaccine campaign cartoon, United Kingdom, 1802.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Dr James S. Corum

Today NATO faces an array of challenges in foreign and military policy that will shape its future. The threat environment is much worse than it was a decade ago, with rising terrorist forces in the Middle East and North Africa and an aggressive Russia supporting the conflict in the Ukraine as well as openly threatening NATO states.¹ The need for collective defence is, arguably, greater today than at any time in the last twenty years.

At the September 2014 NATO Summit in Wales the Alliance heads of state and government approved a Readiness Action Plan (RAP) to ensure NATO is ready to respond swiftly and firmly to future challenges. The

2016 NATO summit in Warsaw reinforced the RAP and provided additional assurances that NATO is and will remain ready to meet collective defence requirements. Although NATO is committed to peaceful resolution of disputes by diplomatic efforts, Allied leaders made it clear at both Summits that NATO is willing and able to undertake military operations under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. The NATO RAP sets out a series of military measures, including the deployment of additional ships to key strategic areas, enhancing NATO's Response Force, creation of a new quick reaction force, and improving NATO's capability to support Eastern allies among other measures.²

In order to respond to increased threats across NATO's area of interest, NATO needs to adapt its forces and polices to meet the changing nature of these threats. A key element of NATO's response to current and developing threats will be the Alliance's ability to com-

municate its policies and actions in an effective manner. While presenting the NATO message, the Alliance must also counter its opponents' misinformation and disinformation campaigns. As an alliance of democratic nations with democratic values, it is essential that NATO win and preserve the support of the public among its member nations. NATO nations can only develop long-term capabilities and engage in military operations with the support of their populations.

Because air power provides NATO with a huge asymmetric advantage in conflicts, air power is a top target for media and disinformation campaigns waged by NATO opponents. NATO's opponents seek to influence public opinion against NATO and to push NATO to limit or renounce the use of air power in campaigns against adversary state and non-state actors. If this is accomplished, the asymmetric advantage air power brings is nullified. The loss of the full use of NATO's air power advantage could be a serious blow to NATO's ability to respond effectively to threats. This particular danger to NATO can best be answered and overcome through effective Strategic Communications.

A broad lesson that can be taken from recent NATO operations is the critical role strategic communications plays in meeting the strategic objectives of military campaigns, especially those against irregular enemies. We can win battles at the tactical and operational levels, but we can lose the war at the strategic level if the local population does not accept that their own government and the NATO forces supporting their government as legitimate. Indeed, the fight for legitimacy is at the centre of Western counterinsurgency doctrines.³ Enemy actors can be counted on to use every means to vilify NATO forces and actions in the eyes of the local population and to turn NATO support for a government into a negative factor in the eyes of the population. Moreover, the enemy actors will try to delegitimize NATO forces and actions in the eyes of the international community through their own sophisticated information operations. Thus, NATO must respond on two Strategic Communications fronts: to the populations of the nations in which NATO has intervened and to the public of NATO nations. Either loss of local support or loss of support for

NATO operations from the public at home can lead to strategic failure.

This study will examine one of the most serious threats against Western air power that NATO now faces – the disinformation campaigns carried out against NATO and coalition forces during recent campaigns that specifically characterized air power as an inhumane and indiscriminate weapon of war. In fighting irregular non-state forces (and even forces in state-on-state war), enemy groups and nations routinely and deliberately exaggerate the number of civilian casualties from aerial bombing – or even make false claims of attacks – to embrace the propaganda advantage of victimhood.⁴ In the last two decades air power has been routinely portrayed as indiscriminate, enormously lethal, and responsible for causing massive collateral damage and civilian casualties. Disinformation and misinformation published in the Western media has had a powerful effect, winning sympathy for enemy forces and undermining Western public support for military operations. In short, groups such as Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Daesh (ISIS) and affiliated groups have made NATO's or Western Coalition's use of air power a major theme in very effective (social) media campaigns.⁵ These media campaigns are some of the best weapons employed by NATO's enemies. Besides their influence on the public, they also steer the political debate, as is seen in the public discussion about the so-called 'drones'.

It is important that the nature of disinformation campaigns that target Western air power, including weaponized Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), be examined in depth so that we can better understand the opposition and its media strategy. It is essential to look at the recent NATO and Western air campaigns, Afghanistan and Libya in particular (but not excluding Iraq and Kosovo), and the degree to which disinformation and misinformation about air strikes influenced media coverage. It is also essential to understand how the negative portrayal of air power works to win sympathy for the enemy and pushes NATO policy to restrict the use of air power to avoid political and media fallout. We can reasonably anticipate that radical Islamist movements and related terror organi-

zations will use disinformation and misinformation to undermine the will of NATO nations to engage in military operations and to specifically influence NATO leaders to prohibit the use of air strikes.

The Concept of the Study on Air Power and Disinformation

This Study on Air Power and Disinformation was commissioned by the Joint Air Power Competence Centre (JAPCC) in Kalkar, Germany. The objectives of the Study are:

- To identify how air power in the strike role, and RPAS in particular, are understood in the Western nations and the best way to educate audiences about the realities of air power as a continuing effort. This will enable NATO to minimize and mitigate criticism based on ignorance in the heat of air operations;
- To understand the nature of disinformation campaigns and misinformation about air operations and how these factors affect NATO's use of air power;
- To understand the ethics of airstrikes as a legitimate subject of public debate and how willing (and successful) nations have been to engage and educate their publics both outside and during operations;
- To understand the strengths and weaknesses of NATO StratCom and information strategies in specific relation to air power, including weaponized RPAS;
- To identify and recommend systems and processes that allow rapid rebuttal and damage assessments that can be put into the unclassified arena to support information campaigns;
- To understand how air power and RPAS are portrayed in the public view in selected countries in order to better understand the dynamics of public perceptions of air power in major countries;
- To provide specific recommendations as to the likely vulnerabilities of air power to disinformation in future operations and develop doctrinal and policy

recommendations to best counter the expected enemy information campaigns and media characterizations of air power;

- To provide specific recommendations on developing StratCom and information strategies with regard to the application of air power. This approach will include recommendations for educating operators about StratCom in order to incorporate this understanding into targeting and planning processes.
- To develop a data base on how Western media has portrayed air power in recent campaigns that can be used to support future training exercises.

This Study asks questions about air power and StratCom to identify problems and develop solutions. In several ways, as this Study will illustrate, the media reporting on air power and the way that NATO and national ministries represent air power might make the difference between strategic success and failure.

This study will identify problems and solutions to ensure that air power continues to be a key enabler to the security of NATO. It will analyse the disinformation campaigns that have been mounted against NATO and Western air power over the last fifteen years with the intent of discrediting NATO air power. The study will provide doctrinal solutions to counter the threat of disinformation and to improve NATO's strategic communications in explaining the role of air power in future operations. The finalized study will support *NATO Forces 2020* by providing realistic concepts and doctrines to meet the challenge of disinformation.

This study is unclassified and releasable to the public. Furthermore, this study is intended to support the development of NATO policy and operational doctrine in the field of information and media operations.

Study Methodology and Deliverables

To accomplish these ends, this study will examine how air power is broadly understood in the Western nations and how disinformation and misinformation about air operations affect public opinion. The study

includes five country studies of nations that have used air power on active operations and are likely to use air power again. The countries selected for special case studies are: Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, and the United States. The study looks at national public reactions to the use of air power by NATO and national forces. The country studies and historical case studies will identify which themes and information strategies have worked best in countering the negative portrayals of air power and won international support for the enemy cause. The case studies will also identify where NATO and Western StratCom have succeeded in shaping the information environment. The Study will also look at how disinformation works in circumstances where the enemy was allowed to enjoy an advantage. The five country studies will provide insights into national public opinion so that NATO and national StratCom efforts can be better focused in the future.

In order to place the problem of StratCom and air power into perspective, the team created a data base of news articles, websites, reports, and other data on how air power is presented in the media in the Western nations and, to some degree, in non-Western nations. The team compiled and organized a large database of more than 2,000 media stories concerning air power and NATO in operations over the last two decades and provided translations of some media stories from Chinese and Arabic. In addition, an experienced Russian expert provides insights into how the Russians use information operations and how the Russians portray NATO in their information campaigns.

Media stories from Arabic, Russian and Chinese sources provide examples of how the Western use of air power is covered in much of the world's media. The study team members also collected a large number of public opinion polls and academic studies relating to air power and public perceptions. Part of our database is an analysis of selected websites that deal with air power matters and conflicts involving air power. It is on these sites and those of various NGOs that analysis of much of the public data concerning the use of air power and civilian casualties is found.

The team leader of the project and the authors of the five country studies are all experienced PhDs and most have military experience in service in the armed forces or working for the armed forces.⁶ The editor and country study authors are all professional academics and no one works directly for NATO or comes under the NATO or national military chain of command. As the authors are not dependent on NATO or the national forces for their career progress, the authors are clearly free to ask critical questions and write critical analysis without fear of a negative effect on their careers. Because this is a study with broad strategic implications, it is essential to strive for objectivity and, when appropriate, to criticize NATO and national ministries with complete frankness.

In studying the history of recent NATO air operations and also in creating the country studies key questions are to be asked: How is air power portrayed in the media? How are RPAS portrayed in the media? What is the public understanding of aerial strike operations? What does the public understand of the targeting process? To what extent does the media repeat the disinformation themes of NATO opponents? What is the public effect of the media reporting on the public view of air power and RPAS? The Study will also examine how the application of air power is considered by commanders and planners in development of operational plans and information strategies. Examining these questions will help us understand the effectiveness of NATO in strategic communications concerning policy and air power. The study will determine main deficiencies and vulnerabilities of NATO and national strategic communications in terms of air power, and how these deficiencies can be addressed.

This study will make specific recommendations as to the future vulnerabilities of NATO air power to disinformation and will develop doctrinal recommendations that can be used to counter the expected enemy media campaigns and characterizations of air power. The Study will provide specific recommendations on developing NATO StratCom supporting air operations. The study members believe dealing effectively with both disinformation and misinformation

and developing more effective strategic communications will be important parts of the foundation for future success of NATO operations.

Building on case studies, the Study in its final form will provide the foundation for an adaptable training module capable of being tailored to a number of different audiences including NATO senior leaders, their staffs, and Ministry of Defence (MoD) officials who will have to counter disinformation campaigns in future operations. The study database showing how the media has portrayed air power and RPAS in the recent air campaigns is designed to be used for future training and exercises that consider air power and StratCom.

Air Operations and Strategic Communications Issues since the 1990s

To provide the context for this Study we will briefly look at the development of Western air power over the last two decades in order to understand why air power has become the preferred means of the Western nations when employing military power and how the employment of air power in military campaigns has become a major issue for NATO Strategic communications.

The First Gulf War of 1990–91 was fought as a coalition operation and included the participation of air forces of major NATO nations (France, Britain, Italy, Canada) fighting alongside the United States. The war signified a milestone on the path of air power development, as the air operations demonstrated the effectiveness of air power and also identified issues that shape the public perception of air power in both positive and negative manners. The successful employment of Coalition air power in the First Gulf War became a model for using air power in future operations.

Several major lessons for the use of air power emerged from the Gulf War. First of all, in the crisis that began when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and threatened the other Gulf States, the first response to Iraqi aggression was to send air units to

defend Saudi Arabia. Within days US Air Force units were operating from Saudi bases. Within forty-eight hours of the British decision to send forces to the Gulf RAF aircraft were deployed to Saudi Arabia and flying missions. Within a week of the American decision to oppose Saddam Hussein's aggression two US Navy carriers were operating in the Gulf. For weeks the only real deterrent to a further offensive by Iraq against Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States was Western air power. While light airborne troops could be moved quickly, the heavy armoured and mechanized ground units that were needed to oppose the Iraqi heavy forces required months to be deployed to the Gulf.

In January and February 1991 the Coalition air forces carried out an air campaign to cripple the Iraqi heavy forces occupying Kuwait and southern Iraq. In addition, strategic targets were struck in the Iraqi capital and rear areas. The six week air campaign was followed up with a four day ground offensive that completed the destruction of the Iraqi forces in Kuwait, which had been heavily attrited and demoralized by constant air attack. Thanks to the advantage of the air power and the preparatory air campaign, Coalition losses in the war were extremely low, with only 146 American military personnel killed in battle. Losses for other coalition partners were equally low. It was one of the most one-sided victories in modern warfare.⁷

The Gulf War showed that air power capabilities had evolved dramatically since the Vietnam War. Advanced Command and Control (C2) allowed hundreds of aircraft to be effectively controlled while conducting numerous simultaneous missions across the whole of Iraq and Kuwait. Advanced networked communications allowed the theatre commander to shift air assets to different priorities and target sets on a daily basis to enable the most effective use of air assets.⁸ Stealth technology and precision munitions, technologies that had seen limited use in the previous decades, were used extensively in Iraq and provided capabilities far beyond previous wars to strike heavily defended targets accurately and with low risk. Improved munitions allowed the Coalition aircraft to hit and destroy targets protected by massive bunkers or hidden deep underground.

Perhaps the most important accomplishment of Coalition air power in the First Gulf War was the ability of the Coalition air forces to break Iraq's state-of-the-art air defence system at the very beginning of the campaign, an action which gave Coalition air forces not just air superiority, but air supremacy. For the next six weeks of the conflict, Coalition command of the air allowed the air forces the freedom to conduct simultaneous air operations across all of Iraq to include strategic attack, interdiction, and direct attacks on Iraq's large ground forces in Kuwait and southern Iraq. Wrecking the effectiveness of Iraq's sophisticated air defence network at the outset enabled the Coalition air forces to carry out their mission to cripple the Iraqi military with minimal losses – a loss rate of 1 aircraft for every 1,800 combat sorties (38 total aircraft lost and 48 damaged).⁹

During the First Gulf War, several issues arose that are related to strategic communications. The most controversial issue that arose during the Gulf War was the effect of bombing strategic targets in Baghdad and other cities in Iraq. While the main effort was focused on the Iraqi ground forces, especially those in Kuwait, the Coalition air forces mounted a series of precision attacks against Saddam Hussein's command and control network and key war industries in Baghdad. The attacks on Baghdad were carried out with great care to minimize civilian casualties, but attacking targets in cities invariably caused civilian casualties, the most dramatic instance of this being the air strike on the al Firdos bunker in central Baghdad, which Coalition intelligence had accurately identified as an underground command centre for the Iraqi forces. In fact, unknown to the campaign planners, the upper level of the bunker complex was also used as a shelter for some of the families of Baath Party officials and a bomb strike on the bunker early in the air campaign (13 February 1991) killed a number of Iraqi civilians. At first the Iraqis claimed that as many as 1,000 civilians were killed, but later Iraqi accounts said at least 400 people died.¹⁰ To this day, no one can be sure of the actual casualty toll. The al Firdos Bunker attack received wide international news coverage. Coalition air planners were well aware that negative media about civilian losses could undermine support for the Coali-

tion effort. After the al Firdos attack, Coalition air strikes on Baghdad were restricted to targets whose military nature could not be doubted and for which the chances for collateral damage to civilians was low.¹¹

The perceptions of the international media played an important role in the planning and decision making of the Coalition military and civilian leaders. Coalition air forces paid special attention to how the air campaign was perceived by the public.¹² One of the key lessons on air power from the First Gulf War was the importance of maintaining the moral high ground and ensuring that civilian casualties were kept to an absolute minimum. That collateral damage was bound to occur and that US and Coalition forces would do their utmost to prevent unnecessary civilian casualties was accepted by an overwhelming majority of the American public and the public of coalition partner nations. Early in the bombing campaign, in order to garner international sympathy, Saddam Hussein falsely charged Coalition air power with indiscriminately bombing civilian targets. Saddam Hussein's attempt at anti-Coalition propaganda was quickly answered and refuted by the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell in a press conference.¹³ Throughout the bombing campaign, General Powell served as the lead of the public relations effort and, throughout the war, Coalition leadership emphasized the careful use of Coalition power and their efforts to avoid civilian casualties. Powell, who was an exceptionally credible spokesman for the Coalition effort, was clear and forceful in his engagement with the media and won high respect from them for his readiness to answer questions.

Coalition air strikes in Iraqi cities were successful in producing little civilian collateral damage while, destroying key military and government installations. However, the analysis in the US Air Force's *Gulf War Air Power Survey* made the prediction that, in the future, enemy leaders would readily use civilians as hostages in order to limit Western air power. The Air Force's analysis also noted that strategic air campaigns that include attacking targets such as electricity and bridges that impact the civilian population could undermine public support of an air campaign.¹⁴

Another issue highlighted by the *Gulf War Air Power Survey* was the BDA conducted during the war. BDA had been a problem throughout the war, as reconnaissance units were late to arrive in theatre and were not given a high priority in the operational plans. While space surveillance and imagery assets were highly useful, they could not substitute for real time surveillance and aerial imagery of bomb strikes. One of the major problems identified by the US Air Force's official study of the war was inaccurate BDA which overestimated the attrition to Iraqi heavy forces before the ground campaign.¹⁵ In a future campaign, the lack of intelligence on the effect of air strikes could have serious consequences in terms of maintaining an accurate intelligence picture of enemy forces and capabilities. In terms of strategic communications, the lack of accurate BDA could allow the enemy to make claims of civilian casualties and collateral damage that would be difficult to refute.

In general, the strategic communications carried out by the US-led coalition in the First Gulf War were very effective. The importance of strategic communications in building and maintaining an effective military coalition was recognized and supported by American political and military leaders. The strategy for the air campaign was explained to the international public in clear and simple terms – use air power to cut off and destroy the Iraqi forces in Kuwait and cripple Saddam Hussein's key military capabilities. For the first time in a major war, the public was able to see the videos of precision munitions as they hit their targets. With quick release of strike videos, the public could not only see the types of targets being attacked, but also understand how precise munitions had become. When collateral damage and civilian casualties occurred, as in case of the al Firdos Bunker, response was immediate and detailed explanations were provided to the public as to how and why the target had been targeted. Partly thanks to effective strategic communications, international public support for the Coalition in the First Gulf War remained strong throughout the conflict. Although Saddam Hussein manipulated the foreign journalists inside Iraq, allowing them only to report on civilian damage, and made the civilian casualties a central theme of his information opera-

tions, he succeeded in inspiring only a few small protests against the war in the Western nations.¹⁶

RPA Become a Major Part of Western Air Power

As surveillance, reconnaissance and BDA had proven to be major gaps in the US capabilities in the Gulf War, an emphasis was placed on programmes to develop effective RPAS that could overcome these gaps. Unmanned aircraft were less expensive than manned, had the advantage of being able to loiter for long periods and conduct ongoing surveillance of targets, and were capable of providing accurate real-time imagery to the commander. Being less expensive and unmanned, the loss of a RPAS was more acceptable than losing an airplane and pilot.

By 1994 a new generation of highly capable unmanned aircraft, popularly called drones but more accurately labelled RPA, were in the testing phase. RPA were first deployed on active operations to support combat operations over Bosnia in 1995 and proved very useful. From the start of their use, the new generation of long-endurance unmanned aircraft proved so effective in providing surveillance and intelligence that the programme was rapidly expanded. Although the payload of those first unmanned vehicles was less than that of a manned aircraft, the RPA could be modified to carry smaller precision munitions such as the Hellfire missile. Over time a variety of precision munitions were fitted to RPA, giving them a true attack capability which included guided missiles as well as smaller versions of the Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs).

In 1999 Operation Allied Force saw an increased use of RPA by the United States Air Force and US Army, which fielded, respectively, the Predator and the Hunter. The RPA were used to conduct surveillance of the Serbian Army forces in Kosovo and, with their low profile, were able to penetrate a well-defended enemy air space. However, the use of RPA in combat was still in its infancy and there were numerous problems with the C2 arrangements. RPA effectiveness was limited due to a lack of integration with the strike

packages and a lack of joint training given to RPA operators and forward air controllers.¹⁷ Still, the RPA were regarded as highly desirable assets and two results of the Kosovo conflict were to speed up the production of RPA and encourage better integration of RPA into the forces, with more seamless connections to strike forces and tactical air control.

The coalition air campaign in Afghanistan in 2001 demonstrated that RPA capabilities had improved considerably in the two years since Operation Allied Force. In the Afghanistan campaign the system connectivity between RPA and strike aircraft was dramatically improved and RPA video feeds were connected directly to AC-130 gunships, thus greatly increasing the capability of the strike aircraft.¹⁸ RPA were increasingly used to support larger strike packages of manned aircraft, making the distinction between manned and unmanned systems in conducting missions largely irrelevant. For combat operators, RPA became just another air power capability.

The coalition counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan made RPA the most demanded assets in the US aircraft inventory. Counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq were even more intelligence-driven than the conventional wars in the Gulf and in Yugoslavia had been. The long endurance of the RPA enabled the Allied military to keep areas under long-term surveillance and even to monitor suspect individuals and groups. It was the surveillance of RPA and the ability of highly trained teams to use and transmit information from them that enabled Coalition Forces to target and kill Abu al Zarqawi, the head of the Al-Qaeda in Iraq, in a December 2006 air strike. It should be noted that al Zarqawi was killed with a PGM dropped by an F-16 fighter, but the targeting information for the F-16 was provided by an RPA.¹⁹

Balkan Air Operations 1995

From 1991 to 1995 the political collapse of the Yugoslavian Federation resulted in a series of conflicts that became the bloodiest wars fought in Europe since World War II. Slovenia and Croatia successfully broke

from the Yugoslavian Federation, which was dominated by Serbia, but by the mid-1990s were engaged in a conflict with Serbia over several disputed border regions. The deployment of more than 20,000 UN peacekeepers failed to tamp down the violence in the Republic of Bosnia, where the population was half Serbian and half Bosnian Muslim and Croat. A distinctive feature of the conflict was a series of ethnic cleansing campaigns carried out mainly by Serbs (but also by Croats) beginning in 1992 and which aimed to drive Bosnian Muslims out of claimed territories. The violence became an international crisis in the spring and summer of 1995 when the Bosnian Serb forces mounted a major military offensive that put Sarajevo under siege and in other areas initiated a brutal ethnic cleansing campaign. The UN peacekeepers, operating under a weak mandate and with no air support, were at the mercy of the heavily armed Serb forces. In May Serb forces took 370 peacekeepers hostage. In July the Serb forces surrounded Srebrenica and forced the surrender of the Dutch peacekeeping battalion protecting the local Bosnian population. The Serbs took the Bosnian Muslim population prisoner and 8,000 Bosnian men and boys were marched into the nearby forests, where they were slaughtered by the Serb forces in one of the greatest war crimes on European soil since the end of World War II.

By this point, NATO decided that it would not allow such blatant aggression and disregard for human rights to continue and authorized air operations to target the Bosnian Serb forces and to force the Serbs to accept a ceasefire which would allow a NATO peacekeeping force of heavy forces, operating under a much stronger mandate, to occupy Bosnia and oversee the creation of a democratic government. NATO had prepared an air campaign plan and, on 30 August 1995, Operation Deliberate Force, during which Serbian forces were targeted by NATO aircraft, began. Over a two week period, 3,515 sorties were flown and over 1,000 bombs dropped on Serbian forces.²⁰ The NATO air campaign carefully targeted Serbian heavy weapons systems and supply bases. The air commander, General Michael Ryan, emphasized the use of precision munitions in populated areas and personally reviewed and approved every

strike in order to avoid collateral damage to civilians.²¹ Confronted with NATO air strikes and a successful ground offensive by Bosnian and Croat forces that retook territory lost to the Serbs earlier in the year, the Bosnian Serbs accepted both NATO peace conditions and a NATO force to occupy Bosnia.

In the short NATO air campaign, NATO's first major combat operations since its founding, Strategic Communications were highly effective and there was strong international support for the operation. The NATO strategy was clear, simple, and effectively communicated – to destroy Serbian heavy weapons and impede logistics to coerce the Bosnian Serbs to accept a ceasefire and international oversight, which would be backed up by a heavy NATO ground force. Serbia was clearly the aggressor and, due to well-publicized Serbian war crimes, there was little international sympathy for the Bosnian Serbs. NATO ensured that collateral damage and civilian losses would not become a Serb propaganda tool.²² The successful 1995 air campaign over Bosnia reinforced some of the lessons of the Gulf War – that air power could respond quickly to crises, apply powerful forces with great accuracy to obtain desired effects, and could minimize damage to the civilian population. All this was done with the loss of only one manned aircraft.

The NATO Air Campaign Against Serbia 1999

In 1999 NATO was again in a conflict in the former Yugoslavian Republic, this time conducting air campaign against Serbia that was NATO's response to Serbia's brutal actions against the ethnic Albanian population of the Kosovo Province. By 1999 Serbian actions against Kosovo's population had created a new European crisis, with over 200,000 internal refugees and another 200,000 Kosovars fleeing the country. Faced with Serbia's refusal to accept European and UN demands for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo, NATO initiated an air campaign against Serbia. The conflict began with a series of air attacks against Serb military targets on 28 February and when the Serbs responded by increasing their military operations against the Kosovo

ethnic Albanians, NATO extended the scope of its bombing operations. During the campaign almost 500 NATO aircraft were deployed to the theatre.²³ After 78 days of air strikes Serbia accepted the NATO demands, withdrew their forces from Kosovo and accepted a NATO military force to occupy and administer the Province.

The 1999 air campaign against Serbia highlighted several issues for strategic communications. The 1999 campaign targets included numerous industrial facilities and targets within Serbia's major cities, which raised the risk of civilian collateral damage and casualties as well as significant environmental damage. In contrast to the 1991 and 1995 air campaigns, NATO and the US Department of Defense (DoD) were less successful in communicating the air strategy to the public, nor was NATO effective in justifying specific targets in terms of the aims of the war (how the targets related to stopping the actions of the Serb 3rd Army in Kosovo). While NATO imposed very strict rules of engagement to minimize the possibility of civilian casualties, neither NATO nor the US DoD placed a high priority on responding to Serbian claims of civilian casualties and damage as they occurred. The US DoD generally declined to address the issue of civilian casualties, which left control of the story in the hands of the Serbs, who allowed international media into Belgrade and made the Serbian civilian casualties a major focus of their propaganda effort. It was not NATO, but international NGOs, that provided the public with estimates of civilian losses and damage during the conflict.²⁴

It was a frustrating air campaign that continued far longer than NATO had anticipated.²⁵ Air strikes on Serb forces carrying out the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo were hampered by weather and the Serb's ability to disperse and hide their forces among the ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo. Poor weather and heavy cloud cover made it exceptionally hard to target Serb forces without causing civilian casualties. NATO was unwilling to allow bombs to be dropped without clear targets so many sorties returned without dropping bombs.²⁶ During the conflict the Serbs used civilians extensively as human shields, intermix-

ing military vehicles in civilian convoys, and placing ethnic Albanian civilians near Serbian military command centres to ensure civilian casualties if NATO bombed them.²⁷ Despite care taken to avoid civilian casualties, in attacking the Serbian 3rd Army it was impossible to target military units without hitting some Kosovars. There were several documented instances of civilian casualties incurred from NATO strikes on Serb forces in Kosovo.²⁸ In two of the most dramatic instances of civilian casualties, NATO air strikes on two Serb units in Kosovo on 14 April, Serbian television broadcast images of tractors and civilian vehicles burning and showed civilian casualties. As the story quickly appeared in the major international media, the NATO and American responses to the incident were garbled, with the US and NATO spokespersons presenting conflicting accounts of the incident (there were two attacks and the US DoD spokesman referred to one attack). Over the next days in responding to media questions the NATO spokesman expressed confusion as to the location and circumstances of the attack, a point that was picked up immediately and criticized by the media.²⁹

The conduct of the air campaign exposed weaknesses in planning and intelligence collection that had StratCom repercussions. On 6 May NATO aircraft bombed the Chinese Embassy by mistake (the building had formerly been a Serb logistics headquarters) and killed Chinese diplomatic personnel. It was a mistake that had major repercussions in international relations.³⁰ Other strategic attacks that killed civilians were highly controversial and opened NATO to (arguably) justifiable criticism. On 23 April NATO aircraft bombed the Belgrade television and radio facility, killing 17 civilian staff members. The necessity for the strike on the civilian facility, which could be used for military communications, was questioned by the Western media as the Serbian state media was able to return to broadcasting with hardly any break using alternate facilities and temporary transmitting towers.³¹

During and after the war, the question of civilian casualties became a contentious one between NATO and the human rights organizations, which carefully monitored the campaign. NATO and Western political lead-

ers provided a version of civilian targets struck and civilian casualties that was greatly at variance with the statistics compiled by the human rights organizations. NATO and the US Defense Department acknowledged only 20–30 incidents of collateral damage in the 78-day air campaign and refused to comment on civilian casualty estimates. After the campaign US Deputy Defense Secretary Hamre acknowledged only thirty instances of inflicting civilian casualties in testimony to the US Congress.³² The US/NATO figures contrasted with the Human Rights Watch account of the campaign, which counted 90 instances of collateral damage and civilian casualties inflicted by NATO's air attack. However, despite disputing the number of attacks resulting in collateral damage, NATO declined to dispute the Human Rights Watch estimate of approximately 500 Serbian civilian dead plus 800-plus wounded caused by NATO air strikes.³³

Strategic Communications in Operation Allied Force were not handled well when measured against earlier conflicts. As the lead nation for the operation, the United States paid less attention to StratCom than in 1991 and 1995. As noted, the senior political and military leaders of NATO failed to make clear the strategy of the air campaign to the public. When targets in cities were attacked with resulting civilian casualties and collateral damage, the issue was addressed not by the top military leaders but by second tier NATO and US DoD spokesmen. By avoiding a discussion of civilian casualties and targets within the cities and by failing to link the civilian targets clearly to the military intent of the campaign (stopping the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Province), senior leaders left the public open to the interpretation that the air war was focused on punishing the Serb people rather than stopping the Serb Army's actions. As NATO only acknowledged 20–30 instances of civilian casualties, the media came to rely on the NGO estimates of 90 instances of civilian casualties with approximately 500 civilian deaths – figures that were generally accepted by the Western media as more credible than NATO's estimates. During and after the campaign, the Western media came to rely more on NGOs for their information than NATO, presenting a future problem for NATO credibility with the media.

One direct outcome of the 1999 air campaign was the movement to ban cluster bombs as a legal aerial munition. NATO refused to discuss the use of cluster munitions during the campaign and, when the UN reported that cluster munitions had caused civilian casualties, a movement to outlaw the use of cluster munitions grew at the grass-roots level. This resulted in an international treaty to ban the use of cluster munitions that has been ratified by most NATO partner nations. Today, dozens of nations regard the use of cluster munitions as a war crime (more on this in chapter 2). Simply storing cluster munitions on the territory of an allied country that has signed the treaty (most NATO members) can land a nation like the United States, which has not signed the treaty, in a legal battle with an ally.

In summary, NATO StratCom in Operation Allied Force was poorly conducted in several respects. NATO failed in several instances to respond effectively to the issues of civilian casualties and collateral damage. Public concerns of environmental damage were not adequately addressed. NATO credibility was also damaged in terms of relations with the media, which took to using NGO reports in preference to NATO reports.

Post 9/11 Conflict: Fighting Irregular Forces

The conflict against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban government of Afghanistan was initiated following the terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon that killed approximately 3,000 Americans on 11 September 2001. Although the combat theatre was far from any friendly airfields or logistics base, American air power, operating at long range from Middle Eastern bases and from aircraft carriers, was able to deliver powerful and accurate blows to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces and effectively support the Northern Alliance Afghans fighting the Taliban.

In October 2001 the United States and allied partners began major air operations against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that, by December, had enabled Anti-Taliban Afghani allies to take control of the major cities and populated areas and to push the Taliban

and Al-Qaeda back to the high mountains in the far east of the country. The air campaign was brilliantly successful and demonstrated how munitions, C2 and aircraft capabilities had dramatically improved in the decade since the Gulf War. The ability to deliver timely and precise air strikes played the main role in helping the Afghani Northern Alliance forces rout Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces during the successful offensive. Between the start of air operations in October 2001 and December 2001, US forces carried out 6,500 strike sorties. While US forces dominated early operations, allied air units played key supporting roles, with British tankers and ELINT supporting US strikes and French Air Force Mirages flying tactical reconnaissance missions. Allied aircraft from NATO nations would fly more than 3,000 sorties of all types in Afghanistan from October to December 2001.³⁴

Although the air power operations of 2001 were successful in routing Al-Qaeda and the Taliban forces and enabling a moderate Afghani government to assume power, the war was far from over. Sensing the weakness of the new Afghan government, by late 2002 Taliban insurgents were again infiltrating into Afghanistan and beginning an insurgency against the Western-aligned Afghan government. From 2002 to 2014 NATO, responding to the attack on the United States by Afghanistan-based terrorists, sent forces to Afghanistan to support the Afghani government, to train Afghan Police and military forces, and to carry out counterinsurgency operations. Alongside the United States, which provided most of the Western air and ground forces, other NATO nations sent significant forces into the theatre. Almost all NATO nations as well as other partners sent forces to Afghanistan.

The conflict in Afghanistan was a new experience for NATO, as it was NATO's first counterinsurgency operation. The Taliban hid among the population, offered no large fielded forces and no strategic targets (logistics bases, training camps, headquarters etc.). There were some periods of intense combat in hotspots such as Helmand Province which required extensive close air support. From 2002 on, NATO air units conducted strikes on identified targets, but the most

common strike mission was close air support of NATO and Afghan ground troops.³⁵

Civilian casualties from air attack became one of the major issues of the conflict and one of the central themes of NATO strategic communications. The death of civilians through air attack was unavoidable in a country where guerrillas were intermixed with the population and much of the fighting was carried out in villages and settled areas. Afghanistan presented NATO with a new set of complex air power and Strat-Com problems. The Taliban and its allies proved highly effective in conducting information operations and made vilifying NATO air power a central theme of their propaganda effort. There were ongoing public disputes with the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, over the use of NATO air power. Through the Afghanistan conflict air power came under intense and highly critical media scrutiny. These issues will be covered in chapter two.

Fighting Irregular Forces in Yemen, Somalia, Syria and Iraq and the Use of RPA

The United States has made cross-border air power operations to strike at terrorist groups a core part of its strategy against terrorists since the 9/11 attacks. Operating under a Congressional resolution of 2001 that authorizes American forces to use lethal force against terrorists who pose an active threat to the United States, Americans have used airstrikes against terrorist headquarters, leaders and training centres in north-western Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen and Syria. In these operations, RPA have been the weapon of choice for several reasons: they are stealthy, there is no risk of losing a pilot, they employ a variety of highly precise munitions such as the Hellfire missile and JDAMs, and smaller precision munitions are less likely to cause collateral damage.³⁶ If sending in ground forces is not a practical option for military or political reasons, RPA sometimes offer the best alternative to strike terrorist groups that operate in ungoverned regions. Hundreds of strikes (many of the RPA counter terrorist operations are run by the CIA and remain classified) have

been carried out with casualties inflicted on key terrorist leaders and training and logistics centres destroyed. Even if top leaders are extremely hard to find and eliminate (killing Osama bin Laden required a major effort), removing mid-level terrorist leaders will degrade effectiveness of terrorist groups over time.

The use of RPA in the counter terrorist role is one of the least understood aspects of modern air power, partly because RPA operations in the cross-border strike role remain largely classified. The use of RPA in counterterrorism has received generally negative press, especially in the European media, where they have been routinely characterized as an 'unfair' weapon and used for 'targeted assassinations.'³⁷ One of the problems is the public perception that RPA are less accurate and less capable than manned aircraft. A recent American article titled 'Drones kill more civilians than pilots do' presented data arguing that, from 2009 to 2015, only one civilian had been killed in Afghanistan per every 21 bombs dropped, while cross border strikes in Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan had killed one civilian per every 1.6 strikes.³⁸ There are serious problems with this analysis, the first being the image of the RPA as a stand-alone exotic weapon. In fact, for more than a decade RPA have been fully integrated into NATO and Western air operations.³⁹ In short, in modern air operations there is no fundamental difference between munitions delivered by 'manned' and 'unmanned' systems. Still, there appears to be little understanding of this fact among the public or even among journalists who write about air power.

The other problem in the analysis criticizing RPA as being less discriminate is the source of the civilian casualty figures, which remains a major problem in media reporting on Western air power. In Afghanistan there are friendly troops on the ground and it was possible (although difficult) to investigate damage and casualty claims and develop a more accurate picture of air power's effects. In Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia, the ground is in the hands of terrorist and radical factions and any media analysis comes from either NGO figures or from the terrorists themselves, making those figures suspect at best. Since RPA cross-border operations remain generally classified – a necessary precau-

tion as information regarding terrorist targets largely comes from agents and informants on the ground who could be compromised by a public discussion of terrorist targeting – the full story of the RPA strikes cannot be told to the public.

In fact, counterterrorism operations that employ air power (and other military means) outside areas of active hostilities (cross-border operations) are governed by strict policies that are not widely known or understood by the public in NATO nations. The US government legal justification for cross-border strikes asserts that: *Lethal force will be used outside areas of active hostilities only when the following preconditions are met: First, there must be a legal basis for using lethal force ... Second, the United States will use lethal force only against a target that poses a continuing, imminent threat to U.S. persons ... Third, the following criteria must be met before lethal action may be taken:*

1. *Near certainty that the terrorist target is present.*
2. *Near certainty that non-combatants will not be injured or killed.*
3. *An assessment that capture is not feasible at the time of the operation.*
4. *An assessment that the relevant governmental authorities in the country where action is contemplated cannot or will not effectively address the threat to U.S. persons.*
5. *An assessment that no other reasonable alternatives exist to effectively address the threat to U.S. persons.*

Finally, whenever the United States uses force in foreign territories, international legal principles, including respect for sovereignty and the law of armed conflict, impose important constraints on the ability of the United States to act unilaterally – and on the way in which the United States can use force.⁴⁰

The United States has been the major manufacturer and user of RPA, but, since the 1990s, France, Italy, UK, Spain, and Turkey all have stood up RPA units. MQ-1 Predators and MQ-9 Reapers, all acquired by NATO

partners from the US, have proven to be highly effective combat platforms. RPA are excellent platforms for fighting irregular enemies and for conducting counterinsurgency operations. In reconnaissance and surveillance operations, RPA can carry ever larger payloads and their long endurance makes them especially useful. With the rise of terrorist threats to NATO nations, the use of RPA as strike platforms may well be increased by European nations in operations to strike terrorist organizations.

War against terrorists and irregular groups pose serious political dilemmas for NATO members. When terrorists who attack NATO civilians and threaten NATO nations establish bases in ungoverned areas such as Yemen, Libya, Somalia and north-western Pakistan, are they to be allowed free sanctuary to wage war on NATO nations? If not, NATO nations will have to explain to the public why terrorists who commit unprovoked attacks on civilians of member states should be allowed sanctuary status. If NATO is to respond to direct threats, attacking terrorists in their home bases will be necessary. As there is a general reluctance to commit ground forces, using weaponized RPA to strike terrorist targets may be the most viable military option for several reasons, including stealth, low risk to Alliance forces, low cost, and low risk of collateral damage. From a strategic communications perspective, these are all arguments that can be made to the public to justify the use of RPA.

The NATO Air Campaign in Libya 2011

In 2011 Libya faced a civil war as part of the political upheaval in North Africa and the Middle East popularly called the 'Arab Spring'. Seeking to topple Muammar Kaddafi's totalitarian dictatorship, various groups in Libya went into open rebellion. The rebel groups had general sympathy for Western nations and the UN voted to establish a no-fly zone in Libya. To enforce the UN no-fly zone in March 2011, a coalition of NATO and partner nations – initially Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Spain, UK, US and Qatar – began air operations designed to limit the capabilities of Kaddafi's forces. After considerable debate due

to the reluctance of some NATO members to get involved with the intervention, NATO took over the responsibility to enforce the no-fly zone but left the targeting of Libyan ground forces with the ad hoc coalition.

The Libya air operations exposed a number of problems for NATO. In particular, Strategic Communications for the Libya operation were problematic. The NATO nations lacked a clear legal mandate for conducting a war against Kaddafi and the operation was characterized by political disputes within NATO. At the outset, NATO could not present a clear explanation of the strategy of the conflict or the intent of the targeting other than to say it was supporting the UN-approved no-fly zone. The lack of a clear mandate for the broad use of military force caused some open splits between major NATO members, with Germany refusing to participate and pulling its Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) crews out of the operation.

President Obama lacked any Congressional authorization to use force and promised that the US participation would last for 'days, not weeks,' after which the US would shift to a support role and allow the Europeans to lead the operation.⁴¹ Instead, the Europeans lacked key capabilities and required immediate augmentation by the US for specialist personnel. In fact, the US remained as the lead nation for the operation, which continued for six months. Other problems arose during the conflict, including a shortage of precision munitions in some European nations.⁴²

As expected, Kaddafi attempted to use the issue of civilian casualties as a major propaganda theme. Throughout the operations, Kaddafi made inflated claims of massive civilian casualties caused by NATO and, in September 2011, claimed that 2,000 Libyan civilians had been killed by NATO bombing.⁴³ However, NATO was prepared for this ploy and such claims were quickly debunked by the NATO staff. Kaddafi failed in his attempt to influence the Western media. Thanks to careful NATO ROE, civilian casualties were minimized while Kaddafi's forces were effectively targeted. The effectiveness of NATO air operations was upheld in a UN Human Rights Report released in March 2012

that concluded that only 60 civilians had been killed and 55 wounded in NATO air strikes during the six months of NATO combat operations – a remarkably low total given the number of bombs dropped.⁴⁴

It was the lack of a clear mandate for military intervention that posed a problem for NATO strategic communications. The strategic goals of the operation, beyond enforcing the UN mandate, were not clear. Therefore, it was difficult for NATO to craft a strategic communications programme that was coherent and fully credible. The operation ended with the demise of Kaddafi and NATO air power could justly take credit for enabling the regime change. However, today Libya is a dysfunctional state and largely in the hands of radical militias. In the long term, while the 2011 intervention in Libya can be claimed as an air power success, the operation in general did not enhance NATO's credibility nor can it be deemed successful from a strategic communications perspective.

Key Lessons About Air Power and StratCom from Two Decades of Conflict

Air power is more in demand than ever due to reluctance to put troops on the ground. Because of the improved precision and capability of air power over the last two decades, it is the force that political leaders will turn to when a military response is necessary. Air Power is the one military force that can be engaged rapidly and deliver immediate effects. Air Power capabilities, precision in particular, have improved dramatically over the last two decades and the potential for mistakes is lower.

Counterinsurgency operations and operations against non-state irregular enemies (factions, insurgents and terrorists) have been the main focus of NATO air operations for the last fifteen years. Although the conventional threats to NATO are quite real, conflict with irregular movements in the Middle East and North Africa present the most likely scenarios for NATO's employment of military forces in the near future. Long wars against irregular non-state enemies present

a whole set of unique challenges for NATO Strategic Communications.

Political and military leaders invariably hope that air power can provide quick military effects that will lead to short conflicts and positive solutions. This was the case in Yugoslavia in 1995. However, military campaigns tend to last far longer than the political leaders expect. The 78-day air campaign against Serbia lasted far longer than predicted. The Libya air campaign in 2011 lasted half a year. The air operations that played a key role in toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan morphed into a counterinsurgency campaign that is still ongoing. Even with the end of ISAF in 2014, NATO nations still maintain advisory and training forces and air units in Afghanistan to support the ongoing fight against the Taliban. The United States and allied nations have also been conducting air strikes against the Islamic State since 2014. In short, campaigns against irregular enemies do not lend themselves to quick victories. In long wars, even with the best cause and best intentions, the public at home will become frustrated with the perceived lack of progress.

Obtaining accurate BDA has been an ongoing problem since the First Gulf War. Given the smoke generated by an explosive impact, it is easy to assess a near miss as a direct hit. Although RPA provide better imagery for analysts than space-based assets or other imagery, BDA is still a difficult art and, in conflicts since 1991, the effects of air strikes have sometimes been significantly overestimated. Enemies have shown talent at cover and concealment, setting up decoy targets and placing facilities underground, rendering accurate intelligence gathering challenging. One of the difficulties of using air power as a substitute for troops on the ground is that it is hard to get accurate BDA without putting people on the ground to evaluate the post-strike effects. The difficulty in obtaining accurate BDA allows an enemy to make claims of civilian damage and losses.

Since the First Gulf War, NATO political and military leaders have shown sensitivity to the issue of civilian casualties and how the media portrays the use of air power. In the conflicts since 2001, considerable atten-

tion has been paid to minimizing civilian casualties through strict command and control procedures and an emphasis on using precision munitions. However, the emphasis on avoiding civilian casualties also leads to the dilemma of increasing the risk for NATO ground forces. Withholding close air support for fear of civilian losses can lead to increased NATO force casualties. Such is the dilemma of fighting unconventional enemies, or conventional enemies that fight from heavily populated areas. At some point a clear decision must be made as to how far NATO forces are willing to go to prevent civilian casualties. Such decisions will have to be justified to the Alliance's national publics.

Conflict, at least for Western forces, is increasingly legalistic. Fighting irregular enemies who can be classified either as criminal elements or as fighting forces – or simultaneously both – inevitably leads to legal quandaries. Groups opposing NATO have used, and will use in the future, legal arguments and lawsuits to limit NATO actions. They will attempt to prosecute NATO force members for violations of international law. Some modern interpretations of the traditional international law governing the use of force in conflict argue that many, if not most, actions of NATO forces fighting irregular enemies are illegal. For example, the use of RPA in the strike role is opposed by many groups on legal grounds. This is despite the fact that, in the American case, every use of a RPA in a cross-border operation is only approved after an extensive interagency process and reviewed by lawyers to check whether the operation meets international and American laws.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the general public has little knowledge of the strict rules that govern the use of air power in current conflicts and a significant part of the Western public (discussed in more detail in chapter 2) has become highly receptive to anti-air power arguments. NATO must recognize that the legal challenges to the use of force represent a genuine threat that needs to be strongly challenged in the political and legal arena.

Enemy forces, both conventional and irregular, have shown an impressive ability to adapt quickly to minimize their vulnerability to NATO air power. Concealment, camouflage and the use of decoys is common

practice and, even with air power's high tech advantage, they can be effective in limiting the effect of air power. We can anticipate that enemies will be highly adaptive in the future and may also use human shields to protect their forces and assets. Finally, enemies will use disinformation about civilian casualties and damage to undermine public support for military operations.

Strategic communications has played an important role in past NATO and Western operations and its significance is increasing. Enemy nations and groups have demonstrated great ingenuity in developing information campaigns of their own and the effect of these should not be underestimated. StratCom is much more than just public relations, and an effective StratCom campaign requires resources and, most of all, effective coordination so that clear themes can be presented. Some of NATO's past air operations have not featured a coordinated or effective strategic communications message because there was no clear agreement as to the communications strategy or themes. Yet, strategic communications must flow from the highest levels and be credible. The lack of a clear strategic basis at the NATO and national level, one that can be readily communicated to public and easily understood, will doom any strategic communications campaign to fail no matter how good the public relations staff is.

1. In 2013 Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Deputy Speaker of the Russian Federation State Duma, stated, "Let the puppies (referring to Latvia) bark in the world, eventually they will be occupied . . . The entire Baltics will be either occupied or destroyed . . . definitely." (ITAR-TASS, 9 Apr. 2013).
2. NATO Headquarters, NATO Readiness Action Plan Fact Sheet, Dec. 2014.
3. The US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency doctrine FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency (Dec. 2006) stresses the concept of and importance of legitimacy in every chapter. The USAF Counterinsurgency doctrine DD-2-2 (Aug. 2007) also stresses the importance of legitimacy as a principle of conducting counterinsurgency and supporting allied governments.
4. Emphasizing civilian casualties as a key propaganda point has been a standard practice in the Middle East for decades. See James Corum and Wray Johnson, *Airpower and Small Wars* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003) pp. 406–409, 416–417.
5. On ISIS' use of social media see Joseph Shaheen, *Network of Terror: How DAESH uses Adaptive Social Networks to Spread its Message* (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, Riga, Nov. 2015). ISIS (DAESH) uses social media extensively to spread its message. The JAPCC data base contains dozens of media stories in which ISIS claims civilian casualties from Coalition air strikes.
6. The study team leader is Dr James Corum, Salford University (UK); country study authors are Dr Mathieu Chillaud (France), Tartu University, Estonia, Dr Conrad Crane, US Army War College (US), Dr Philipp Fraud, University of Konstanz (Germany), Dr Eugenio Cusumano, University of Leiden (Italy) Dr Mark Hilborne, Kings College London (UK).
7. After the First Gulf War, the USAF carried out a comprehensive historical analysis of the air

operations that was published in six volumes as the Gulf War Air Power Survey. It remains the definitive work on the war. For an overview of the air operations, see *Gulf War Air Power Survey Summary Report*, eds. Thomas Keaney and Eliot Cohen (Washington DC, 1993).

8. For a good overview of air operations in the First Gulf War see John Andreas Olsen, 'Operation Desert Storm 1991', in *A History of Air Warfare*, ed. John Andreas Olsen (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2010) pp. 177–200.
9. *Ibid.* p. 61–62.
10. "Bombs Killed Victims as they Slept", *Washington Post*, 14 Feb. 1991.
11. The Air Force noted afterwards that if they had known there were civilians in the bunker they would not have bombed it. After the al Firdos incident theatre commander Gen Norman Schwarzkopf personally reviewed every air target in downtown Baghdad. After the al Firdos attack, there was a sharp reduction in strategic air strikes. See *Gulf War Air Power Survey Summary Report*, p. 69.
12. Keaney and Cohen, p. 215.
13. Michael Wines, "The War in the Gulf: the General, briefing by Powell, a fact-filled showcase", *New York Times*, 24 Jan. 1991.
14. Keaney and Cohen, p. 225.
15. Thomas Keaney and Eliot Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey Summary Report* (Washington: US Air Force, 1993) contains a good discussion of the problems associated with BDA in the war. See pp. 138–143.
16. For a good overview of international public opinion during the First Gulf War is found in Eric Larsen and Bogdan Savych, *Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime* (Washington: Rand Study, 2006) On the Gulf War see pp. 21–61.
17. For an excellent critical analysis of NATO air operations and technology in the 1999 Kosovo campaign see Lt. Col. "Goldie" Haun USAF, "Air Power Versus Fielded Army: A Construct of Operations in the 21st Century", in *RAF Air Power Review*, Vol 4, No. 4, Winter 2001, pp. 64–91. See esp. pp. 77–78.
18. Benjamin Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror: America's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom* (Washington: Rand Study, 2005) *Ibid.* p. 256.
19. On the use of intelligence teams and unmanned vehicles in Iraq see Gen Stanley McChrystal, *My share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2013) chapters 11–14. On how the Intelligence teams combined Intelligence from UASs and other sources see Stanley McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams* (New York: Penguin, 2015) pp. 130–131, 235, 242.
20. For a good overview of the 1995 air campaign over Serbia see Peter W. Gray, "The Balkans: an Air Power Basket Case?", in *Air Power History: Turning Points from Kitty Hawk to Kosovo*, eds. Sebastian Cox and Peter Gray (London: Frank Cass, 2002) pp. 330–344. See also Robert Owen, "Operation Deliberate Force" in *A History of Air Warfare*, ed. John Andreas Olsen (Washington: Potomac Books, 2010) pp. 201–224.
21. Michael Beale, *Bombs over Bosnia: The Role of Airpower in Bosnia Herzegovina* (Air University Press: Maxwell AFB, 1997) see pp. 37–38.
22. The Serb dictator Slobodan Milosevic tried to use the issue of collateral damage to present Serbs as victims, but the minimal damage to civilians (approximately 25 casualties) in the campaign quickly ended this propaganda ploy. See Beale pp. 37–38.
23. A good overview of the 1999 air campaign is found in Tony Mason, "Operation Allied Force, 1999" in *A History of Air Warfare*, ed. John Andreas Olsen (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2010) pp. 225–254.
24. Eric Larsen, Bogdan Savych, *Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime* (Rand Study 2006) pp. 66–67, 74–75.
25. NATO political leaders had anticipated that Serbia would give in after two days of strikes had not directed the military staff to prepare an extensive air campaign plan. The initial plan contained only 169 targets with 50 targets authorized. For a highly detailed study of the NATO planning and execution of the campaign see Anthony Cordesman, *The Lessons and Non-Lessons of the Air and Missile Campaign in Kosovo* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Aug. 2000) p.115. Anthony Cordesman is a former Director of Intelligence Assessment in the Office of the US Secretary of Defense.
26. In 1999 the UK was only able to use laser guided munitions and its bombing was highly dependent on the weather. On the RAF's role in Operation Allied Force, see Sebastian Ritchie, *The British Experience in Operation Allied Force' in Aerospace Power: Beyond 100 Years of Theory and Practice*, ed. James Fergusson (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Mar. 2005) pp. 119–132.
27. On Serbs using human shields in Kosovo see *The Kosovo Conflict: Consequences for the Environment and Human Settlement*, UN Environment Programme (Switzerland 1999), p. 19.
28. On use of human shields in Kosovo see Eric Larsen, Bogdan Savych, *Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime* (Rand Study 2006) pp. 71–75. See also *The Kosovo Conflict: Consequences for the Environment and Human Settlement*, p. 19.

29. For a detailed account of this incident see Eric Larsen, Bogdan Savych, pp. 92–99.
30. To this day (2016) the Chinese government uses the 1999 bombing as a point of anti-NATO propaganda, with commemorations held in Beijing and major cities honoring the diplomatic “martyrs” killed by NATO. The Airpower and Disinformation Study data base has examples of Chinese news stories that commemorate the anniversary of the NATO bombing of the Belgrade Embassy.
31. Interview with Dr Dimitar Tasic, University College Dublin, Apr. 2016.
32. Eric Larsen, Bogdan Savych, *Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime* (Rand Study 2006) pp. 66–67.
33. *Ibid.* pp. 64–68.
34. The best work on airpower in the early phases of the Afghanistan conflict is Benjamin Lambeth, *Air Power Against Terror: America’s Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom* (Washington: Rand Study, 2005). On allied air operations see pp. 252–254.
35. CENTAF releases airpower summary for 21 Nov. 2006.
36. On technical details of the major RPA in US and NATO nation service see USAF Fact sheet MQ-1B Predator, 23 Sep. 2015 and USAF Fact Sheet MQ-9 Reaper, 23 Sep. 2015.
37. The Study data base has collected hundreds of media stories about RPA, and most present the RPA in the cross border negatively.
38. See Micah Zenko, “Drones kill more civilians than pilots do,” FP, 25 Apr. 2016.
39. Weaponized RPA are now a common part of NATO air operations. In Afghanistan 56 % of Western air strikes in support of the Afghan Forces were carried out by RPAS. See “Inside Afghanistan: 56 % of strikes by air force drones,” Defense One, 21 Apr. 2016.
40. White House’s 23 May 2013, fact sheet, “U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities,” cited in Nicholas Rostow and Harvey Rishikof, “9/11 and After: Legal Issues, Lessons, and Irregular Conflict” in *Lessons Encountered: Learning Lessons from the Long War*, eds. Richard Hooker and Joseph Collins (Washington DC: NDU Press, Sept 2015) pp. 345–400. See p. 377.
41. Helene Cooper and Steven Lee Myers, “Shift by Clinton Helped Push Obama to Take a Harder Line,” *The New York Times*, 18 Mar. 2011.
42. On NATO air force problems in the campaign see Baltrusaitis and Lt Col. Rui Romao, “Targeting and Adaptation in combat: Examining the Libya Case”, in *Baltic Security and Defence Review*, Vol 15, Issue 2, 2013, pp. 5–26.
43. Kim Sengupta, “NATO air strike kills 354 says Gaddafi spokesman,” *The Independent (UK)* 18 Sep. 2011.
44. UN Human Rights Council, *International Commission on Libya Report*, 2 Mar. 2012.
45. Nicholas Rostow and Harvey Rishikof, “9/11 and After: Legal Issues, Lessons, and Irregular Conflict” in *Lessons Encountered: Learning Lessons from the Long War*, eds. Richard Hooker and Joseph Collins (Washington DC: NDU Press, Sept 2015) pp. 345–400. See p. 377.





Russian news – Russian media portrays Russian invasion of Ukraine as fake news made up by NATO generals.

CHAPTER 2

On Media and Conflict – The Nature of Disinformation and Misinformation

Dr James S. Corum

Disinformation Today and Its Role in Conflict

Disinformation is false information which is intended to mislead, especially propaganda issued by a government or non-state group.¹ States and non-state actors employ disinformation on targeted audiences with the intent of putting their enemy in a bad light, undermining the morale of the enemy, and bolstering the morale of their own public. Disinformation has been part of information operations in conflicts for centuries. Today, dictatorships, radical movements, groups supporting violent revolutions, and others use

disinformation as a major part of their broader information campaign. Disinformation can be used as part of a long-term strategy to undermine the public's confidence in their government and key institutions or it can be used tactically, in the short term, to discredit a particular act or operation.²

Carefully crafted, covert disinformation campaigns to undermine Western values and push populations to distrust their governments were a major part of the strategy of the Soviet Union and its subject states during the Cold War. For decades, the Soviets and their allies' intelligence agencies, such as the DDR's Stasi, crafted a variety of anti-NATO and anti-Western media themes. With the aid of sympathetic Western groups and media, these ideas were disseminated to the Western public. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, the Stasi secretly and generously funded Neo Nazi groups in West Germany so the leftist press could point to the 'Nazi' character of the West German State.³ Another covert disinformation campaign carried out by Soviet bloc agencies in the 1980s was to spread

the story that the AIDS epidemic was actually created by the United States.⁴ Although most people rejected these stories as patently false, many millions believe such myths even today. Such is the power of creative storytelling: it appeals to a certain portion of the population that is already inclined to favour anti-Western and anti-NATO views.

One of the great successes of the Soviet Bloc intelligence services in the 1960s and 1970s was to create and push false atrocity stories about the American military in Vietnam, including false stories of war crimes and massacres by aerial bombardment. Such stories, widely believed by much of the Western European media, helped fuel the anti-NATO peace movement of the 1980s and gave an impetus by the anti-Vietnam movement.⁵ Of course, there were genuine instances of some war crimes and abuse of civilians by US military forces in Vietnam. However, allegations of crimes by US military personnel were investigated very seriously by a special investigations office in the Pentagon. The US DoD's Criminal Investigation Division investigated hundreds of cases over the nine years of American military operations in Vietnam and brought 244 prosecutions against US soldiers for violating the laws of war. The files on American war crimes investigations from the Vietnam War are open today and anyone can see the strenuous effort the United States military made in adhering to the laws of war.⁶

Such care to see that the laws of armed conflict are properly followed and enforced is a key part of the military ethos of every NATO nation. Following the traditional laws governing the use of force in conflict and the requirements to protect civilians from harm and to minimize collateral damage to civilians are essential features of NATO doctrine. This concern for maintaining the international laws of armed conflict is a key feature that often separates NATO from its opponents. Unfortunately, disinformation campaigns intended to convince the public of the opposite also often succeed and have a long-term effect on international perceptions. Today the characterization of Vietnam War crimes still resonates with the international left and in developing nations. Ironically, few today re-

member any of the mass murders inflicted by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces during the Vietnam War, notably during the occupation of Hue during the Tet Offensive of 1968, when thousands of civilians considered class enemies were systematically rounded up and murdered. Unlike the United States, North Vietnam neither ever acknowledged any war crimes carried out by its military nor condemned such blatantly criminal actions.

During the Cold War Soviet information operations and disinformation campaigns were a priority mission and received ample resources in a variety of campaigns intended to undermine Western morale and weaken the NATO Alliance. Bolstered by the wave of anti-American propaganda and disinformation in the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet Bloc intelligence helped radicalize a large part of the European peace movement, leading them to vilify NATO and to oppose the stationing of NATO nuclear weapons in Europe. Curtailing Western rearmament even as they carried out a massive arms build-up in the 1970s was a priority of the Soviet information campaign. Communist parties and leftist groups were active in the peace movement to block the deployment of US nuclear weapons to NATO and received generous funding from the Soviet government.⁷ Parts of the West German and Dutch peace movements were covertly supported by the East German Stasi and the Stasi, KGB and other Soviet Bloc agencies worked widely to influence Western attitudes. The culture of Western openness and freedom made it easy for the Soviet Union to funnel money to Western groups in order to support influence operations. Today access to Stasi files provides detailed information about disinformation and propaganda campaigns that attempted to influence Western groups and politics.⁸

The themes used by disinformation campaigns against the West are only limited by the imagination of a hostile country or radical group. In Central America in the 1990s, one of the major anti-American themes spread by communists was that peasant babies were being kidnapped and sold to wealthy Americans for body parts. Leftist groups maintained that Americans adopting children were actually

body snatchers who took third world children to America to be killed and harvested for body parts. In Guatemala, with 75% illiteracy rate and involved in a long civil war, the story spread quickly. Some Guatemalan newspapers picked up the story and showed crude pictures of plastic bags with what appears to be pieces of meat and labelled 'baby lungs and heart', 'baby liver' and so on. The US Embassy countered this by bringing Guatemalan judges and lawyers to the US to learn about the body part transplant system that made it impossible to use children for body parts. But the programme to counter the lurid communist propaganda was geared only to Guatemalan elites, and failed to reach the broader populace. The story continued to flourish and created such hysteria that American tourists were attacked by mobs on the streets of Guatemala and badly injured.⁹

As seen in Guatemala, it is difficult to prevent such disinformation operations in countries that have low levels of education, authoritarian rule, and a controlled press. In developing countries, the national media may not have a reporting standard that would meet the standards of developed democratic countries. Furthermore, communists and anti-Western forces have had few or no moral reservations about spreading lies to discredit their enemies. Yet, even in nations with higher education levels and more developed economies, but which are lacking in democratic traditions (Russia is a prime example), elaborate conspiracy theories to cast blame for events are a mainstay of many disinformation campaigns and tend to be widely believed.¹⁰

In the developing world (especially in tribal cultures with low literacy rates) populations have historically had limited knowledge of the outside world and have a natural distrust of all outsiders, even the educated elites from the own country. In a society such as Afghanistan, with an overwhelmingly Muslim population, the local view of foreigners is sometimes extremely prejudiced and inaccurate. No matter how culturally aware and sensitive the outsiders are, they are still likely to be seen with hostility and extreme suspicion. The relative isolation of the local worldview

puts any strategic communication by Westerners at a disadvantage.

For example, the Taliban puts out extreme stories about foreigners. Local allies are branded as agents of the West out to perpetrate evil against the locals. In January of 2016, Taliban members, supported by local mullahs, put out the story that anti-polio vaccinations for the local population were a Western plot to sterilize the Pashtun community. The story provoked a series of suicide bomber attacks against Pakistani government medical clinics in Northwest Pakistan that killed fourteen people in an attempt to stop the programme of polio vaccinations. The Taliban has repeatedly used stories such as this to inflame the Pashtuns and inspire suicide attacks on the Taliban's enemies.¹¹ On several occasions in Afghanistan, NATO troops were attacked by outraged Afghans after rumours were spread that Americans had burned or defaced Korans.

Research indicates that groups in the Middle East also construct false narratives and create stories to imply that NATO and Western forces are deliberately insulting Islam or have an agenda to forcibly convert the local populations.¹² Even in more literate societies, conspiracy theories find a ready audience. A July 2015 poll of Iraqis and Syrians showed that over 80% of Syrians believed that ISIS was a creation of the United States. Forty per cent of Iraqis also believed that the United States was behind ISIS.¹³ False stories are meant to appeal to base fears and prejudices and use the ignorance of the local population. False narratives work to demonize foreign forces and win support for opposition forces as defenders of the people and the faith. As noted, in isolated and tribal societies with a low education levels, even the most implausible stories are more commonly accepted as true. However, in dealing with better educated and more developed populations, the countries or groups that employ disinformation tend more to using complex conspiracy theories, although they still develop false stories that tend to be more plausible.

One of the most common disinformation themes is to accuse NATO air and ground forces of indiscriminately

killing civilians. In Islamic countries the themes are expanded to accuse NATO or Western forces of deliberately attacking mosques where people are innocently praying. This kind of disinformation can be easily spread worldwide by the Western media, which operates on a competitive 24/7 news cycle and often doesn't take time to check stories. Few major newspapers today have an in-house expert on military issues and getting an outside consultant to review a story coming from a news agency takes time. So, routinely, news agency stories, which are rarely carefully checked for accuracy, are simply picked up and printed by the major US and Western newspapers and media companies.

Disinformation can come from various sources and not always from an enemy country or radical group. On 1 May, 2004, the *Daily Mirror*, one of Britain's largest newspapers, published a series of photographs that purported to come from British Forces in Iraq and showed troops in British uniforms beating and abusing Iraqi prisoners. After the story of the abuse of prisoners by US forces at the Abu Graibh Prison in Iraq had broken, additional stories of Western war crimes were easily believed. Thus, the *Daily Mirror* photos became Britain's scandal and received international notice, as the alleged misconduct was seen as further proof of the bad intentions of Coalition Forces in Iraq. But there was something not quite right about the photographs. First of all, they looked too good and well-composed to be taken by a pocket camera. When closely examined by people knowledgeable about British units in Iraq, it was noted that the hats of the soldiers in the photos were not normally worn by units deployed to Iraq. A weapon noted in one photo was identified as a model not used by any British units in Iraq. Finally, the truck interior in one photo was a vehicle model that had not been deployed to Iraq. Upon investigation, the exact truck in the photos was found in a Territorial (Reserve) Army depot in the UK. The whole thing had been a hoax. A British soldier was charged with faking the photos and trying to sell them to the media for £5,000. Although the *Daily Mirror* published a front page retraction of the story, considerable damage had already been done. The photos had gone worldwide

immediately and had become part of the lore of the Western forces in Iraq. For a time British public opinion of the forces had been degraded.¹⁴

Misinformation and its Effects

Misinformation consists of exaggerated stories that normally have some basis in fact but have become, deliberately or through poor practices of the media, broadly distorted and barely reflect the factual events. Misinformation commonly occurs when there is pressure to publish information that is sensational and has great media appeal but there is no time to research the subject or to assemble key elements of information. Many times, the story ends up being basically wrong. Misinformation is closely related to disinformation in its effects but is much more common. Rather than being deliberate, misinformation is caused by several elements that, singly or in combination, work to undermine accuracy. Common causes of misinformation are poor use of sources, overreliance on highly biased informants or material, and the publication of unverified and poorly understood information. Misinformation can occur because the reporting agency, the media or NGO, might have a minimal understanding of military operations or conditions – which is often the case. In other cases, even reputable and experienced journalists and organizations will publish poorly researched and unverified (but sensational) material because of the 24/7 pressure to get news stories and commentary out – and to get it out faster than competing networks. However, over the long term misinformation can have effects even more damaging than disinformation because the media source is usually one that possesses some level of trust and credibility with the public.

Even when the Western media does not intend to support disinformation themes, a core vulnerability of the Western media is media bias. Even when Western media personnel uphold standards of professionalism, the local media personnel are often the only personnel who can safely work in a war zone and, thus, commonly provide information to major news organizations. Even the best educated and most professional reporters in developing nations will likely have

grown up in a milieu where suspicion of the West and Western values is the norm. Therefore, local reporters contracted by the major Western media organizations usually have a built in local bias and normally have not lived in a culture where the concept of media objectivity is understood. In fact, media bias remains one of the most common problems of strategic communications and one of the most difficult to combat. Most commonly, anti-NATO media bias is rooted in a bias against the West and Western values and institutions. This bias is also a common attitude among the elements of the far right and far left in Europe and North America.

In the developing world, the dominant tradition in reporting events is the media should serve the interests of the government or a faction. In most countries, media coverage of the news is controlled and censored at several levels. Because Western media organizations are reliant upon local journalists to provide coverage in Middle Eastern conflicts, the inevitable casualty is honest reporting. During the 2006 Lebanon/Israeli conflict Reuters International News Agency had to fire a local photographer upon which it had relied for hundreds of photos because the journalist was caught doctoring photos to put the Israelis in a bad light. In fact, the journalist was sacked only after extensive complaints and extensive proof of the image manipulation was presented. Yet, with worldwide coverage of the doctored photos, the damage had already been done.¹⁵

Western groups that are anti-NATO, usually aligned with the far left or right, have well-designed websites featuring anti-NATO messages. Many NGOs have a strong bias against NATO and tend to portray any Western use of force or military operation negatively.¹⁶ In Western nations such messages, even blatant propaganda, are legal and must be tolerated. However, it should also be noted that most websites and NGOs that cover defence and air power issues try for a measure of objectivity and credibility.

However, an anti-Western and anti-NATO, and especially an anti-American, bias in media reporting is common and can have an effect on how the public

views military operations. The Study data base includes a large number of international public opinion studies as well as a large sample of news and commentary from major Middle Eastern media centres such as al Jazeera. Throughout the Middle East, Western nations have a serious problem in strategic communications. Part of this is cultural and part is due to poor communication on the part of the West.

Thanks to the internet, there is more media than ever before and more information available for the public. All the Western nations have numerous NGOs and organizations that concern themselves with political and security issues. There are many groups covering current conflicts, maintaining websites, and publishing reports on NATO operations. Air operations in Afghanistan and Western air operations against ISIS receive extensive coverage. Some groups have a high level of credibility and present well-researched reports. Other groups have a blatant institutional bias and present data that is so lacking in critical analysis of the sources as to be useless in providing accurate comment. When it comes to counting civilian casualties caused by Western forces, even the figures of the best intentioned NGOs can vary widely. For example, one website (of many) trying to provide a count of civilian casualties provides data for Afghanistan that puts the number of children killed in 2015 air strikes between zero and eighteen.¹⁷ This is typical of the many websites that cover casualties.

The fundamental problem with relying on an air power-heavy strategy is that there can be no rapid and exact verification of casualties on the ground and the person who controls the ground controls the story. When fighting an enemy that does not wear uniforms, it is easy enough to remove weapons from the bodies and photograph the dead as innocent civilians. A local villager, if asked by NATO investigators whether the casualties were fighters or innocents, would risk his life if he provided an honest answer. Unless NATO forces were there permanently, and in force, to protect him and his family, the villager has every incentive to refuse cooperation with NATO forces. Killing villagers suspected of supporting the Afghan government is

normal behaviour for a Taliban fighter. The situation in Iraq or Syria is the same. Yet many websites that report on civilian casualties rely heavily upon testimony of local people as their primary source.

NGOs provide much of the data that is used by Western news media and NGOs normally have little to no expertise in military operations or analysing the effects of military operations. An untrained civilian would not be able to tell the difference between the effects of a bomb strike or a military rocket that misfired or fell off course, yet such detail is crucial to accurate reporting. The dilemma for NGOs that work closely with populations in combat areas is that their safety would be at extreme risk if they challenged the narrative of the factional forces on the ground, no matter how implausible.

So, even with the best of will,¹⁸ there is little reliable information available coming from the ground in combat zones and information about civilian casualties often contains vague estimates at best. Like the NGOs, Western media organizations tend to have little understanding of military operations, especially air operations and the media's capability to critically assess the stories they print from combat zones is limited. And one must remember that this refers to the professional Western organizations that seriously try to publish accurate information.

The team researchers carried out an analysis of four major websites that counted civilian casualties, and the estimate of percentage of civilians killed by NATO air operations in Afghanistan varied from a low of 7% to a high of 34%. Since air strikes often take place far from any Western troops, in many cases (drone strikes) it is impossible to conduct a ground evaluation after a strike. Western forces do the best BDA that they can and, when necessary, conduct full investigations when it is likely that civilians have been killed. On top of these difficulties, in places like Afghanistan, the local officials routinely concoct their own version of events to support their tribal politics and that version may or may not be reliable. Even with an improvement in NATO/Afghanistan relations with President Karzai's retirement in 2014, the issue of NATO air

support for Afghan Army troops is problematic. In April 2016 American aircraft carried out two airstrikes in Paktika Province Afghanistan. The provincial police chief praised the operation and claimed that 14 Taliban insurgents had been killed. The deputy provincial council chief condemned the airstrike and claimed that US aircraft had killed 21 innocent civilians. In this case we have two Afghan government officials with completely conflicting accounts of events and casualties. Given the strict rules on American and NATO use of air power, it is more likely that the provincial police chief is right, yet the figure of 21 civilian deaths (unconfirmed by any independent investigation) will undoubtedly end up in the international casualty statistics because an Afghan government official provided credibility to the figure.¹⁹ And even if a later investigation shows that the Afghan official submitted phony statistics about civilian casualties he will suffer no penalty for his action – such is the nature of Afghani politics.

NATO's enemies have shown that they can move with great speed and effectiveness to get their story out to an international audience. Anti-Western radical movements have been adept at using the internet and social media to spread their story in their home countries and to an international audience. The Taliban, ISIS and other groups make a great effort to develop well-designed and highly professional websites and social media sites that feature online magazines, videos and daily news commentary. This effective use of the internet and social media plays a central role in the radicalization of Muslims in the West as well as the Middle East.

Even without media disinformation there is the aforementioned problem of media bias in the use of local personnel to cover events in conflict. Even in cases where trained Western journalists were on the ground, the danger in reporting the truth is extreme. Eason Jordan, a New York Times journalist who visited Iraq in the 1990s, recalled that he refrained from accurate reporting on Saddam Hussein's regime because any local contacts or friends were likely to be immediately executed if a story representing the true face of Iraq were published.²⁰

A major development in the Middle East is the broad use of social media. Radical movements have become expert at using social media to further their message.²¹ Groups like Hamas have long used internet sites to promote its agenda, including websites devoted to glorifying suicide bombers.²² Al-Qaeda publishes an English language glossy magazine with high quality pictures and professional layout to push its view internationally.²³ ISIS publishes an online magazine and uses websites and well-produced films to show the positive side of its Caliphate. It also films its own executions of infidels and prisoners in order to instil terror in local populations. ISIS also shows its positive side, with ISIS songwriters and ISIS music meant to inspire Muslim youth circulated on social media.²⁴ One British ISIS recruiter uses photos of kittens posing with bombs to attract ISIS recruits.²⁵ Indeed, an entire internet culture is devoted to supporting ISIS and other elements of radical Islam.²⁶ Currently there are few effective means for Western nations to challenge such popular movements that use social networking and the internet extensively.

Disinformation in Recent Conflicts

NATO's opponents use information operations in a strategic and tactical manner to portray the use of air power as ruthless, indiscriminate and inhumane. They also portray air power as immoral and illegal. The key issue is civilian casualties. Although other uses of air power are sometimes a theme of anti-Western movements, such as condemnation of the aerial crop spraying carried out by the US State Department with the Colombian government to destroy coca plants. Yet, it is the depiction of civilian suffering that is the most effective theme to undermine Western military operations by acting on their home populations. The issue of civilian suffering also gains sympathy for terrorist movements and rogue regimes and helps in recruiting terrorists and convincing local populations of the rightness of the radical cause.

In recent conflicts, often involving irregular non-state forces, many groups have had a policy of using civilians as human shields and deliberately violating the laws of armed conflict in order to ensure casualties

among the civilian population. This has been done by using hospitals as military centres, firing rockets and mortars from school grounds to invite counterbattery fire, using mosques as military centres, and using ambulances to carry combatant soldiers and ammunition (an act expressly forbidden by the Geneva Convention).²⁷ Irregular non-state forces have made a point of fighting in built-up areas and placing military positions among the population to make it nearly impossible for regular military forces to fight enemy armed combatants without killing civilians. The object of ensuring that civilians are killed is to provide the world media with dramatic images of the regular military forces operating as ruthless aggressors who deliberately target innocents. The consequent deaths and wounding of civilians is given major coverage through both social and international news media. In many cases the international media members present are kept under tight control when operating in areas held by the irregular non-state forces and are allowed only to film images and events that will support the irregular groups' political agenda and propaganda message.

During NATO's 2011 air operations in Libya, Colonel Muamar Gaddafi's regime attempted to gain sympathy and undermine NATO by claiming that NATO had deliberately killed 85 civilians in an airstrike in a remote village. Gaddafi's spokesmen went to the world media claiming a massacre by NATO air forces. Gaddafi went all out in an attempt to play the 'victim' of Western aggression role. However, the buildings that NATO bombed were actually located in the front line of an area of intense combat and not likely to have had any civilians present. A NATO investigation found no evidence that any civilians had been killed in this case.²⁸ Due to effective and timely refutation by NATO, Gaddafi's disinformation ploy failed to have much effect.

However, NATO's major efforts to avoid civilian casualties has also had its negative side, in that the goal to avoid civilian casualties works as an incentive for radical groups or dictators – who have little care for civilian rights – to deliberately place military forces among civilians. The dilemma is that, whether NATO opts to strike the legitimate target and risk collateral damage

or opts to avoid the strike, it works to the advantage of non-state groups or dictatorial states. If NATO bombs enemy military forces and kills civilians as collateral damage, the enemy leader can claim a NATO ‘massacre’ and parade photos of the victims and grieving families. If NATO avoids bombing enemy forces and clear military targets for fear of hitting civilians, NATO has ceded a military advantage to an enemy. The result is likely to be increased enemy activity and increased casualties for the civilians and NATO later – a consequence of not destroying enemy forces and weapons. This kind of dilemma, and the propaganda manoeuvring that accompanies it, has been a common feature in recent conflicts.

Case Studies in Responding to Disinformation

Two decades of air campaigns provide some good examples of how to handle disinformation and effectively counter it as well as some examples of failure to properly answer disinformation. At the beginning of the First Gulf War in February 1991 a biological weapons facility in Iraq was bombed and destroyed by the US Air Force. Saddam Hussein announced to the international press in Baghdad that the Americans had struck a ‘baby milk’ factory and even took journalists to the entrance of the ruined facility, with ‘Baby Milk’ signs prominently displayed. The next day Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs, General Colin Powell, briefed the press and personally addressed the matter. In frank terms he refuted the charges and pointed out the layout of the Iraqi plant was identical with that of a known Libyan biological warfare facility. The crude attempt by Saddam Hussein to manipulate the world media quickly flopped and Coalition credibility was bolstered by General Powell’s attention to good strategic communications.²⁹

In 2003 Saddam Hussein tried the same approach during the early stages of the Coalition air campaign. On 26 March 2003, Iraq claimed that a coalition missile fell on a Baghdad marketplace, killing 14 and injuring more than 30 civilians. Within days the number of the alleged dead had been increased to 58. Within hours of the announcement, the UN and international agen-

cies were expressing concern about the bombing campaign the US had just begun. The next day Major General Stanley McChrystal, the Pentagon’s vice Director of Operations, briefed the international press, like Powell in 1991, using graphics and maps to illustrate his point. McChrystal explained that no US bombs or missiles had fallen into the market neighbourhood the previous day and that the US targets in Baghdad had been some distance from the bomb strike. McChrystal patiently, but firmly, explained that the explosion was most likely an Iraqi anti-aircraft missile that had gone astray and crashed into the market.³⁰ Again, the concerns in the international media and the UN were quickly laid to rest by the prompt action of a highly informed and credible senior officer who was part of the war planning team.

During major conventional war combat operations in 1991, and again in 2003, Pentagon leaders gave strategic communications a high priority. Obvious attempts to use disinformation were not only immediately refuted, but refuted by senior military personnel who were intimately familiar with the operational plans. In 1991, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Colin Powell made it his personal responsibility to brief the press and to communicate the strategy and progress of the military operations in a fluent and candid manner. His position as America’s senior military commander gave him a special credibility with the press and public. In 2003, Major General Stanley McChrystal, as vice director of the Pentagon’s Operations Staff, was fully conversant with the operational plan and, like General Powell, was an excellent communicator. His quick response to answer the accusations of indiscriminate bombing in Baghdad put to rest Saddam Hussein’s allegations in front of the world media. When confronted with a potential major story accusing Americans of violating the laws of war, both senior officers were able to immediately stand before the media to refute the charges using simple graphics to illustrate their arguments.

Unfortunately, once the conventional combat operations ended and the occupation of Baghdad began, significantly less focus was placed on strategic communications. As the occupation of Iraq quickly turned

into a counterinsurgency and combat casualties increased, strategic communications were still ignored. For the next three years, the counterinsurgency campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan lacked a strategic communications plan. With intense combat ongoing, with little command support, and with too few staff, the Coalition command in Baghdad was unable to counter disinformation broadcast by sectarian factions and insurgents. In November 2006, factions opposing the Iraqi government claimed that more than 30 women and children had been killed by American airstrikes during combat within the city of Ramadi. The initial report gained wide circulation in the local and international media. It was only weeks later that a US investigation revealed that there had been no air strikes in Ramadi on the day in question. The entire story was a fabrication and only weeks later did the American media even publish a retraction of the original story.³¹ The chance to quickly expose obvious disinformation by the enemy and to win a victory in the battle for credibility was lost. Indeed, it was the enemy that won the information battle in this case. The failure to respond to false charges was due to a lack of interest in strategic communication at the top political and military command levels, who left an undermanned staff to handle strategic communications.

What Do Recent Conflicts Teach Us About the Relationship of Strategic Communications and Air Power? Lessons from Coalition Operations in Iraq

The Iraq Conflict between 2003 and 2011 was carried out by a large international coalition of more than thirty nations. It was not a NATO operation, but, between 2003 and 2011, nineteen NATO nations sent military forces and civilian personnel to support the Multinational Force operations.³² Thus, the Iraq conflict included a majority of NATO nations and provided extensive combat experience to the forces of those NATO nations. As a major campaign conducted over a long term, it provides some important lessons on how to conduct strategic communications and media operations.

The Iraq conflict shows the perils of ignoring planning for strategic communications and then later failing to adequately resource the strategic communications effort. The Iraq campaign also shows the problems of pushing a too Western face onto a largely local conflict. The numerous mistakes made by the Coalition forces in Iraq are, in some cases, important examples of how not to fight insurgent or radical groups.

The US Army pre-war planners working out of the Army War College in late 2002 developed an outline plan to guide the US military in stabilizing Iraq after major combat operations was finished. The US Army planners developed a task list of 135 key tasks to be carried out by the occupying forces as Iraq made the transition from dictatorship to a moderate elected government. The US Army planners placed the restoration of media communications in Iraq and establishing a free Iraqi media high on their list of priorities as a means to establish stability in Iraq.³³ The planners for Lieutenant General Jay Garner, who briefly led the reconstruction efforts, also insisted that a Strategic Communications campaign oriented to an Iraqi audience would need to be coordinated with the US forces and the authorities of the new Iraqi government.³⁴ The US planners included Iraq and Middle East experts who understood the Iraqi culture and also foresaw problems that might occur in communicating with the Iraqi populace. Although the Iraqis have a high level of education, any intellectual life and all media was tightly controlled by the government during Saddam Hussein's totalitarian rule. For years, Iraqis were presented with a constant barrage of Baath Party ideology and anti-American rants. As is typical in dictatorships, most Iraqis came to distrust everything presented by the government-controlled media.³⁵ Owning a satellite television in Iraq was a criminal offense under Saddam Hussein, and all internet correspondence was closely monitored. All foreign news journals were prohibited as well. With this broad array of totalitarian restrictions, as well as a ruthless secret police force enforcing the rules, news from the outside world was circulated in a garbled form if at all.

Adding to this environment, it must be noted that the greater part of the media in Arab states is government-controlled and much of the media publishes what can be best described as propaganda. Peaceful, reasoned debate on public issues or responsible criticism of the government is not part of the tradition of Arab nations. In the days after the 9/11 attack, the media in the Arab World was filled with wild stories alleging that Israel and the Zionists were behind the attacks on the United States, not Islamic radicals. In commenting on US government policy, America is often denounced in crude terms. America is often described as a Zionist nation or as being under the secret control of Israel. America is often described as an imperialist nation simply out to rob the developing world. American popular (non-news) media is also viewed by the authorities as an underhanded plot to destroy national cultures, even as many American programmes and films are hugely popular with Arab audiences. Ironically, not only is American media popular (whatever the government might say), the preferred places of university study for upper-class Arab youth are the United States and Western Europe, which have cultural similarities.

Many in the Middle East have a love/hate relationship with the West and the United States. Many Arabs embrace American dress, media and American technology. Members of the Arab upper classes love to visit the United States and the West. At the same time that America is broadly admired, it remains the target of a largely anti-American and anti-Western media. These paradoxical attitudes lead to a broad cynicism towards the press. While many educated people ignore their own government media, the routine calls for violence against Zionists and their Western allies and the tendency to blame all problems on a conspiracy of the Western nations find a ready audience among poor and middle class Arabs. Given this context, plus the rising Sunni-Shia factionalism in Iraq in 2003, the problems of communicating with the Iraqi people was enormous. The Iraqi people had been demoralized by decades of ruthless oppression and a media campaign to encouraging Iraqis towards a peaceful settlement of factional differences was going to be a difficult task. In developing a plan for post-conflict

Iraq, the US Army War College planning team understood that Iraq could easily turn into another Lebanon because of the sectarian divisions lying just under the surface. This was yet another reason why Iraq needed a comprehensive post-conflict plan as well as an effective strategic communications plan to help defuse the factional tensions in a volatile post-Saddam Iraq.³⁶

Unfortunately, the draft plan developed by US Army planners was rejected and ignored by the Bush Administration's top national security officials. Key Defense Department officials (including Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith) insisted that the occupation of Iraq would be a very short term affair would require a minimal amount of money and effort.³⁷ Because the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, and his Deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, insisted there would be no need for any long US occupation of Iraq and failed to anticipate any need for reconstruction programmes or assistance to stabilize a new and democratic Iraqi government, US planning was focused on fighting a war 'on the cheap' and spending as little money as possible to end the rule of Saddam Hussein. With these planning assumptions, there was no chance for a strategic communications campaign to be considered.

When Saddam Hussein's regime collapsed in April 2003, there was no Coalition plan to control the extensive Iraqi media assets or to ensure effective communication with the Iraqi people. Iraq possessed, in fact, an extensive state-controlled media sector, with television channels and radio stations as well as newspapers and magazines. In the power vacuum that followed after the fall of Saddam Hussein, various Iraqi factions, in many cases radical Shiite factions with a hatred of Americans and a love for Iranians, seized television and radio stations and media outlets and began pushing their own agenda through an unregulated Iraqi mass media. In anticipation of a friction-free occupation of Iraq, no plans had been made and very little money had been allocated to provide a new Iraqi government with a media service. The lack of a means of mass communication severely hampered the Coalition's effort to organize post-war Iraq and to build a democratic Iraqi government.

After the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, the Iraqi Media Network was established by the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Aid (ORHA). With only a small amount of support from America, the Iraqi Media network managed to get a radio station up and running staffed by a small group of volunteers who found some old equipment in a studio in Baghdad. With ORHA's approval, they began broadcasting services for the Iraqi provisional government. However, the problem of old equipment and ramshackle studios was compounded by the shortage of trained Iraqi media professionals willing to work for the new Iraqi government. Immediately after Baghdad fell to Coalition Forces, the major networks of the Arab nations hired the best known and most experienced Iraqi media specialists to manage their reporting and broadcasting in Iraq for salaries significantly higher than ORHA was able to pay with its small occupation budget. As one could have anticipated, many Arab networks took an anti-American position on the Iraq War and employed their Iraqi correspondents to criticize every action by the Coalition forces and magnify every perceived mistake.

Due to the lack of a Coalition strategic communications plan and failure to help the new Iraqi government, radical factions in Iraq had months to organize their supporters and get their message out through the television and radio stations that they had seized. For the first year of the Coalition occupation in Iraq, at the crucial moment that an Iraqi government was being formed, radical factions dominated the national media controlled most of the media broadcasting to the public. These radical factions used the mass media to encourage a growing insurgency. At the same time, media in other Arab states tended to broadcast an anti-Coalition message to the Iraqi mass audience. One of the most radical television stations broadcasting to Iraq, Al Arabiya (broadcasting from the Emirates), became one of the most popular stations for the Iraqi public. In the fall of 2003 it broadcast an audio-tape, purportedly of Saddam Hussein, urging Iraqis to attack the Coalition forces and their Iraqi collaborators. Only in November 2003 did the Iraqi Governing Council finally move to shut down the Baghdad bureau of the station.

The Al-Hawza newspaper of the rebel cleric and militia leader Muqtada Al-Sadr was also free to push violent anti-government propaganda for a full year after the fall of Saddam. In 2004 the Iraqi government, justifiably upset that regional satellite channels were broadcasting a message supporting the insurgency, finally closed the newspaper. The Iraqi government specifically complained about the Al Manar television station (owned by Hizbullah), as well as Al-Alam (the Iranian government's Arabic channel), Al Arabiya (mostly Saudi-owned) and Al Jazeera. Even though conditions were actually improving in Iraq, the Arab World and the West were presented with constant barrage of stories depicting only a chaotic and failing Iraq. This largely untrue picture was widely spread by factions that were hostile to a democratic Iraq and had well-financed and professional media organizations at their disposal. A small group of Iraqis working for the Coalition's Iraqi Governing Council tried their best to present their side of the story but had few resources and inferior equipment in contrast to their opponents.³⁸

In failing to plan for media operations, the US and Coalition forces ensured they would lose the post-war battle for Iraqi public opinion. General Jay Garner, who headed the first civilian administration in Iraq in 2003, admitted after his dismissal that he should have done a better job communicating with the Iraqi people.³⁹ The first budget of the Iraqi government in 2004 had little money to support its media and press operations, with only \$1.57 million allocated for a country of 23 million in the midst of a conflict. Private groups in the West and even US soldiers began raising money to finance and support Iraqi-owned television and radio stations that would be committed to a democratic Iraq.⁴⁰ In 2005 the new Iraqi government was finally able to allocate more funds to train the personnel of the government-operated Iraqi Media Network⁴¹ but these efforts were too little and came too late. For two years after the fall of Saddam Hussein, the media was allowed to be dominated by radicals within Iraq and hostile elements outside. These factions very effectively used their media organizations to spread disinformation and helped fuel the radical Shiite and Sunni movements.

A comprehensive strategic communications plan, as well as a few million dollars and professional support made available at the start of the occupation, might have made the difference in the nature of the Iraqi insurgency. It is doubtful that the radicalization of Iraqi factions and the growth of the insurgency would have proceeded so quickly if they had faced effective strategic communications campaign by the new Iraqi government. A Coalition plan to control the extensive media inside Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime could have also made a major difference in the ability of the radical factions to organize. A well-resourced media plan by the Coalition to support the moderate Iraqis developed before the invasion of Iraq could have had a significant effect on inhibiting the rise of the insurgency in Iraq.

NATO's Experience in the Afghanistan Conflict

The use of air power in the strike role became one of the most controversial issues of the Afghanistan War. The relations of Western Forces and Afghanis could be characterized as a clash of cultures that was exacerbated by the complex tribal politics of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a nation of extreme poverty and high illiteracy and its society is very tribal. Indeed, much of the motivation for Taliban supporters lies in tribal relationships and rivalries rather than ideology. The Taliban insurgency is concentrated in the Pashtun tribe, the largest of the ethnic groups of Afghanistan.⁴² In dealing with Afghanis, nothing was simple for NATO and its partners. Westerners have little credibility in the country, where the difference in cultures from the west is extreme. No matter how NATO troops might have tried to understand and respect the local culture, tribal Islamic Afghanis were predisposed to distrust Western motives.⁴³ Yet, as difficult as these obstacles were, another one arose. The President of Afghanistan became one of the primary problems in establishing a favourable relationship between NATO and the Afghan government and people. By the latter part of his term of office, President Hamid Karzai had become more and more extreme in his anti-NATO speeches. In early 2013, Karzai alleged that US forces and the Taliban were secretly working together to convince

Afghans that they would be worse off when the foreign troops left in 2014. The US commander, Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford, had to issue a public statement insisting that Karzai's bizarre charge was 'categorically false.'⁴⁴ In many respects, the president of the government that NATO forces were supporting became a propaganda spokesman for the enemy.

On many occasions that NATO used air power in a strike role, the Taliban, headquartered in Pakistan, would claim that NATO aircraft had attacked and indiscriminately killed civilians. Because of the nature of the war and the difficulty of reaching isolated tribal areas, it was difficult to fully investigate each claim of civilian loss, although NATO made strenuous efforts to ascertain the exact casualties of each mission. Communicating NATO's message to the Afghani people and building trust was difficult, but making it more difficult was President Karzai's repeated condemnations of NATO and open accusations that NATO had targeted and indiscriminately killed civilians. In many cases, President Karzai made statements about civilian casualties before any investigation, in some cases relying on reports from his governors or appointees who contacted him with their version of events before ISAF could even compile a report. In at least one case, Karzai insisted that NATO formally apologize for killing a civilian when ISAF had hard proof (a video) that the casualty was killed while shooting at ISAF troops.⁴⁵ Karzai's repeated denunciations of NATO had little to do with facts and much more to do with the complex tribal politics played in the Karzai regime and the readiness of Afghanis to blame all problems on foreigners. In any case, Karzai's actions made it difficult for NATO to carry out any strategic communication within Afghanistan.

The anti-NATO behaviour of President Karzai and his political appointees, who routinely condemned NATO operations in a tone almost identical to the Taliban's, was closely linked to internal Afghani political posturing and backroom negotiations with the Taliban. This Afghani government strategic communications campaigns that was at odds with the NATO forces protecting and enabling them provided great support to the Taliban and to the anti-NATO narra-

tive. On several occasions, the Afghani government made extreme and implausible claims of civilians killed by NATO air strikes and condemned NATO air forces, while NATO investigations showed there were few civilians killed and that Taliban fighters were, in large part, the casualties.

One (of many) examples of negative media coverage of air strikes against the Taliban forces occurred on 22 August 2008. According to the official US account, Coalition forces were fired on first by the Taliban and called in air strikes. Afterwards, the Afghani armed forces (Afghani Western Command) *AND* the Taliban publically claimed that no Taliban fighters had been killed by the air strike but that 90 innocent civilians were killed – 15 men, 15 women and 60 children. This account was immediately and uncritically accepted by the UN, which quickly condemned ISAF's actions. President Karzai, then in the midst of a re-election campaign and looking for a chance to show his hostility to the West and that he was no puppet, used the opportunity to berate the NATO forces. In the meantime, the US headquarters sent officers to conduct a thorough on-site investigation and collect evidence. The reality, compiled after a complete investigation, was that the air strike had killed 25 Taliban and 5 civilians. Furious at the political tactics employed by their Afghani allies, the US military spokesman called the claims by the Karzai regime forces 'outrageous'.⁴⁶

Such media conflicts occurred many times during the tenure of President Karzai. Another example occurred in February 2011, when an Afghan general, backed up by the Karzai regime, publically claimed that NATO had killed 64 civilians in an air strike in a remote valley. NATO countered with its own investigation and argued that, by its count, the air attack had killed 36 armed insurgents.⁴⁷

Afghan insurgents were unable to counter the effects of kinetic air power with effective anti-aircraft measures, so they turned to asymmetric means aiming to either render kinetic air power ineffective or to persuade population and political leaders to force the coalition to hold back the use of kinetic air power.

'They used information warfare as much as combat.'⁴⁸ They tried to turn encounters with coalition forces into situations where collateral damage and casualties become an issue so they could exploit the situation in the media and in the population. 'A combination of actual collateral damage, actual civilian casualties and the insurgents' propaganda machine has led the Afghan government to request restrictions on coalition airstrikes.'⁴⁹

Thus, in 2008 General McKiernan, ISAF commander, issued new rules on employing air strikes that limited the use of air power and tightened the rules of engagement. On taking command of ISAF in 2009, General Stanley McChrystal put even more restrictions on the use of air power and ground firepower in order to win better public support for the Afghani government among the population. The strategy involved greater risk to NATO forces, but McChrystal went among the troops and to the Afghans explaining the need for greater restraint and the need to accept risk to improve the counterinsurgency climate by taking away one of the Taliban's major propaganda points. McChrystal was helped in furthering the action on the ground by a surge of thousands of additional US ground troops.⁵⁰

Although ISAF operated under careful rules of engagement and paid compensation to families of civilians killed or wounded in the course of military operations, the constant Taliban disinformation campaign was quite successful in creating discontent against the ISAF forces within local as well as international public opinion. In 2008 a poll of Afghans showed that over 60 per cent of the population believed that NATO air power was killing too many civilians. It is important to emphasize that this might not have been true, but in an insurgency, it is public perceptions that matter in the long term and air power in particular was causing some very negative public perceptions. By 2008 every NATO nation showed a lack of public support for the Afghanistan War. While the role of air power was not a specific question in the public opinion polls, the majority of people polled in every country that committed troops to ISAF showed a lack of confidence in the strategy and of the likelihood of success.⁵¹

The anti-airpower barrage in the media, no matter how implausible the stories, worked very effectively to limit the use of air strikes by US and NATO forces. The year 2009 saw a major decrease in the number of air strikes in Afghanistan in order to minimize civilian casualties and avoid bad press. In the summer of 2008, NATO fixed-wing aircraft dropped 2,366 bombs and other munitions; the following year, 1,211 bombs and other munitions were employed during the same period.⁵² As mentioned, General McChrystal, the US Commander in Afghanistan, published new directives limiting the circumstances in which commanders could call for air strikes. McChrystal stated in September 2009, 'Destroying a home or property jeopardizes the livelihood of an entire family – and creates more insurgents.' The perception that air strikes caused excessive civilian casualties was stated as the main reason for the limits placed on kinetic air operations.⁵³

Afghanistan provided many other valuable lessons for NATO in terms of strategic communication. ISAF learned the importance of issuing directives to allow the rapid declassification of strike imagery and the immediate release of video and photo imagery to the media to counter Taliban claims of bombing civilians. Another important lesson learned by NATO public affairs officers was the importance of communicating to the Afghani population through well placed locals. Knowing that Westerners have little credibility in a tribal and mostly illiterate country, the ISAF public relations team cultivated a network of well-placed Afghanis who, like most people of their class, had connections with both the government and with the Taliban. When the Taliban headquarters made their usual claim that NATO had killed civilians after an air strike, ISAF public relations staff disseminated the ISAF account of the incident through their Afghani contacts, who would counter Taliban claims by word of mouth and through the Afghani media. In Afghanistan it was the only effective way to get the ISAF story out to the Afghani public.⁵⁴

Throughout the Afghanistan conflict, ISAF followed the Western norms of transparency in strategic communications. When NATO made mistakes and killed

civilians, it was important to admit mistakes immediately and to get hard data to the public as quickly as possible. In such situations, it is generally difficult to get the full details out quickly but, if enough facts are known to make a quick evaluation of the story, it is best to get that information out while waiting for a complete investigation report, which is likely to take time. During the operation in Afghanistan, NATO learned some key strategic communications lessons. In operating in an environment with a 24/7 news cycle, speed is of the essence and the normal bureaucracy that waits cautiously for full details is not effective in countering media reporting of events that are likely to be exaggerated or confused. While NATO seriously investigates claims of civilian casualties, the normal procedure of releasing information had to be sped up to counter poor reporting and outright disinformation.⁵⁵

Lack of Emphasis on Strategic Communications in Recent Conflicts

One consistent theme in examining the role of information in Western operations and in countering disinformation is the lack of any overarching strategy or strategic organization to manage information operations. The lack of a coherent approach to strategic communications in the American approach to recent conflicts contrasts sharply with the successful information organization and strategy employed during the Cold War. During the Cold War, the United States created programmes to combat Soviet information and disinformation operations and to offer a positive view of the Western values to the developing world. The US Information Agency (USIA) was a specialized organization that carried out strategic communications on a large scale. In the US strategy from the 1950s to the 1990s, information operations played a central role in the successful effort to contest the Soviet Bloc in the world of ideas.⁵⁶ A leading disinformation specialist of the Warsaw Pact, Romanian Lieutenant General Ion Pacepa, noted that the USIA's Voice of America broadcasts (part of the US strategic communications strategy) had a huge impact in undermining the Soviet Bloc's credibility and in helping the West win the Cold War.⁵⁷ In the 1980s

American President Reagan ensured that the USIA received an ample budget (\$820 million a year in the early 1980s) and the USIA was able to relentlessly expose Soviet falsehoods and disinformation. Soviet false information was not allowed to stand unrefuted in the ideological battlefield. The USIA also ensured that Russians had access to Western views and ideas.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, the USIA was disbanded in the mid-1990s, as the United States government believed that it no longer needed a specialist organization for worldwide strategic communication. American strategic communications has never recovered from a loss of this specialist organization and expertise. The USIA not only had broad expertise in all aspects of media, it also served to provide a clear and consistent strategic communications message across the agencies of government. The strategic communications effort was broken up and embedded across several agencies which have been unable to cooperate on a strategic communication message after 2001. A recent study of the US National Defense University cites numerous reports critical of the recent American strategic communications effort, noting that internal government feuding and the lack of any central direction has left the US strategic communications dysfunctional.⁵⁹ The National Defense University study also notes that American strategic communications policy and strategy have gone mostly rudderless in the last two decades due to a lack of emphasis at the top of the command chain. On top of this, poor resourcing is another problem. In 2007 the United States, with its vast global commitments and involved in two major conflicts, spent no more than France for public diplomacy.⁶⁰ Some senior leaders have simply disregarded strategic communications as being of little importance. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff (2007–2011), in 2009 argued that the United States basically needed no strategic communications effort, that good policies and actions would be enough.⁶¹ In short, lack of command emphasis, lack of resources and lack of a unified organization have severely limited America's strategic communications effectiveness.

The Media and Perspectives on NATO Air Power

In several ways, the media reporting on air power and the public opinion in NATO's countries might make the difference between an effective response to strategic problems or strategic failure.

The media in Western democracies expect standards of perfection for fighting wars that cannot work in real conditions and there is a perception gap between what is feasible and what is desirable. Photo and video images can be made and transmitted immediately. Photos and videos generate dramatic pictures that speak for themselves and maximize the appeal to the emotions of viewers. Part of the problem between the media and the military is the lack of in-house military expertise in the media. This means that we have media personalities with no training or experience in military matters and who have little competence in assessing and interpreting the images and information they present. In 2016 Ben Rhodes, President Obama's deputy national security advisor, noted that the knowledge and experience level of the media reporting on national security and foreign policy issues was abysmally low, 'Most of the outlets are reporting on world events from Washington. The average reporter we talk to is 27 years old, and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns. That's a sea change. They literally know nothing.'⁶² Yet the ability of the media to dramatize events and create a global audience for a conflict puts policy makers under pressure to make decisions quickly, providing scant time for reflection and research. There is certainly pressure on political and military leaders to respond to media stories which are presented with little research and analysis, but are instead crafted for dramatic impact. In today's conflicts, in some cases, political leaders spend as much time explaining and justifying a conflict to the public and media as they do actually managing events. The media are primarily interested in the instantaneous image, which becomes the reality of the day and has significant impact on the citizens' perceptions. The media's principle is simple: 'no pictures, no news'.

Media bias is one of the most common problems of strategic communication for the military in general and for NATO specifically. Groups that are anti-NATO usually align with the far left or right and have well-designed websites featuring anti-NATO messages. Many NGOs have a strong bias against NATO or the use of any force by Western nations and portray the military negatively. On the other hand, most websites and NGOs that cover defence and air power issues try for some measure of objectivity and credibility. The problem with NGOs is that, while they operate in conflict regions and thus comment with apparent expertise on the situation on the ground, very few NGOs (or media organizations for that matter) have deep resident military expertise. Well-intentioned aid groups are very quick to criticize NATO operations or even call a military operation that results in claimed civilian casualties a 'war crime' without having or consulting personnel with serious knowledge of military capabilities, the rules of war, or the realities of the battlefield. Yet the media is often quick to cite NGO claims and criticisms, providing them credibility. NGOs and international organizations, usually very effective in the aid work they do, are seen in a favourable light by the Western and international public, which lends statements by NGOs and international organizations on military operations a credibility that they do not deserve. In practical terms, the media is both a friend and enemy, but it remains an actor with which Western nations must deal. However, an anti-Western and anti-NATO, and especially an anti-American, bias in media reporting is common and can have an effect on how the public views military operations.

A notable example of bias in media reporting comes from the 2001 US airdrop of food to starving Afghans who were being blockaded by the Taliban regime as the US began the Enduring Freedom Operation to topple the Taliban regime. As the US began the air operation to support the Northern Alliance forces in defeating the Taliban in October 2001, a humanitarian catastrophe was imminent. The Taliban's strategy to control Afghanistan included cutting off aid and food supplies to Afghani tribes that failed to support them. The US government feared that millions of Afghans

could succumb to starvation and large numbers would try to migrate to find food in the middle of a ground war. The best solution, on both humanitarian and operational grounds, was to drop food to the Afghans threatened by starvation so they would stay safely in their villages, neither impeding ground operations nor risking their lives to find food.

Thus, the air targeting of the Taliban was carried out in parallel with a large humanitarian airdrop campaign to feed the Afghans. The Enduring Freedom airdrops, which lasted 68 days and delivered 2.4 million food rations to the Afghani people, were a highly successful humanitarian operation that arguably saved thousands of lives and alleviated suffering. As such, one might expect generally favourable coverage in the Western news media. In fact, that was not the case. While the coverage of the food airdrops was viewed in a favourable manner in most US newspapers, the news coverage in the third world and in Western Europe tended to be unfavourable.

Journalists writing about the events relied heavily on official reports and information from a variety of NGOs and agencies, many with an anti-American bent. In the first week of the operation, the left-oriented UK *Guardian* ran headlines such as 'Aid Agencies Reject "Risky" Food Drops'; 'Folly of Aid and Bombs'; 'Fears Grow over Food Drops'; 'Drop the Food Drop'; 'Food Parcels Fail to Win over Arab World'. Surprisingly, even the usually conservative the *London Telegraph* reported that the food drops were a bad idea with headlines such as 'Dropping Aid is No use: give Money to the Afghans'; 'Afghans Burn US Food Parcels'; 'Grand Spectacle, But Not the Way to Feed the Hungry'. *Le Monde* in France also took a negative view with the headline, 'NGOs Take Issue with Coupling Humanitarian, Military Actions'. A sampling of stories from eleven major Western newspapers (Europe, Canada, and Australia) and five UK newspapers found 78.6% of the British stories had negative headlines and 41.7% of the Western newspaper stories had unfavourable headlines, the other stories being either neutral or positive in their language⁶³. What the Afghanistan humanitarian airdrop example shows is that, even when air power is used carefully and successfully in a non-kinetic role

and has a positive effect, there are still many in the international mass media who will spin the facts to conform to their worldview.

So how did an air operation get such negative coverage from some of the most influential and prestigious newspapers in the world? Essentially, if the journalist writing the story has a strong anti-American bias, it is easy for him to find people of a like mind among NGOs and academics who will offer quotable comments as to why feeding starving people by airdrop was a bad idea. In some cases, the negative slant of the stories was sustained by pure disinformation put out by the Taliban, in which the Afghans rejected such food drops and were burning the food from the infidels. Many journalists still gave the Taliban some credence, despite their horrendous human rights record.

As the campaign evolved, the negative stories faded away, which was probably a good thing for the credibility of the newspapers involved in printing the negative accounts. In fact, the very large and difficult operation that required long flights over hostile territory and a major logistics effort was highly successful in all respects. However, the episode of the widespread condemnation of humanitarian food drops highlights the reality of a powerful anti-American and anti-Western bias among European media, most notably in the media favouring the hard left. Moreover, it is notable that some of the more moderate and conservative newspapers joined in the criticism of food drops. In short, political biases against NATO and the US are evident in a significant part of the Western media.

A part of the media culture, especially among the hard leftist media in Europe, maintains a kind of radical chic attitude to coverage of news concerning conflicts in the Middle East. Mohammed Emwazi was a radicalized British Muslim who was nicknamed "Jihadi John" and was filmed gleefully and ruthlessly beheading civilian hostages in the service of ISIS. The gruesome murder videos that Mohammed Emwazi presided over became internationally notorious and Emwazi, as an ISIS leader, was killed in a Western air strike in late 2015. *The Guardian* newspaper, a bastion

of the British left, provided extensive coverage of Emwazi after news of his death that was remarkably sympathetic to a man who had publically beheaded two British aid workers on camera. *The Guardian* produced childhood photos showing Emwazi as a sweet child, interviews with his teachers explaining that he was a hard working student, and a quote from a former boss describing him as, 'the best employee I ever had'. A video commentary quoted Asim Qureshi, a leader of CAGE, a political advocacy group staunchly opposed to British, NATO and Western operations in the Middle East, who described Mohammed Emwazi as a 'beautiful' man and argued that it was the British security services that were responsible for radicalizing Emwazi.⁶⁴ *The Guardian* coverage pushed several themes to put the killing of Mohammed Emwazi, a known and active war criminal, into a negative light by citing two advocacy lawyers who questioned the legality of dropping a bomb on Emwazi.⁶⁵ A hard leftist advocacy group in London, CAGE, had been active in defence of Emwazi when his identity as ISIS executioner was first discovered. CAGE claimed that Emwazi was a victim.⁶⁶ This position was maintained after news of his death. However, other news media conducting their own investigation discovered that Emwazi was consorting with people with close links to Islamic terrorism well before he travelled to Syria to join ISIS.⁶⁷

In the Emwazi story we see some characteristics of the anti-Western and anti-NATO narrative and some very popular modern disinformation themes. Although *The Guardian* gives full coverage to ISIS atrocities and fully covered the war crimes committed by Emwazi, the sympathetic coverage of Emwazi after his death fit in well with one of the common themes of the critics of Western air power and Western intervention in the Middle East – that it is Western military actions that play a key role in radicalizing a basically good young man. It is easy to portray a terrorist sympathetically. An enterprising journalist can readily find teachers, family, friends who will protest the terrorist's innocence even when they are faced with overwhelming evidence of guilt. In the major Islamic communities of Europe, where a significant percentage of the population has come under radical influence, it is also easy to find community groups and NGOs who will speak

favourably of a brutal murderer such as Emwazi.⁶⁸ Secondly, *The Guardian's* commentary as well as campaign by CAGE was designed to shift the blame of Emwazi's horrendous crimes to the British government. In that manner, Emwazi, a man who gleefully murdered civilians, was given the coveted mantle of 'victim'. Claiming victim status has been the stock in trade of terrorist groups and violent factions for decades, and this theme resonates with a large bloc of the international left as well as in developing nations. Finally, the legality of killing Emwazi by an Allied air strike was questioned in a classic case of 'lawfare', accusing the British and American governments in colluding in an illegal act.

NGOs and Interest Groups Views on NATO Air Power

As well as media bias there is also a serious problem with anti-Western bias in many NGOs and public interest groups. Western freedoms allow numerous groups to form whose beliefs and media are strongly opposed to Western values. This is an old phenomena dating back to the Cold War when the radical left and right maintained front groups and media. Even with the end of the Cold War, the anti-Western view were never modified. Various groups, normally with a far left orientation, were formed in North America and Europe and put out extensive media against NATO and Western air power. An example of the virulently anti-NATO message put out by some groups is the assessment of civilian casualties of the last decade in fighting terrorists and radical groups in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan made by three groups with impressive names: Physicians for Social Responsibility (US), Physicians for Global Survival (Canada) and Internationale Ärzte für die Verhütung des Atomkrieges (IP-PNW International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War). In a 2015 book, *Body Count*, the three groups accuse the US, Western nations, and NATO of killing massive numbers of innocent civilians. The groups maintain that the NATO and Western casualty figures are all complete lies and that the actual number of civilian dead from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan alone amounts to at least 1.3 million, about ten times the official numbers put out by the West and

NATO nations. The groups insist that 1.3 million dead civilians is a figure on the low side, with two million dead civilians more likely.⁶⁹ The self-styled humanitarians insist that the West is responsible for virtually all the deaths in the Middle East over the last decade, with virtually no mention of Al-Qaeda or the Taliban or radical Islamist groups or the Iranian involvement in conflicts. The virulent anti-Western and anti-NATO tone is evident throughout, with the bald assertion that the US tries to limit civilian casualties is a 'propaganda lie'. The groups also state that wedding parties and festivals are deliberately targeted by Western air power.⁷⁰ The narrative that all people killed by the West, even active Islamist fighters, are victims is a prominent theme. Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters killed in action are described explicitly as 'victims'.⁷¹ Interestingly, the one-sided bias seen in *Body Count* makes the West the only serious perpetrator of war crimes. One might note that Russia has been carrying on a bloody war against Islamic terrorists and separatists in Chechnya and in the Caucasus, a war that, by any account, has claimed thousands of civilian lives. But *Body Count*, a book that stresses the suffering of Islamic peoples at the hands of the West, makes no mention of Russia or of the Muslim civilians who have died in Chechnya. Quite an oversight.

In any case, while the Physicians for Social Responsibility lie at an extreme end of the spectrum, one can see the repetition of a variety of standard anti-NATO and anti-airpower themes that are often repeated in the publications of other NGOs, albeit in a less blatant and propagandistic manner. However, it ought to be noted that the book *Body Count* is a slickly published work, with excellent graphics and visuals and plenty of footnotes. Most Western nations have multiple NGOs and organizations that concern themselves with political and/or security issues, covering current conflicts by maintaining websites and publishing reports on NATO operations. NATO operations in Afghanistan and Western air operations against ISIS continue to receive extensive coverage by NGOs. It must be noted that some NGOs and academic groups have a high level of credibility and present well-researched reports. Others have a blatant bias and present data that is so inaccurate as to be useless in supporting

serious analysis. Such NGOs and groups are little more than propaganda organizations. Therefore, when it comes to citing civilian casualties caused by Western forces or Western air strikes, the figures available can vary widely. It is difficult to determine civilian casualties in current conflicts with any high degree of accuracy. With real data difficult to find, and many groups eager to present false data, the conditions for disinformation on a grand scale are present.

Media Portrayal of Air Power – Effect on Public Opinion

The team researchers supporting this project developed a data base that includes a large number of international public opinion studies as well as a large sample of news and commentary from major Middle Eastern media centres such as *Al Jazeera*. In total, the data base provides over 2,000 media articles in several languages, mainly focusing on aspects of NATO air power over the last two decades.

The Study database shows that, throughout the Middle East, Western nations have a serious strategic communications problem. Part of this is due to cultural differences and part is due to poor communication on the part of the West. The BBC tends to be widely watched in the Middle East and have some credibility, but that is a rarity among the Western media organizations that broadcast to the region. In 2002 the United States State Department set up an Arabic Language television network to broadcast to the Middle East and present the American perspective on the news in the region. Despite large expenditures for programming and administration, the US State Department Arabic network, *al Hurra*, has a lower than 1% viewership in the Middle East. Apparently, the Middle Eastern peoples do not like the format or content. What is especially troubling is that the Russian Federation's RT Arabic television one of the top three television channels in the Middle East, reaching 18% of the Middle Eastern and North African population. RT Arabic is especially popular in Egypt, an important audience for Middle Eastern influence. In contrast, since its inception, the extremely expensive *al Hurra* network has failed to gain an audience.⁷²

The Case of Drones

One of the most common themes in disparaging NATO air power is to attack the use of armed RPA, commonly called drones, by assorted parties and groups of the hard left who have initiated legal action through national courts and provoked a political outcry against drones – all of which is reported in the media. The issue is an important one, as unmanned aerial vehicles are and armed drones are being acquired in large numbers by NATO's armed forces. Because of their versatility and endurance, drones are an increasingly important air weapon. Thus, their effectiveness and growing importance make them a prime target of states and groups hostile to NATO. Drones are a major story in the Western media and are often noted in a highly negative light.⁷³ The disinformation campaigns against drones have two major themes: first, drones (like aircraft) employ weapons in an indiscriminate manner against innocent civilians; secondly, drones are an illegal weapon, killing accused terrorist leaders by remote assassination. As an assassination weapon, the use of drones is portrayed by some groups as a war crime.⁷⁴

A July 2014 Pew Research Center poll of conducted the most extensive study on the use of RPA and international public opinion done to date. Drawing on more than 48,000 interviews in 44 countries, the poll noted that, across 43 nations, in only three nations – the United States, Israel and Kenya – was there a majority of the respondents who favoured the use of drones against terrorists. Of the nine NATO nations surveyed in only one, the United States, did the public favour the use of armed RPA. In NATO countries where opinion was against drones, only in Poland, the UK, and Germany did support for drones crack the 30% approval rate.⁷⁵

On the other hand, just how much does the use of RPA resonate as an important public opinion issue? Despite an extremely high level of disapproval among the general public in many NATO nations, the main nation that uses RPA strikes in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, the United States, also experiences a generally favourable level of public opinion

throughout the world. In the same poll that showed high levels of disapproval over the use of RPA, the public had an overwhelmingly favourable view of the United States in all regions of the world except for the Middle East. The global media favourability rating of the United States was 65% favourable, with Europe at 66%, Asia 66%, Latin America, 65% and Africa 74%. In the Middle East only 30% view America favourably.⁷⁶

It is clear from the data that, for the vast majority of the public in NATO countries, the use of RPA in conflict is not a central issue. No one to date has conducted any study of what the public actually understands about drones, or air power for that matter, but it is a fairly safe bet that the level of public understanding about the use and capabilities of RPA, and air power in general, is extremely low. The only branches of the public that might have a major interest in RPA and their use would be people involved in some way with the military (fields and family members of servicemen, people in the defence industry) or with a sector of academic/political elites who might oppose RPA on general principle. Although RPA are little understood, they are generally disliked as the public sees them as some kind of unfair or immoral weapon. Some of the anti-drone sentiment is based on the claims of civilian casualties made by ISIS, Al-Qaeda and radical groups that are accepted uncritically by journalists in the West. In an April 2016 article in the prestigious *Foreign Policy* magazine, James Bamford (writer and producer of documentaries for the American Public Broadcasting Network) argued that the Islamic State is developing its own drones for terror attacks because it is angered by the human rights concerns of the innocent civilians who have lost their lives to US drone strikes. 'The government has deliberately kept Americans in the dark about this cause and effect. Victims of strikes die in obscurity; their broken bodies are buried in remote towns in the Middle East and South Asia. Whistleblowers have leaked documents to the *Intercept* showing that upward of 90 percent of victims may be unintended yet labeled 'enemies killed in action,' making it easy for the government (if asked at all) to deny responsibility for civilian deaths.'⁷⁷ So strong is the anti-drone prejudice among many in the media and

politics that even mainstream journals are readily willing to accept the idea that ISIS – whose well-documented human rights record is characterized by genocide, sexual slavery, burning POWs and prisoners to death in public ceremonies, and mass summary executions – is now compelled to develop terror weapons because it is deeply concerned about the morality of using drones.

Using Lawfare to Limit and Criminalize NATO Military Operations

Using the Western national and international court systems to challenge the legality of military weapons or of military actions taken by NATO member states has become one of the favoured tactics of groups generally opposed to NATO or Western military actions. A number of major human rights groups are working to have a variety of common Western weapons banned. Some groups are well intentioned but also have a built-in bias against the military. Some international humanitarian and pacifist movements are popular with the political elite and have great influence. Some groups maintain an attempt to be officially objective, that is, to look to limit weapons for both sides in international conflicts. The problem with this approach is that it views all use of force as fundamentally wrong and often sees both sides in a conflict as equally guilty. NGOs with strong anti-Western biases tend to see all Western use of force as wrong but excuse violence used by revolutionary regimes or radical groups. In short, they want to see limits and strict rules applied to the democratic Western powers, but then ignore violations of human rights by radical non-state groups.

Many groups are committed to using 'lawfare' to achieve NATO disarmament. Lawfare is the practice of enacting national laws or international conventions that limit munitions and specific tactics. Enacting laws and regulations means Western powers and military personnel can be criminally sanctioned and condemned as war criminals for conducting normal military operations. This approach takes advantage of a key element of democracy, which is respect for the rule of law.

One example of lawfare is the banning of the use of cluster munitions in a 2010 treaty that has been ratified by dozens of nations and most members of NATO (but not the United States). As a result of this treaty, an extremely useful weapon for conventional war can no longer be legally used by most NATO air forces. While concocted as a humanitarian measure to limit civilian casualties, it may actually increase civilian casualties.⁷⁸ Instead of small bombs being delivered, by law many NATO nations will have to use large bombs, which cause more collateral damage and have a much greater blast effect, which increases the likelihood of civilian casualties.⁷⁹ Western media members, actually knowing little about what cluster bombs are or how they are used in conflict, were ready to condemn the weapons.⁸⁰ Because of this prejudice, the treaty banning cluster bombs in most NATO nations passed with little debate or comment.⁸¹

Currently one of the main issues in the legality of war debate is the use of RPA, commonly called drones in the media, in conflict with irregular forces and radical groups. For several years various NGOs and groups aligned with the UN have argued that the use of armed drones against terrorist groups is illegal under international law. The US has contested this in legal arguments, but the US is at a disadvantage in the media coverage of drones in counter terrorism operations. UN-aligned and international groups argue that ANY use of drones in the strike mode is wrong, and this is reflected in major media stories⁸².

Lawfare is one of the most important issues Western armed forces face today. The laws of warfare that are expounded in the Geneva and Hague Conventions provide legal protections for civilians and define acceptable use of force and also definitions of war crimes and unacceptable situations. Under the laws of armed conflict developed in international law, there are common sense protections for civilians. While the military is required to make a careful effort to avoid targeting purely civilian targets in order to minimize civilian casualties, unintentional collateral damage and casualties caused by military operations are not considered to be war crimes.⁸³ The fact that civilians may be caught in an active combat zone is one of the

tragedies of war. While churches, historical buildings, hospitals and such other civilian facilities are considered off limits as military targets, if such buildings are used as military strong points then they do become legitimate targets. The laws of war have been violated in such instances, but the guilty party is the party that chose to ignore the prohibitions on using such targets. Using civilians as human shields is also expressly forbidden by international law.

Yet international laws governing warfare become more complex when one side fights as irregular forces, wears no uniforms and carries no identification, routinely attacks civilian targets and carries out terror attacks, and has no compunctions about using civilian buildings such as mosques and hospitals for military operations. Irregular non-state forces are not committed to following the international laws of warfare and, indeed, quite routinely violate them. Irregular non-uniformed forces fighting as insurgents can, in fact, be held and prosecuted as civilian criminals rather than treated as soldiers. Yet such prosecutions as civilian criminals, or even prosecutions for irregular forces violating the laws of war are extremely rare events.

The Conflict between Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law

The use of lawfare against NATO and Western air power is indeed a form of disinformation, because the new human rights standard is one that is impossible to follow and grants credibility to war crimes accusations to every use of air power. What the media and activist groups do not note is the extreme care that NATO and Western nations take in ensuring that all drone strikes and air missions are carried out in accordance with humanitarian law. The US commando strike against Osama bin Laden in 2011 was carried out only after an extensive legal review that determined that such as raid met the standards of the International Law of Armed Conflict.⁸⁴

At the core of the lawfare debate is the question of which international laws ought to apply to modern conflict and be followed by NATO. In an article in the *Military Law Review*, American military lawyer Major

Michelle Hansen argues that the major legal issue in applying the international rules of war lies in the conflict between Humanitarian Law, the legal system codifying the laws of armed conflict as agreed on by the Geneva and Hague conventions, and human rights law. The Humanitarian Law, which has formed the international norm for the regulation of conflict for a century, is based on a codification of the rights and obligations of states and regulates behaviour of states. By contrast, human rights law is essentially the regulation of rights between a citizen and his own state. In the last three decades an array of human rights treaties have come into effect that essentially try to internationalize personal rights. While an admirable intention, applying human rights law to international conflicts is fundamentally impossible. Human rights law centres on individual human rights and human dignity. However, in setting human rights against a state's needs to defend itself in the middle of a conflict the standard for the legal use of force in a conflict is set impossibly high. The insistence in human rights law that the use of force is a last resort, and ensuring all civilians are covered by legal protections, contradicts the need for a state to use force, sometimes considerable force, to protect the lives of its citizens from aggression – which is certainly the first requirement of any state.⁸⁵

In 2014, during the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, Hamas carried out terrorist attacks on Israeli towns via tunnels built under the Gaza border. Israel retaliated by bombing Hamas military sites inside Gaza. Hamas carried out rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli civilian towns and over a fifty day period fired thousands of rocket and mortar rounds into Israel territory, causing damage and casualties. Israel counter against large scale acts of war by an intensive air campaign against Hamas that targeted Hamas weapons and known military personnel while trying to avoid civilian targets. Israelis warned civilians before bombing raids (Hamas never warned Israel of terror or rocket attacks) and was careful in its targeting. But, as Hamas was well emplaced inside the civilian community and used building such as schools for weapons storage, the Israeli air campaign killed some Palestinian civilians. Afterwards a UN commission wrote a report

of the conflict and accused Israel of international war crimes in its bombing campaign by applying international human rights law as a measure against Israeli actions rather than the international laws of war (Humanitarian law). While also noting that Hamas had violated the international laws of war by using schools for weapons storage and using civilians essentially as human targets, the UN's criticism fell largely upon Israel. In short, the UN report wanted to examine every bomb through a careful legal review and argued that any loss of a civilian life was a potential war crime.⁸⁶

The Gaza case is significant for NATO air power doctrine, because the Israelis acted essentially in the same manner as NATO in employing air power in an area full of civilians, fighting against an enemy that readily sheltered military weapons and forces among civilians. Per humanitarian law, Israel was acting in self-defence and responding to large scale acts of war. But human rights law treats acts of war as criminal acts, to be responded to with minimum force with each use of force carefully justified. That thousands of rockets and mortar shells were raining onto Israeli territory was not enough justification for an air campaign to stop it. The UN Commission is even trying to take Israel to the international court of law for war crimes – essentially for bombing military targets inside Gaza. In Gaza, the UN's use of human rights law to regulate what was clearly a conflict is a development that was predicted exactly by Major Hanson in 2007.⁸⁷ The Israeli rejoinder was essentially that humanitarian law, not human rights law applied.⁸⁸ If the UN-cited human rights of adequate standard of living, health education, security etc. are to be the norm for regulating warfare, then any act of warfare can be considered criminal.

In other cases, lawyers and advocacy groups are using Western national law to attempt to charge military personnel participating in a multinational conflict with war crimes. British soldiers who engaged in a sharp firefight in Iraq in 2004 with members of the Mahdi militia, a violent faction opposing the Coalition forces in Iraq, were accused by a British interest group of having committed war crimes and of wrongly imprisoning and torturing Iraq prisoners taken in the

incident. British lawyers receiving taxpayer funds, were allowed to pursue the allegations of murder and torture against the British soldier at the cost of 31 million pounds to the British taxpayer. A five-year investigation by the British governments determined that all the key charges were completely baseless. The exhaustive report of the government documented that the claims of murder and torture had been based on 'deliberate lies and reckless speculation' from biased groups and witnesses who were determined to use the British legal system to smear British forces. In fact, the legal team bringing the false accusations against the British soldiers had in their possession documents that showed that the Iraqis had indeed been members of the hostile Mahdi Army, instead of being innocent victims out shopping and caught in a fire-fight.⁸⁹

In October 2015 an American gunship, flying in support of the Afghani armed forces, carried out a support mission to help the Afghani forces that were engaged in a major firefight with Taliban forces that had entered the city of Kunduz and were threatening to overrun Afghan Army forces. In the middle of the fire-fight, the US plane mistakenly fired on an Afghani Hospital manned by the Doctors without Borders. The US strike resulted in 19 dead and 37 wounded. It was a tragic mistake, but not unusual considering the confused situation and the fact that the hospital was in the middle of a major battle zone. However, even before an investigation could take place a UN human rights official stated that the air strike was 'inexcusable, possibly even criminal'.⁹⁰ The sensational news coverage, led by the *Deutsche Welle's* headline – 'Kunduz hospital bombing could amount to war crime, says UN' – went worldwide with dramatic photos of the damaged hospital and the victims. Especially disconcerting was the readiness of UN human rights officials to throw the term 'war crime' out without any information beyond the fact that an air strike had taken place and there were casualties.⁹¹

The movement to use Western and human rights law as a weapon to attack NATO and Western military operations has reached a point that the ability for NATO to mount military operations is impaired. As

noted in the Mohammed Emwazi (Jihadi John) case, there were charges from British lawyers that the use of an air attack to kill a public mass murderer was a crime. Using the same reasoning, there are attempts today to make the use of armed drones in conflict a war crime. At the heart of the issue is the practice of using civilians as human shields, a standard tactic used by Middle Eastern militants. In a recent television interview, French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian noted the difficulties that lawfare and the use of civilians as human shields created during the conduct of air strikes against ISIS: 'Daesh [ISIS] is organized in such a way that children, women, civilians are being put on front lines. Its leadership is hiding in schools, mosques, and hospitals, making the action of the coalition in Iraq and the action of France and other partners in Syria difficult, because we don't want civilian casualties. We pay as much attention to the targets we select as to the need to combat Daesh.'⁹²

Colonel Richard Kemp, a former British commander in Afghanistan, noted, 'Islamist terrorists have no interest in protecting their civilian populations. They are happy to use them as human shields, to terrify them, to risk and to sacrifice their lives. Whatever happens, the terrorist who uses human shields wins. If he deters Western forces from attacking his terrorists and his munitions, then he scores a tactical victory. He can attack our troops with impunity. On the other hand, if we attack him and kill or wound his human shields, then he exploits this in the world media and there is an outcry. He has gained a strategic victory. The Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan frequently use human shields. They drive innocent local people between NATO forces and the terrorists who are attacking them ... They have killed British soldiers by booby-trapping mosques and schools, and by attacking them from protected locations and from behind human shields.'⁹³

Colonel Kemp notes that the weak international response to the use of human shields by Hamas and other radical groups in the Middle East simply encourages the practices. Kemp noted that after each conflict with Israel, Hamas, noting the international outcry against Israel and the outpouring of sympathy for

Hamas as ‘victims’, would increase the use of human shields and the practice of placing military forces among the civilian population. ‘And the consequence of the international community’s response? To further encourage the use of human shields by Hamas and by terrorists everywhere.’⁹⁴ It is notable that lawfare is already having a negative impact on Western air operations against the Islamic State. Due to a strategy of using air power against ISIS without inflicting any civilian casualties, 75% of the US air sorties against the ISIS forces return without dropping their ordnance because they could not get clearance to engage ISIS targets. While the desire to prevent civilian losses and collateral damage is admirable, such a policy hampers the Western campaign against the Islamic State.⁹⁵

Further Threats – The Russian Information Programme

In terms of the threat that disinformation poses to NATO, it should be noted that the threat does not come only from radical groups and sympathetic national factions. Disinformation can also be a major weapon of states. Disinformation campaigns by adversary states may be even more effective than those by non-state groups, as states have broader financial and media resources and can also use cover groups and sympathetic national groups to further their narratives.

Going back to the days of the Soviet Union, the Russians have placed a strong emphasis on information and disinformation campaigns as part of their view of conflict that includes the information, economic, and diplomatic means as well as military power. For the last decade Russia has carried out an extensive and often virulent information campaign against NATO with a particular emphasis on some of the NATO member nations. Indeed, Russian military doctrine (2010) lists NATO as a prime enemy of Russia.⁹⁶ NATO is seen as an aggressor and active threat against which Russia must defend. The Russians conduct information campaigns on several fronts. The first is oriented towards their own populace and is designed to support a xenophobic worldview in which peaceful Russia is under constant threat from

Western powers, who seek only to undermine and impoverish Russia. With the suppression of independent media in Russia and dissent suppressed under new laws that make it crime to present a ‘false’ history (meaning any honest accounting of the Stalin and Soviet eras), the population is encouraged to support a threatened Putin and Russia.

As an adjunct of their internal information campaign, the Russian media concentrates considerable effort on broadcasting and providing books and magazines to the Russian ethnic minorities in the Baltic States and the Ukraine. The Baltic States, all of which are NATO members, as well as the Ukraine, are special targets for Russian media operations. The theme is a constant one, which is voiced by Putin himself: the Baltic States and Ukrainians are all ‘Nazis’ and ‘Fascists’. The Russian campaign aims to destabilize the Baltic States and the Ukraine and portray the democratic governments there as illegitimate. The media message in this case is often crude, to include cartoons of Latvians flying the Nazi flag with the Russian comment ending in obscenities.⁹⁷ Some of the internal Russian propaganda goes to great lengths to float conspiracy theories that are a staple of the Russian disinformation campaign. In 2014, when Russian forces in the Ukraine shot down the Malaysian Airline flight, the Russian media floated several stories, the first being that the Ukrainians had shot down the plane and wrongly blamed the Russians and the second being that the shoot down was part of an elaborate NATO/CIA plot to discredit Russia. The Russian media also uses blogs and social media to push such stories.⁹⁸ One purpose of the Russian use of paid bloggers and supposedly (but actually state supported) private websites to push invective and conspiracy stories is simply to create confusion and noise. To divert attention from Russian actions (invasion of the Ukraine, human rights abuses), this kind of disinformation works not only to mislead but to distract from the main story.⁹⁹

Another front of the Russian information offensive is oriented towards the West and generally refrains from the crudities and open xenophobia of Russian-oriented propaganda. The media campaign aimed at a

Western audience targets the elites and political left with the theme that Russia has been a victim of Western exploitation since the end of the Soviet Union. One of the major Russian propaganda themes, publicized at the highest levels, is the illegitimacy of the NATO expansion into Eastern Europe in 1998 and 2004. This is described as violating the agreements made between the Western powers and Russia to withdraw Russian troops from Eastern Europe in 1992. In fact, there was never any international agreement or understanding to not expand NATO and the Russian position is an example of pure disinformation. Unfortunately, this Russian theme resonates with some of the Western elites who argued that it was the West who betrayed and provoked Russia to act defensively in the Ukraine.¹⁰⁰ The expansion of NATO is portrayed by Russia as an example of straightforward Western aggression and the Russians claim they are acting only for self-defence in invading the Ukraine.

Russia has recently ratcheted up its claims of Western victimization by insisting that the Russian government's act of recognizing the independence of the three Baltic Republics in 1991 was an illegal and unconstitutional act according to a ruling by Russia's attorney general in July 2015.¹⁰¹ This ruling is part of Russia's strategy of using lawfare against NATO by tarring almost all of NATO's actions in the Baltic region as violations of international law.¹⁰² NATO manoeuvres in the Baltic States, including the Baltic air policing programme, are also characterized as illegal and aggressive moves against Russia.

Russia has one significant advantage in media operations in that they can count on support from the political hard left in Europe. In the Cold War era, especially in the 1970s and 1980s when the US committed new forces to Europe and new nuclear weapons to counter the Soviet build-up, the Soviet Union could count on the support from numerous political groups in the West to carry out mass demonstrations against NATO. Today, many of the same European groups that in the Soviet era saw NATO as the villain and showed sympathy for position of the Soviet Union have transferred their sympathies to the new Russian state. Although unable to mobilize the kind of massive anti-

NATO demonstrations carried out in the 1980s, the hard left still holds to the same beliefs of decades ago. The Russians can count on the European hard left to readily accept and promulgate key Russian disinformation themes that portray NATO, not Russia, as the main threat to peace in Europe.¹⁰³

Although the Russian disinformation campaign has a limited impact with the general public in the West, NATO nations need to pay attention to exposing and refuting the Russian media campaigns. While the Russian style, heavy on crude invective and using conspiracy accusations to deflect attention from Russian actions, does not play well in developed Western nations, it does have considerable appeal in the Middle East and developing world. The Russian propaganda themes, as unbelievable as some are, are meant to work over the long term – and the long term goal is to discredit NATO and the Western powers in general. In any contest with Russia, the Russians can count on having a fully controlled media at home and a solid group of the European hard left who will be ready to support the Russian line.

Russian Information Operations Doctrine in Practice

The Russian Federation strategy and doctrine employs information operations to support its long and short term objectives. As with the USSR, the Russians believe that information operations are an essential and integral part of conflict and, again like the USSR, the Russian state provides considerable resources and personnel to support active disinformation campaigns aimed towards undermining its enemies and to bolster the Russian population at home. Disinformation operations are a key speciality of the Russian Federation. The Russians use their national state media to support a host of ostensibly private organizations as front groups and make full use of internet blogs social media to push its stories. The Russian Federation employs 'soft power', with their own strategic communications programmes as a primary means of extending Russian power and influence and in supporting Russian objectives.¹⁰⁴ If Russian media and information operations and themes resemble those

of the former USSR, it is simply because major USSR media and information agencies simply changed their names and continued their operations under the Russian Federation in the 1990s. The old personnel of the USSR agencies also simply transitioned to serve the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁵ The development of Russian disinformation capabilities grew rapidly under the leadership of Vladimir Putin.

In dealing with Russian disinformation and information operations, NATO confronts an ongoing, long term campaign to discredit the Western nations. The Russian world view and long term goals are clearly laid out in the volumes of *Project Russia*, a series of books written by a small circle of Vladimir Putin's close advisors and published by Russia's largest publishing company.¹⁰⁶ *Project Russia* makes Russia's contempt for Western democracies and the Western economic system clear. The Russians believe that Russia should be the preeminent world power and that all the countries that once belonged to the Soviet Union should be under a Russian-led security and economic system. NATO is openly considered an enemy, its existence is regarded as a direct threat to Russia, and it serves as an obstacle to what the Russians believe is their leading nation role.¹⁰⁷

The Russian approach to information operations in recent years has been characterized by increasingly sophisticated ways to disguise the instigators and perpetrators of conflict so as to seed confusion and develop doubt in the minds of the public. Russian television news has a routine technique of encouraging conspiracy stories and providing alternative interpretations of Russian actions. This technique is oriented less to convince even their own Russian viewers than to undermine the credibility of *any* news reports in the eyes of the public.¹⁰⁸ By creating maximum confusion, Russia can avoid answering obvious questions.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine, Russia has developed an aggressive information campaign as part of its hybrid approach to conflict by using all available means to stir up problems they can then begin to exploit through their military tool. The most

amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare was part of the first Russian push in Ukraine.¹⁰⁹ Where once information was a part of the mix, it is now – as General Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian Armed Forces, has noted – increasingly dominant. It forces us to significantly re-evaluate and revise tactics, strategies, training, organization, and doctrines.¹¹⁰

Conclusions of Part I of the Disinformation and Air Power Study

The first part of the JAPCC Disinformation and Air Power Study has laid out the nature of the problem of disinformation. The experience of the last decades since the end of the Cold War show us that media and information have a major role in current and future conflicts. New forms of media have developed such as the internet and social media that allow instantaneous communication and information transmission. People who used to be isolated now have cell phones. They might be illiterate, but they can use their cell phones to communicate information and disinformation.

Both state and non-state opponents of NATO routinely engage in disinformation campaigns to undermine NATO and NATO member nations and to build political pressure to limit or curtail any Alliance defence plans or military operations. In recent years, disinformation campaigns have shown that they can directly affect public perceptions and push NATO to limit military operations. Air power remains a social theme and key target of disinformation campaigns. When using air power, it is often difficult to attain highly accurate BDA and, while NATO forces are trying to obtain exact information, enemy forces will already be circulating the story of another atrocity by air power. Because air power remains NATO's most dramatic advantage in any conflict, it will also be the prime target for enemy disinformation.

As the historical case studies show, while disinformation can take many themes, the main themes used against air power are very consistent: first, air power kills large numbers of civilians and causes immense

civilian suffering; second, the use of many forms of air power such as drones or cluster munitions constitutes a war crime and further legal restrictions need to be placed on air power by the international community (lawfare); third, people on the receiving end of air power are always victims. These themes work quite effectively to influence and inflame local populations who find themselves in the middle of a conflict and likely have a built-in anti-Western bias. They also resonate with much of the media and sectors of the NATO countries, most notably the hard left.

Misinformation about air power is almost as dangerous as disinformation in its political effects. As the public knows little about air power capabilities and limitations, rumour and bad assumptions abound among the public and the media. Rumours, stories and misperceptions might not have a major effect on influencing the perceptions of most of the Western public, but in a land such as Afghanistan, where people have little understanding of foreign cultures and may be egged on by local leaders with tribal and factional agendas, all kinds of outrageously improbable stories about NATO intentions and NATO operations will be rapidly disseminated and believed. In the Middle East, the local cultural conditions enable disinformation and misinformation to flourish.

While NATO has shown an impressive ability to conduct ever more complex air operations since the mid-1990s, NATO's ability to conduct information and media operations and to counter enemy media and information campaigns has been unimpressive. In the 1990s NATO was not well prepared to handle media operations, nor did NATO have an effective media operations doctrine. With the rise of Russian aggression, first against Georgia in 2008 and against the Ukraine now, and facing an ongoing massive media and information campaign directed against NATO, the need to counter the Russian propaganda apparatus is evident. The Russians believe that conflict is not solely a military endeavour, and they place considerable effort, personnel and resources into their information campaign. They have a capable doctrine and organization to use disinformation and media operations to undermine the will of NATO and NATO partners.

After the experience of Afghanistan, and with the current crisis in the Ukraine, it is clear that NATO needs a more robust response in terms of strategic communications. Information is an important weapon, something that is better understood in NATO today than it was a decade ago. NATO is putting more resources into Strategic communications and developing better policies and doctrines.

In terms of dealing with the irregular conflicts on the periphery of NATO, information and strategic communications will continue to play a key role. One can also anticipate that NATO will face disinformation campaigns in any future involvement in North Africa or the Middle East region. As counterinsurgency specialist Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl has noted, 'Information is the strategically decisive front in counterinsurgency and we need to use information operations to divide and conquer'.¹¹ A NATO information campaign must target the correct audience, establish primary vectors to communicate the message in a timely manner, shaping the battlespace. The primary audience in counterinsurgency information operations is local people. But one must not forget the broader public audience at home, which needs accurate information, especially if their national forces are engaged in active operations. The media releases must be honest and transparent with the information available. Silence creates the perception that negative information is hidden and, consequently, legitimacy will suffer. Finally, accurate and detailed information must be provided to the public concerning insurgent and terrorist atrocities and insurgent tactics of using human shields to avoid airstrikes. Disinformation and misinformation must be constantly countered as part of a comprehensive communications campaign.

1. Definition adapted from the Oxford English Dictionary.
2. For an excellent study of modern disinformation, see Lt Gen Mihai Pacepa and Ronald Rychlak, *Disinformation* (Washington DC: WND Books, 2013). Gen Pacepa was the chief of the Romanian Intelligence Service in the 1970s and worked closely with the Soviet leadership as a disinformation expert. Pacepa helped the Soviets develop disinformation campaigns against NATO and the West. He defected to the United States and remains the highest ranking defector from the Soviet Bloc. Pacepa's book provides a detailed background to several of the major disinformation campaigns mounted against the West by the Soviets.
3. Jillian Becker, *Neo-Nazism: A threat to Europe?* (London: Alliance Publishers, 1993) p. 16.
4. See Thomas Boghardt, "Operations Infektion: Soviet Bloc Intelligence and its AIDS Disinformation Campaign," *Studies in Intelligence* vol. 53, No. 4, Dec. 2009, pp. 1–15.
5. ON the Soviet Bloc effort to manufacture false stories of US atrocities in Vietnam see Pacepa, pp. 302–303.

6. ON US war crimes in Vietnam and the work of the US military to prosecute its own soldiers see Bernd Greiner, *Krieg ohne Fronten: Die USA in Vietnam* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2007) p. 26.
7. On details of the funding of communist parties and leftist movements by the Soviet Union, to include the major peace groups such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, see Robert Service, *The End of the Cold War 1985–1991* (London; Macmillan, 2015) pp. 78–79, 96–100.
8. For example, the Stasi worked to influence the Dutch peace movement. See Beatrice de Graaf, *Over de Muur. De DDR, de Nederlandse kerken en de vredesbeweging* (Amsterdam, 2004) p.113.
9. Carol Morello, “A nation in the Grip of Panic in Guatemala, a Deadly Fear of Baby Snatching”, *Philadelphia Enquirer*, 10 Apr. 1994.
10. A good example of Russian disinformation is the shoot down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 in Jul. 2014 by Russian backed forces or Russian forces in the Ukraine. The attack in Ukrainian air space killed more than 200 people, mostly Dutch citizens. For the next weeks Russian media floated alternate stories, many of them arguing that the shoot down was an elaborate NATO conspiracy set up to frame the Russians. Russian disinformation using an army of paid bloggers and websites, float numerous theories to discredit the West. Part of this is to appeal to Russian audiences and part to simply confuse the issue.
11. “14 killed as Taliban hits polio vaccination centre”, *London Times*, 14 Jan. 2016. P. 32.
12. Despite being careful in dealing with the population and showing great sensitivity for the Afghan culture, many Afghans believe that Westerners have a secret agenda to convert Muslims to Christianity. In cultures where the vast majority of the population is illiterate and has little contact outside their own tribe or village, such misunderstanding of foreign cultures is common.
13. ORB International Survey, *Iraq and Syria Results*, Jul. 2015.
14. Nathan Roger, *Image Warfare in the War on Terror* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) pp. 160–164.
15. Reuters, “Reuters withdraws all photos by freelancer”, 7 Aug. 2006.
16. The Airpower and Disinformation Data Base has collected data from several NGO websites that deal with air power issues. The websites range from highly objective to blatant anti-NATO and anti-Western propaganda.
17. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism Website tries to cover all the NATO and Western air operations. See the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, “Afghanistan, most recent strike 20 Jul. 2015”. Casualty figures given: Total Killed 324–477, civilians killed: 14–39; children killed: 0–18; Injured: 23–28. These general figures are typical of all the websites trying to count casualties.
18. Analysis by our Study team members reviewing the data base showed that most websites in Europe try hard to obtain good information.
19. “Afghan officials at odds over US airstrike deaths”, *London Times*, 8 Apr. 2016.
20. Eason Jordan, *The News We Kept to Ourselves*, *New York Times*, 11 Apr. 2003.
21. See Ali Hashem, *The Islamic State’s Social Media Strategy*, *AI Monitor*, 19 Aug. 2014.
22. Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies (C.S.S.) 20 Jun. 2006. “Terrorism and Internet: an examination of Hamas’ websites and the hosting providers used by them – The Internet as a means for glorifying suicide bombers.”
23. The Al-Qaeda magazine Inspire can be viewed on the Public Intelligence Net website. See Inspire Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Magazine, Issue 10 Mar. 2013. <https://publicintelligence.net/aqap-inspire-issue-10/>.
24. For a good overview of the ISIS propaganda programme see Greg Miller and Souad Mekhennet, “Inside the surreal world of the Islamic State’s propaganda machine”, *Washington Post*, 20 Nov. 2015.
25. Divesh Gaher, “Islamist uses kittens to groom recruits”, *London Times*, 20 Dec. 2015.
26. See Joseph Straheen, *Network of Terror: How Daesh uses Adaptive Social Networks to Spread its Message*, (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2015).
27. For several examples of the PLO placing artillery and anti-aircraft guns on top of hospitals and civilian buildings, and using marked ambulances to transport explosive and other violations of the laws of war see James Corum and Wray Johnson, *Airpower and Small Wars* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003) chapter 9.
28. “Libyan officials claim 85 dead in NATO airstrike”, *Telegraph*, 9 Aug. 2011.
29. Michael Wines, “War in the Gulf: the General, a Briefing by Powell, a data-filled showcase”, *New York Times*, 24 Jan. 1991.
30. Eric V. Larson and Bogdan Savych, *Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime* (Washington: Rand, 2006) pp. 190–192.
31. Solomon Moore, “Marines deny Airstrikes Used Against Insurgents in Ramadi”, *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Dec. 2006.
32. Nations that sent military and specialist forces to serve in the Multinational force in Iraq 2003–2011 were: United States, UK, Italy, Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark, Norway, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania, Albania, Iceland, Netherlands, Hungary, Spain, and Portugal.
33. Conrad Crane, W. Andrew Terrill eds., *Reconstructing Iraq*, US Army War College, SSI Study, Feb. 2003. p. 65.
34. Ibid.
35. Donna Leinwand, “Iraqis Can’t Believe Everything they Read”, *USA Today*, 18 Sep. 2003.
36. On the Iraq War planning projections see James S. Corum, *Bad Strategies: How Major Powers Fail in Counterinsurgency* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2008) pp. 201–202.
37. Ibid 204–215.
38. On the failure of the Coalition media operations in Iraq see James Corum, *Fighting the War on Terror* (St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2007) see chapter 5.
39. Michael McDonough, “Retired General Discusses Iraqi Occupation”, *Washington Times*, 26 Nov. 2003.
40. In Apr. 2004 a group sponsored by the US Marine Corps raised \$1.5 million to support six Iraqi-owned and operated TV stations in Al-Anbar province. See Spirit of America website, <http://www.spiritofamerica.net/cgi-bin/soa/project.pl?rm=view-project&request-id=51>. 9 Mar. 2005.
41. On 20 Jan. 2005 the Harris Corporation received a \$22 million contract from the Iraqi government to train personnel of the Iraqi Media Network.
42. A useful work on the background of the Afghans and their views is David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla* (Oxford: oxford University press, 2010).
43. For an excellent guide to the social and ethnic issues concerning the conflicts in the Middle East see David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
44. Rahim Faiez and Kimberly Dozier, “Afghan Leader alleges US, Taliban are colluding”, *Associated Press*, 10 Mar. 2013.
45. Interview of Dr James Corum with Lt. General Wundrak, ISAF Deputy chief of staff 2011, Interview Jun. 2015.
46. See “UN finds Airstrike Killed 90”, *Washington Post* 22 Aug. 2008. See also “Afghan officers say troops in raid were fired on first”, *Los Angeles Times* 1 Sep. 2008.
47. “NATO probes claim it killed 64 Afghan civilians”, *Washington Times*, 18 Feb. 2011.
48. Ronald Keys, *USAF 2007 Counterinsurgency Symposium*.
49. Eugene L. McFeely, *Balancing kinetic effects of airpower with counterinsurgency objectives in Afghanistan*, US Army War College Research Project. Mar. 2009.
50. The issue of airpower and firepower in Afghanistan and Gen McChrystal’s decision to reduce air operations is discussed in Gen McChrystal’s memoirs. See Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).
51. Source: a large number of polls of major polling groups including international polls by the Pew Foundation, CNN polls, Gallup polls etc. All indicated a general lack of public will to support the Afghan War by 2008. See Jon Cohen and Jennifer Agiesta, “Poll of Afghans Shows Drop in Support for U.S. Mission”, *Washington Post*, 10 Feb. 2009. A 2009 poll showed 80% of Afghans believed Coalition air strikes were unacceptable due to heavy civilian casualties.
52. “Airstrikes in Afghanistan drop by almost half”, *USA TODAY*, 8 Sep. 2009.
53. “U.S. Tightens Airstrike Policy in Afghanistan”, *New York Times* 22 Jun. 2009
54. Interviews by Dr Corum with Mr Mark Laity and Lt. Col. Jay Janzen, SHAPE Public Relations, Jan. 2015. Both Mr. Laity and Lt. Col. Janzen served tours with ISAF in Afghanistan and served in a PR capacity.
55. These were key lessons pointed out by the SHAPE Public Relations staff.
56. A worthwhile study outlining the foundations of the US information operations in the Cold War is Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).
57. Lt Gen Ion Mihail Pacepa and Ronald Rychlak, *Disinformation* (Washington DC: WND Books, 2013) p. 307.
58. Robert Service, *The End of the Cold War 1985–1991* (London; Macmillan, 2015) pp. 262–263.
59. For an excellent critical study of the US strategic communications and interagency rivalries see Christopher Lamb and Megan Franco, “National-Level Coordination and Implementation: How System Attributes Trumped Leadership’ in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, ed. Richard Hooker (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2015) see pp. 165–276, esp. pp. 228–229.
60. Lamb and Franco, in *Lessons Encountered*, p. 229.
61. See ADM Mike Mullen, “Strategic Communications: Getting Back to Basics”, *Joint Force Quarterly* 55, 4th Quarter 2009. ADM Mullen, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff

- (2007–2011), argued that the United States basically needed no strategic communications effort, that good policies and actions would be enough.
62. David Samuels May, 'The Aspiring Novelist who Became Obama's Foreign Policy Guru', *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 5 May 2016.
 63. David S. Farrow, *Dropping Bombs and Bread in Parallel: The Effects-Based Food Drops of Operation Enduring Freedom*, SAAS Thesis, Jun. 2004. Farrow provides a good overview of the whole operation. On his analysis of world press coverage see pp. 71–74.
 64. See the extensive story that includes video footage, Alexandra Topping, Josh Halliday and Nishaat Ismail, "Who is Mohammed Emwazi? From shy, football-loving boy to Isis killer," *Guardian*, 13 Nov. 2015.
 65. Owen Bowcott, "Mohammed Emwazi: debate over legal basis of targeted killings remains confused", *Guardian*, 13 Nov. 2015.
 66. On the Cage coverage of Emwazi see: "Jihadi John: 'Radicalised' by Britain," Cage website, <http://cageuk.org/press-release/jihadi-john-radicalised-britain>.
 67. Dipesh Gadhre, "Jihadi John's early terror links", *London Times*, 24 Jan. 2016, p. 7.
 68. Polling in two of Europe's largest Muslim communities, Britain and France, show that a significant part of the Muslim communities show a high level of sympathy for the most radical versions of Islam. In Britain after the 2015 Islamist terrorist attack in Paris where twelve people at the Charlie Hebdo humor magazine were killed for "insulting Islam" 27 % of the Muslims polled by BBC expressed sympathy for the motives of the attackers. See BBC News 25 Feb. 2015. "Most British Muslims 'oppose Muhammed Cartoon Reprisals.'" A 2014 Poll by French polling group ICM found that 16 % of French Muslims supported ISIS, with ISIS support as high as 27 % among French Muslims between 18 and 24. See Madeline Grant, "16 % of French Citizens Support ISIS, Poll finds", *Newsweek*, 26 Aug. 2014. Radical Islamic influence has reached into the mainstream of the British Muslim community. In 2015 A British government report noted that Britain's largest Islamic organization and its largest Muslim student organization both had links to the Muslim Brotherhood, a network that has incited terrorism in the past. See "Muslim Council Secretly linked to Brotherhood", *London Times*, 18 Dec. 2015.
 69. IPPNW, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Physicians for Global Survival: Body Count: Casualty figures after 10 Years of the "war on Terror"; Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan. (Washington, Berlin, Ottawa: IPPNW, Mar. 2015) see p. 15.
 70. *Ibid* pp. 92–93.
 71. *Ibid* p. 71.
 72. On RT Arabic see Alexey Filippov, "In Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAE and Iraq: RT Arabic is watched by 6.7 million viewers every day," *Sputnik News*, 19 Feb. 2015. On al Hurra see Craig Whitlock, "US Network Falters in Mideast Mission," *Washington Post*, 23 Jun. 008.
 73. For an example of the anti-drone stories see Baraa Shiban, "US-backed airstrikes on Yemen are killing civilians – and all hopes for peace," *Stop the War Coalition Website*, 12 Apr. 2015.
 74. One only needs to check out the radical left websites and media to observe this theme. The Stop the War Coalition, an ultra-left organization in the UK, provides commentary that is sympathetic to all violent anti-Western movements, and also sees Russia as a victim of Western aggression. Commentary against NATO air power and drones as a tool of state assassination are standard stories on their website. See <http://www.stopwar.org.uk/>.
 75. Pew Research Center, Report: Global Opposition to U.S. surveillance and Drones, but limited harm to America's Image, 14 Jul. 2014 p. 5.
 76. *Ibid* 27, p.13.
 77. James Bamford, "Terrorists have Drones Now. Thanks Obama." *Foreign Policy*, 28 Apr. 2016.
 78. For a full discussion of the legal aspects of cluster munitions and the international treaty against them see Maj Erkan Agin, "Cluster Munitions: Recent Developments," *Military Law Review*, Vol 215. Spring 2013. Pp. 108–132.
 79. "BBC News – Global cluster bomb ban comes into force." *BBC Online*. 1 Aug. 2010.
 80. This author has routinely dealt with the European and British press since 2009 to include major national and regional newspapers, television and radio programmes. I have been interviewed many times as an expert on military and terrorism issues. Almost all the professional journalists I have dealt with, including the military editors of national newspapers, knew little about military issues and even less about air power or drones. The only journalists this author has met who were informed about air power and drones were the writers for the specialist media oriented towards the defence and aviation industries. However, these specialist medias have small circulations for a very limited audience and almost no informed discussion about air power reaches the mass circulation media.
 81. A representative media story about cluster bombs can be found in the *New York Times* Editorial, "No Place for cluster Bombs," 26 Aug. 2006.
 82. See "Drone Strikes by US may violate international law, says UN," *Guardian*, 18 Oct. 2013. See also "RAF's crew's role in US drone unit revealed", *Guardian*, 23 Jul. 2015.
 83. On some of the developments in humanitarian law and irregular forces see Trevor Keck, "Not All Civilians Are Created Equal. The Principle of Distinction, the Question of Direct Participation in Hostilities and Evolving Restraints on the Use of force in Warfare," *Military Law Review*, Vol 211 Spring 2012. pp. 115–178.
 84. Charlie Savage, "How 4 Federal Lawyers paved the Way to Kill Osama bin Laden," *New York Times*, 28 Oct. 2015.
 85. See Maj Michelle Hansen, "Preventing the Emasculation of Warfare: Halting the Expansion of Human Rights Law into Armed Conflict," *Military Law Review*, vol. 194, Winter 2007, pp. 1–65.
 86. See the UN Report: UN Human Rights Council, Report of the detailed findings of the independent commission of inquiry established pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution S-21/1. 23 Jun. 2015. The UN Report cited various human rights of the Gaza residents to include the right to housing, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to education, the right to life and the right to health care. See pp. 151–158.
 87. *Ibid* UN Human Rights Council Report, pp. 3–15.
 88. *Ibid*. pp. 11–14.
 89. Ben Farmer, "Al-Sweady lawyers should now face disciplinary action," *London Telegraph*, 17 Dec. 2014.
 90. "Kunduz hospital bombing could amount to war crime, says UN," *Deutsche Welle*, 3 Oct. 2015.
 91. One should note that the UN Human rights Council member nations contain some of the world's leading human rights abusing nations – to include Russia, China, Congo, Kyrgyzstan, Venezuela and Vietnam.
 92. Cited in Michael Gurfinkiel, UK Cdr: World's Weak Response to 'Human Shields' Encourages Terrorists to Use them," *Middle East Forum*, 27 Oct. 2015.
 93. *Ibid*.
 94. *Ibid*.
 95. Adam Kredon, "U.S. Pilots Confirm: Obama Admin Blocks 75 Percent of Islamic State Strikes," *Washington Free Beacon*, 20 Nov. 2015.
 96. See The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, Approved by Russian Federation Presidential Edict on 5 Feb. 2010. Translation by the SRAS – School of Russian and Asian Studies. The Main external threats to the Russian Federation are as follows: "8: The main external military dangers are: a) the desire to endow the force potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with global functions carried out in violation of the norms of international law and to move the military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation, including by expanding the bloc; b) the attempts to destabilize the situation in individual states and regions and to undermine strategic stability; c) the deployment (buildup) of troop contingents of foreign states (groups of states) on the territories of states contiguous with the Russian Federation and its allies and also in adjacent waters . . ."
 97. A 2014 cartoon from the Russian State media shows the new US ambassador to Russia standing next to a Latvian dressed in Nazi uniform and holding Nazi and NATO crossed flags, with the concluding comment: "F**K You."
 98. The JAPCC Project Mitigating the Disinformation Campaigns against Air Power data base has a collection of Russian media translated and several stories from Russian media on the Malaysian Airline shoot down theories. The Russian disinformation method is to float stories, sometimes bizarre conspiracy theories that blame secret NATO covert operations, as possible explanations proposed by some commentators (Russian media agents), to explain how NATO, and not Russia, is behind the bloodshed in the Ukraine.
 99. The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence has published some good research on Russian disinformation techniques. See Andris Spruds et. al, *Internet Trolling as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare: the Case of Latvia* (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2015); *Executive Summary, Russian Information Warfare Against the Ukrainian State and Defence Forces* (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2015).
 100. On the dispute about NATO expansion and the Russian line on this issue see Mary Sarotte, "A Broken Promise? What the West Really Told Moscow About NATO Expansion", *Foreign Policy*, Sep./Oct. 014 pp. 90–97.
 101. See *Комсомольская Правда*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, "Генпрокуратура РФ проверит законность выезда Прибалтики из СССР" 1 Jul. 2015.
 102. In the author's experience (as an academic), Russian academics and officials can be expected to bring up the illegality of NATO expansion at any academic conference where they are present.

103. An example of an anti-NATO leftist group that saw the Soviets with some sympathy and maintains the same attitude towards Russia today is the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the UK. The core of the CND has always been hard leftist, but they have some influence to include some members of Parliament. It's hard for the CND to deal with the Russian invasion of the Ukraine except to say that it was the NATO expansion that is the real cause of the problem. The CND still advocates that the UK withdraw from NATO.
104. On Russia's approach to soft power and information see Robert Orturg, "Russia's Use of PR as a Foreign Policy Tool," *Russian Analytical Digest* 81, Jun. 2010, pp. 7–10. See also "Russia's World" – Russia's Soft Power Approach to Compatriot's Policy," *Russian Analytical Digest* 81, Jun. 2010, pp. 2–4.
105. For an excellent overview of the Russian doctrine of information operations and their employment in the last 15 years see Nerijus Maliukevičius, "(Re)Constructing Russian Soft Power in Post-Soviet Region," *Baltic Security and Defence Review* vol. 15, Issue 2, 2013, pp. 70–97.
106. The four volumes of Project Russia lay out the ideology of the Putin Regime: See Шалыганов, Юрий (Shalyganov, Yuri, et al.). *Проект Россия: Первая Книга* (Project Russia: The First Book). Moscow: EKSMO Press, 2006. Шалыганов, Юрий (Shalyganov, Yuri, et al.). *Проект Россия Выбор Пути: Вторая Книга* (Project Russia, Volume 2: Path Selection). Moscow: EKSMO Press, 2007.
- Шалыганов, Юрий (Shalyganov, Yuri, et al.). *Проект Россия Третье Тысячелетие: Третья книга* (Project Russia, Volume 3: The Third Millennium). Moscow: EKSMO Press, 2009. Шалыганов, Юрий (Shalyganov, Yuri, et al.). *Проект Россия Большая Идея: Четвёртая книга* (Project Russia, Volume 4: A Great Idea). Moscow: EKSMO Press, 2010. Шалыганов, Юрий (Shalyganov, Yuri, et al.). *Проект Россия: Полное Собрание* (Project Russia: The Complete Collection). Moscow: EKSMO Press, 2014.
107. The standard Russian disinformation themes of NATO as an aggressive threat against Russia, with NATO exercises in Northern Europe and NATO air policing in the Baltic States, as well as the illegitimacy of NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe are routinely cited as examples of NATO aggression against Russia in the Sputnik English language programmes aired in the UK.
108. For an in-depth discussion of Russian television news techniques see Stephen Castle, "Playing with reality on Russian TV news," *International Herald Tribune*, 14–15 Feb. 2016.
109. Gen Philip M. Breedlove speech at NATO Summit, Wales. Dec. 2014.
110. Mark Laity, *The Three Swords Magazine* 28/2015.
111. Lt. Col. John A. Nagl, US Army, USAF 2007 Counterinsurgency Symposium.



A USAF MQ-9 Reaper, armed with GBU-12 Paveway II laser guided munitions and AGM-114 Hellfire missiles, flies a combat mission over southern Afghanistan in 2008.

CHAPTER 3

Strategic Communications and American Air Power

Dr Conrad Crane and Dr James S. Corum

This chapter will focus on the relationship of the American air power, primarily the US Air Force, with the media and the public. In the era since service independence in 1947 American airmen have generally enjoyed a high level of support inside the media and with the public. However, there have been long periods when this relationship was a very rocky one. While today US air power enjoys a high standing with the public, as does the whole of the US military, there are also some problems in terms of public support for air power and in the effectiveness of the US Air Force in portraying American air power of the public.

The Air Force, and its predecessors the Army Air Corps and the Army Air Forces (AAF), have been

highly effective in terms of pushing their service view to the public. Since the time of the Air Service, US Army in World War I, the American Airman has shown considerable talent at public relations and getting American military aviation before the public in a favourable light. Beginning with the years following World War I, American Army airmen held the view that their service had the potential to be the branch of service that would be decisive in future wars. American airmen in the 1920s crafted a doctrine of strategic bombing that emphasized the independent role of air power in war.

From the early 1920s, through World War II and right up to 1947, the leaders of the Air Service (and later Air Corps and Air Forces) believed that, in order to be fully effective, air assets needed to be controlled by a fully independent branch of the US military. With that goal in mind, key air leaders developed a close relationship with the media to build public support for service independence. Though air leaders successfully used this public support to gain

appropriations and support from Congress, they also irritated the Army's senior leadership to the point that, at start of World War II, they tended to reject the claims that air power could be the decisive weapon of war.

Pioneers of Strategic Communication – Mitchell and Arnold

Early attitudes about strategic communications on the Army Air Corps were shaped in part by the experience of Brigadier General William 'Billy' Mitchell, the most outspoken American air power advocate in the period between the World Wars. He had commanded the front Aviation combat forces of the American Expeditionary Force in France and returned from that war determined to get the American air arm its due. When his initial campaign to get recognition within military and government circles failed, he moved to a more public campaign, shrewdly emphasizing the defensive capabilities of air power for the United States. His spectacular sinking of the battleship *Ostfriesland* in 1921 was the highlight of this phase of his strategic communications plan.

When that failed to achieve his objectives, his arguments became more shrill, until, in 1924, he began to attack the War and Navy Departments in a series of articles in the press alleging 'treasonable administration of the national defense' because of their neglect of air power. Such actions eventually led to his court-martial conviction in late 1925 for conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline and bringing discredit upon the military service. His unusual punishment, five years suspension from active duty at half pay, achieved its purpose in motivating Mitchell to resign from military service. Despite his failure to achieve his goal, the future leaders of the Air Force – Henry 'Hap' Arnold, Carl Spaatz, and Ira Eaker – were all inspired by Mitchell and he established a legacy that senior American air service leaders had to be outspoken advocates for air power. However, those who witnessed his court-martial also realized they had to be less confrontational in the way they presented their arguments.¹ After his resignation, Mitchell carried on writing about air power

and pushing for an independent air force. However, his adherents followed their own path in developing an American doctrine based on precision bombardment.² Mitchell's followers also knew they had to win support for an independent force from within the services and, most of all, from the public. The future of the Air Corps would be based on strong public support.

The rising star of the Air Corps, Hap Arnold, who had served as America's youngest colonel in the First World War, understood the importance of getting public support. As chief of public relations on the staff of the Air Corps in Washington in the 1920s, he took the initiative to put air power in the public eye. Arnold not only cultivated the press, he wrote a series of boys' adventure books about the career of a fictional American aviator 'Bill Bruce' through his service in World War I to his adventures flying in the Air Service. In another take on getting support for military aviation, Arnold encouraged the Army Air Corps to have pilots participate in national air races and record-setting flights that brought international publicity to American air power and technology.³ It certainly helped that the most internationally renowned American of the 1920s was Charles Lindbergh, a reserve officer in the Air Corps, who made the first New York to Paris flight in 1927.

As a rising star among the Air Corps leaders, Arnold wasted no opportunity to get positive publicity for American air power. As commander of the 1st Bombardment Group in southern California in the early 1930s, Hap Arnold made good connections in nearby Hollywood and whenever possible provided Air Corps locations and airplanes for Hollywood films. Posing Hollywood's top actors with America's latest airplanes was sure to get positive publicity in the 1930s. Arnold also arranged for Air Corps demonstration flights at the 1932 Olympic Games. In 1934 Arnold led a flight of B-10 bombers, the Army's first all-metal monoplane bombers, on a record-breaking flight to Fairbanks Alaska, showing how America's new bombers could fly and navigate long distances and quickly deploy to far regions. The flight also won national publicity and the McKay Trophy.⁴

The Air Corps' public affairs campaign certainly won the public over. In 1935, when modern style polling had just been created, one of the first Gallup polls asked Americans about increasing defence spending. About half of Americans favoured increased spending on the Army (54%) and the Navy (48%), but 74% of Americans favoured increased spending on military aviation.⁵ In following years the numbers of Americans supporting an increase in military aviation spending rose, with 80% favouring more spending in 1937 and 90% in both 1938 and 1939. While large majorities of Americans also supported increased spending on the Army and Navy, the public support for the other services was lower than that for military aviation.⁶

As American entry into World War II approached, public support for air power continued to rise. In a Gallup Poll of June 1941, on the question of which service most needed strengthening 66% of the public answered that the AAF was most in need, with only 18% answering that the Navy needed strengthening and 10% the Army. The public's support for air power as America's top priority persisted into the war, with 50% stating that the AAF should have the first claim on materials.⁷ In Gallup polls of August 1942, 58% of Americans supported an independent air force.⁸ The overwhelming public support for the Air Force was, in large part, due to the brilliant salesmanship of General Hap Arnold, who had become chief of the Air Corps in 1938. Arnold was unique in having a real genius for public relations.

Arnold wrote to his senior commanders in 1942, 'Within the borders of continental United States, two most important fronts exist, namely, aircraft production and public opinion.' He thought that the American public was entitled 'to see pictures, stories and experiences of our Air Force in combat zones', and he sent personnel from his staff around the world to gather such information. He also favoured the declassification of as much information as possible, an unusual position for most military leaders. In 1943 he complained to his commanders that too much information was being withheld because of secrecy; it was more important that the people be kept informed of

the major impact the Air Force was making on the enemy's war effort, an impact that could save millions of lives in ground combat. 'For whole-hearted and official support of our Air Forces in their operations ... the people [must] understand thoroughly our Air Force precepts, principles, and purposes ... In short, we want the people to understand and have faith in *our way of making war*.'⁹

General Arnold understood the value of communication directly to the American people through every media type and of sending a clear message to the public. In 1942 he encouraged the noted author (and later Nobel Prize Winner) John Steinbeck to write a book about training an AAF bomber crew. Steinbeck was given full support to visit AAF bases and observe all aspects of AAF training. His book, *Bombs Away: The Story of a Bomber Team*, took the reader through the training of a typical B-17 bomber crew, with the training programme of each crewmember – from pilot to gunner – described. The second half of the book brings the crew together to train as a bomber crew and then train to operate as part of a squadron and group.¹⁰ Steinbeck, with a folksy style, provided the public with a clear picture of how the AAF operated and of the typical men who served in the AAF. The book was highly popular for a public hungering for accurate information about America's airmen. After finishing the book, and having developed a close affinity for American airmen, Steinbeck went to England in 1943 to cover the AAF for the *New York Herald Tribune*.

During the war, General Arnold worked his excellent Hollywood connections to the fullest to present American air power to the public. America's top movie stars, like Clark Gable and Jimmy Stewart, joined the AAF and flew combat missions, which were noted in the press and newsreels. Actor Ronald Reagan, whose eyesight kept him from flying, directed and narrated training films. Arnold ensured that the AAF was prominently featured in the media of the time, both press and film, and the public relations effort of the AAF surpassed the other services. By November 1944 fully 40 percent of the total film released by the Army to newsreels came from AAF

combat camera units.¹¹ General Arnold himself appeared regularly before the public in brilliantly produced half-hour documentary films about the activities of the AAF. Arnold would open each film with a short talk about the AAF being America's air power and emphasizing the role of all Americans in supporting the AAF. The films themselves were highly informative and showed combat footage and depicted every fighting front, as well as every aspect of air power. Strategic bombing was shown in both Europe and in Japan, the AAF was shown providing close air support for allies. Transport forces were not ignored and the films featured the feats of transports crossing the Pacific and bringing supplies to China. AAF engineers were shown carrying out miracles of base building under nearly impossible conditions. The activities of the training units and the civilian aircraft workers were noted as well. Arnold's films also showed American losses and the harsh conditions of the war and never failed to describe the enemy as tough and capable. Yet the films showed the public the central role that air power was playing in every victory in Africa, Europe and the Pacific and how a powerful air force enabled American success. Arnold's sincerity and manner were highly effective in communicating with the public.¹² In another ingenious use of Hollywood, the Walt Disney Studio produced a film with animation illustrating the book by aircraft builder Alexander DeSeversky, 'Victory through Air Power'. Arnold ensured that the AAF provided full support to films featuring American airmen, most notably the 1942 film 'Air Force' that told the story of the devastating efficiency of heavy bombers against the enemy.

Beginning in the 1920s, the Air Corps, which would become the AAF in 1941, promoted the idea of 'air mindedness' and the vision of an independent air force, which was justified by the decisive role that air power was bound to play in the future. Before and during the war, the AAF publically promoted the core doctrine that precision bombing of key industrial and infrastructure targets was the path to military victory. The AAF emphasized the precision aspects of the theory in the belief that the American public would not stand for any doctrine of indiscriminate

aerial bombardment of civilians.¹³ As the American strategic bombing campaign became increasingly effective, and increasingly lethal, in 1944–45 General Arnold and his close friend and commander of the US Strategic Air Forces in Europe, General Carl Spaatz, expressed concern about the image of American air power being presented to the American people.

Even using the best technology and training to employ precision bombing, the US bombing of German industrial and transport centres was to cause massive collateral damage given the limitations of 1945 technology. Although the Americans did not expressly target city centres as area targets, hitting industries in built up areas, or attacking rail yards in the centres of German cities had much the same effect. Thus, the AAF public relations touched on the subject of enemy civilian casualties and collateral damage with great sensitivity. Newsreels and still photos released by the AAF never showed collateral damage and instead emphasized accuracy and discriminate targeting. AAF headquarters was always concerned about a negative reaction from the public to attacks on enemy cities, and their fears were realized in February 1945 with the massive bombing of Dresden and the general destruction of that city. As the result of a press conference after the Dresden attacks on the 14th and 15th, nationwide headlines appeared such as 'Terror Bombing Gets Allied Approval as Step to Speed Victory'. Howard Cowan, an AP reporter, based his story on Dresden on a briefing in Paris by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) Air Staff. The RAF air commodore who had given the briefing did not mention causing terror or civilian casualties, but he did point out that recent heavy-bomber attacks on population centres such as Dresden had caused great need for relief supplies and had strained the German economic system. Arnold was appalled at the negative publicity and worried that the AAF would be tarred with the same brush as the British for conducting area attacks.¹⁴ After the Dresden bombing, which was carried out by both the Royal Air Force and the AAF, Secretary of War Henry Stimson expressed grave concern about the bombing policies and ordered an investigation. 'An account of it has come out of

Germany which makes the destruction seem on its face terrible and probably unnecessary.' The resulting AAF report by Arnold's staff blamed RAF incendiary bombs for most of the damage in Dresden. Trustful of his military advisers, Stimson seemed satisfied, and he let the matter drop.¹⁵ Yet, General Spaatz, the strategic bombing commander in Europe, also expressed concerns about the moral aspects of bombing German cities and how the Air Force would look in the post-war analysis. The deputy chief of the air staff in Eisenhower's headquarters said of General Spaatz, 'He is determined that the American Air Forces will not end this war with a reputation for indiscriminate bombing'.¹⁶

As a result of these concerns, in March 1945 the AAF issued new policies generally ending the bombing of German cities. Ironically, it was the US Army that wanted exceptions be made to the new policy and requested that the AAF strike German cities near the front. As Army ground forces swept into Germany and encountered resistance in German urban areas, they wanted heavy air support to pulverize the collapsing German forces. In the end, there was no public outcry in the United States over the bombing of German cities and the heavy damage and casualties caused by the bombing.

That issue of targeting cities and civilians would become harder to avoid in light of Major General Curtis LeMay's incendiary bombing campaign against Japanese cities, which began the same month as the restrictive bombing directive in Europe. Newspaper accounts of the fire raids, mirroring Air Force intelligence on bombing results, concentrated on physical damage rather than on civilian deaths. Articles about the big Tokyo raid of the night of 9 March that opened the campaign were typical. They noted the heavy population density, but emphasized that in the area destroyed, 'eight identifiable industrial targets lie in ruins along with hundreds of other industrial plants'. One account quoting LeMay mentioned thousands of 'home industries' destroyed, and another claimed that the raid's purpose was realized 'if the B-29s shortened the war by one day'. Accounts did not estimate civilian casualties, but they did proclaim that the many

thousands made homeless posed an immense refugee problem for the Japanese government. Deaths were not mentioned, and there were no pictures of the destruction, only maps of the destroyed zone.¹⁷ The lack of reference to non-combatant casualties by the press reflected the AAF accounts of the incendiary attacks, which avoided the issue. In Washington, it was again only War Secretary Stimson who expressed concern over the morality of the AAF bombing policies. General Arnold explained that because of Japanese dispersal of their industry, 'it was practically impossible to destroy the war output of Japan without doing more damage to civilians connected with the output than in Europe'. Arnold promised Stimson that 'they were trying to keep it down as far as possible'. So Stimson continued to approve the fire raids, but was very disappointed that there was no public protest about them.¹⁸

However, the attitude of the American military and political leaders, as well as the American public, was highly supportive of the firebombing of Japan. The Pacific campaigns were bloody and the country was tired of war. Any actions seen as hastening the end of the war and bringing back more American servicemen alive was seen as morally justified. The attacks that caused the most collateral damage and civilian casualties were the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Despite the massive devastation and heavy civilian losses, the attacks did bring a quick end to the most destructive war in history and probably saved America the hundreds of thousands of casualties that would have resulted from invading the Japanese homeland.

Despite the AAF's worries about its public image, the ultimate city bombing of the war – the atomic bomb – was approved by 85% of Americans in a poll of August 1945. The swift end of the war and the saving of American lives by forcing Japan's immediate surrender was seen as the best solution. Interestingly enough, after decades of discussion about the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki with many books and documentaries opposing the action, fifty years after the use of atomic weapons on Japan a strong majority (59%) of Americans still approved of

the decision to use the atomic bomb. The reasoning behind the American approval is clear. In a 1995 Gallup poll 86% of Americans believed that the use of the atom bombs saved American lives.¹⁹

Early Cold War View of Air Power

At the end of the Second World War, the AAF stood high in the standing of the American people and, with approval of the Army and Navy leadership, became a separate service in 1947. Congress approved a goal of seventy air groups for the service, but rapid demobilization and budget cuts kept the force well below that level until the rearmament sparked by the Korean War. On V-J Day, the AAF possessed 2,253,000 men, but, by the end of May 1947, its total strength was down to only 303,614. However, so strong was the positive view of the Air Force that General Hoyt Vandenberg, the second chief of staff of the Air Force, proved himself very adept at garnering support from Congress and the public for Air Force programmes despite the Truman's administration reluctance to spend money on defence.²⁰ Indeed, it was the USAF that in 1948–49 won the West its first notable victory of the Cold War by accomplishing the seemingly impossible task of supplying the Allied enclave of West Berlin during the Soviet land blockade. The peaceful victory of American air power put the service into the public limelight and the Air Force's mission to deliver atomic weapons made it the centrepiece of American defence. In a 1949 Gallup Poll, an impressive 85% of Americans believed that, in any future war, the Air Force would be the most important service.²¹ The public view that the Air Force was, by far, the most important military service persisted every year from 1949 to 1960. The number of Americans who believed that the Air Force was the most important military branch dropped a bit during the Korean War but remained high throughout the decade.²²

The invasion of South Korea by the communist North in June 1950 shocked the West and pushed America into a major war – one it was not ready for. North Korea had been trained and prepared by Stalin's Soviet Union and had ample tanks and heavy equipment.

Their initial offensive tore through the weak South Korean Army. Having demobilized after the World War, the United States had few combat-ready forces, but available air and ground forces were immediately deployed to South Korea as America quickly mobilized. The weak South Korean and American forces, soon joined by several allied nations, were thrown back into a small perimeter around Pusan. In August 1950 American naval and Air Force aircraft carried out effective interdiction and close support operations that played a key role in halting the communist advance. The American landing at Inchon in September allowed for an allied counterattack that broke the North Korean forces. By October and November the US and South Korean forces had advanced almost to the Chinese border. China intervened with significant ground forces and, during the next three months, drove the UN coalition forces into headlong retreat to South Korea. In the spring of 1951, after the front was stabilized north of Seoul, the UN forces settled into a bloody war of attrition.

American public opinion initially strongly approved of President Truman's decision to commit US forces to war. In June 1950, 78% of Americans approved the action and only 15% disapproved. In August, when things were going badly, 65% of Americans still supported defending South Korea and only 20% thought the war was a mistake. However, after the Chinese winter attack, the UN retreat, and the beginning of stationary warfare, US opinion had changed. In February 1951, 49% of Americans thought the American involvement in the war was a mistake and only 41% supported defending South Korea.²³ In June 1951, after negotiations between the communists and the United Nations began, public opinion again switched to supporting the war, with 47% of Americans responding that the war had not been a mistake with 42% opposing the war. For the next two years, with negotiations going nowhere, public opinion again drifted into negative territory, with 50% of Americans believing in February 1952 that the war had been a mistake. Public opinion only edged up again into positive figures after Dwight Eisenhower was elected and promised to end the war.²⁴ The Korean Conflict ended in July 1953 with a negotiated truce.

The Korean War was an exceptionally frustrating conflict for the American people and military. Media/military relations had been poor, and in early 1951, with the war going badly, the theatre commander, General Douglas MacArthur, instituted full media censorship of media coverage of the war, just as had been the policy in World War II. The censorship was later lifted, but the rules for dealing with the media were left unclear. In any case, no media message could have presented a positive picture of a bloody, stalemated war. The war had exposed notable shortcomings with American military readiness, featuring major strategic mistakes (such as initially ignoring proof that the Chinese Army had intervened during the war) and showing the inability of American air power to cripple the North Korean and Red Chinese armies through massive interdiction campaigns. However, the shortcomings of the war were found mostly in the army's performance. American air power, if unable to deliver a decisive blow to the communists, twice saved the US Army and Marines from disaster. The massive application of air power in August 1950, in the account of US Eighth Army commander, stabilized the Pusan front and prevented the South Korean and US forces from having to evacuate the Korean Peninsula.²⁵ In the winter of 1950, the massive application of Air Force and Navy air power prevented the US 7th division and Marine 1st Division from being overrun. Air supply, as well as close air support enabled the US divisions to retreat in good order and evacuate North Korea as battered, but intact and combat capable units.²⁶

After the war, the Air Force worried about its image with the American public and launched a series of public relations measures designed to feature the Air Force in the best light. The first step was to carry out a vigorous publicity campaign to emphasize its role in Korea. In 1955 the Far East Air Forces Assistant Deputy for Operations, Colonel James T. Stewart, was selected by the USAF Public Information Office to edit a book that would demonstrate the service's important contributions in Korea. The title, *Airpower, The Decisive Force in Korea*, conveyed the message the Air Force wanted to send. His volume began with an article by General Otto Weyland, who had commanded the Air

Force in Korea, which summed up the air campaign and contained detailed studies of key bombing operations. He argued, 'Without question, the decisive force in the Korean War was air power.'²⁷ Robert Futrell at the Air University produced a history, *The United States Air Force in Korea 1950–1953, in 1958*. Futrell's book also emphasized the themes of successful and decisive air power.²⁸

Other ideas pushed by Air Force public relations to put the Air Force in a positive light for the broader public included a television show to influence parental opinion and comic strips and movies to popularize the Air Force. A drop in youth interest in aviation coincides with what historian Joseph Corn has portrayed as a period of decline in 'the air-age education movement' in the late 1940s. To influence young people to consider joining the Air Force, Milton Caniff's comic strip 'Steve Canyon' was designated to be subsidized as it would depict aviation cadet life and appeal to the 17–19 age group. In fact, the comic did do much to promote a positive image of the Air Force, as did the television show that derived from it.²⁹

Yet the limitations of air power demonstrated during the Korean War did the US Air Force no lasting harm in the eyes of the public or the government leaders. As soon as the Korean War ended, President Eisenhower announced a 'New Look' defence policy for the United States that included large cuts in Army and Navy strength and funding, while maintaining the Air Force budget and even increasing the funds and forces for the nuclear mission. For the next decade the United States Air Force would be the priority military service under a defence policy that relied on Air Force-delivered nuclear weapons to deter The USSR and China. The unpopularity of the bloody and inconclusive war in Korea soured both the American people and the military on engaging in another limited conventional war. Both during and after the Korean War, the American public named the Air Force as the most important branch of the armed forces, with 80% of Americans favouring the Air Force according to the Gallup Poll. Between 1953 and 1960 the Air Force dropped slowly in the public estimation, but 62% of Americans still listed the Air Force as the top service in 1960.³⁰

Vietnam – America’s Most Unpopular War

The role of the US military and the USAF in particular in Vietnam influenced the views of two generations of Americans and still has notable political and social effects today. In the early stages of the American military involvement in Southeast Asia (1961–1964), a state of considerable distrust was established between the US military command in Vietnam and the media. The difficult media/military relations stemmed primarily from the poor public relations policies of the Pentagon before major US forces were deployed to combat operations in 1965. The poor start of media/military relations would also affect the media coverage of the war and the media’s reporting of the war would play a central role in the collapse of the American public’s support for the war after 1968.

From 1961 to 1963, the American military assistance to South Vietnam was rapidly increased and, by early 1964, more than 20,000 American military advisors and support personnel were serving in the theatre. By 1963 major newspapers and media companies were deploying reporters to Vietnam to cover the war. Considerable friction between the military and the media arose from the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) headquarters in Vietnam and its attempt to put a positive spin on the South Vietnamese war effort against the Viet Cong insurgency. The problem lay in the consistently poor performance of the South Vietnamese as well as the South Vietnamese government’s incompetence and corruption. The actual situation could not be hidden from any enterprising journalist and the increased effectiveness of the Viet Cong in their fight against the South Vietnamese forces could not be ‘spun’ by even the American military’s Public relations effort.³¹

One of the most contentious issues for international and American media in the early stages of the Vietnam War was the employment of American air power. Officially, US Air Force personnel were in South Vietnam only to train and advise the South Vietnamese Air Force and were officially in a non-combat role. But by 1963 US airmen were routinely flying combat mis-

sions in support of the South Vietnamese due to the weakness of the South Vietnamese Air Force. The Pentagon and US MACV headquarters in South Vietnam attempted to deny the stories of Americans flying in combat, but soon journalists were demanding information about the American airmen in combat and the use of napalm and defoliants by American pilots. The military’s attempt to impose a news blackout on air combat operations in South Vietnam failed, as stories about the air operations appeared in American newspapers and magazines in 1964.³²

The other military/media confrontation over the air war in Southeast Asia concerned the American air operations in Laos. As Laos was officially a neutral country (but was already used by the North Vietnamese as a base and supply route to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam) any American operations there were classified and could not be acknowledged. In fact, it was impossible to keep American reconnaissance and bombing operations in Laos a secret – they were certainly no secret to the enemy. So despite a series of denials and evasions by the US military about air operations in Laos the story was quickly broken by the international media with the Chinese news agency putting out stories about Americans operating in Laos. American journalists at the time noted ironically that, in this case, the communist Chinese were proving more credible than the American military.³³

With military/media relations at a low point, in 1964 the new MACV commander, General Westmoreland, attempted to improve relations with the press by allowing the press greater access to information and press facilities. However, Westmoreland’s ‘Operation Candor’ had something of the opposite effect on military/media relations. The attempt of MACV to downplay the air operations in Laos even after the story broke further damaged the already poor credibility of the Defense Department. Thus, even before the commitment of major US combat forces to Vietnam, the American effort was already strongly criticized by the press and public. In a Harris Poll of October 1964, only 42% of the American public gave President Johnson good marks for his handling of the Vietnam War. In December 1964, this approval level fell to 38%.³⁴

As the war escalated and became the main media story for the American public, the Pentagon found itself operating in a completely new media environment. At the time of the Korean War, only 10% of the American households had a television. By 1966 96% of American homes had a TV and most Americans received their news through the evening television shows. Vietnam would be America's first televised war and the real images of the war shown on the evening news brought the war home to Americans in a way that print and radio journalism never could. Although strict media censorship had been imposed by the US military during World War II and for part of the Korean War and was discussed as a possibility by the Pentagon in 1963 and 1964, this approach was never a realistic option. South Vietnam was not a closed theatre of war and the American public expected television coverage of news events.³⁵

Public Support for the Vietnam War

In 1965 President Johnson committed large American combat forces to South Vietnam, a force that would rise to over 500,000 personnel by 1968. He also ordered the commencement of a major Air Force/Navy air campaign against North Vietnam. A series of key industrial, military and logistics targets were identified, the loss of which would supposedly cripple North Vietnam's ability to support the Viet Cong insurgency in the south. Some of Johnson's closest advisors were highly optimistic that a sharp bombing campaign against North Vietnam would quickly force the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table and resolve the war.³⁶ From the start of the air campaign, US civilian and military leadership remained highly sensitive to the international media coverage of the war and any negative press that might result from civilian casualties. The targets for US air power in the North were carefully selected to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage. Highly restrictive guidelines for the air war were established that put North Vietnam's two most important cities, Hanoi and Haiphong, off limits to air attacks. These latter restrictions were kept in place until 1972, when President Nixon changed the bombing policies in order to force the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table.

When President Johnson committed major American forces to Vietnam in 1965, most of the media supported the policy and 61% of the public favoured Johnson's war policy, with 24% against and 15% with no opinion.³⁷ Like President Johnson, the American public hoped for a speedy resolution to the war. As the American military commitment to South Vietnam grew through 1966 and 1967, public support for the war remained fairly strong, but media coverage started becoming more negative, which was paired with a gradual decline in public support. The American public supported the air war over North Vietnam as a means to end the war quickly by forcing North Vietnam to negotiate. In early 1966 a Harris Poll indicated that 73% of Americans favoured efforts to achieve a ceasefire and 59% favoured a halt to the US bombing if that would de-escalate the war. Yet, at the same time, a Harris Poll of February 1966 showed that 61% of the American public was ready to accept an all-out bombing campaign of North Vietnam if the communists refused to negotiate. For the public – and in this case the media broadly reflected the public's view – the main issue about Vietnam was the duration of the war. The public supported the war as long as there was a good hope for a speedy and favourable resolution.³⁸ There was also hope in the Johnson administration that the combined air and ground strategy was working. In the spring of 1967, General Westmoreland had concluded that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had reached their high point and were in decline.³⁹

North Vietnamese Information Operations

In Vietnam, America had a very capable enemy who was extremely competent in using information operations. As America entered the war in Vietnam, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese developed the *dich van* programme (action among the enemy). *Dich van* was a sophisticated psychological warfare programme directed against the civilians of South Vietnam and America as well as towards the international media. *Dich van* presented an idealized version of North Vietnam and the Viet Cong to the world while undermining the legitimacy of the South Vietnamese

government in the eyes of the international public.⁴⁰ In opposing the American air campaign, the North Vietnamese had several advantages. Throughout the war, communist nations maintained diplomatic and some trade ties to North Vietnam. What was surprising was that American's European allies and Canada did as well. Thus, international journalists, preferably those with known leftist sympathies, could visit North Vietnam and present the North Vietnamese view to the world.

The North Vietnamese had two major themes in their presentation of the American air campaign. The first was that the US bombing was indiscriminate and targeting civilian sites of no military significance. The second theme was that the North Vietnamese were able to adapt and continue the fight despite US power. Both themes were highly popular with the international media and were disseminated by sympathetic journalists. The North Vietnamese consistently overstated the damage caused by American aircraft and grossly inflated civilian casualties in their presentations to a largely credulous and anti-American international press corps. In fact, for all the bombs dropped on North Vietnam, the collateral damage to civilian targets and civilian casualties was very low.⁴¹ The North Vietnamese civilians were portrayed as a valiant people under relentless bombardment by a large, aggressor nation.⁴² In late 1966, the North Vietnamese managed to reach a mainstream American audience by allowing a top reporter from the *New York Times*, Harrison Salisbury, to visit North Vietnam and report on the air war. As a guest of North Vietnam, Salisbury was given a closely guided tour of bomb sites. Salisbury, whose reports were published in the *New York Times* and as a book in 1967, proved exceptionally gullible to disinformation. Salisbury dutifully reported North Vietnamese stories of civilian casualties and damage. On the front page of the *New York Times*, Salisbury reported that the USAF was deliberately 'dropping an enormous weight of explosives on purely civilian targets'.⁴³ Brought to a pile of rubble he was told that it was the Catholic cathedral of Phat Diem. In other instances he reported the North Vietnamese claims of damage and casualties with no attempts to visit the sites or verify the claims.⁴⁴

Salisbury's reports received national attention in the US as the first American insider account of the North Vietnamese war. In fact, much of what Salisbury reported was easily debunked as disinformation. A USAF aerial reconnaissance photo showed the reportedly destroyed cathedral of Phat Diem as standing and unharmed. Bombed towns Salisbury described as having purely civilian industries actually had significant military installations.⁴⁵ Although the story of Americans bombing civilians played well in the international media and helped inspire the anti-war movement and the massive anti-Vietnam demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s, it was the other part of the story that had the greatest effect on the American public. Salisbury's reporting showed a nation whose morale was high and was effectively coping with the bombing and using its manpower and many simple adaptations to maintain the support of the war in the South. In short, the US bombing campaign was neither breaking the North Vietnamese will nor was it crippling their ability to send troops and supplies to South Vietnam.

Surprisingly, the US government and military failed to mount any media campaign of their own to counter the constant drumbeat of North Vietnamese propaganda in international forums. Indeed, the biggest loser of the media war was the South Vietnamese government, which had its legitimacy questioned and was publicly derided by most of the international media from the beginning of the war. While unable to defend its own policies effectively, the United States also failed to finance and support a coherent South Vietnamese government effort to bring its view of the conflict, and the views of the majority of South Vietnamese, who had no great love for the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese either, before the international media.⁴⁶

The Tet Offensive and the Break With the Media and Military

In January–February of 1968 the communist launched a massive offensive against South Vietnamese cities that took the Americans and allied forces by surprise. In the severe fighting that followed the Viet Cong was largely destroyed as a military force.⁴⁷ While the Tet

Offensive worked out as a notable military victory for the South Vietnamese and the Americans, it was portrayed in much of the international and American media as a US military disaster. America's top television journalist, Walter Cronkite, declared that the American effort in Vietnam had failed and his view was echoed throughout the media.⁴⁸ By early 1968 American public opinion had turned decisively against the war with 49% of Americans saying the war was a mistake and only 41% supporting the war.⁴⁹ After Tet the television and print media were increasingly critical of the Pentagon and military. For the next five years, until the US withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1973, public opinion declined.⁵⁰ After Tet President Johnson announced he would not seek a second term and announced an end to the American bombing of North Vietnam as a prelude to peace talks with the North Vietnamese.⁵¹

The dramatic loss of public support severely hindered the American president's ability to maintain the American war effort. From 1969 to 1973, American ground troops were withdrawn from South Vietnam as the ground war was turned over to the South Vietnamese. However, the US Air Force and Navy maintained a strong air presence in the theatre. Although the US bombing of North Vietnam was halted in 1968, when the North Vietnamese took advantage of the American troop withdrawals and launched a major ground offensive in the South in the spring of 1972, President Nixon renewed the air strikes on North Vietnam. With the North Vietnamese now conducting a conventional war against the south, complete with tanks and heavy artillery, they were much more vulnerable to air strikes on the logistics lines and heavy forces. In fact, air power gained a significant victory in 1972, as it played the main role in defeating the North Vietnamese offensive, with heavy losses to the enemy.⁵² But Nixon's renewal of the air war went against American public opinion that now wanted a complete end to the war. The bombing of Hanoi in December 1972 helped end the impasse at the negotiating table and enable an agreement for a ceasefire in the South with full US withdrawal in 1973.⁵³

By 1972 the Vietnam War as well as the US military had become very unpopular with the American people.

The later stages of the Vietnam War saw a breakdown in American military morale with widespread indiscipline, violent racial confrontations, and drug use among military members.⁵⁴ The military faced a tidal wave of negative press coverage with the revelations of the 1969 My Lai Massacre, where a platoon of the Americal Division slaughtered a large number of Vietnamese civilians.⁵⁵ In 1971 the New York Times published the *Pentagon Papers*, which showed that the military and civilians leaders had not been honest with the American people about the war in its early stages.⁵⁶ The public's confidence in the American military, which had been more than 70% at the outset of the war, barely registered over 50% in the early 1970s, it would remain at a low level into the 1980s.⁵⁷

After the 1973 Peace Accords, the North Vietnamese carefully took American public opinion into account in planning further moves against South Vietnam. The 1972 invasion had produced heavy losses and a sharp defeat in which American air power had played the major role. The North Vietnamese could only conduct a major attack if assured that American air power would not intervene. In 1974 President Nixon, politically crippled from the Watergate affair, resigned the presidency and the US Congress, now overwhelmingly against any military involvement in Vietnam, cut off all funding for military operations. Secure in knowledge that America would not intervene, the North Vietnamese launched a massive conventional invasion of South Vietnam in early 1975. The offensive was spearheaded by large tank columns, supported by heavy artillery and supplied by a large mass of trucks – all of which would have been ideal targets for American air power if American forces had intervened. But the American public's opposition was so strong that the American military had to stand by as South Vietnam collapsed in April 1975.⁵⁸

Long Term Fallout From Vietnam – Disconnecting the Elites From the Military

A significant long-term effect of the Vietnam War, one that persists to this day, was to disconnect the American elites from their nation's military. During the Viet-

nam War, the universities became a centre for anti-war protest, much of it violent. Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) buildings on dozens of campuses were vandalized or burned and even bombed. Anti-war emotion raged high on many campuses and dozens of elite universities banned military training (ROTC) from the campus.⁵⁹ Five of the Ivy League universities threw ROTC off campus as did top universities such as CalTech and Stanford, as well as other smaller but selective colleges.⁶⁰

At the same time that the military was thrown off campus, the strong anti-war sentiment in academia worked to push anything associated with the military out of the university, which included the study of military history. This was especially the case in the elite universities. After the Vietnam War, the study of military history at universities went into a steady decline, which is still ongoing, and the academic study of military history is in danger of dying out in the United States.⁶¹ In 1975 2.4% of history faculties in American universities listed a military history specialist, but that number had fallen to only 1.9% by 2005. In contrast, 8.9% of the faculties have specialists in women's studies. For three decades (1970s to 2007), the main journal of American academic historians, the *American Historical Review*, published not a single article dealing with war or battles.⁶²

While ROTC rebounded and continues at hundreds of American universities, the top tier universities resisted any contact with the military for decades. Only after the 9/11 attack and renewed public interest did a few of the elite universities reconsider their Vietnam-era decisions to ban the military. After six years of debate, and forty-two years after removing ROTC from Stanford the university senate voted to allow ROTC back on campus. Harvard recently agreed to allow ROTC back. However, ROTC is still unwelcome at other elite universities that banned the military more than four decades ago.⁶³ In New York City, home to many universities including top ranked universities such as New York University, ROTC was completely absent from the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn, areas with a population of approximately three million with tens of thousands of university students.⁶⁴ ROTC finally

returned to City University of New York in 2013 after more than four decades of absence. Yet, even though the elite universities are less hostile to the military than they were decades ago, the number of students taking military training at elite schools is very small. In 2011, there were only five ROTC cadets in the Columbia University student body and only three at Yale University (both institutions were over 10,000 students).⁶⁵ That is less than 0.04% of students between the two schools.

Not only are future officers rare in the elite universities, US military veterans are also rare. Although military veterans represent approximately 10% of the American population and younger veterans represent 4.9% of the national collegiate population, in the thirty-one top-rated universities, in 2013 there were only 168 military veterans enrolled in undergraduate programmes – a negligible percentage of the tens of thousands of students. Among Ivy League schools, the rate of veteran enrolment is abysmal. In 2013, Yale University had two veterans enrolled, Princeton one veteran, and Brown zero.⁶⁶ By 2016, veteran student numbers had not improved for the Ivy League schools and selective private universities.⁶⁷

This disconnect between the military and elite educational institutions stems from the heritage of hostility from the Vietnam War that was firmly ensconced in the academic community. In the post 9/11 debates on bringing ROTC back to campus it was the faculty, rather than the students, who tended to insist on keeping the military away.⁶⁸ In academic circles, the low regard for the military that was common in the 1970s still persists. Education reporter Wick Sloane noted that the president of one Ivy League university had told him that 'Veterans can't do the work', a likely explanation why the elite institutions make no effort to recruit them as students.⁶⁹

Studies of US armed forces recruitment show that the US military is still well connected to the broader American middle class. Even in the midst of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US military services have recruited a disproportionately large number of enlisted recruits from the top 40% of American house-

holds in terms of income. In 2007–2008, 49.3% of enlisted recruits came from this demographic and only 29% of recruits came from the lowest 40% of the households in terms of income.⁷⁰ However, it is among the top 3% of the American households, precisely the group that is generally educated in the elite universities and where that group educates their children, that the military/society disconnect occurs. This disconnect may have long-term consequences for American civil/military relations. The part of the American society with the greatest influence in business, media and politics is also that part of society with the least personal connection to the American military. Because the elite universities have cut themselves off from the military, the academic study of war, and from veterans it means that a person from the top 3% of the population will most likely go through a university and graduate programme without ever meeting a person training to be an officer or who has served in the armed forces. Almost none of the elite graduates will have ever taken a military history course. In short, for American elites, their information about the military will come from popular culture (television and films) or from a largely anti-military professoriate.

Military/Media Relations After Vietnam

One of the long term effects of the Vietnam War was to create an adversarial relationship between the media and the military that would last to the First Gulf War and even beyond. The military accused the media, with some justification, of undermining the war with the American people, especially by portraying the Tet battles of 1968 as an American defeat. The media in the 1970s stood much higher than the military in the view of the public and assumed the title of the 'Fourth Estate', seeing its role to expose government and military scandals. In 1976, the media hit its highest point of public confidence ever, with 72% of the public expressing 'A great deal or quite a lot' of confidence in the media.⁷¹ At that time the media stood 20 points above the military in public confidence. In the post-Vietnam period, much of the blame for the state of the media/military relationship

went back to the early days of the Vietnam War. The media could rightfully point to the actions of the government and military leadership in misleading the public about the nature of the air war and of the state of the South Vietnamese forces and government.

In the latter stages of the Vietnam War and beyond, the military was in bad shape in terms of its effectiveness, morale and public standing. Throughout the 1970s, there were not many positive stories to report on the American military. The military services themselves saw the Vietnam War as a bad period and looked to forget the war and focus on developing future forces for a large scale conventional war in Europe. Indeed, the military's preference was to bury the Vietnam War rather than study it and, because Vietnam was associated with counterinsurgency, that subject and the study of small conflicts was largely shut down in American staff colleges for the next twenty years. There was also little interest in learning lessons from how the military had dealt with the media in Vietnam. In another failure to learn from the war, the military failed to carry out a thorough study of the North Vietnamese *dich van* campaign, which had worked so successfully to delegitimize the South Vietnamese government in the eyes of the world and to brand the Americans as ruthless aggressors in the international media. This meant that, again, the United States might face a hostile international media without a plan.

For the fifteen years after Vietnam, the attitude of the senior US military commanders was to keep the media at arms-length and either side-line or avoid contact with them if possible. This, in turn, only served to make an unfriendly media even more suspicious that the military had something to hide. Yet the media did not understand that the military of the post-1980 era was also no longer the crippled American military of the late Vietnam War years. The US military was thoroughly rebuilt in the decade after Vietnam, with higher recruiting standards, new equipment and better training. A decade after Vietnam, the US military, by then an all-volunteer force, was an exceptionally capable professional force. However, it was a picture

that the press had not seen as the US entered into several new conflicts.

The first major military operation after Vietnam was the US intervention in Grenada in October 1983. In this case, military commanders worked to keep the press away from all aspects of the operation until long after the fighting had stopped. The junior officers of Vietnam, many of whom blamed the media for losing the war, were now senior officers. In Grenada there were to be no opportunities for the media to portray the US forces in a negative light. Thus, the media was barred from accompanying the amphibious assault on Grenada and journalists loudly complained to their companies and to the military about a lack of assistance from the military to get to the island to cover the story. Once the US forces were on the ground, US commanders ordered the journalists who made it to the island to be arrested for their own safety. In addition, some reporters accused US Navy aircraft of firing on their boats as they tried to get to Grenada. If this was a low point for military/media relations, it was also a low point in the media's attitude towards the military. After Vietnam, many in the media instinctively assumed that any American military venture was wrong-headed and bound to fail.⁷² However, one good thing came out of the Grenada operation and that was an agreement between Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger and major media companies to form a pool of reporters who were approved to cover military operations and could be deployed quickly to the scene of action.

The next major military intervention came in Panama in 1990 and was the first test of the press pool concept. It did not go particularly well. The biggest problem came from the press organizations, which planned poorly, bringing in people and equipment late and failing to cooperate with the military in planning for transportation. There were also serious breaches of security on the part of the press, with newsmen talking openly of the US intervention beforehand. In the end, the press arrived late and was held on US bases until most of the operation was over. As in Grenada, US military commanders treated the press with a great deal of distrust.⁷³

For all the distrust on the military's side, and the lack of competence and professionalism displayed by the media in Panama, the Defense Department realized that things had to change in military/media relations in future conflicts. In a democracy, the media needs to be able to have access to the troops in combat and to as much information as possible without compromising security. As the media could not be avoided, it would be necessary for senior commanders to be proactive and engage with the media and address their concerns. As a result of the Panama operation, the military would take a very different approach to dealing with the media in the Gulf War of 1990–91.

Air Power, the Media, and Public Opinion 1983–1991

Between the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War, American air power was a feature of two military operations. In 1982 President Ronald Reagan deployed a force of US Marines to Lebanon as part of an international peacekeeping force to enforce the ceasefire between Israel (which had invaded Lebanon to fight the PLO) and the PLO and its allied Lebanese factions. At first all went well, but after several months, the international forces were drawn into the ongoing Lebanese civil war. The US Navy provided gunfire support to the Lebanese Army fighting pro-Syrian factions. Still serving in the peacekeeping role, the US forces in Lebanon became targets of the Lebanese factions, which included Hezbollah (the Shia Lebanese organization). Hezbollah specialized in guerrilla attacks and pioneered the use of suicide bombing as an operational technique. In October 1983, British and French peacekeeping forces were attacked by Hezbollah suicide bombs with heavy losses and the US Marine battalion stationed near the Beirut airport was virtually destroyed by a large truck packed with explosives that was driven into the US Marine Barracks by a suicide bomber. Almost 300 Marines died and hundreds more were wounded.

The US responded with military action against hostile groups occupying Lebanon, including the Syrian Army as well as Hezbollah. In December the US lost two carrier-based aircraft striking Syrian positions. A Harris Poll after the strikes asked if the loss of

American lives in Lebanon had been worth it and 67% responded it was not worth it. At the same time, a Gallup Survey asked if they approved or disapproved of US air strikes against Syrian Army positions in Lebanon, and 64% approved.⁷⁴ As the intermittent strikes continued, in February 1984 a Harris Poll asked Americans if they thought the US air strikes would work to keep the Syrians from controlling Beirut, and 49% said that the strikes were 'not likely to work' and 37% said they were likely to work.⁷⁵ Essentially, the American public was willing to support air strikes if the president ordered them, especially against groups that had attacked Americans. But the public was also not behind the US involvement in Lebanon, a situation where there was no clear strategy behind the US deployment. President Reagan soon ordered the withdrawal of US troops from Lebanon.

The other instance of using American air power in the 1980s was Operation Eldorado Canyon, a major US air strike against Libyan military targets in Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986. There had been a series of Libyan provocations against the US that culminated in the terror bombing of a West Berlin disco by Libyan agents in which several American soldiers were killed and others wounded. With proof that Libya's dictator was behind the deed, Air Force F-111s and Navy fighters struck Libya. The air strikes resulted in heavy damage to the Libyans and no American aircraft losses. The American public strongly supported the air strikes. An NBC/Wall Street Journal poll conducted before the terrorist attack on US soldiers in Berlin showed that 47% of the public favoured air strikes on Libya and 20% favoured a ground invasion. Only 17% of the public favoured no military response at that time. After the terror attack on the US troops four different polls indicated public support of over 70% for the air strikes with only 21% opposed.⁷⁶ Looking back, a poll was conducted two years later that asked the public whether they still supported the 1986 air strikes and 65% of the public still approved and disapproval had risen to only 27%. Clearly, despite some media criticism of President Reagan's strikes and Libya's claim that civilians were killed in the bombing, Americans strongly supported using air power against states or groups that conduct terror attacks on Americans.

Gulf War to Afghanistan – American Air Power, the Media, and Public Opinion

Chapter two of this study provided a review of the role of air power and disinformation from the 1991 Gulf War to the present, so this part of the US country study will focus on the relationship of the American media and the military and how air power and American military operations have been viewed through the lens of American public opinion in recent conflicts.

In August 1990, when the Iraqi Army under Saddam Hussein invaded and overran Kuwait, the United States responded by rushing large air, ground and naval forces into the theatre. Saddam Hussein's aggression was so blatant that there was massive worldwide support to employ force, or the threat of it, to push the Iraqi regime out of Kuwait. Hoping to coerce Iraq to leave Kuwait, the United States and allied nations began a massive force build-up in Saudi Arabia and in the Persian Gulf. US forces were joined by Saudi, Egyptian and Syrian troops, as well as British and French ground forces and air units from several NATO nations. A grand coalition was formed and, between August 1990 and January 1991, training and planning began for an air and ground war against Iraq if the ultimatum to withdraw Iraqi forces was not heeded. However, maintaining a coalition and leading it into battle would be tricky from a command perspective and would require good media relations and maintenance of strong public support through all the Coalition countries, not just the United States. It was not an option to keep the press at arms-length, as maintaining good relations with the media and planning the operation to minimize friction with them were essential elements of the final war plan. The emphasis by the Coalition commanders on how the war played in the media was seen as necessary to prevent friction and opposition within the large international Coalition. Maintaining Coalition support by minimizing civilian casualties and collateral damage were also major factors in planning the air campaign.⁷⁷

All the senior American military commanders were Vietnam veterans and they were determined that the

military would not make the same mistakes as in Vietnam. The US leaders knew that any mistakes could be exaggerated by the media and that the media had it in its power to undermine public support, not just in the United States but across the Coalition nations. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Colin Powell and CENTCOM commander General Norman Schwarzkopf, the commander of all Coalition forces in the theatre, understood that they would have to deal with a large press corps and brief them regularly, dealing with major issues quickly. Two decades after Vietnam, the relationship with the US media and military was still largely antagonistic and the recent disputes between the media and the military during the Panama operation did not make for an easy or trusting relationship.

In the run-up to the war, between August 1990 and January 1991, the antagonism between the media and the military was very much in evidence. While the Saudis wanted few members of the media to be allowed into the country, the US commanders successfully negotiated to allow more than 800 US and international journalists into the country. However, they were there under the conditions that they were always escorted and would remain mostly in the rear areas, away from the front.⁷⁸ The media, both American and international, complained loudly about the restrictions and demanded that they be given the right to wander about much as the media had done in Vietnam. The media complained of restrictions on publishing operational information as well. The *New York Times* and American networks complained about the military press rules (ignoring that they would not have even been allowed into Saudi Arabia if the US commanders had not intervened) and complained about censorship of the media, although media stories were not restricted except for operational information.

The Gulf War highlighted the lack of understanding that the media had for common sense rules about security. If journalists had been allowed the unfettered access to forward areas as they demanded, Coalition ground force deployments could have leaked to the Iraqis with the likelihood of far higher

Coalition casualties. Cable News Network reporter Frank Sesco declared that if he came across operationally sensitive information – such as when the ground war would begin – he would not hesitate to announce it on the air.⁷⁹ Before the start of the war, major American networks concocted stories showing how badly the Coalition build-up was going. In October 1990 NBC journalist Arthur Kent reported on a morale crisis among then American troops, declaring that the poor morale ran ‘pretty deep’ and ‘perhaps half the troops we spoke to said they were very unhappy with the way things were going.’⁸⁰ General Schwarzkopf’s regular press conferences were described abrasively by *Newsweek Magazine* as ‘diversionary tactics’ and ‘spin’ cleverly orchestrated by the Pentagon, State Department, White House and CIA.⁸¹ One foreign journalist even admitted after the war that many in the press corps in the Gulf were hoping to witness and report on a second Vietnam.⁸² The final point is important: reporting the failures of Vietnam had made some great journalistic careers and few in the American media had noticed that the US military had changed enormously since the Vietnam era.

The Gulf War highlighted some dramatic new factors in reporting war to the public. With CNN, there was now a 24/7 news channel and much greater coverage of the war news on television. Conflict was no longer seen mainly through the lens of non-military journalists, as the major American television networks hired retired generals and colonels to provide expert background commentary to explain the war strategy and operations to the public. Most importantly, satellite transmission allowed nearly instantaneous communication with the public. Rather than seeing short clips and sound bites from the war theatre, the public could watch entire press conferences live, where General Powell, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs, and Coalition Force commander General Schwarzkopf, would explain Coalition goals, strategy and major operational events. When combat operations began, both Powell and Schwarzkopf, using video imagery, moved quickly and effectively to refute any attempts by Saddam Hussein and his sympathizers to present disinformation. Thanks to the regular press conferences

broadcast by satellite, the military leaders could communicate directly to millions of American and Coalition viewers.

The war began on 17 January 1991, with a six week strategic air campaign designed to cripple the Iraq command and control, logistics, and key military industries in the rear. Another main focus of the air campaign was to decimate the Iraqi heavy forces in Kuwait and southern Iraq. Air power was, without a doubt, the great star of the show in the First Gulf War, as Coalition air forces immediately won complete air superiority. Key military and command and control centres were taken out on the first days of the battle with minimal Coalition air losses. For the next six weeks, international audiences were treated to action videos of precision strikes on military targets and a worldwide audience watched the incredible efficiency of the US and Coalition air forces as they systematically wreaked havoc on Saddam Hussein's forces.

Air power was certainly the big star of the Gulf War in the eyes of the media and the public, as well. Reporter John Leo of the US News and World Report commented '...that first film of the air war, showing a "smart bomb" seeking out and destroying a Baghdad installation, probably settled the issue of collateral damage once and for all. No later findings of inaccuracy could ever have erased that powerful image of precision bombing and the emotional support it brought to the war.'⁸³ Indeed, although Coalition air power had targeted key military sites in Baghdad and urban areas, the targeting had been done with great care to minimize collateral damage and civilian casualties. Even the civilian casualties that occurred when the Al Firdos bunker was bombed in Baghdad did not result in any weakening of public support for the war. Indeed, a Gallup Poll of 7–10 February 1991 showed that 72% of Americans supported continuing the air campaign instead of beginning the ground war.⁸⁴ However, although the American public had come to have great confidence in the air campaign, 82% of respondents on an ABC/Washington Post poll of 8–12 February 1991 also thought a ground war would be eventually needed to force Iraq out of Kuwait.⁸⁵

At the close of the fighting a group of journalists and peace advocates travelled to Iraq to document the damage to civilians from what they assumed was the Coalition's indiscriminate bombing of Iraqi cities. Yet, instead of finding the expected massive collateral damage, the activists/journalists found a city almost entirely intact, with daily life almost normal, services rapidly restored and little evidence of damage in residential areas. Basically, the promise of careful targeting and minimal damage to civilians turned out to be true.⁸⁶ Indeed, US and Coalition air power had performed so well during the Gulf War that some of the media's sharpest critics of air power were converted to the air power cause. New York Times columnist Anthony Lewis, who wrote in 1991 of the devastation of air strikes and said 'we should never again tolerate anyone who talks about "surgical strikes"' was calling for precision bombing as the solution to the violence in Yugoslavia two years later.⁸⁷

Air power stood high in the eyes of the public and international opinion after the First Gulf War. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, American air power was undoubtedly the most capable military force in the world. In the Gallup Poll on confidence in American institutions taken at the end of the Gulf War operations 85% of the American public said they had a 'great deal or quite a lot' of confidence in the US military. The number of people stating they had no confidence in the US military was below 1%. This is the highest approval rating on the yearly poll of American institutions the military has ever achieved.⁸⁸

Despite the success of the US military in the war, the relationship between the media and military was still largely adversarial after the conflict. Just after the war, the *New York Times* published an entire series of articles highly critical of the media rules set by the military on escorts and release of operational plans and likening the rules to outright censorship.⁸⁹ The *New York Times* even criticized the military for airlifting journalists to Saudi Arabia for free, arguing that bringing in hometown reporters to visit troops from their area would provide a too favourable and pro-military bias to the coverage of the military.⁹⁰

Newsday's Susan Sachs accused the military of deliberate disinformation.⁹¹ Other journalists piled on with the themes of censorship and disinformation.⁹² The military had won some admirers in the US media, but there was still a large part of the media that held an anti-military bias.

American Opinion and Conflict in the Balkans

As Yugoslavia disintegrated and the new states went to war, the UN moved in to try to bring peace. But the war escalated, along with human rights abuses. As pressure came from Europe to help solve the conflict, the American people were generally negative on the idea of the US taking part in Balkan operations. In January 1994 a Gallup/USA Today poll showed 68% of Americans wanted the US to stay out of the Balkan conflict.⁹³ However, the importance of supporting international efforts and UN attempts to bring peace brought the Americans into the conflict in 1995, as US aircraft carried out a brief but sharp air campaign against the Bosnian Serbian Army as a means to push the Serbs to a negotiated peace agreement.⁹⁴

As with the Gulf War, the Americans ran the air campaign and target planning was carefully accomplished to minimize civilian losses in order to maintain alliance cohesion as well as the moral high ground. Once the decision to use American air power was made the public rallied to the president and 65% of Americans polled supported the bombing of the Bosnian Serbs.⁹⁵ The bombing campaign (20 days) did not last long enough to register a drop in public opinion. But when the public was asked about committing peacekeepers to Bosnia the reaction was different. In September 1995 67% of Americans supported sending peacekeepers to Bosnia *if there were no US casualties*. When asked to support the operation if there were US casualties the support for peacekeeping dropped with only 31% in favour of US involvement and 64% opposed.⁹⁶ Over time the US public support for the Bosnian peacekeeping mission grew, but only because there was no fighting. If the US had gotten involved in a shooting war after the successful air campaign public support would likely have quickly collapsed.⁹⁷

In 1999 the Americans and coalition partners would again face the same enemy – the Serbs – and with the same coalition partners and over the same issues, human rights for Islamic minorities living in Serb provinces. As the diplomatic crisis heated up between NATO and Serbia in early 1999 and the potential for NATO military action rose, polling indicated that there was very weak public support for an air or military campaign against the Serbs. The Gallup Poll of February 1999 showed that 43% favoured and 45% opposed US participation in air attacks if the Serbs rejected a peace agreement. In a March 1999 Gallup poll support for air strikes had increased to only 46% with 43% opposed.⁹⁸ The same poll also showed that only 42% of Americans believed the US had to be involved in Kosovo for the American national interest with 50% believing that Kosovo was not in the national interest.⁹⁹

In a crisis, the American preference is to trust the president and, when the air strikes began on 24 March, more than 50% of the US public supported them.¹⁰⁰ In the first weeks the support for the air strikes were high, reaching 59% by mid-April. However, support declined and, by 11 May fewer than 50% of the public supported the air operations. As they continued into May and June, most of the public (70%) thought that a ground war would be needed and it was the idea that the conflict with Serbia would engender a war with ground troops that pushed down general support for NATO's military action.¹⁰¹ As with the 1995 air campaign against Serbia, any American support for air operations and military action was very weak. Americans feared getting involved in a long ground war and most Americans did not see a clear national interest in protecting Kosovo.¹⁰²

The 1999 air campaign against Serbia featured major issues of civilian casualties and collateral damage. The issue of long-term environmental damage was also brought up. In the 1999 conflict, a large part of the international media and many of the international NGOs were highly critical of the air campaign. This had no real effect on the US public, but the actions of the NGOs led to numerous charges of excessive force and casualties and even attempts to brand

the United States and NATO as international war criminals.¹⁰³ The issue of lawfare, using legal means to limit air campaigns, was an important feature of the war, which soon saw an international outcry against cluster bombs and bombing dual use facilities.¹⁰⁴

Unfortunately, the USAF failed to carry out a comprehensive study of the Balkans air operations like the Gulf War Air Power Survey. In the Balkans operations, there were major controversies over striking dual use targets and collateral damage to include environmental damage. The Serbs used human shields as a standard tactic to foil NATO bombing. NGOs and their reporting played a much larger role than in the Gulf. Lawfare played a more prominent role in the international coverage of the war. A comprehensive and critical study of all these air power issues would have been of great service in handling similar issues during the next decade of non-stop conflict.

Both the 1995 and 1999 Balkan conflicts were air power wars and the American public was certainly happy with the performance of American air power even if they had doubts about the wisdom of getting involved in the Balkans. As in the Gulf, air power was the star player. In the midst of the Balkans crises, a Roper Poll of November 1998 that asked which service should be built up to a greater extent showed that 43% of the public favoured the Air Force, with 17% for the Navy, and 20% for the Army.¹⁰⁵

The Media and Manufactured Military Scandals

Although the military was highly respected by the public in the post-Gulf War period, they did not always receive favourable media coverage. Indeed, in some notable cases the military was subject to intense media criticism by major media companies in which members of the media exhibited a profound ignorance of and antipathy to the military. In some cases the major media, not finding genuine military scandals, have simply created stories and accusations of scandalous behavior by the military that were essentially not scandals or misbehavior at all.

In 1997 Lieutenant Kelly Flinn was the US Air Force's first female B-52 pilot and much was made of her by Air Force public relations and the media. However, Lieutenant Flinn came into conflict with military law by carrying on an adulterous affair with the husband of an enlisted woman. Flinn disobeyed her commander's direct order to break off the affair, and also acted abusively to the enlisted woman. Finally, she was found to have lied under oath to Air Force investigators on two occasions. Flinn committed some serious crimes that fully compromised her ability to serve with honor as an officer and the Air Force initially wanted to see Flinn court-martialed and punished. However, Flinn cleverly played the media card and her story was picked up by national media, where the Air Force was portrayed as being rigidly old fashioned and trying to force outdated social mores on the modern military. Her lies under oath and treatment of enlisted personnel were hardly mentioned. The scandal received widespread media attention at the time and was discussed in a US Senate hearing on 22 May 1997. The New York Times castigated the Air Force in an editorial that ridiculed the military's antiquated adultery rules and blamed the Air Force's ineffective management training for Flinn's behavior.¹⁰⁶

Given the media's support for Lieutenant Flinn and the generally hostile media coverage of the Air Force, the Air Force leadership backed away from a certainly warranted court martial and the Secretary of the Air Force, Sheila Widnall, granted Kelly Flinn a general (honorable) discharge from the Air Force – an action that went against the core principles of obedience to lawful orders, respectful treatment of enlisted personnel, and officer accountability. An honorable discharge for Flinn and no punishment sent a message to the media as to its power over the military.

The most dramatic case of a fully manufactured military scandal was in June 2010, when journalist Michael Hastings wrote a story in *Rolling Stone Magazine* about General Stanley McChrystal, commander of American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. Hastings, who spent a few weeks in Afghanistan following McChrystal and his staff, titled the article 'The Runaway General', implying that General McChrystal was

out of control and directly challenging civilian authority. Hasting's article included third hand accounts of meetings McChrystal had with the President, as well as Pentagon gossip from unnamed officials about frictions between McChrystal and the administration. The article also quoted bar talk by unnamed staff officers that was disrespectful of Vice President Biden (with no evidence that McChrystal had been present). In short, despite labeling McChrystal as 'out of control', not a single quote or action by McChrystal could be cited to show he was challenging the administration.¹⁰⁷ The only facts that Hastings could cite as proof that McChrystal was indeed out of control was his accusation that McChrystal had challenged the US leadership and State Department by forming a relationship with President Karzai of Afghanistan and having direct access to Karzai. In this, Michael Hasting demonstrated a profound ignorance of American command responsibilities and the way that war theatres operate. In reality, for decades it has been normal practice for American theatre commanders and commanders of war theatres to have direct access to heads of state and government.¹⁰⁸ Certainly General Schwarzkopf had enjoyed direct access to the Saudi king and ministers in 1990–91 with no complaints that he had violated protocol or gone 'out of control'.

The Rolling Stone article was given national coverage by the major newspapers and television networks, with the story widely reprinted.¹⁰⁹ For a week the New York Times ran articles strongly critical of General McChrystal and even set up a comments page titled 'Should the "Runaway General" be fired?'¹¹⁰ Hardly an objective debate question.

The top military and civilian leadership reacted immediately to the story and condemned McChrystal in sharp terms. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike Mullen, was the most harsh, condemning McChrystal for his remarks without ever specifying what remarks that McChrystal had made. Mullen also condemned McChrystal for 'challenging civilian control' of the military – again, never explaining what McChrystal had actually done to challenge civilian control. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates joined in the con-

demnation of McChrystal for his words and actions (never specified).¹¹¹ Within days of the scandal breaking McChrystal was relieved of command and forced to retire. Ironically, a thorough investigation into the McChrystal affair by the Pentagon's inspector general was unable to find any words or actions by McChrystal that had been improper and the investigation could not verify the bar talk and gossip by unnamed staff officers quoted in the Rolling Stone article. In short, a proper investigation cleared McChrystal – but by then he was retired and gone.¹¹²

The media manufactured scandals caused real damage to the US military. Allowing and excusing incredibly bad behavior of an officer refutes core values of the Air Force. The media attack on General McChrystal forced an exceptionally competent officer from his post in the middle of a war. Both the media handling of the Lieutenant Flinn and General McChrystal scandals demonstrated a deep ignorance of the military in the American media. In the first case, the media was simply uneducated about the military values an Air Force officer is expected to uphold. In the McChrystal case, proper and even laudable behavior (working closely with the president of Afghanistan) was mislabeled as improper and a challenge to the US government. That senior military and political leaders immediately caved in when confronted by media stories – without any attempt to challenge the media for obvious bias and mistakes – unfortunately shows that some top military and civilian leaders see the media as an institution that cannot be challenged.

American Air Power and Public Opinion in War Since 2001

The conflicts that have existed from 2001 to the present have considerably changed the American public's views on security, the role of air power, and their confidence in the military. The position of the media with the American public has also dramatically changed. After fifteen years of nonstop conflict, the American public has shown a consistently high level of confidence in the US military. In 2016 73% of the US public expressed 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence in the US military. Indeed, since the 9/11

attacks the confidence standing of the military has never fallen below 70%, and in 2003 and 2009 broke the 80% mark.¹¹³ In 2016 the military held the top position in public confidence among a list of twenty institutions named in the Gallup survey.

In terms of the public's view of the relative importance of the military services, from 1949 to 2003 the Air Force had consistently received the highest standing (of the four military services plus the Coast Guard) in the Gallup Survey. That changed in 2004 with the Army surpassing the Air Force in a poll asking 'which of the five branches of the armed forces are most important to the country today?' In 2004 the Army stood with 25%, the Marines with 23%, and the Air Force with 23%.¹¹⁴ In subsequent polling in 2011 and 2014, the Army still stands higher than the Air Force in the public's assessment of service importance (2011: Army 25%, Air Force and Marines 23%, 2014 Army: 26%, Air Force 23%).¹¹⁵ In the Gallup analysis, the relative standing of the services is due to Iraq and Afghanistan being essentially ground wars, with the Air Force playing more of a support role. Due to the nature of those wars, far more media coverage has gone to the Army and Marines than to the Air Force or Navy. In terms of the public's view as to which military service is most prestigious (not the same as importance), the Marine Corps consistently tops, by far, all the other services. From 2001 to 2014 the Marines have been viewed as the most prestigious service with over 30% of the Gallup Survey voting for the Marines. With the ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the standing of the Marines is such that, in 2014, 47% of the public saw the Marines as the most prestigious service.¹¹⁶ This high standing with the public is likely due to the Marine's prominent role in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and also the perception that the Marines are the most 'military' of the armed forces.

The media coverage, and consequent public image of the military, during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars has been affected by the practice since 2003 of embedding journalists with military units for weeks at a time. Operating under a few restrictions about the release of operational information and identifying casualties before public release of the information, the embed-

ed journalists have, with few exceptions, worked well with the military and provided in-depth coverage in reports and documentary films. With the maturation of the embedding system, some journalists have come to know the military and their stories have focused on the soldiers and Marines. Focus on the serving soldiers under tough conditions has presented a very positive picture of the military to the public.

While the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan had very strong public support at first, over time public support declined. When the US military operations against the Taliban began in October 2001, the American public supported the war with 82% in favour and only 14% opposed. At the start of the Iraq War in 2003 64% of the public supported the war with 33% opposed.¹¹⁷ After the quick victory in the conventional war, Iraq developed into a major counter-insurgency, a conflict for which the United States had not prepared. As the insurgency in Iraq increased and US casualties rose, public support for the war declined. By August 2005 54% of Americans considered the Iraq War a mistake with 44% supporting the war. For the next two years the public position for and against the conflict was within a few points of the August 2005 figure. However, in July 2007 the opposition crossed the 60% line.¹¹⁸ With the consistently high confidence ratings in the military over the period the drop in public support cannot be attributed to actions of the military or any objections to the use of air power. The decline in support, as in previous wars, comes from public frustration over the lack of progress.

From 2001 to 2014, the American public supported the Afghanistan War by a large margin. Only in early 2014 did a plurality of the public (49%) say the war was a mistake while 48% of the public said the war was not a mistake.¹¹⁹ Indeed, it is remarkable that public support for a frustrating conflict with little visible progress could hold for such a long time. As with conflicts since Korea, the Gallup analysis argued that the loss of support was tied to the duration of the conflict. However, the extremely long duration of the public support for the war also shows how important it was to the American people to combat the terrorists that had attacked their homeland.¹²⁰

In contrast to Afghanistan and Iraq, the American-led coalition that conducted air operations against the Kaddafi regime in Libya from March to October 2011 had a low level of public support at the start and that was quickly lost. In March 2011, as the air operations began, only 47% of Americans supported military action (air strikes) against Libya with 37% opposed.¹²¹ In only three months, support for the Libya campaign had reversed, with 46% of the public disapproving of US involvement and only 39% approving.¹²² The Libya war was problematic for the American public, partly because Libya posed no military threat to the United States and partly because the American intervention in the Libyan conflict had been initiated solely on the orders of the president without seeking congressional approval. In the June Gallup Poll 29% of those who opposed the war did so because there had been no congressional approval.¹²³ The theme of congressional approval for conflicts is a strong one with the public. In a 2008 Gallup Poll the public overwhelmingly favoured congressional approval before engaging ground troops or in using air power against states or terrorists.¹²⁴

RPA, Air Power, and the Media

The United States is the only major Western nation where a majority of the public favours the use of RPA in the strike role against terrorists. In the Pew survey of 2014 52% of Americans supported the use of RPA against terrorists with 41% against such use. The only other countries where public opinion supports the use of RPA are Israel, Kenya, and Nigeria – all countries that have faced major terrorist threats.¹²⁵ The public support for RPA in the United States is tied to the positive view of air power as a means of fighting terrorism. In a Gallup Poll of December 2015 79% of Americans responded that airstrikes and stricter visa controls were the most effective options (of 11 offered) in combatting terrorism, which was an issue of top public concern.¹²⁶

American public support for RPA is interesting, as the international media, US media, and popular media depictions of RPA are largely negative. The popular media depictions of RPA can be seen in television

series such as *Homeland*¹²⁷ and in films such as *'Eye in the Sky'* (2015),¹²⁸ where every use of RPA is shown as slaughtering large numbers of innocent civilians in order to get at a terrorist leader. Two major themes critical of RPA are found in the mainstream media: that there are no controls over the use of RPA and that, by using RPA (and inflicting civilian casualties), the Americans will cause Islamic populations to turn against the United States as RPA use 'creates more terrorists'. Both themes were set out in a 2013 *New York Times* article by a former congresswoman who argued that the use of RPA lacked any legal framework, and that 'taking out bad guys may ultimately create more of them'.¹²⁹

The theme that RPA operate without clear rules and that RPA strikes are carried out without legal review is simply untrue and Chapter Two of this study offers details of the strict rules that cover drone strikes. Still, the mainstream media provides a highly inaccurate view. As to the other argument, that RPA strikes 'create more terrorists', there is ample evidence that this is also completely wrong. The failure to strike terrorist headquarters and bases would provide terrorist groups a military advantage, giving them a de facto secure sanctuary to train and operate. Stopping RPA strikes would be claimed by the terrorists as a military and moral victory – that they had stood up to the United States and won. It is, in fact, a weak response to terrorism that is most likely to encourage ever more violent terrorist attacks.¹³⁰

The Media, the Public, and the View of the US Military Today

After fifteen years of non-stop conflict, the military stands high in the national opinion. Security from terrorism is one of the main concerns of the American people and, in a January 2016 poll, 55% of the public were dissatisfied with America's security from terrorism.¹³¹ This concern with security translates into a plurality of Americans saying the government spends too little on defence. The Gallup Poll of February 2016 found 45% of the public saying the national defence is not strong enough, with 41% saying it was about right, and only 13% saying that defence spending as

too much.¹³² Basically, the public favours more defence spending and a stronger national response to terrorism.

At the same time Americans place high trust in the military, the public confidence in the media has fallen to record lows. In the yearly Gallup survey of Confidence in American Institutions in 2016, the media rating hit a record low of 32% of the public expressing 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of trust in the media. A great part of the public's dissatisfaction with the media is the view that the major media companies are highly biased. In a Media Research Center/YouGov Poll just after the 2016 Presidential election, 59% of the voters believe the media was biased in favour of Hillary Clinton.¹³³

At the same time that the US media tends strongly to the left of the political spectrum, the military and their families tend to vote overwhelmingly on the right of the spectrum. The initial demographic analysis of voting of dozens of demographic groups the US presidential election by the Gallup organization shows that veterans and their families voted more than 65% for Trump, with only slightly over 30% of that demographic supporting the Democratic candidate. Military members and veterans were one of the strongest demographics for Donald Trump in the 2016 election.¹³⁴ Essentially, the media and the military stand on opposite sides of the political spectrum and hold different worldviews.

The level of knowledge that civilians have about the military has not been studied in depth. However, there is one study by the Hoover Institution on the views of the Millennials (Age 18–29) and the military. A series of surveys of millennials showed that that group was generally favourably disposed towards the military, but that their basic knowledge of the military was very poor. For example, Millennials tended to know little of military ranks or the difference between an airman, soldier, sailor or marine. Only 15% could claim being "very familiar" with the US military. On factual questions, the mean estimate of the Marine Corps was upwards of three million – off by a factor of twenty. In estimating the size of the US

military the mean estimate was nearly 11 million – the real figure being approximately 2.3 million (counting reserves)¹³⁵ One of the key reasons that the Millennial generation is generally ignorant of the military is the lack of personal and family connections to the armed forces. The majority of people in older generations (over 30) have family members who have served in the military.¹³⁶ However, among Millennials, only 33% have any family ties. The Pew Center study found that people who have served in the military, or who have family who served, are noticeably more aware of military issues and tend to be broadly more pro-military and supportive of the nation in conflict.¹³⁷

Some Insights on American Public Opinion, the Media and Air Power

Air power has held a favoured position in American public opinion since modern polling began in 1935. From 1949 to 2003 the American public consistently placed the Air Force as the most important service. In polls through those years the public also favoured giving the Air Force the priority of funding. This dynamic changed a decade ago, with the Army claiming top place as the most important service in the polls and the Marines as the most prestigious service. The rise in the public's view of the Army and Marines is due to those services being seen as bearing the main burden (and casualties) of the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Media coverage also has been more extensive for the ground forces. However, Americans see air power as the best means to fight terrorists and strongly support the use of air power, including RPA against terrorist.

Americans are highly supportive of military action and today a majority support an increase in defence spending, essentially to deal with the terrorist threat. Yet the use of force in conflict has clear and consistent limitations in the public view. Americans support military action when that action is clearly in the national interest and against enemies who pose a direct threat to the United States or our military forces. From Korea to Afghanistan, the public supported conflict until there appeared to be little progress. Wars that were

carried out without congressional support (Balkans 1995, 1999, Libya 2011), and for amorphous reasons such as supporting human rights, started with weak public support which quickly declined. America might have to fight such conflicts, but none will have strong support from the public. The support, or loss of support, in every conflict since 1945 has never been related to concerns of collateral damage or enemy civilian casualties. The public trusts that the military will do its best to avoid such casualties. Nor is lawfare a major issue for Americans. However, in the conflicts since the Gulf War of 1991, how the international media has portrayed American air power has been a critical issue. At the strategic level there is a deep awareness of the importance of maintaining coalition solidarity. It is coalition concerns that have made avoiding collateral damage and explaining air operations to the media a central issue.

The fact that the media and the military come generally from different ends of the political spectrum and have very different values and worldviews means that there is bound to be considerable friction. Working with the media and informing the general public are a requirement of a healthy democracy, and not all friction is a bad thing. However, if it comes to a fundamental clash between the media and the military on issues that concern basic military values and or command policies, the highly credible and popular military will win the public opinion battle against a highly unpopular media. If clashes between the media and military occur, the military should not be quick to compromise based on media pressure.

Recommendations

1. *Conduct a coordinated strategic communications campaign.* In conflict the US military has three primary audiences: 1) The American public, who need to be fully informed of all aspects of military operations insofar as security requirements allow. 2) International media and alliance citizens who may have different concerns than the American audience. 3) Local citizens in the war zone who need to be assured that the US and NATO allies are carefully targeting enemy leaders and combatant forces

and that care will be taken by NATO to ensure their safety and human rights. In the latter case a strategic communications campaign also has to combat disinformation and radical ideologies in a knowledgeable and systematic manner. Coordinating a strategic communications campaign addressing all these audiences, and doing it effectively, is beyond the resources and expertise of the military services. While the public relations specialists of the military should be able to present information on their respective services, overall coordination of American strategic communications to all audiences should rest in a properly resourced specialist agency such as the US Information Agency that operated with great success in the Cold War. The USIA was disbanded in the 1990s with the view that ideological conflict was over. But in a current era of ideological conflict a revival of the USIA as the main coordinating agency for strategic communications makes sense.

2. *Educate the American Media and the Public about air power.* Embedding journalists has been a successful experience for the Army and Marines in connecting those services to the public. The Army is seen as an organization of people while the focus of the Air force is on aircraft and technology. As wonderful as technology is, the public understands and identifies more with people. The general with a brilliant understanding of public affairs, AAF chief Hap Arnold, understood the importance of the personal connection when he talked to the American people about the Air Force team – not just the planes and pilots, but also the essential contribution of the ground crews, the engineers, the training personnel and the aircraft factory workers. Providing a public image of the Air Force as a professional team is essential to maintain long-term public support. The Air Force should look at ways to embed selected journalists in Air Force units, and should also look at producing its own documentary films about RPA that show the large team that supports RPA operations and planning. Teaching the media about air power ought to have a high priority. A useful step would be to establish 3–4 day orientation courses for journalists where they can stay on an Air Force base, see aircraft

demonstrations, observe air squadrons in normal operations, and get to meet the enlisted and support personnel.

3. *Connect with the Elites and Millennials.* The best means of connecting the public to the military is through personal connections, namely, actually knowing service personnel or veterans or ROTC cadets. A Hoover Institution Study noted several ways by which the military could connect with the elite universities. The services should explore paths to officer commissions through means other than ROTC, perhaps with summer training courses which would allow officer candidates to attend elite universities where ROTC is banned or unwelcome. The military might also consider giving senior NCOs fellowships to study at elite universities.¹³⁸ Other means to connect the elites at universities should include the American services working with service associations and veterans groups to endow military history chairs in some universities where academic study of the military has virtually disappeared. In the same manner, the USAF should work with the Air Force Association and veterans groups to endow chairs of air power history at key universities. Air power has been around long enough for it to be accepted as a serious branch of social science study, but a university environment heavily biased against all things military will need outside pressure and initiatives to allow an academic study of air power. Most importantly, the US military should work with the Department of Education and with veterans groups to encourage and finance veterans to study in the elite universities, a place where they are today almost completely absent. As the Hoover Institution study noted, most the millennials do not have any contact at all with people who served in the armed forces. These few initiatives would cost only a small amount of money, but would be highly effective in building personal connections to the elite institutions and the Millennial generation and the armed forces.
4. *Senior commanders need to be involved.* Maintaining public and coalition support is a key mission of an American military commander. The best way to combat disinformation, or to get the message to the media, is to have a senior commander brief the

media. No one has the credibility of a military commander who is intimately familiar with the operations and plans when it comes to refuting disinformation or accusations from the media. During the Gulf War of 1990–91 General Schwarzkopf and General Powell devoted considerable time to regular press public press briefings. Their work as effective communicators stymied Saddam Hussein's disinformation efforts and held keep the Coalition together.

5. *Be aware of Lawfare.* Lawfare might not be a primary concern for American commanders, but America's allies are far more sensitive to the issue. The use of lawfare can limit allied involvement and even drive allied participation from a coalition operation. The United States should be attentive to the issues as they are raised and respond quickly to lawfare challenges.
6. *Invest More in Foreign Internal Defence* – One of the easiest ways for the United States and NATO to avoid criticism about air strikes from supported governments and their people is to make sure such operations are conducted by their own indigenous air force. Not only do they learn best that way, they also furnish a major boost for indigenous morale with their display of technological expertise.¹³⁹ Such forces usually do not require the most advanced aircraft. For instance turboprop attack planes will often suffice for combat air support requirements in austere theatres and they are much cheaper and easier to maintain than jets.

1. An excellent biography of Mitchell is Alfred F. Hurley, *Billy Mitchell, Crusader for Air Power* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975).
2. *Ibid.*, 6, 146–147; John F. Shiner, *Foulois and the US Army Air Corps, 1931–1935* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 48.
3. On Arnold's service in Air Corps public relations, his Bill Bruce books and his work to get publicity for the Air Corps in Hollywood see Bill Yenne, *Hap Arnold: The General who Invented the US Air Force* (Washington: Regnery, 2013).
4. *Ibid.*
5. Alan Vick, *Proclaiming Airpower: Air Force Narratives and American Public Opinion 1917 to 2014* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2015) p. 88.
6. *Ibid.* p. 89
7. *Ibid.* p. 91.
8. *Ibid.* p. 92
9. Arnold to Spaatz, 15 Sep. 1942, Box 8, Papers of Carl Spaatz; Arnold to Eaker, 29 Jun. 1943, Box 16, Papers of Ira C. Eaker, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. (Arnold's italics).
10. John Steinbeck, *Bombs Away: The Story of a Bomber Team* (New York: Viking, 1942).
11. Eaker to Lt. Gen. Barney Giles, 29 Sep. 1943, Eaker Papers; Arnold to Spaatz, 26 Sep. 1944, and Giles to Spaatz, 11 Nov. 1944, Box 16, Spaatz Papers; Giles to Curtis LeMay, 11 Nov. 1944, Box Bl 1, Papers of Curtis LeMay, Library of Congress.

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A Reaper of 39 Squadron Royal Air Force, Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan. The RAF used the Reaper in Afghanistan mainly as an ISR asset.

CHAPTER 4

UK Country Study

Dr Mark Hilborne

Introduction

The Royal Air Force is an institution that is historically highly respected and trusted by the British population. The RAF has historically enjoyed a generally positive image in the media and this trend continues today, with recent surveys indicating that the public is broadly supportive of the UK's military in their recent operations. For the most part, the British public is quite resistant to narratives that seek to undermine British military operations. Nevertheless, there is considerable scepticism among the British public about the value of the campaigns themselves, and this leads to media coverage questioning the UK's employment of air power. The use of Remotely Piloted Air Systems (RPAS), in particular for kinetic operations, has become the focus of a significant and vigorous debate, in which the morality, legitimacy and effectiveness of

such systems are disputed. The use of RPAS raises new questions due to the complex nature of current engagements and the role of RPAS, which fuels public controversy. Some of the debate about the use of military force and air power in the UK reflects the aspects of operations that are specific to the operation of RPAS by the US, particularly the operations run by the CIA. There is a fear that Britain might be brought into such operations. To offset these concerns, the UK MoD needs to consider its specific parameters of engagement within its Strategic Communications to ensure a clear message is provided. Yet, at the same time, US air operations provide many important lessons for the UK, and thus will be central in any analysis of UK air power.

A key debate over the use of air power in the current asymmetric conflicts in which the UK is involved concerns the legitimacy of the employment of military air power, and again the debate becomes most fierce over the use of RPAS. Narrowing the focus further, it is the targeting of specific individuals that most often captures the media headlines. Controversy can serve as a point of vulnerability through which opponents

of UK and NATO air power can undermine the public's faith in the military and in military operations. This country study focuses on the United Kingdom and examines the law of armed conflict and related humanitarian law and concludes that the posture and activities of the RAF is within the confines of international law. In addition, the terminology used in policy and doctrine is important. Allowing the media to characterize missions against insurgent leaders as assassinations serves to stigmatize these operations. Indeed, insurgent leaders are legitimate targets in war and effort should be made to ensure that more accurate terms should be applied. The debates in the UK, along with misleading terminology, create misperceptions regarding the nature of the conflict and the employment of air power and these debates have the potential to undermine the public's support for British air operations. As in any democracy, public support for military action will be contingent on a *causus belli* and on the clear understanding that the operations conform to laws of armed conflict. The adherence to those laws and international humanitarian law is a key tenet of British defence doctrine, which needs to be communicated strategically by the MoD.

Today numerous public misperceptions persist about the level of destruction and civilian casualties that air operation cause in current conflicts that are focused on non-state irregular forces. This study has used objective and reliable reports to argue that the level of casualties is in fact quite low. Such data is available from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the annual reports indicate that insurgents are consistently responsible for the vast majority of civilian casualties.¹ In recent years ISAF forces have been responsible for between two and six per cent of the civilian casualties in that nation's conflict. While air power is a significant part of these numbers, contrary to a number of media reports, where figures are available it is clear that RPAS are usually responsible for a minority of the air power related civilian casualties. It is essential that the UK MoD amplify these findings to counter sensational and often highly misleading media reports that fuel the perceptions of widespread carnage.

This study also contests the belief that air strikes, and RPAS in particular, undermine the long-term strategic objectives of COIN campaigns by fueling deep resentment in the local populations and engendering future terrorism. Examining a full spectrum of sources reveals that this is not necessarily so. While it is clear that a continued air presence will engender hostility in some instances, the hostility to the insurgents may be much greater and there may be a tacit acceptance or even outright support of air strikes. The use of RPAS, according to some analysis, is preferable to conventional aircraft in this respect. Thus, narratives that suggest that COIN campaigns are creating the seeds of future anti-Western sentiment must be addressed in communications at a strategic level. This will require engagement with the local populations, with the objectives and campaign parameters set out clearly, but also with the domestic audience to give assurance. Liberal societies abjure coercion of foreign populations, particularly without valid cause, and emphasizing the humanitarian objectives and the case for intervention will help dispel fears.

These are the key areas upon which legitimacy rests and upon which public support is contingent. The MoD and the RAF derive significant and consistent support from the British public, along with high levels of trust. Polling data suggest that, despite any war-weariness that would be expected given the number and length of recent engagements, there is widespread support for using RAF aircraft to attack ISIL in Syria.² It is a defining feature of democracies that their armed forces operate with public support, and maintaining this support is crucial. Strong civil-military relations will need to be maintained as part of the MoD's strategic communications.

The current campaigns are complex and the impression of events in theatre are subject to disinformation campaigns, in part because there are few or no foreign journalists. This introduces new challenges to public understanding and requires an increase in transparency to counter some of those narratives – an activity that can be anathema to a military organization. Such challenges are set to increase, with recent events in Ukraine indicating that there are state

actors that are very adept in the battle of the narrative. Russia is a particular concern for NATO and the UK given its proximity. However, China, too, controls a sector of the media and is challenging the status quo in a number of areas, underpinned by its own controlled narrative. The combination of these actors means that winning legitimacy and public support are as important as they have ever been, and this must be a prominent strand of the defence policies of Western States.

Background: UK Operations

The UK has been involved in a number of major conflicts since the end of the Cold War. These have arguably attuned the British public to the engagement of their forces in operations abroad, though this attuning has brought with it the potential for a degree of war-weariness. Since Gulf War I, British forces have been engaged in a number of major conflicts. The RAF saw action over Kosovo as part the NATO operation ALLIED FORCE in 1999. Both Harrier GR7 and Tornado GR3s ground attack aircraft were deployed, along with ISTAR and Air-to-Air Refuelling (AAR) support aircraft. The RAF took part in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom from 2001–2014. This was an extended campaign that relied on air mobility and lift principally with significant input from ISTAR and ground attack aircraft as well.

RAF aircraft were also used to enforce the no fly zones over Bosnia in 1995, along with providing assistance to UN missions there, and the no fly zones over Iraq from 1992 to 2003. The British Operation TELIC supported operation Enduring Freedom in Iraq from 2003 to 2009. This was one of the largest deployments of British forces since World War II, and involved over 100 fixed-wing aircraft and over 100 rotary-wing aircraft covering the spectrum of air power roles.

Operation ELLAMY in Libya, as part of Operation Unified Protector, in 2011 involved the RAF in flying attack, armed reconnaissance and air patrol missions. While the US remained in the background, providing a great deal of the support for air missions, both Britain and France took a leading role in the operation

against Colonel Gaddafi's forces. More recently, the RAF worked in coalition to transport French armoured vehicles to Mali in 2013 to support the French-led Operation Serval. Currently, the RAF is involved with the air campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

These operations have required the full spectrum of air power to be employed at different times. The attack and ISTAR roles were consistent features in the major campaigns, with air mobility, both inter- and intra-theatre as well as AAR, required in many, most notably Afghanistan where airlift was utilized heavily. Control of the air was an important requirement in the no-fly zones.

It is clear from these campaigns that the RAF is the component of military interventions that is resorted to first and most often and that it is a key contributor to NATO operations. It is also notable that each of these campaigns involves the US, usually in the leading role. It is unlikely that this will change in any fundamental way in the near future, so it is imperative to fully understand the US position given that the UK will need to be interoperable with the US in order to operate with them. It is also crucial that, when required, the British government has public support for military engagements. Legitimacy is essential in order to maintain such support and to deflect narratives from anti-war campaign groups and leftist political elements that seek to undermine British military involvement no matter the conflict or reasons.

UK Policy on the Use of RPAS

With the exception of the debate over whether the UK had sufficient support helicopters to sustain operations in 2009, mobility, both intra- and inter-theatre, is non-contentious. Air defence has had limited applicability in recent campaigns and is generally an application of air power that is not the subject of disension. ISTAR and attack, particularly in counter insurgencies, however, are far more controversial and have been at the heart of a number of debates about the ethical, moral and legal aspects of their employment in addition to whether their application is an effective strategy.

At the epicenter of debate in terms of air power is the subject RPAS. The terminology surrounding these platforms is complex and the same systems are variously referred to as unmanned air vehicles, RPA or simply drones. The latter term could be considered to have gained a pejorative quality and the term 'unmanned' gives a false sense of how these platforms are controlled. As a result, the RAF has adopted the term RPA for the aircraft itself and RPAS for the wider network of components. This was set out in the 2011 Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 2/11, *The UK Approach to Unmanned Aircraft Systems*, the RAF's first indication of their policy on RPA.³ It is noted here that simpler terms, such as unmanned aircraft, 'can be unhelpful, particularly when working with an uninformed audience,' noting the importance of public perception.⁴ The current RAF doctrine document JDP 0-30 incorporates the main aspects of RPAS into wider air doctrine and treats RPAS as but one facet of air power: 'Remotely-piloted air systems are an integral component of our combat and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) network. However, the effects we create with manned and unmanned aircraft are essentially the same, so remotely-piloted air systems change the way that we deliver air power rather than its more fundamental outputs or capabilities.'⁵ Viewing the effect of integrating RPAS into the broader system of systems that is RAF air power may be an effective way with which to normalize how such systems are viewed by the public.

Regardless of the definitions, the debate surrounding these systems had been on-going for some time prior to these doctrine documents. Thus, the ability of the armed forces to influence the nomenclature, especially in the mind of the public and media, may be limited. Indeed, the term drone has become quite pervasive. It would be a significant challenge to find a media article that refers to RPAS in any other way, and any bibliography on this topic would find a long list of titles that use this term. Furthermore, this term is often connected to an image of 'killer drones', despite the limited application they have had in the kinetic realm up to the present. Such preconceptions will be difficult to dispel, though doing so would permit RPAS to be viewed in a less contentious way and in a manner

similar to other air force platforms. This would generate a better understanding that the effects that both unmanned and manned platforms deliver are essentially no different.

As will be discussed later, the use of air power by the UK is sometimes viewed as analogous with the US. Once again, an area where this has particular impact is the operation of RPAS. This is mainly due to number of US operations that have been carried out by the CIA and not by the US Air Force, and it is these missions that have garnered the lion's share of reporting in the British media. These missions tend to be obscure, as, indeed, the CIA operates in a highly covert manner and the parameters of the use of RPAS by the CIA are unclear to the public. Indeed, much about the CIA's use of drones in kinetic operations is classified, including the precise rules of engagement. This is undoubtedly necessary, as any strike by the CIA will likely involve highly classified human intelligence sources and a thorough intelligence analysis to determine the target and its' importance. Another aspect of the CIA targeting is that the targets are normally found hidden among a civilian population and any strike is highly likely to cause some collateral damage among civilians. This lack of transparency, and the prosecution of strikes in areas where there is no formal declaration of war or legal declaration of hostilities, have created severe doubts about the legitimacy of cross-border long range drone strikes. The lack of accountability has tainted the operation of RPAS in particular, and perhaps air power more generally.

While CIA-executed RPAS strikes are not representative of the strikes carried out by the UK, the view of employment of air power by the UK is vulnerable to contagion by association. After all, the British military works very closely with the United States in allied operations. Emphasizing the distinct elements of the UK's doctrinal approach is an aspect from which the MOD and RAF could benefit, and this is probably a crucial issue in maintaining public support.⁶ On the other hand, the RAF operates so closely with the United States in military operations that distancing the UK too much from US policy in campaigns against a common enemy could generate needless friction among

close, and very necessary, allies. In any case, central to maintaining support for UK doctrine among the public is a robust affirmation of the adherence to international law.

The UK Debate on the Morality of RPAS

Although controversy surrounds the use of air power in counterinsurgencies, the UK observes the international rules governing war. With the recognition that waging war is a necessity that is unlikely to disappear, the Western Just War Tradition is an attempt to bring justice and compassion to the conduct of war. Beginning in the Roman era and continuing into the Middle Ages, rules evolved that sought to regulate and constrain the context in which war is resorted to and prosecuted. The Just War Tradition has two components: *Jus ad bellum* (the legality of the use of force) and *Jus in bello* (the humanitarian rules to be respected in warfare).⁷ In the modern context, the last century has seen further regulation of warfare through International Humanitarian Law (IHL) which is a branch of international law that limits the use of violence in armed conflicts by 'sparing those who do not or no longer directly participate in hostilities (and) restricting it to the amount necessary to achieve the aim of the conflict, which ... can only be to weaken the military potential of the enemy.'⁸ In addition, a further body of rules regarding distinction and proportionality apply.

These rules are recognized as governing both interstate conflict and what the ICRC terms 'non-international' conflict. The latter covers situations such as a conflict between a state and a non-state actor, as well as situations where that conflict spreads into neighbouring states, or indeed, where there is a coalition or international group of states involved rather than a single state.⁹ It is these types of situation that typify and complicate current conflicts.

Within these criteria, there is a great deal of controversy over the targeting of individuals in war. The issue is an important one for the understanding of the laws of war in the UK and US. The term often used to de-

scribe such air attacks against individuals is 'assassination'. This term creates a number of problems. William Banks and Raven-Hansen, both Professors of Law in the US, note that the term assassination 'pejoratively conjures up the murders of Julius Caesar, Abraham Lincoln and John F Kennedy'.¹⁰ In the United States, assassinations are banned by Executive Order 11905. However, there are a number of analysts that suggest such a term is not accurate for conditions of war and self-defence, and that 'targeted killing' is a distinct and more accurate term. Professor of Law Gary Solis argues this distinction, and notes five required characteristics of targeted killing.¹¹ First, an international or non-international conflict must be in progress. Secondly, the target must be a specific individual and he must be targeted by reason of his activities in the conflict. The individual must be situated so that arrest would be highly difficult if not impossible. Finally, the authorization for the targeting must be made by a senior military commander.

Banks and Raven-Hansen also argue that there is a clear distinction between targeted killing and assassination.¹² Similarly, former intelligence officer and author Thomas B. Hunter asserts that targeted killings are not assassinations. He defines the latter as 'the premeditated killing of a prominent person for political or ideological reasons'.¹³ In contrast 'targeted killing is the killing of an individual or group of individuals without regard for politics or ideology, but rather exclusively for reasons of state self-defence'.¹⁴ Despite this, it is the term assassination that persists in media reports.¹⁵ Legal scholar John Woo argues that, as the US is legally at war with Al-Qaeda, then the use of force, specifically targeted force, is permissible. 'Precise attacks against individuals have long been a feature of warfare. These attacks further the goals of the laws of war by eliminating the enemy and reducing harm to innocent civilians.'¹⁶

To date much of the debate in the UK has focussed on US operations. While these debates are pertinent to the UK, there has been rather less coverage of RAF strikes. This changed in October 2015, when the UK government launched an investigation into its policy on targeted killing.¹⁷ This was in the wake of a British

aircraft launching strikes at two individuals in Syria who had UK citizenship.¹⁸ The UK Joint Select Committee notes that ‘The UK has previously used drones to deliver lethal strikes in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the Government’s policy was to do so only in countries where the UK was involved in an international armed conflict. In September 2014, Parliament authorized military operations in Iraq, but not Syria.’¹⁹

While the attack seems to fit within the accepted definition of non-international conflict and the acceptance that this definition covers a conflict spreading into neighbouring states, the fact that the UK government had carried the strike out without formally declaring war in Syria itself was controversial. *The Guardian* quotes Michael Clarke, director-general of London’s Royal United Services Institute, as saying ‘This announcement by the prime minister is a big departure in a number of ways.’²⁰ Of primary concern was that it is beyond the authorized zone of military operations. A human rights group, Rights Watch, has announced it will initiate legal proceeding to compel the government to publish the advice it was given in relation to the strike.²¹

The Select Committee notes that the Government has not published any specific policy on the use of RPA for targeted killing and this leaves a lack of clarity about the policy concerning the legal frameworks of international humanitarian law, the application of international human rights law and ordinary criminal law, and about the relevant legal tests and principles that would accompany the use of lethal force in such circumstances.²² This creates a number of potential problems, both in terms of the image of British transparency and the legal repercussions for military personnel. The British government has been robust in its defence of the strikes and, as noted, these appear to be within the correct legal boundaries of non-international conflict. Nonetheless, as the government pledged in 2014 that there would be no military operations in Syria, this creates some confusion on the boundaries of British air strikes. It is hoped that the Joint Select Committee investigation will provide a clear framework for the use of force in complex environments such as that in Syria in 2015–2016. The

deliberate character of these operations demands clear command and accountability, which becomes impossible if they are conducted covertly.

Proving that any operations such as the September 2015 British strike on the two ISIS insurgents in Syria discussed above are in self-defence becomes critical in instances where the fighting occurs beyond the borders of the conflict. Here, the question as to whether there are any law enforcement alternatives to an attack becomes a crucial issue. Professor of International Law David Kretzmer notes ‘As the object of such force must always be to prevent further attacks, rather than to punish, or even to seek general deterrence, I suggest that in deciding whether targeting suspected terrorists could be regarded as absolutely necessary we draw a parallel to a state’s inherent right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. In exercising this right a state’s actions are subject to the requirements of necessity and proportionality. Under the principle of necessity a state may not use force if there are other means of defending itself.’²³ Indeed, the UK government stated its right to self-defence under Article 51 as its justification for the strike on the two ISIL insurgents in Syria.

The highly respected *Economist* magazine has supported the legality of the employment of RPAS. The journal noted in 2011 that certainly until that date, ‘the use of drones has not fundamentally challenged the Geneva Convention-based Law of Armed Conflict.’²⁴ These analyses demonstrate that there is a body of legal opinion that suggests that there is a legitimate basis for the strikes against individual insurgents, and in fact there is little new about such a tactic in the conduct of war. Yet these strikes continue to dominate media headlines. These points are one that the UK government and MOD could amplify, helping to support and clarify their position in order to capitalize upon and avoid eroding the trust that the MOD enjoys from the public and to dispel propaganda material against the UK.

While there is certainly evidence for the legal case for such air strikes, that has not stopped legal challenges to the use of air power in recent campaigns. These are

perhaps more serious than the construction of mere competing narratives by campaign groups and opponents, and the UK and Western forces face an increasing onslaught of 'lawfare' – that is the use of the legal tactics to undermine military forces and activities. There have already been a number of attempts to force the British Government to stop or curb their use of RPAS, or criminalize them outright. Of note, Drone Wars UK, a UK-based anti-RPA activist group, challenged the secrecy over RPAS use in court in 2013. Requests for information were refused by the MoD and Drone Wars UK appealed to the Information Tribunal challenging the MoD's stance and arguing that the public interest lies in releasing the information.²⁵ In 2014 there was a legal challenge to establish whether the UK was complicit in the US campaign in Pakistan. This was stopped by the Court of Appeal.²⁶ The September 2015 strikes against the two ISIS insurgents who held British citizenship has led to a legal challenge by the human right group Reprieve.²⁷ The legality of the attack was also openly questioned by the leader of the opposition in Parliament.²⁸ Regardless of their legitimacy, these attacks all serve to undermine the position of the military forces and their activities and place questions in the mind of the public.

- The starkest example of this is the Al-Sweady Inquiry. The basis of the enquiry was a set of allegations that members of the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment (PWRR) and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders tortured and subjected nine Iraqi men to mock executions. The servicemen were also accused of mutilating the bodies of insurgents and killing others in cold blood, either while they were lying wounded on the battlefield or at Army detention centres.²⁹ It is important to note that the final government investigation resulted in a full victory for the Government and made both the government and the military take very seriously attempts to use disinformation and lawfare against the British military.³⁰
- While the source for the Al-Sweady allegations were Iraqis, there are groups in the UK whose stance is anti-military, or anti-Western. These include the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), Islamist groups, and elements of the political hard left. Dur-

ing the Cold War the CND held anti-US and anti-NATO views, and today as a group it is susceptible to similar sentiments. That group can be expected to be a conduit for anti-NATO and anti-military disinformation in the future simply by their readiness to accept any anti-military and anti-Western perspective as credible. The British 'Stop the War' movement is also virulent in its anti-NATO and anti-US and anti-military bias on its website. Groups such as this can be expected to support the lawfare movement and to disseminate allegations against British and NATO forces.

- The findings of the Al Sweady Investigation, however, increased pressure for legal reforms to protect military personnel involved in combat from such cases. The pressure for legal reforms was enthusiastically supported by major British newspapers including The Mail, the Telegraph and the Times of London. In October 2016 Prime Minister Theresa May pledged that Britain would opt out of the European Convention of Human Rights in future conflicts. Prime Minister May and the Defence Secretary announced that this move would protect British personnel from 'spurious claims'. However, the British leaders also noted that Britain would still abide by international humanitarian law, to include the Geneva Convention, as well as military regulations. Defence Minister Sir Michael Fallon noted that the previous policy of following the European Human Rights Conventions and allowing suits to be brought against British military personnel in civilian court had gone out of control and 'Our legal system has been abused to level false charges against our troops on an industrial scale.'³¹ The Government also pledged to set a date after which no new claims would be allowed. The law would be changed to a 'no win, no fee basis', which would put a financial disincentive to pursuing charges against British military personnel.³² These measures will dampen but not end the use of lawfare against British military, and especially in air operations.
- RPAS missions will likely be a focal point of future legal actions using the traditional international humanitarian law. However, international humanitarian law has a much stricter standard for making criminal charges, a stricter standard of evidence.

A limited amount of collateral damage is also condoned under international humanitarian law. So lawsuits will continue and financial damages will be requested, but British soldiers and airmen are now better protected from groups and claims made mainly with the intent of damaging the armed forces.

In addition to the legal challenges, air strikes and the use of RPA create other debates regarding proportionality, transparency and accountability. The requirement that targeting must be proportionate, minimizing the loss of civilian life as well as damage to property, and discriminate between combatants and non-combatant is highly complex in environments where combatants and non-combatants are intermixed. Attacks from the air can create controversy in that they are perceived by some groups as 'unfair' against combatants with little or no technology that are unable to fight back. Fortunately, current RAF capabilities offer much greater levels of discernment and accuracy than were previously available, which means the requirement for discrimination and proportionality are well served.

Air Strikes and the Concept of Fairness

The aspect of unfairness raised above is certainly of relevance in terms of *jus in bello*. This perception of unfairness is perhaps most acute when considering remotely piloted vehicles. Robert Sparrow, a professor in the field of bioethics, political philosophy and applied ethics, in considering the use of RPA argues that 'there is something inherently dishonorable about killing people one is observing on a video screen from thousands miles away and who have no opportunity to return fire.' However, this is not unique to RPAS. The same is true for cruise missiles, stand-off weapons and indeed aerial bombing, yet these systems do not draw the same amount of criticism. International relations scholar Christian Enemark, argues, in the context of the Just War Tradition, there is no ethical requirement for war to be 'fair' in the sense of being evenly-balanced. Rather, in the conduct of war, the use of force should: 'discriminate between combatants and

non-combatants; and be anticipated to generate a level of harm (including unintended harm to non-combatants) that is proportional to the expected military benefit.'³³ The technological aspects of RPA do not raise any undue concerns regarding the Just War Tradition. As a weapons system, RPAS, while perhaps epitomizing the technological advantage of Western forces, are no less 'fair' than many other weapons platforms. They are simply the latest in a series of steps in developments that aim to gain a military advantage. As American General David Deptula notes, 'War is not about 'equality'; it's about inflicting damage on your enemy without suffering damage yourself.'³⁴ Nonetheless, perceptions persist, and the RAF and MOD need to carefully calibrate their communications to reflect these points.

Enemark notes a second debate that follows on from this however – the idea that regardless of legality, other characteristics are important. Virtues such as valor, courage and self-sacrifice, the noblest of warrior attributes, and characteristics that inspire and bind together fighting men and civilians, are not ones attributable to the operation of RPA. Courageousness, fearlessness and boldness cannot be exhibited in the absence of physical risk. This risks distance from within the military cadres, and contempt in targeted populations, Enemark argues.³⁵ These points may be true, but as stated above, they are not unique to RPA. As the technologies related to waging war change and the value attached to the lives of our fellow countrymen increases, such remote forms of warfare will become more and more commonplace. Indeed, Enemark and others argue that the world is now in a post-heroic era of warfare. The discrimination of RPA, and indeed precision munitions delivered by air generally, makes them, in many respects, an ethically superior way of war, despite the lack of heroics.

Media Misperceptions About RPAS

While precision attack can be delivered at distance from various platforms, once again, media attention on these attacks is focused primarily on RPAS. Other types of platforms are almost completely overlooked (and it is worth noting that air vehicles themselves are

only one part of a wider development of remote warfare). Lieutenant General (ret.) David Deptula, USAF, states that, contrary to the general perception of media reports, the majority of kinetic strikes were carried out by manned aircraft, notably AC-130s, based on information gathered by RPAS missions. 'Only rarely would we use the MQ-1 Predator in direct attacks on its own, and when we did, it was for a very specific target, with very specific intelligence, requiring extreme accuracy, and minimal collateral damage.'³⁶ He states that approximately 98% of RPAS missions were for ISR.

Because Britain has armed RPAS and plays an active role in NATO and coalition air operations, the more assertive British use of force in combat operations is bound to create considerable friction between the UK and some European allies. An article by Oxford University DPhil candidate Ulrike Franke titled 'The Five Most Common Media Misrepresentations of UAVs' suggests that one of the most commonly held misperceptions is that most RPAS are armed. This view is the most common view expressed in the major European journals and newspapers.³⁷ As Britain has acquired both armed and unarmed RPA and intends to employ them as part of its combat operations, one can anticipate considerable future friction between Britain and some of its NATO partners in the future. Much of the anti-RPA feeling is fueled by media reports that display considerable ignorance about RPAS. One can anticipate a genuine problem in maintaining coalition support and public support for future air operations.

Similar misconceptions distort the level of destruction that these platforms visit on their targets. While the picture of RPAS is frequently one of indiscriminate damage, the reality is quite different. David Deptula maintains: 'The fact of the matter is that RPA are one of, if not *the* most, accurate means of employing force at a distance in the military arsenal.'³⁸ That the negative image of 'drones' is disproportionate to the number of attacks they have carried out is borne out by statistical analysis of civilian casualties. The annual reports by the UNAMA provide an objective analysis on the number of civilian deaths in Afghanistan during

NATO's involvement. In the years in which it reported, its statistics show that of the civilian casualties from air strikes, the majority are from conventionally piloted aircraft.

In terms of the perceptions regarding RPAS, the UNAMA reports of 2013 are revealing. In 2013, UNAMA documented 8,615 civilian casualties (2,959 civilian deaths and 5,656 injured). 74 per cent of civilian deaths and injuries were attributable to Anti-Government Elements.³⁹ 182 civilian casualties (118 deaths and 64 injured) were from 54 aerial operations conducted by international military forces, a 10 per cent reduction in casualties from the previous year. This is 2 per cent of all civilian casualties. Of the air strikes, approximately one-third was the result of RPA – 45 deaths and 14 injuries.⁴⁰ RPAS then were responsible for 1.25% of the total civilian casualties in 2013.

The annual reports for other years do not specify the casualties that occurred from RPA, but the total rates resulting from air strikes are consistently low. In 2014 UNAMA documented 10,548 civilian casualties (3,699 deaths and 6,849 injured), marking a 25 per cent increase in civilian deaths, a 21 per cent increase in injuries for an overall increase of 22 per cent in civilian casualties compared to 2013.⁴¹ 72 per cent of all civilian casualties were attributed to Anti-Government Elements.⁴² In 2014, air strikes were responsible for 162 civilian casualties (104 deaths and 58 injuries, or 4 and 0.8 per cent respectively), a 13 per cent reduction in civilian casualties from such operations compared to 2013.⁴³

In 2012 UNAMA report that there were 2,754 civilian deaths. 2,179 of these, or 81 per cent were the result of anti-government forces. There were 126 deaths from 55 aerial operations.⁴⁴ This was 42 per cent less than 2011, and represented 3 per cent of civilian deaths.⁴⁵ UNAMA could only confirm 16 deaths resulting from RPA.

UNAMA documented 3,021 civilian deaths in 2011. Of these, anti-Government Elements caused the most civilian deaths: 2,332 civilians deaths in total (an increase of 14 per cent from 2010), or 77 per cent of all

civilian deaths. Pro-Government Forces caused 410 casualties, of which 187 were via air attacks, which is approximately 6%.

Despite these statistics demonstrating that air power has overall been a relatively minor factor in the casualties, media reports focus on air power, and RPA in particular, to a much greater extent than on IEDs, which cause the majority of civilian casualties. An example of an article that gives a somewhat unfair view of the air campaign was one written by the Bureau of Investigative Journalists.⁴⁶ The title of the article, 'Civilian drone deaths triple in Afghanistan, UN agency finds' reflects the increase of civilian casualties resulting from RPAS operations, rising from 16 in 2012 to 45 in 2013 as illustrated above. However, there is no mention of the fact that the overall casualty rate from all air strikes (including those by conventional aircraft) had in fact decreased by 10 per cent in 2013, which was the overall trend in Afghanistan from 2008–14. The article at least acknowledged that the Taliban is responsible for the vast majority of civilian casualties, but this point is made only in the closing paragraphs. The impression to the reader is quite different from the broader picture.

Of the roles undertaken by the RAF in the current campaign against ISIL, the majority of strikes have been carried out by conventional aircraft – mostly the Tornado, though this has been joined by the Typhoon more recently. The UK-based campaign group *Drone Wars* has compiled statistics on the strikes based on MoD briefings, and these conclude that in Iraq in 2015, in nine months conventional aircraft were used in the majority of airstrikes, and of the annual total of 510 strikes, 306 were carried out by conventional manned platforms.⁴⁷ With the introduction of the Typhoon into theatre in December, there were only 16 RPAS strikes as opposed to 92 strikes by manned aircraft. In 2016, since the UK Parliament backed air strikes in Syria, there has been one RPAS strike out of 17 strikes in total. These figures illustrate the point made above – the lion's share of attention is shone on the strikes by RPAS. Having a campaign group (indeed *Drone Wars* is not the only one) dedicated to this one aspect of air warfare provides a further sense of

opprobrium to RPAS missions, when it has been shown their operational use does not differ from other strike platforms, particularly within the context of UK operations. The focus on RPA is quite distorting and has the potential to create a negative perception of air operations generally.

The inclusion of RPA in wider air doctrine as but one facet of the RAF's air power is an effective way of reducing the impact that these disinformation campaigns and negative media coverage can have. Demonstrating that RPA are used in the same roles for the same effects as conventional manned aircraft should mitigate the view that RPAS are by themselves immoral or unjust. The enquiry by the UK Joint Select Committee regarding the use of drones should help clarify British policy and avoid questions regarding the parameters of their use.

Strategic Effect and the Use of RPAS by the UK and Allies

As Great Britain possesses armed RPA and the trend will be for the RAF and other services to obtain and use more RPAS in the future, the use of such aircraft by Britain, Britain's main ally, the United States, and by other NATO nations will be a central one for air strategy in the future.

Alongside the arguments debating morality and legality, the question of the strategic effect of air power operations in asymmetric conflicts is also a crucial element that affects the perceptions of how air power is used. Precision-guided munitions, delivered by conventional aircraft and RPAS, have provided a highly discriminatory capability and given Western forces a distinct tactical advantage. This must be measured against their strategic effect, however. Especially in terms of how the RPAS are viewed by the public and also by the people in war-zone countries. There is a widespread belief that such over-arching military power creates resentment that serves to undermine the strategic goals of the counter-insurgency campaign. This is specifically applied to the issue of RPAS when they strike across border areas into so-called sanctuary countries.

General (ret.) Stanley McChrystal suggested that RPAS use was a strategic problem:

‘What scares me about drone strikes is how they are perceived around the world ... The resentment created by American use of unmanned strikes ... is much greater than the average American appreciates. They are hated on a visceral level, even by people who’ve never seen one or seen the effects of one.’⁴⁸

However, there is a danger that the simple idea that RPAS create more terrorists becomes an assumption in the minds of the national elites and media that rests unchallenged. Indeed, some basic research indicates that the constantly repeated refrain that the RPAS are hugely resented and help inspire support for terrorism are in many cases simply not true. Media headlines do not often portray this balance, and are often hijacked by anti-war themes that seek to undermine the use of air power and RPAS in particular. A good example of this was the extensive media coverage of four USAF servicemen who issued a plea to the Obama administration in November 2015 to revise its strategy of employing RPAS.⁴⁹ All were connected to the RPAS operations. In their letter, which was well-publicized in the UK and which formed an important part in the hard-left’s anti-RPA campaign, the four servicemen stated that their operations, ‘fueled the feelings of hatred that ignited terrorism and groups like Isis, while also serving as a fundamental recruitment tool similar to Guantánamo Bay’. In particular, they argued that the killing of innocent civilians in drone airstrikes has acted as one of the most ‘devastating driving forces for terrorism and destabilization around the world’.⁵⁰

This study does not wish to question the integrity of these men or the stress that they endured in their roles – all four suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁵¹ Their case demonstrates that the trauma of war is still felt even remotely, via a computer screen. But the extensive media attention was out of all balance with the broader perspective – this story appeared in all the major UK newspapers and the four men were on numerous talk shows. It needs to be remembered that these are only four servicemen out of

many thousands, most of whom do not feel that these operations are immoral or undermine the campaign objectives. Conscientious objectors are not a new phenomenon and their views must be balanced with the wider body of opinion, not taken as fact. It was also notable that the media did not seem to question the basis of their view. How were they to conclude that in combatting insurgents such as the Taliban, air strikes fuel further terrorism? Their roles meant that these men were remote from the targeted areas, so it is difficult to see how this conclusion is reached. The strategic picture is not one that they possess.

There is ample evidence to challenge the popular media views that air strikes create future generations of terrorists, suggesting that the supposed resentment is not universal, and it may not even be widespread. Professor Brian Glynn Williams has compiled reports that demonstrate that, in some areas, the air strikes, particularly by RPAS, were seen as the least problematic of the potential threats to local populations. The insurgents were often seen as much more violent than Coalition Forces. In Pakistan the population believed that the air strikes by the Pakistani Army and Air Force were far less discriminating than the American RPAS strikes. In his book *Predators: the CIA’s Drone War on Al-Qaeda*, Williams notes that in Afghanistan there was widespread support amongst the police and intelligence officers for the drone strikes that were interdicting Taliban suicide missions, which were particularly virulent at that time.⁵²

In Pakistan, a nation that has seen many US RPAS strikes, Pakistani journalist Pervez Hoodbhoy made reference to the masses of suicide bombers in an article ‘Their Drones ... And Ours’. In it he characterizes suicide bombers as programmed and unthinking weapons. ‘Pakistan has many more drones than America. These are mullah-trained and mass-produced in madrassas and militant training camps ... their targets lie among their own people, not in some distant country. Collateral damage does not matter.’ ‘The walking (or driving) drone’s trail is far bloodier than that of the MQ-1B or MQ-9; body parts lie scattered across Pakistan.’⁵³ In 2009–2010 a number of articles like Hoodbhoy’s appeared in the Pakistani press, not-

ing both the horrors of the Taliban and the general public support of the RPAS campaigns. These were spurred perhaps by the revelation that, in striking contrast to the outrage expressed by the Pakistani government, the US strikes in Pakistan were actually being launched from air bases within Pakistan, with the government's blessing.⁵⁴ In 'Drone attacks: challenging some fabrications', Farhat Taj wrote in the *Daily Times*:

'The people of Waziristan are suffering a brutal kind of occupation under the Taliban and Al-Qaeda ... (who) have done everything to stop the drone attacks by killing hundreds of innocent civilians on the pretext of their being American spies. They thought that by overwhelming the innocent people of Waziristan with terror tactics they would deter any potential informer, but they have failed ... It is in this context that (the people) would welcome anyone, Americans, Israelis, Indians or even the devil, to rid them of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Therefore, they welcome the drone attacks.'⁵⁵

Similarly Irfan Husain, writing in the Pakistani paper *The Dawn*, notes that the claimed outrage over US air strikes had been accepted as the 'gospel truth'. Outrage was based upon the notion of Pakistan's sovereignty being undermined and that the US campaign was counter-productive. However she argues that 'hypocrisy inherent in these protests is little short of breath taking.'⁵⁶ She further argues that '[w]ith the concept of sovereignty comes the responsibility to exercise control over territory. Successive Pakistani governments have failed to seal our borders, and the entire region is suffering from terrorism as a result.' Finally, 'We need to wake up to the reality that the enemy has grown very strong in the years we temporized and tried to do deals with them. Clearly, we need allies in this fight. Howling at the moon is not going to get us the cooperation we so desperately need. A solid case can be made for more drone attacks, not less.'⁵⁷

These sentiments support evidence revealed through the research of a Pakistani think tank, the Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy (AIRRA). Teams of researchers were sent into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and interviewed over

500 people regarding the use of RPAS in the region. The findings of this research challenged the view that these strikes created outrage. Brian Williams notes the main conclusions:

- 'Only 45 percent of those Pashtuns questioned felt that drone strikes brought fear and terror to the common people.
- 52 percent of those questioned felt the strikes were accurate.
- 58 percent said the strikes did *not* cause anti-Americanism.
- 60 percent felt the militants were damaged by the strikes.
- 70 percent felt the Pakistanis should carry out strikes of their own against the militants.'⁵⁸

Thus, the notion that these attacks were unpopular appears without basis. In addition to the issue of combatting the insurgents directly, the respondents also commented on the issue of sovereignty, which was the point of the most vociferous official Pakistani complaint: some of the local Pashtuns did not view the US as violating Pakistan's sovereignty, but rather that they were violating the sovereignty of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda!⁵⁹ It is clear that the media have given a great deal of emphasis to this notion that air strikes are counter-productive from a strategic view point within a population-focused counter-insurgency effort.

It is clear that the notion that air strikes, and RPAS strikes in particular, are counter-productive cannot be simply assumed. As the statistics mentioned in the previous section demonstrate that overall Western air strikes in Afghanistan and the US campaign in Pakistan have not been responsible for anywhere near as many civilian casualties as the insurgents have been (and this does not take into consideration the barbarity of the insurgent treatment of the civilian populations). A logical conclusion is that those committing the vast majority of crimes are also those who would receive the greatest contempt.

There is clear military utility in these strikes, and in particular RPAS strikes. It was a fact that in the case of the four US airmen who wrote the appeal to President

Obama, it was noted that they were not completely against the use of RPA, which were seen as having beneficial uses.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, even if the 'counter-productive' view can be easily qualified or rejected, the air campaigns must do their utmost to guard against civilian casualties, for all the moral, humane and legal reasons mentioned above and the strategic effects that mistakes can engender.

It is certain that a similar mixture of dynamics is present in the current situation in Syria and, if a survey were to be taken in the region, along the lines of the survey conducted by AIRRA in Pakistan, they would likely show a similar balance of sentiments regarding the air strikes. The UK should not be deterred by the notion that striking such barbaric groups would create a backlash. However, the MoD and the RAF need to do more to emphasize the case for their air strikes and to combat the misperceptions. David Dep-
tula suggests that 'our adversaries are most certainly conducting an aggressive perception management campaign on this issue – an effective campaign if the recent attention over RPA use is a measure of effectiveness.'⁶¹ The UK's Secretary of State for Defence (2011–2014),

Philip Hammond, noted the need for greater efforts in terms of communicating the UK's perspective in the Guardian in December 2013. 'Much criticism ... is based on genuine misunderstanding or a wild misrepresentation of reality – even in the pages of prestigious newspapers. We in the MoD have not done enough to correct these misapprehensions.'⁶² His words should be heeded. The RAF and the UK's military enjoy substantial support but the public will demand clarity and assurance that their military personnel are engaged in worthy, legal and moral causes.

Unease is increased by media articles and campaign groups that can be misinformed or pursuing distinct anti-government and anti-military agendas. Such controversy is a particular problem for air power. This can be deduced partly by the number of headlines dedicated to air strikes compared to headlines referring to other forms of military power. Air power is delivered at distance in comparison with troops on the

ground and in contact – regardless of what type of platform is used – and therefore air power draws criticism of unfairness and asymmetry. It is, in fact, a rather bizarre conception of 'fairness' and equates to a double standard. Irregular forces routinely violate the international rules of war and attack civilians and commit acts of pure terrorism. The idea that it is unfair to use air power against such forces because it is a weapon that they do not possess (instead they use suicide bombers) has no place in traditional international law. Nevertheless, this is a theme that appears in the critique of the British hard left. Some recent events give an idea of how this can manifest itself. The killing of 'Jihadi John' by an RPAS strike and the sniper shootings of five ISIS suicide bombers a month later were treated very differently in the media. While there are a number of contextual differences between the two cases, the former created a vociferous debate, with the leader of the Labour Party maintaining that the insurgent should have been arrested (even though this was virtually impossible), while the sniper shooting has not been challenged in any moral capacity and is seen universally in a positive light.⁶³ In general, in dealing with parts of the UK media and the political groups of the hard left, air strikes have to overcome a more difficult set of problems than other forms of military power.

The UK Media and Air Power

This chapter so far has addressed how the issue of drones is covered by the British media and the issue of drones and their use remains problematic. However, for the broader coverage of the British military and of British air operations and the RAF the British media provides extensive and generally accurate coverage to the public. As Britain has been continuously involved in military, and especially air, operations for the last fifteen years there is strong public interest in the military and the military receives extensive coverage in the main media of newspapers, radio and television.

One of the major issues covered by the British media since 2010 has been the debate on the military budget and the issue of defence cuts initiated by the

Cameron government. One of the key aspects of the British tradition is the freedom that senior British officers and service chiefs have in speaking to the press in frank terms about issues concerning their service. Of course, service chiefs cannot openly oppose the government on service issues, but serving officers can issue ‘warnings’ and discuss the problems associated with government policies concerning the defence budget. In the intense debates about defence spending in 2010–2011 RAF senior officers spoke up calling for increased infrastructure spending to maintain the RAF as an effective force.⁶⁴ During the Libya operation Air Chief Marshall Stephen Dalton, chief of the RAF, told the media that the RAF would require additional funds to be able to carry out such operations in the future.⁶⁵ In 2010 Air Vice Marshall Greg Bagwell, commander of the British fighter force, told the press that defence budget plans would leave the RAF with insufficient forces to properly cover Britain’s commitments in Afghanistan and other operations.⁶⁶ The openness with which senior officers are allowed to talk to the press and to make critical statements on key defence issues without being penalized is one thing that makes the British military/media relationship quite different from most other NATO nations.

Indeed, the media has generally been highly supportive of increased defence spending and spending for the RAF with several major daily newspapers before and after the 2015 national elections publishing prominent opinion editorial pieces on the subject.⁶⁷ There was strong media support for Prime Minister David Cameron’s decision to increase defence spending in late 2015 that included more spending on the RAF and also on acquiring more RPAS.⁶⁸ While British newspapers have a fairly predictable bias in their editorials and opinion pages (Telegraph and Times and Daily Mail generally pro-conservative and the Guardian pro-Labour) there is a good balance of media coverage on major military issues. The charter of the BBC requires that the government-chartered national radio/television company provide unbiased coverage. This means that in their many news commentary programmes the BBC makes an effort to get both views of an issue presented. The concentration

of major national newspapers in London as well as major media studios there means that journalists do not have to go far to obtain expert commentary on air power and military issues. While there are limits as to how far serving officers can go in talking with the media, retired senior officers including the retired service chiefs have full freedom to comment to the press and even author articles to the newspapers – as they often do.

Britain also has a concentration of expert think tanks and defence publications based in London. The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and Janes’ Publications as well as other specialist defence journals are based in London and have a world-class reputation and produce excellent publications on air power. While their own publications are routinely read by a relatively small audience in the defence industry or military the influence of these institutions and publishers is considerable in defence debates. The British media has some first rate expertise on air power close to hand. Thus, in general, the British military is in a favorable position in being able to get its message out and in its ability to participate in the national debates on military spending and military policy.

UK Public Opinion

There is widespread support for the military in the UK and within this support for the RAF is particularly sound. History, of course, plays a significant role in this, and Britain’s ‘finest hour’ was the defeat of the Luftwaffe by the RAF and the preservation of the homeland from invasion. It is arguable that no other country in Europe supports its military, and commemorates its military history, to the extent of the UK. Currently, this seems to be reflected in a relatively high trust in military figures. In October 2014, the YouGov (a major British polling concern) UK poll indicated that the public placed a higher degree of trust in senior military figures than they did in their own political leaders when it came to discussing conflict and much more than in other political actors (see Table 1).⁶⁹ YouGov’s conclusion regarding the polling data was that, ‘Our armed forces enjoy a highly positive reputation over all, including both senior ranks and squaddies,

Actors in the debate on war	Total 'trust'	Total 'do not trust'	Don't know	Net trust
Senior members of the UK Armed Forces	60	29	11	31
US President Barack Obama	43	47	10	-4
UK Prime Minister David Cameron	37	54	9	-17
Your local Member of Parliament (MP)	28	57	15	-29
Leaders of anti-war organizations	23	64	13	-41
Senior officials of the European Union	21	68	12	-47

Table 1: How much do you trust the following to tell the truth when it comes to debating whether the UK should take military action (%)?

and are trusted substantially more than various other actors to tell the truth when it comes to debating military action, such as that of local MPs, European officials, the Prime Minister and the leaders of anti-war groups.⁷⁰ While this may reflect the political fallout over Gulf War II and the erosion of trust in the office of Prime Minister, it is notable that the trust in senior military figures surpasses that in the current US President, which implies that this trust in the military is deep rooted.

Such attitudes are fundamental when engaging in expeditionary campaigns, where the public is less able to make the connection between their security and the costs in terms of blood and treasure. In such campaigns public support is more likely to fray quickly, and thus the case for military involvement must be clearly made. Given the consistent engagement of British forces in military campaigns in recent years, the support of the public may be considered to have been severely tested. Indeed, a 2014 YouGov survey that tracks opinion regarding Britain's involvement in Gulf War II indicates a long-term decline. At the start of that campaign in 2003, in response to the question 'Do you think the United States and Britain are / were right or wrong to take military action against Iraq?' support was in the region of 60%. By 2014, those answering 'right' were only 20%.⁷¹ The strategic picture also suggested that Britain's engagement in international affairs was eroding. Towards the end of 2013, the government's proposal

for airstrikes in Syria was defeated in Parliament, forces were being withdrawn from Afghanistan, and there was an acceleration in the withdrawal of British forces from Germany.⁷² The 2010 SDSR cuts were beginning to take effect and the future of Britain's nuclear deterrent seemed less assured due to the possibility of Scottish independence.

Despite what would appear to be a declining appetite for engagement on behalf of the Government and a reduction in the conviction of the public in its value, the situation in Syria sparked a clear about face, with increased support from the public for air strikes in the following year. Polling data indicated that support for the RAF taking part in air strikes against ISIS in Syria rose from 37% in August 2014 to 59% in October.⁷³ In November 2014, support for employing manned aircraft against ISIS in Syria was 60%, and against ISIS in Iraq was 60% also. Support for RPA strikes was 62% in Syria and 61% in Iraq.⁷⁴ While the UK public is supportive of the military generally and its employment abroad to a similar extent, the polling data on their attitude to using remotely piloted vehicles is generally similar.

In 2013, YouGov conducted a number of surveys to determine the attitude towards RPAS, targeted killings, and civilian casualties. When asked whether they would support or oppose the UK Government assisting in a drone missile strike, 'to kill a known terrorist overseas', 55% supported this. If the terrorist were

a UK citizen, the support rose to 60%. If it 'were guaranteed that no innocent civilians would be killed', those in favor of the strike rose further to 67%. This drops to 43% if there was a possibility of 2–3 innocent civilians dying, and to 32% if the likelihood of civilian casualties was between 10–15 per cent.⁷⁵

When asked a related question 'Imagine a terrorist attack against the UK was imminent and could be stopped by a drone strike in the Yemen. To what extent, if at all, would you support or oppose the UK Government assisting in a drone missile strike?' the sensitivities to casualties were less. The same qualifications were applied: if it was a strike 'to kill a known terrorist overseas' 74% supported this. If the terrorist was a UK citizen, support lowered to 71%. If no innocent civilians would be killed, the support rose to 75%. If it was possible that 2–3 innocent civilians would die, support drops to 64% and further to 60% if the probability of civilian death was between 10–15%.⁷⁶ The latter category is most surprising, with almost double the respondents accepting the higher civilian casualties than for the previous question, which did not include the strike on the UK.⁷⁷

A third question in this survey related to targeted killing. In the cases of carrying out such a strike against pirates/hostage takers, known terrorists in the UK or overseas, there was majority support. If it were targeting a scientist on Iran's nuclear programme, or Bashar al-Assad, most respondents opposed.⁷⁸

Finally, the survey looked at a number of main arguments about the debate over RPAS. 61% of those polled felt that 'drones were a useful tool for gathering intelligence'. 57% agreed that the use of these platforms helped reduce casualties by removing the need to send in people on the ground (presumably ground forces). 47% agreed that 'drones can help reduce civilian casualties because of their accuracy compared to other weapons'. 47% said that 'drones make it too easy for Western governments to conduct military strikes in foreign countries'. A minority of 39% thought that 'drones give Western politicians too much personal power'. The response to whether 'drones are more likely to cause civilian casualties than other weapons

used over long distances' split the responses (24% for, 25% against, 24% unsure).

A question was also asked about whether these strikes increase or decrease Western security. The response here were inconclusive, with roughly a third suggesting that security is increased, a third disagreeing while a third responded 'neither/don't know.'

Faulkner Rogers concludes that these responses indicate a more sophisticated understanding of remotely piloted vehicles than is often assumed. Rather than a 'binary moral understanding' there is a broad appreciation of the potential benefits in employing these platforms, as well as an understanding of some of the disadvantages.⁷⁹ Furthermore, there is a distinction to be made in the perceptions of the technology itself and the operations that they are used for, which suggests public qualms are centered more on policy than the aircraft themselves.

The numerous YouGov surveys give a good indication that the British population is well attuned to UK military involvement overseas. While support has flagged to some extent with extended military commitments to foreign theatres and when political debates question the strength of the case of that involvement (as was the case in Gulf War II), it is notable that it is overall resilient, returning quickly when a crisis arises. This is coupled with a strong trust in the military as an institution. But as some of the findings indicate, it is not unconditional.

The case for the employment of air will need to be consistently demonstrated to the public. Philip Hammond's points need to be amplified here. More effective education as to the effectiveness of RPAS is needed to ensure this is maintained. This needs to be disseminated via mainstream media, including embedded journalists where security allows. This is becomes impossible when the campaign is conducted secretly. Transparency is crucial and its absence can undermine a campaign. Such a lack of transparency, some observers noted, was the greatest failing of the US in Pakistan. By acquiescing to Pakistan's hypocrisy in denying that it knew anything about the Predator

strikes and covering up 'Pakistan's official lies, the United States undermined its own credibility.'⁸⁰ The UK has not carried out campaigns such as this, but this is a good example of the need for transparency, particularly in intervention campaigns.

Transparency and Credibility are Closely Bound

Similarly, the limitations of air power need to be understood and disseminated. The impact of air power has often been over-estimated in history. When such estimations are not realized, this can erode confidence and credibility. The public must be made aware that the employment of force will have a cost, and it is never bloodless. It can also rarely win a campaign on its own. Faulkner Rogers suggests 'if UK ministers want sustainable, public support for an extended, Syrian air campaign in the meantime, they might aim for an open disclosure about its narrowed potential to contain and harass, rather than defeat.'⁸¹

Nonetheless, the UK can count on a solid base of support. More will need to be done to ensure this is maintained, particularly in expeditionary campaigns where the moral justification must be made clear, and also where elements of new technology many prove controversial, where their parameters of use need clarification.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Throughout the recent campaigns, the British public has shown a solid degree of support for the RAF and its operations. The November 2015 attacks in Paris, and the open ISIS threats to the UK amongst other Western states all serve to create a direct impetus for military action. These threats are credible, with evidence of many UK citizens migrating to Syria to fight with ISIS, with the potential to return. In such situations, the UK can resort to military action on the basis of self-defence, which indeed was the justification that the Government used when it targeted the two ISIS insurgents in Syria who held British passports in September 2015. A fierce debate in Parliament over whether to begin air strikes in Syria in December 2015

caused a slight dip in public support, though this seemed to reflect political party divide with Labour voters less supportive. Nonetheless, the situation in Syria and Iraq was sufficient to move the Government to bolster defence spending in the recent defence review, and in particular that for air power capabilities. It is air power that is seen as the only credible method with which to fight this insurgent threat. In this environment, the MoD has more marked case for involvement and this will strengthen its position in terms of its strategic communications, enabling it to deflect disinformation campaigns by opponents.

Historically the British public has shown it is resistant to disinformation efforts that question the RAF's application of air power. There is a consistent depth of support that is high compared to other countries in NATO. The level of trust placed in the military personnel is also high when it pertains to receiving accurate information about military campaigns and engagements. Indeed, the military has a far higher level of credibility with the public than political actors, and certainly more credibility than the peace campaign groups. The credibility of the military with the British public derives from soundly based traditions of solid civilian-military relations, which provide a fairly open interface and a high degree of mutual understanding between the military and the public. But the public support and trust is not unequivocal. The nature of recent campaigns have placed the relationship under higher strain at times. This is due to the indirect nature of security threats, as well as some of the technology that both promises great precision but which is also misunderstood to a great extent.

As this study demonstrates, the epicenter of the current debate on air power in the UK is the employment of RPA. As the main operator of these platforms, this debate resonates with the RAF. The debate on air power, as well as the use of military force, hinges on the morality, legitimacy and effectiveness of RPAS, as well as the public's understanding of the campaigns in which they are used. This study has noted that, despite criticism from certain sectors that view the use of these platforms for strike operations as illegal and immoral, there is a strong counter-case to this view.

Traditional international humanitarian law permits the use of these systems as long as the caveats of proportionality and discrimination are met. Their use is permitted in acts of self-defence, although this can become a tenuous link to 'homeland' security when fighting insurgents in expeditionary campaigns such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria. The problematic and complex nature of current battlefields also fit within the definition of 'non-international' conflict – a term that covers situations such as a conflict between a state and a non-state actor, as well as situations where that conflict extends into neighbouring states, or indeed where there is a coalition or international group of states involved rather than a single state. This correlates closely to the complex environment of the current campaigns against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

The targeting of individual insurgents has been labelled 'assassinations' in the media. However, a number of legal experts contend that this term is inappropriate. Continued application of this term in parts of the media serves to undermine such strikes, which are permissible according to many as an act of war. Targeted killing is a term that is distinct from assassination and is appropriate to such strikes. If in a conventional war a military leader is targeted and killed it is not deemed illegal. Nor should it be in counter-insurgency operations. This distinction is one that needs to be amplified by the MoD and RAF.

Many claims are made about the high civilian casualties that air strikes cause and, again, the focus is most often on RPAS missions. These do not seem to be supported by statistics, however, and are likely distorted. David Deptula raises this objection, noting 'enemies spread falsehoods which posit that, what they call "drones", cause reckless collateral damage, or are somehow not accurate.'⁸² The UNAMA reports indicate that the number of casualties in Afghanistan at the hands of NATO air strikes were low – in some years as low as two per cent – and much lower than the casualties inflicted by the insurgents.

A further challenge in applying air power in counter-insurgencies is the often uncontested acceptance

that air strikes breed resentment and fuel future terrorism. Common sense would suggest that insurgents that carry out intensely barbaric and inhumane acts on populations would be likely to be held in contempt by those affected populations. Air strikes that are precise and are known to be able to disrupt these insurgent groups and kill their leaders are certain to generate some support, perhaps even widespread support. Such conclusions are supported by surveys and articles in Pakistan in particular, though there are similar findings in Afghanistan. Of all the options, RPA are the best – they permit time to assess the situation precisely and avoid the problems of a pilot affected by physical exhaustion, or by the adrenalin rush of a combat situation.

Those legal and moral questions noted above will nonetheless persist and can call into question a state's operations in a counter-insurgency. They are points easily manipulated by groups with an agenda to undermine Western states' actions and it is here that public confidence can be affected. For democratic states, it is a central function that their activities and their armed forces gain and maintain public support. As discussed, the British public's view has been one of consistent support. However, support can be tested by the campaigns in which the UK has been, or is currently, involved. The polling data analysed here indicates that there is a fairly good understanding of the utility of air power and of the more complex issue of RPA.

Such support cannot be taken for granted. This study has some clear recommendations to ensure that legitimacy is upheld both in action and in the eyes of the British public.

Transparency is required to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the rules and limits with which the RAF engages targets. At present the RAF has engaged insurgent groups within the confines of international humanitarian law. Making video evidence available quickly – not a natural endeavour of a military organization – will make this clear and help over-ride contravening narratives disseminated by opponents and anti-Western groups.

Transparency would be of much diminished utility if the public had little understanding of the parameters of intervention, the main rules governing the use of force, and the role of air power within these operations. Within the understanding of the role of air power, RPAS will also have to be understood – this is an area in which misconceptions are most prevalent. This requires public education. On such a broad scale, education is a difficult process. It will crucially require the involvement of the media, as this is the conduit through which much of the information will flow. Key political leaders also must have a clear understanding of the engagements. More direct civil-military relations also have their place. The engagement of the RAF with anti-drone campaign groups at RAF Waddington, explaining the roles and procedures of RPAS, has had a positive effect in terms of quelling some doubts and fears and helped extend relations more deeply.⁸³ Thus, the education piece needs to be broad and sometimes direct. Fortunately, this has been recognized by the current UK government, as Philip Hammond's article in the *Guardian* indicates. The Joint Select Committee's investigation into RPAS and targeted killing will hopefully help bring greater clarity to the public.

NATO's Secretary General has set out a vision that reflects these central ideas: 'We will remain transparent and predictable. We will continue to respond to disinformation with information, not propaganda.'⁸⁴ This is a sound aspiration and the need for such a stance will only become stronger. The actions of Western governments must derive from a strong public mandate and be subject to constant and intense public scrutiny. If the Western nations fail to counter Russian information operations effectively and fail to explain Western defensive responses clearly to both the NATO and Russian public, they risk being outmaneuvered by Putin in the battle of the narrative.

The UK, in line with NATO, must better comprehend the role of public support, media and strategic communication in its employment of military force. For certain, the UK and NATO will face discordant and opposing views, some of the contrary positions supported by active disinformation campaigns. But by main-

taining its focus on human rights and legitimacy and engaging the public in a transparent way, the governments can ensure public support for military operations and the use of air power will be maintained. Victory may not be assured, but the resolve of the state to employ military power for national defence and in national and Alliance interest should not be in question.

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3. United Kingdom. Developments, Concepts and Doctrine Centre. *The UK Approach to Unmanned Aircraft Systems*. Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 2/11 (Shrivenham: DCDC, Mar. 2011), p. 2-2.
4. United Kingdom. Developments, Concepts and Doctrine Centre. *The UK Approach to Unmanned Aircraft Systems*. Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 2/11 (Shrivenham: DCDC, Mar. 2011), p. 2-2.
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6. This is in line with recommendations by the Birmingham Policy Commission, who note that RPA must be used in accordance with British interpretation of international law, and British rules of engagement. Notably, it suggests that 'where UK forces are embedded with US or other forces, the UK government should do more by way of reassurance to explain the safeguards which are in place to ensure that embedded personnel remain compliant with international humanitarian law.' See Birmingham Policy Commission, 'The Security Impact of Drones: Challenges and Opportunities for the UK' University of Birmingham, Oct. 2014, p. 10.
7. Marco Sassòli, Antoine A. Bouvier, Anne Quintin, *How Does Law Protect In War? Cases, Documents and Teaching Materials on Contemporary Practice in International Humanitarian Law Volume I, Outline of International Humanitarian Law*, International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva 2011, Chapter 1, p.1.
8. Sassòli et al, Chapter 1, p.1.
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10. William C. Banks, Peter Raven-Hansen, 'Targeted Killing and Assassination: The US Legal Framework', *University of Richmond Law Review*, Vol 37 no 667 (2002-03), p. 670.
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13. Thomas B. Hunter, *Targeted Killing: Self-Defense, Preemption, and the War on Terrorism* Booksurge, 2009, p. 5.
14. Hunter, p. 7.
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16. John Yoo, 'Assassination or Targeted Killings after 9/11', *Berkeley Law Scholarship Repository*, 1-1-2011.
17. UK Joint Select Committee, 'UK policy on use of drones for targeted killing inquiry launched', <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/human-rights-committee/news-parliament-2015/uk-drone-policy-evidence-15-16/>. While the Report is not yet written this page is updated with the hearing and evidence.

18. 'Drone killing of citizens in Syria marks major departure for UK', *The Guardian*, 7 Sept. 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/07/drone-british-citizens-syria-uk-david-cameron>.
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French air force on NATO exercise in the Baltics, 2015.

CHAPTER 5

'It's a Bird, It's a Plane, No It's French Air Power' – Information/Disinformation, Public Opinion and Strategy in France

Dr Matthieu Chillaud

Air-Vice Marshall Guillaume Gelée, then director of the French Joint Forces Centre for Concept Development, Doctrine and Experimentation (*Centre interarmées de concepts, de doctrines et d'expérimentations, CICDE*)¹, made the above remarks at a conference organized in Paris (June 2010) on the subject: 'What is the strategy of influence in support of military operations?' (*Quelle stratégie d'influence en appui aux opérations militaires?*)² The Air Marshall's remarks, sensational at the time, would seem quite obvious to us today. Scholars in

Disinformation, manipulation, the lack of verification of information, the absence of guidelines regarding the direction of the combat in which we engage under international mandate, even confrontations between civilizations, (all) lead to the conclusion that information warfare disrupts the military strategy that could lawfully/legitimately guide a state or group of states. Today's wars are subject to confrontation, using strategies to influence the parties involved, by those who may or may not be belligerents, with the objective of influencing perceptions/public opinion. Populations, groups, and individuals, involved directly or not, have become targets for conquest in order to influence their decisions or to tarnish any success that is actually obtained. We have entered into a battle of perceptions, the outcome of which has become a key factor in the success of the military strategies chosen.

General Guillaume Gelée, Keynote address at a conference on 'Influence en appui des opérations' (June 2010)

strategic studies who study how the media presents war and conflict, as well as examining the relationships of media, information and conflict in democratic countries, indeed understand that there is a strong link between all these factors – information, disinformation or misinformation, warfare and public opinion. This applies especially in a context in which technological means increase, as sources for getting information are not always trustworthy.

Disinformation is the deliberate manipulation of information with public opinion as the target. It is intended to influence the views and perceptions of the public, or specially chosen sectors of the public, as a means of setting attitudes of a wide or selected opinion sector, normally over a long period of time. Sometimes, disinformation is used to win a short-term advantage, but mostly it is part of a long-term strategy because disinformation has a cumulative effect. In many respects, air power is an easy target for a disinformation campaign because the audience has been prepared to receive the message through the popular understanding of history. Europeans, North Americans, and even many in developing countries know of World War II and the massive collateral damage and civilian casualties caused by aerial attacks. Films and documentaries and television dramas keep that aspect of history alive for the public.

Even in this new era of high-precision aerial warfare, many of the old historically-based perceptions of air power as an indiscriminate weapon remain. This is a notion that is common to journalists and academics who are unfamiliar with strategic and security issues. Disinformation and misinformation, as noted in the introduction of the team study, can be effective almost in direct relation to the ignorance of the political elites and the general public of air power. As air power is a subject that is necessarily bound up in complex technology and is employed in a manner that the public rarely sees, or has any direct relation to, it is also an easy target for any group taking the effort to develop a moderately credible disinformation campaign. As it stands today, in terms of the general public, the French use of air power is that aspect of military operations that the public sees and understands the least. It is also

an essential aspect of all modern military operations. When air power works well – when it conducts effective surveillance and provides French forces and allied forces with vital information, or when transport aircraft efficiently move forces and equipment, or when French forces are supported in daily operations by French aircraft – it scarcely has any impact on the public. Only when something goes wrong, when air support is not present or civilian casualties result from military action, does the media and public take note. Few in the general public or among the elites have any realistic grasp of the technological capabilities and limits of air power and this number is declining in France, as France has transitioned to an all-volunteer armed forces. Smaller but more professional armed forces means that fewer Frenchmen will have served in the armed forces and fewer will thus have a basic understanding of the military. Much of what the public understands of military operations today is from Hollywood films or brief news clips showing a few seconds of a grainy video film of a bomb hitting a target. Such things provide drama, but no context. Precision bombs look easy to drop and employ on television. Few among the public know of the vast effort in intelligence collection, planning, and logistics required to drop one bomb.

The ironic term 'Weapons of Mass Communication' (WMC)³ refers to use of the media as a means to discredit NATO air operations by forces hostile to NATO. For several reasons, large sectors of the French public are susceptible to anti-NATO and anti-air power disinformation campaigns. Such anti-NATO stories have a powerful effect in a country like France, which has been involved in several conflicts since the 1999 Kosovo campaign, in which air supremacy has always been held by the allied or coalition forces that included France.⁴ Public opinion shaped by media can become a real constraint if there is a latent hostility or even an active mobilization against a military action advocated by the French government. As in all democratic countries, France is aware that, before any decision is to be implemented, an analysis of the public opinion and an attempt to obtain the general support of the public for such an operation is an essential task of the government.⁵ The problem is to know the fundamentals of

public opinion on key issues, along with a solid historical context of French public opinion, and to understand how public opinion can change over time. Public opinion always has a context (social, historical, and political) and, in many respects, contains certain constant factors that stem from the unique French context. The idea that public opinion is fickle and easily swayed is certainly overdone. In an intriguing article, two leading American academics, Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, argued that, 'the notion of a capricious public is a myth'.⁶ They rule out the idea that public opinion is subject to wide swings on the basis of relatively minor causes. Shapiro and Page argue that a public opinion change is normally based on some key variables; chief among them is the nature of readily accessible and available information. In that regard, there is a strong argument that, over the long term, public opinion in developed democracies with a high level of education is essentially based on rationality. It is precisely this theory of public opinion that I shall defend in this study: information shapes public opinion. This, in turn, influences and shapes French strategic options.

Introduction – The Aim and Scope of the Research: Air Power and the Key Role of Information for France in the Context of NATO

Created *de facto* in 1912 and *de jure* in 1934⁷, the French Air Force is a relatively young institution in a nation with a military tradition going back many centuries. Yet, even before World War I French military theorists were writing about the role of air power. Clément Ader wrote some prescient articles in 1904–1905 which were gathered into his prophetic book *Military Aviation (L'Aviation militaire)*, published in 1908, in which *inter alia* he stated that 'He who masters the air will master the world.' (*Sera maître du Monde, celui qui sera maître de l'Air*)⁸. The First World War highlighted potential of the new air arm and in many Western countries, including France, some visionary minds saw in it the means to free oneself of the constraints of the ground. These thinkers forecast the advent of a strategy dominated by air power and pleaded with their governments to strengthen the place of air power within the

national forces and strategies. Despite strong opposition within the forces, the French partisans of air power ensured the creation of the *Armée de l'Air* as an independent force in 1934. The Second World War confirmed and even amplified the role of air power. The founder-director of the review *Forces aériennes françaises* in 1946, General Lionel-Max Chassin, contributed actively to the elaboration of a French doctrine of air power. The *Provisional Instruction on the Employment of Air Forces (Instruction provisoire sur l'emploi des forces aériennes)* was written under the supervision of General Paul Gérardot, then Chief of the Staff of the French Air Force. This work, published in 1947, was a major first step in developing a uniquely French doctrine on the use of air power.⁹

Nevertheless, one must acknowledge that no true French air doctrine emerged after the publication of the 1947 *Instruction*. In fact, despite some texts published here and there, in France the principles of air power have never been formalized. The integration of French Air Force within NATO seems to have exempted the French from elaborating a real corpus of national air power theory. In addition, from the 1960s to the 1980–1990s, nuclear deterrence theory and practice was central to the strategic thinking of the French Air Force and so strong was the pull of nuclear deterrence thinking that there was little interest in developing concepts for conventional or irregular warfare. With the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and the collapse of the USSR, the missions of the French Armed Forces changed dramatically. Engaged in an array of new conflicts, the French Air Force had to transform its *raison d'être*, to include its organization, its operational concepts and its tactics to serve in a new role as a power projection force. Furthermore, the French Air Force would be operating within the context of coalition operations.

The next event that forced the French military and the Air Force to change was the conflict in Afghanistan. The new problem that France faced was fighting insurgents according to a model of conflict that the French armed forces had not used since the Algerian War of the 1950s and 1960s. How would air power be used most effectively for this 'new' type of conflict? The chal-

lenge was, in many respects, a new one, as communication in the media took on a much greater role than in any previous conflicts. In addition, if indeed France was making a step-by-step reintegration into NATO structures, the French Armed Forces were still lagging behind in terms of serious reflections on the new relationships and alliances of the post-Cold War era. The next coalition war, in Libya, in which France was one of the major air force belligerents, saw that air power, despite new forms of warfare, was still relevant. It also highlighted the need for strong strategic communications. Furthermore, the broad French military involvement in Africa has demonstrated that the issue of dis/mis-information can be essential even though NATO or a coalition is not directly involved.

Since the end of the Cold War, France has routinely been one of the major contributors to NATO operations. It contributed to operations in Bosnia from 1993 to 1994 under IFOR and then SFOR, as well as to the NATO air campaign in 1999 in Kosovo. It committed forces in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2012 and provided a considerable contribution to the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF) under NATO command from 2003.

As a matter of fact, France's involvement with NATO has varied over the years: in turns France has played various roles to include founding member, inside protester, voluntarily exile and finally return as a 'prodigal son'. Indeed, the relationships between France and NATO have been and remain complex. In the aftermath of World War II, France got what it had wished for during both world wars: the military and political involvement of the US in Europe. Confronted with the Soviet threat, France was aware of its weakness and especially the inadequacy of its military means and its strategic ambitions. At the same time, confronted with decolonization, France tried unsuccessfully to push its allies to involve NATO in supporting the retention of France's Mediterranean and Near East possessions and influence. Furthermore, French leaders also demanded participation in the strategic direction of the Alliance in equal measure to France's role in NATO. These demands were made in a context of wavering trust, even to a certain degree distrust, mainly due to American pressure during European Defence Community (EDC)

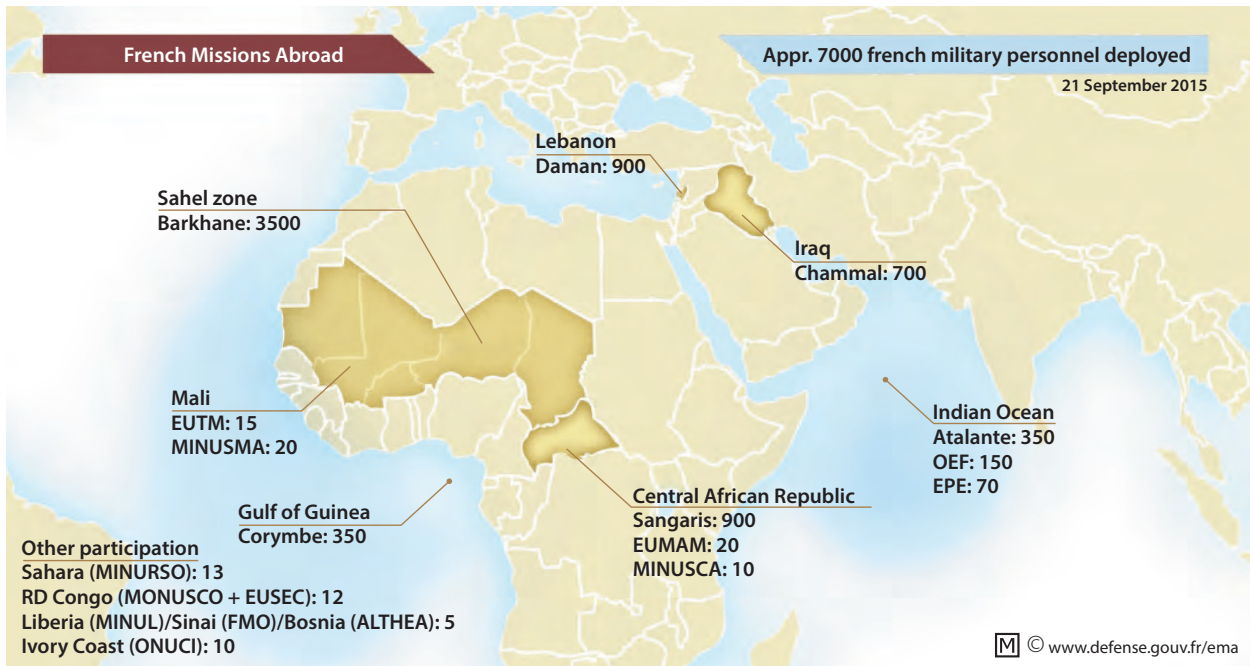
debates, to America's stance during the Suez crisis, and, in general, to the United States' support for decolonization.

Charles de Gaulle returned to power amidst a climate of anti-Americanism, ironically widely fed by the French Communist Party propaganda. The new president, who was particularly sensitive about the presence of American armed forces on national soil as part of France's NATO involvement, abhorred the integrated military system because it placed France in a politically insupportable position of subordination. Convinced that it was crucial for France to maintain complete control of its own defence, De Gaulle's 1966 decision was logical and coherent. France, however, remained a member of NATO since it had only left the organization's integrated military structure. This remained the French relationship with NATO, along with alternating phases of rapprochement and tension, until the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In the period after 1966, a decisive year in understanding the following French politico-strategic posture, there was considerable friction in the relations between France and the US. The chief points of friction were on the scope of the evolution of NATO in policy, strategy and organizational contexts. France wanted to see an autonomous European defence entity established and the Americans wanted to stay in Europe and to maintain their leadership of the Western Alliance.

However, after the Soviet Union was dissolved, France changed its position and readily joined the military coalition to fight the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. France's active participation in the conflict under overall American leadership softened the long period of French/American disagreement over the direction of NATO. In addition, in regards to the developing crises in Yugoslavia and the need for a Western and European response, the French became aware that their stance vis-à-vis NATO was increasingly indefensible.

The lessons of the First Gulf War were not the only motive for accepting the role of the returning prodigal



Recent French military overseas deployments as of early 2016.

son. European weakness and the failure of the Europeans to find peaceful solutions to the conflicts in Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995 sounded an alarm. Europe was unable to conduct an autonomous defence policy even on its doorstep. France, the erstwhile champion of a European Defence system independent of the US, based on the militarization of the ghostly Western European Union, moved step-by-step to the idea of a 'European pillar' of NATO. With this aim in mind, France had to get closer, ever so gingerly, to NATO. Eventually, the President Jacques Chirac announced in December 1995 that France would return with full participation to the NATO Military Committee.¹⁰ Yet disagreements and even disputes on the nature of NATO and its *raison d'être* continued. For some in the French government, NATO was a political organization. For others it was a military alliance. This difference in fundamental concepts found its climax after the 9/11 attack on the United States and especially during the debate between the US and several European allies about the need for a conflict with Iraq in 2003. Over time the US and French relationship improved and France decided to come back to full NATO participation. France officially announced its full participation in the NATO Integrated Military Command Structures during the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit in April

2009. But, at the same time, France also attached several conditions to its return to the command structures: maintaining full discretion for France's contribution to NATO operations and maintaining its nuclear independence. France decided not to join the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), which determines the Alliance's nuclear policy. No French force is placed under permanent NATO command in peacetime and non-participation in the common funding of certain expenditures were conditions made prior to France's return to the command structures.¹¹ Subsequent to its reintegration within NATO structures, France had slowly incorporated into its strategic thinking some aspects of the NATO doctrine. This is true especially for 'Strategic Communication' (*StratCom*). Coincidence or not, it was during the April 2009 Strasbourg-Kehl Summit that *StratCom* was integrated into NATO's comprehensive approach. In addition, one can note that this was three months after the Chief of Staff of the French Air Force Stéphane Abrial was appointed to lead *Allied Command Transformation*, which had been given responsibility for *StratCom*.

Since the Afghanistan campaign, NATO has sought to strengthen its strategy of communication, its aim being to promote behaviour in target audiences in order

to promote the actor's objectives and subsequently to shape the operational environment. NATO has defined *StratCom* as follows:

The coordinated and appropriate use of NATO activities and capabilities communications in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims. These activities and capabilities are: *Public Diplomacy*: NATO civilian communications and outreach efforts responsible for promoting awareness of and building understanding and support for NATO's policies, operations and activities, in complement to the national efforts of Allies; *Public Affairs*: NATO civilian engagement through the media to inform the public of NATO policies, operations and activities in a timely, accurate, responsive, and proactive manner; *Military Public Affairs*: promoting NATO's military aims and objectives to audiences in order to enhance awareness and understanding of military aspects of the Alliance; *Information Operations*: NATO military advice and co-ordination of military information activities in order to create desired effects on the will, understanding, and capabilities of adversaries and other NATO-approved parties in support of Alliance operations, missions and objectives; *Psychological Operations*: planned psychological activities using methods of communications and other means directed to approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives.¹²

France and NATO indeed share similar concerns without them actually overlapping. As a matter of fact, the case of France may show the difficulty – but certainly not the impossibility – of the challenges of a country which differs, in many respects, from other nations that contribute to NATO strategic thinking. Indeed, France has hitherto shown a reluctance to participate in or to contribute to any *StratCom* within NATO, the main reason being historical. Since the War of Algeria – a conflict during which the concept of psychological warfare was widely used – the French have been reluctant to risk any amalgamation of the concepts of influence and information. Nevertheless, the French agenda is not unchangeable, and several recent events signal a significant evolution of French thinking in this area.

This study will analyse the nature of the problem since the term disinformation, in the context of relationships between wars, media and democracy in general, and air campaigns in particular, has a myriad of aspects. How does the media's representations of war in general and air power in particular affect and significantly influence the public? What are the emotional effects of images and media on public opinion? How do French political authorities integrate this in their strategy? In order to address these questions, it is necessary to 'dissect' the expression¹³. Afterwards, we shall see how France uses air power through examining some case studies and will look at to what degree public preferences have been shaped by French media and how the media has been incorporated in the policy-making process. Last, but not least, we shall try to analyse French peculiarities and to give some recommendations. Shedding light on 'the French case' is all the more important since France does not share many of the same traditions of other NATO countries in dealing with the media. In addition, France is now waging war in different theatres in a context in which it also had to consider the impact of internal security – especially after the impact of two major terrorist attacks on its soil in 2015 that were motivated and supported from radical groups outside of France.

This country study argues that that we are literally at the crossroad of democracy and aestheticism. In Latin '*forma-*' means beauty. To deform means therefore making something ugly. The term 'to inform' provides the aesthetic of developing knowledge – a key requirement for any free and democratic society to function; 'to disinform' is to isolate people from knowledge. If people in a democracy lack accurate information, eventually democracy could be fatally weakened through disinformation.

Public Opinion, Information and Strategy. What is at Stake?

The issue of information – and its corollary 'disinformation' or 'misinformation' – is as old as war itself.¹⁴ But what is more recent is its strategic and tactical usage commensurate with the emergence of new technologies. Frequently evoked but seldom defined, the term

'disinformation' is commonly applied to denigrate a group or someone who does not share accepted opinions. The term is often used in espionage or military intelligence as a way to deliberately spread false information in order to mislead an enemy, or to distort true information in such a way as to render it useless. Disinformation can be also understood as the planting in the media information that the media believes to be credible and true. In fact, the issue of disinformation in modern warfare has two dimensions. The first one is a strategy conducted by an opponent to influence public opinion and discredit the country. This can work to push a country out of military actions. The second dimension of disinformation is to support selected internal political adversaries who are opposed to their country's national strategy. In fact, these two dimensions often overlap. The arguments provided in the first dimension may be relayed by the second dimension in order to strengthen the hostility of anti-government elements without those elements being necessarily aware that the information they rely on is untruthful. Incidentally, even if there is 'only' misinformation that influences the public and media, it has some similar consequences even if it does not occur with any intent. The problem of mis- or disinformation may concern journalists who might act as the conductor due to their lack of informed knowledge. Traditionally, journalists validated stories carefully by cross-checking the truth and relevance of their sources. Today, journalists – claiming time pressure – readily accept the reliability of their sources. The imperative of the 24/7 news cycle and the need for immediate journalistic response is indeed incompatible with any critical perspective of information by the public. In addition, governments and NGOs set up more and more sophisticated strategies of communication, meaning that journalists, even the most seasoned, may have to take for granted the validity of their sources. Each journalist wants a 'scoop'.

The story of sensationalism in the media is not a new one. Nonetheless, because of the current emergence of new technologies and the near-simultaneity of the event and the information at hand, journalists today have to find a balance between speed and accuracy. The development of information technology has had the main effect of complicating the task of influencing

the audience's way of thinking. The revolution in information technology – the diversification as well as the democratization of available means – has had a significant impact on communication. In addition, there are some phenomena of psittacism between newsrooms of different media. The validity of the first available information being taken for granted, it is repeated by others, and it is very difficult to deny it or even modify it. Indeed, a basic level of journalistic integrity is required in Western media, but that is no certain barrier to prevent disinformation.

Nonetheless, the Western standards for journalism are not common to the Middle East and North Africa and the French public can observe this. With the launch of several satellite channels based in North Africa and the Middle East that broadcast in France in French and in Arabic in the Middle East and North Africa, there is a means by which the French public can get the perspective from those regions. The perspective of journalists in North Africa and the Middle East is usually different and far more critical of Western belligerents than French networks. As France has one of the largest Muslim populations in Western Europe, the country may be especially targeted by North African and Middle Eastern channels. There is undoubtedly a struggle of influence. On the one hand, there are French media personnel who are not fully protected from dis/misinformation. However, they have the integrity and professionalism to present facts and to analyse events in a non-biased manner. On the other hand, some members of the media, chiefly from the Middle East and who broadcast in French and in Arabic, are more disposed to adopt a perspective critical of the West – at times even employing very biased and false reporting. These journalists are susceptible to convey and spread disinformation.

Influence and External Operations

'One must admit the decisive influence of the media on both the decision to launch a military operation and in a way to conduct it.' It is with these words that the former French minister of Foreign affairs and chairman of the Committee of Foreign affairs at the National Assemblée Jean-Bernard Raimond concluded his study

OPÉRATION CHAMMAL

3 200 MILITAIRES FRANÇAIS
DONT LES MILITAIRES SOUS LES ORDRES D'ALINDIEN
ET INSÉRÉS DANS LES PRINCIPAUX CENTRES DE COMMANDEMENT

6 RAFALE DE L' ARMÉE DE L'AIR

6 MIRAGE 2000 D DE L' ARMÉE DE L'AIR

1 AVION DE RAVITAILLEMENT C135-FR

1 AVION DE PATROUILLE MARITIME ATLANTIQUE 2

1 GROUPE AÉRONAVAL (2 600 MILITAIRES) COMPRENANT

- + 1 ÉTAT-MAJOR EMBARQUÉ
- + PORTE-AVIONS CHARLES DE GAULLE
- + GROUPE AÉRIEN EMBARQUÉ :
 - 12 RAFALE MARINE
 - 9 SUPER-ÉTENDARDS MODERNISÉS
 - 1 HAWKEYE
- + FRÉGATE DE DÉFENSE AÉRIENNE CHEVALIER PAUL
- + PÉTROLIER RAVITAILLEUR MEUSE
- + 1 SOUS-MARIN NUCLÉAIRE D'ATTAQUE
- + FRÉGATE ANTI SOUS-MARINE HMS KENT (UK)

OPÉRATION LANCÉE LE 19 SEPTEMBRE 2014 POUR FOURNIR UN APPUI AÉRIEN AUX FORCES ARMÉES IRAKIENNES

MODES D'ACTION : RECONNAISSANCE ARMÉE, RENSEIGNEMENT, CONTRÔLE AÉRIEN, COORDINATION

MISE À JOUR 23 FÉVRIER 2015
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published in 1995.¹⁵ By 2016 the influence of the media and its role in shaping public opinion has become clear. The power of the dramatic pictures of refugees, mainly from Syria, and the emotion triggered in Europe by the shocking *images* of a drowned Syrian refugee boy dead on the Turkish coast in September 2016 had an enormous impact on French, as well as European, public opinion. Incidentally, it was not a coincidence that President Hollande decided few days after publication of these photos to strengthen *Opération Chammal* which, at that time, concerned only the Northern part of Iraq.¹⁶ This event did not go unnoticed and a debate whether to send ground troops to the Middle East to help deal with this crisis is ongoing as of early 2016. In the run-up to 2017 French Presidential elections, these issues are likely to become important in the French political debate. It is obvious that some losses or even casualties among the armed

forces would trigger and generate a debate whose political context would be mainly shaped by the media.

Of course, public opinion is not the only factor taken into account when a strategy is initiated. French strategy makers are not insulated from public pressure and, without public support, they know it is impossible to wage war. There would undoubtedly be a political penalty for those who would think it would be unnecessary to engage in conflict.¹⁷ Actually, there are two different 'schools' in social sciences with different perspectives on this issue of public support. The 'idealistic' school argues that an individuals' integrity in politics is central and rejects the arbitrary actions of the state. The democratic control of foreign policy and ensuring that the strategic options decided by the state are in accordance with the popular will is possible and even desirable since citizens are able to produce a stable

opinion, upon which the state can carry out strategic actions. For the most 'liberalists', this school includes some significant advantages in emphasizing the involvement of citizens, the most significant one of these being the reduction of the warlike temptations of states and offering an opportunity for the expansion of peace. The 'realistic' school argues that foreign policy must generally be isolated from public opinion since public opinion can be unstable and irrational. Since the modern world is becoming increasingly complex, the average citizen cannot understand world politics. Essentially, public opinion would be a hindrance to the coherent promotion of national interests. Additionally, one must note that in France the political and constitutional context is specific in regards to foreign policy and defence issues, as these are considered as belonging to the so-called '*domaine réservé*' (reserved area) of the president.

Since 1958, France has been considered by commentators of the French political system (chiefly specialists in constitutional law) as the ideal type of strong state for managing defence and foreign affairs. It is in the foreign and defence realms that the president's role has significantly increased since the promulgation in 1958 of the Fifth Republic's constitution. The president is responsible for the general direction of foreign policy and for taking major decisions of international importance. The French President, apart from foreign policy being constitutionally the President's *domaine réservé*, chairs the *Conseil de Défense* and, according to the decree of July 18, 1962 controls, '*the overall framework of national defence*'. Though the same decree created the *Secrétariat général de Défense nationale* (SGDN) nominally under the Prime Minister's office, the fact that its main function was to service meetings of the Defence Council put it firmly in the grasp of the President. A 14 January 1964 decree gave sole responsibility for firing France's nuclear weapon to the President, while the decree of 10 December 1971 gave the president authority over the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to Samy Cohen, an expert on defence decision making, the French president is a 'nuclear monarch,' whereas the government most of the time plays a minor role in the formulation of foreign and defence policy.¹⁸ In addition, the powers of the French parliament are rath-

er limited. Until the significant 2008 constitutional reform, the parliament had no authority to forbid or authorize external military operations except in case of declaration of war (Article 35 of the Constitution). Since 2008, the parliament has had the possibility to vote, but only if the external military operation lasts more than four months.¹⁹

The constitutional flexibility granted to the president might be an asset since it may not be subject to the fickle public opinion. In fact, it is not so simplistic and an analysis of the role of the public opinion and the way it is shaped cannot be black-and-white. This is obvious, as neither the 'idealistic' nor the 'realistic' school considers that public opinion should be integrated into the state decision process. A deeper analysis may suggest the opposite. Indeed, the growing role of media in affecting public opinion and French defence policies shows that French political authorities no longer take for granted that the French people are not interested in foreign policy and defence issues. The interest of the French people has become more evident with the growing media coverage of international events since the beginning of the 1990s and the emergence of new technologies and means of communication.

The Media and France in Different War Theatres

France is not a pacifistic country. It does not refuse by principle to wage wars or external military operations, as long as such operations are considered legal (whether according to defence treaties or bilateral agreements or at the request of an international organization). As a matter of fact, since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, questions about the use of military forces in general and air power in particular have become topical issues in France. The French armed forces have been deployed more times in more places than in any comparable number of years during the Cold War.²⁰ France's involvement and role in the international system have always been strong and, in many respects, the principle of the use of force has constantly been, more or less, accepted by public opinion as shown by regular polls. This volunta-

rism for external operations has been shown, for instance by survey questions – nicknamed ‘barometer’ – developed by the DICOD (*Délégation pour l’information et la communication du Ministère de la Défense*). Moreover, in an old but still relevant study, the case is made that the French have always agreed with external operations – even those which are not strictly ‘humanitarian’ – as long as the aims include assisting people in distress, supporting international law or to contributing to peace making.²¹

Regrettably, very few polls in France make a distinction between the use of the navy, army or air force. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some conclusions about public perceptions and preferences. First of all, the consistency of some political parties on defence and security issues is also generally reflected in the national newspapers and journalist that align with the views of political parties and can be said to represent the views of those parties. The radical-left (*Parti communiste, Front de Gauche*) and even moderate left parties are more or less fiercely anti-NATO and anti-American, anti-imperialist and sometimes pro-Russia. Parties such the *Mouvement des Citoyens* are usually against any French participation in Western military coalitions. Looking at the perspective of the radical right – groups such as the *Front national*, or Gaullists inside the tiny *Debout la France* group, or even a small part of the conservative party *Les Républicains*, these groups are not especially concerned about French overseas military operations as long as they are not conducted in a NATO framework and under NATO command. Command independence of French forces is a key issue for these groups.²² In the case of journalists, there is a still a residue among them – very often subconscious – of an anti-American and anti-NATO bias. This is shaped and even conditioned by more than 30 years outside NATO and by tendency to criticize the allegiance by Western European countries to Washington. Some of them, even among those who are the most open to the US, may bring a biased view.

Furthermore, since the January and November 2015 mass terrorist attacks in Paris, public opinion has clearly been ‘white-hot’. A quick glance on headlines of the leading French newspapers show a clear focus on

DAESH (also called ISIS), the air strikes of France, and the coalition against ISIS. There is almost nothing in the media on on-going operations in Africa, although these operations are important in working against the rise of radical Islamist groups. There was only limited public interest in *Opération Serval*, which had as its goal defeating Islamic militants in the north of Mali, probably because French officials had been willing to restrict information on French military operations there.²³ The situation is similar for *Opération Serval’s* successor *Opération Barbkane*, which is ongoing in Africa’s Sahel region. Of interest to note, the traditional humanitarian arguments for such operations have virtually disappeared from the French media and government statements and have been replaced by the argument that such operations support the destruction of the Islamist threat. In the context of public support for military retaliation after the Paris terrorist attacks (2015 and 2016), the critics of French air power have slowly been disappearing from the main media. This is especially striking, as detractors of the use of Western air power were only recently common within the French media.

The issue of whether to deploy French military forces and air power overseas became a major media issue in 1999, when NATO decided to use an air power-alone campaign, not against a non-state actor, but against Serbia. This air campaign has usually been presented, rightly or wrongly, as a success for air power. The 1999 operations initiated a strong debate in the French media on negative and positive aspects of air campaign and operations. Indeed, note that the French public opinion was initially in favour of the French participation to the allied airstrikes.²⁴ However, a large sector of the French public and media soured on the operation and criticism increased as the conflict dragged on for 78 days. In the Kosovo case, the criticism increased directly as this air campaign, which was promised to be a short one, dragged out and allowed the public to see the images of Belgrade being bombed.

In Afghanistan, the situation was different for France, as France committed ground forces and naval air forces in addition to the French Air Force. A review of the major French newspapers in the period between 2001 and 2014 shows that the words ‘France’ and ‘coali-

tion' are found much more often than 'US', 'NATO' or 'alliance' when the stories referred to tactical success. If the media was reporting on military setbacks the contrary was true. Then the terms 'NATO', 'US' and 'alliance' were emphasized by the press. This approach to terminology is more striking for *Opération Harmattan* in Libya. Called '*Sarkozy's War*' by the French journalist Natalie Nougayrède²⁵ (referencing the 2010 Bob Woodward book *Obama's Wars* about the US president's conflict leadership in Afghanistan and Pakistan), this operation was regularly presented in the media as a successful air power campaign for France, which was the leader of the operation along with the UK.²⁶ In the coverage of the Afghanistan conflict, there were highly critical articles in the main media organizations against NATO and the US (for instance, friendly air-strikes causing civilian and military casualties or the destruction of civilian hospitals). In Libya such critical coverage did not occur, probably because the operation lasted only eight months. The long participation of France in Afghanistan certainly suffered from the long duration of the conflict and the general fatigue of the French public with that war.

French Peculiarities and Prospects in the Framework Of NATO

French External Operations

During the Cold War, the deployment of French forces out of the metropolitan territory came with certain political limitations. French forces could be readily deployed to the French overseas territories or to African states with which France had defence agreements, such as the deployment to Chad in the 1970s. French overseas deployments could also be based on special circumstances, for instance, the deployment to Kolwezi in 1978. Deployments of French forces could be carried out to support UN resolutions, such as with the force commitments to Korea in 1950–1953 or to Lebanon with the UN Truce Supervision Force since 1978. After the First Gulf War, the number of external operations for the French Armed Forces increased dramatically, and what had been the exception became the rule. With the suspension of the conscription in 1997 and the subsequent professionalization of the armed forces,

overseas operations became the primary mission of the French Armed Forces.

The First Gulf War

Very soon after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi troops, the French were convinced that, in the context of the post-Cold War order, aggression against a sovereign state was unacceptable. President François Mitterrand said at the beginning of that conflict that France was ready to support the US as long as France would not appear as a mere 'follower'. The French participation in the Gulf War turned out to be limited because of the internal political context, contradictory diplomatic interests, and a military force that was somewhat outdated, which restricted the capabilities and operational use of the French force deployed to the Kuwaiti theatre of war.²⁷ The French Air Force deployed 18-24 Jaguars attack fighters, 12-14 Mirage 2000C multirole fighters and 4 Mirage F1-CR reconnaissance fighters, as well as transports, electronic warfare, and tanker aircraft. But the French also had more interoperability problems with the Saudi and US Air Forces than Britain's Royal Air Force had. At the start the French were less ready than other major allied nations to work in a coalition environment. However, the experience of working with NATO countries facilitated the adaptation and evolution process and the French Air Force 'adapted quickly to operating in a coalition environment'.²⁸ Like the ground forces, the French Air Force was under French operational command and American operational control. In practical terms, this meant that the Allies would furnish a list of objectives to the French forces in theatre, but the final agreement on the strike would come from Paris.

The French Air Force (FAF) played a generally marginal role in the 1991 Gulf War. 'Desert Storm proved too big, too technologically advanced and too Anglo-Saxon for the FAF.'²⁹ In fact, the First Gulf War demonstrated that modern war fighting required rapid reactions forces capable of being deployed rapidly to remote theatres. Unfortunately, at that time France was not organized or ready for long-range force projection. Its army was based on conscription, and unsuited politically and by training to be deployed to distant thea-

tres. Indeed, not since the Algerian War have conscripts been deployed out of the French territory. This turned out to be a real constraint. Incidentally, it was not a coincidence when President Jacques Chirac decided in 1996 to suspend the system of conscription in order to prepare for a professional army system.³⁰ In addition to all these changes, the French Air Force did not possess the technology necessary to effectively complete all potential missions. For instance, its *Jaguar* aircraft were not equipped with night vision equipment that would enable the aircrew to use the plane for the preferred night missions.³¹ Essentially, one of the key lessons of the First Gulf War was that the French military system, developed since the 1960s, was no longer possible to maintain. In the new environment of power projection and coalition operations, France recognized the necessity of a closer collaboration with the US and NATO.

Ex-Yugoslavia

Facing conflict in the ruins of Yugoslavia, there was indeed a dramatic lack of consensus within the ranks of the Western powers regarding strategic objectives in the region, due in part to differing analyses of the nature of the conflicts that erupted in the Balkans in the 1990s. Yet, France – despite its traditional status of maverick within NATO – now showed a clear willingness to participate politically and military in the allied operations to stabilize that region. As far as French Air Forces was concerned, they participated actively in the air operation *Deny Flight* set up on 12 April 1993, with the aim being to monitor the skies over Bosnia according to the UN resolution banning flights by any aircraft without approval from UNPROFOR. Its mandate was further expanded to include providing close air support as necessary to protect UN peacekeepers. The no-fly operation, which spanned two years, proved successful in preventing the use of air power by combatants in the conflict. France also experienced some losses in these deployments. After the first CAS strikes, which took place on 10 and 11 April 1994, some ground fire damaged a French navy *Super-Étendard*. A worse event occurred on 30 August 1995 during Operation *Deliberate Force*, when two airmen were detained after their *Mirage 2000* was downed by Bosnian Serb forces. They were released some months after when NATO dis-

patched a 60,000-member peacekeeping force into Bosnia to enforce the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Four years later came the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia, provoked by the Kosovo War, which lasted from 28 February 1998 to 11 June 1999. This was another opportunity for France to show its strong support and solidarity with allies in a conflict where air power played the decisive role in forcing Serbia's capitulation. If the French media generally agreed on the strategic aspects of the operation, the media also especially emphasized the highly controversial aspects of the conflict, which included the lack of approval of the UN Security Council. The civilian losses due to NATO bombing were also noted by the media and became a major story. NATO's strategic communication about the conflict also became a prominent theme in the French media. For instance, an interesting article was penned in *Le Monde* and titled '*LOTAN a perdu la guerre des mots et des images*' ('NATO has lost the war of words and pictures'). This article pointed out the dominance of the Anglo-American culture within NATO communications.

'This British control over the 'war of communications' is certainly satisfying to the Anglo-Saxon media, including CNN- which is the true official media of the Pentagon – but it appears to many as a lightly disguised American desire to control the discourse on the war. This discomfort is reinforced by the paucity of information available to correspondents on the operations themselves.³² During the period when France had one foot within NATO and another one outside, the issue of communication at the level of the Atlantic Alliance was indeed not really in her agenda. But one can wonder if strategic communication was a priority for NATO as well. NATO received some sharp criticism in France during the Kosovo conflict due to perceived problems in NATO's strategic communication. NATO was especially criticized for its lack of transparency, poor information dissemination, and sometimes confusion in describing the circumstances of NATO air operations. NATO's strategic communications in that conflict raised suspicions of NATO's intentions and also raised questions about the legitimacy of France's intervention in Kosovo.

Afghanistan

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks that triggered Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, France pledged its armed forces to serve at the side of her allies. French had, moreover, bound themselves to the US in a feeling of solidarity encapsulated in *Le Monde's* opinion-editorial (op-ed) titled 'We are all Americans' (*Nous sommes tous américains*).³³ President Jacques Chirac showed his solidarity with America when he was one of the first Western leaders to tour the rubble of the Twin Towers and pledged an iron-clad commitment of French solidarity. Despite a strong solidarity with Washington, soon after 9/11 relations between France and the US and UK became strained due to disagreement over America's preparation for the Invasion of Iraq in 2003. Although France had participated in the First Gulf War, the French government, unlike the British, decided to stay out of this new war. However, France showed solidarity with America and NATO partners by committing forces to Afghanistan from 2001 to 2012. In Afghanistan France made a considerable contribution to the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), which was placed under NATO command from 2003 on. The French Air Force deployed for various periods six Rafale and Mirage strike aircraft to support NATO in spite of the growing disapproval of French public opinion to the NATO operation in Afghanistan. As for sending aircraft to support an unpopular war, France's main principle was to not be seen as failing her allies.³⁴

Libya

In Libya, at the beginning, the French were among the most active supporters of military action.³⁵ During *Opération Harmattan* the French Air Force deployed fighters (5 Rafale and 6 Mirage 2000-5), fighter-bombers (6 Mirage 2000D) and reconnaissance aircraft (Mirage F1CR). Rafale aircraft began reconnaissance missions on 19 March and were the first among the coalition to attack Libyan forces. As the conflict progressed, though reluctant to invoke NATO mainly because Paris feared the political consequences of another NATO mission in a Muslim country³⁶, France tried to put good face on the situation by accepting that

NATO assumed oversight over the coalition along with the UK and the US. *Opération Harmattan* was the largest engagement for the French Air Force (and Navy³⁷) since Kosovo. At the peak of the operation, France had committed more than 40 aircraft, 30 helicopters and a dozen warships.

In the context of the Arab spring, the French people were rather in favour of popular revolts and defended the military option pushed by their country. As Libya was considered a ruthless dictatorship by the public, there was little sympathy for the Gaddafi regime. The information conveyed by French media was generally positive but there were concerns in the media about the authority of Resolution 1973 of the Security Council and the consequent legality of the operation under international law.

The Operations Against ISIS

The Issue of Communication

Opération Chammal, the code name for the French involvement against DAESH, began in November 2014. At the start, it was only concerned with conflict within the borders of Iraq. In September 2015, Syria was added to the area of combat operations. Public opinion was generally in favour of French air-strikes against DAESH forces.³⁸ After the November terrorist attacks in Paris, carried out by operatives who were DAESH members who had planned the attack in Syria, the French air operations against DAESH were even more popular. In response to the terrorist attacks on Paris in November 2015 that killed 130 civilians and wounded hundreds more, France invoked Article 42-7 of the Treaty of Lisbon and not Article 5 of the Treaty of Washington. Some commentators questioned this decision and wondered why France had not invoked assistance from NATO allies. In fact, Article 42-7 obligates 'only' EU Member States to provide the country which invokes it with aid and assistance, although it does not confer a security commitment, as NATO's Article 5 does. France likely chose the EU option rather than the NATO option because it wanted to establish solidarity with its partners without having the constraining commitments that would come with invoking NATO's aid.

In this conflict the concept of *StratCom* for France is very important and relevant. This subject has recently been subject to major strategic factors – the recent massive terrorist attacks on French soil being the major event to affect strategy and public perceptions. In addition, France has chosen to participate actively in NATO operations since its reintegration in the Alliance. Another factor is that contemporary wars increasingly take on the nature of counterinsurgencies and in such conflicts influence operations play a significant role. The French are well placed to understand this aspect of conflict. Some French theorists at the School of Counterinsurgency and Psychological Warfare (*Ecole de la contre-insurrection et la guerre psychologique*) demonstrated by their experiences in Indochina and in Algeria the key role played by the support of populations in determining success or failure against irregular forces.³⁹ These theories are still relevant and are an important part of the irregular warfare doctrine of major NATO nations, notably the US and UK. Today, incorporating ‘influence’ in modern strategies for waging war is much more complex, particularly because of the revolution of information technologies. Information technologies and the fact that deployment of forces in operations are decreasingly a purely national operation and increasingly coalition operations means that communication – whether military or civilian – must be fast and coherent if it is to achieve the desired effects. The type of foes that France and NATO face know that they must use communications effectively to succeed. Understanding influence operations is crucial, as the counter-insurgent must fight on the enemy’s turf where the enemy has a *de facto* the advantage of cultural and linguistic understanding of the local population and can easily communicate with them. In addition, insurgent and radical forces have flexible organizations and can communicate with the local public and with the media instantaneously. Unfortunately, such is not the case for France, as with all democratic countries, which generally have a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure that is neither suitable nor favourable for quickly processing and transmitting information.

Under such conditions, the active participation of France in the current debates is necessary. Its *de facto* sidelining from NATO in the 1990s is partly explained

by France’s particular culture vis-à-vis the media – the French army has always been faithful to its sobriquet ‘*la Grande Muette*’ (the great mute). This term comes from the 19th Century when the French Third Republic, afraid of a Bonapartist coup by the Army, compelled the Army to refrain from any comment on political issues. This makes France a unique case within NATO.

Following the First Gulf War, which was the first conflict broadcasted live for the French, the French tried to learn lessons from their experience. At that time almost nothing in terms of background briefings and media coordination had been prepared by French officials for journalists, even though France was a belligerent in that conflict. The French media worked closely with the French military’s *Public Relations and Information Service* (*Service d’informations et de relations publiques des armées*) (SIRPA),⁴⁰ which essentially had to manage the media relations almost alone. In addition, French officials were discomfited by the role and the expansion of satellite broadcasting and international news companies in war theatres as well as the new concept of ‘embedded journalism’, which was considered to be too ‘American’ and, and thus something that could not be imported into France.⁴¹ French officials groped about to find an alternative model for media relations. The first idea, which emerged in the mid-1990s, was to grant to some journalists an accreditation or even a ‘super-accreditation’ to report among regular military troops. Eventually, this was determined to not be an effective general model, but only a system that would be applied in a case by case basis. For instance, during *Opération Serval* in Mali, more than 400 journalists were ‘immersed’ (French militaries use the word ‘*immergé*’ and not ‘*embarqué*’ [for embedded])⁴². The usual rule is that the Communication Section of the general-staff decides according to each war theatre whether journalists can be ‘immersed’ or not. If they can be immersed it is only for a short period (there are some exceptions) and if no special forces are engaged. For other theatres, journalists may have either more freedom or none at all (keep in mind that neither Jordan nor United Arab Emirates, where there are French Air Force bases,⁴³ allows any journalists). In addition, the French MoD works hand in hand with the so-called *Association des Journalistes de Défense*.⁴⁴ Since 2003 this

association has selected a number of journalists who are offered the opportunity to undergo a military training programme, organized twice a year just for journalists (between 15 and 20 journalists for a training session of six days).⁴⁵ Foreign journalists can apply, although priority is given to those who are based in France. Indeed, this programme does not include all journalists who specialize in defence issues, which is probably one of the main drawbacks of this programme. Yet, it provides a great advantage for the French MoD in providing a cadre of journalists with whom they can deal.

Another development is that the French public's long-standing opposition to any 'psychological' warfare seems to be eroding. Indeed, some recent developments suggest that France might have become more flexible. For instance, there is no longer any 'absolute' refusal in the French government to employ psychological warfare means and programmes as a tool to win 'hearts and minds'. In 2012, the *Centre interarmée d'actions dans l'environnement* (CIAE) was set up principally to work against 'Islamic propaganda'.⁴⁶ This is an evolution in French policy that looks to be a favourable development for French and for NATO StratCom.

Does the Future of la Grandeur de la France Need to Be Attained Through Communication? The Special Case of Air Power

France has a great sense of its past, perhaps even more so than other states. Its awareness of being *'exceptionnel'* has conditioned its role as a world power and has fed the feeling among its partners that the country was, at times, a 'conceited' maverick in terms of its relations with allies. The French are proud of their identity and are, in fact, quite willing to engage in wars in distant theatres as long as some conditions are fulfilled to allow France to participate as part of an allied force, or even to go it alone. First of all, external military operations are no longer associated with the 'gunboat diplomacy' of an earlier time. There is usually a strong enough consensus among the French people to allow the executive to wage wars. Another requirement is

that the participation of France in external military operations strengthens its international prestige as a major power. French officials believe that public opinion is mature enough to understand the strategic stakes that France faces, chiefly those linked to air power. Furthermore, the French seem to be willing to toe the line by gradually incorporating openness and cooperation with journalists in military matters, but with some significant limits. In addition, France is now willing to reintegrate into its 'natural' place within NATO.

Yet, the evolution of the nature of warfare and the development of the issue of communication has also put some constraints on the French President's freedom of manoeuvre. Waging war would be barely thinkable without air power. Even if ground forces may be essential, the effective employment of air power has become a crucial factor if success is to be attained. This has certainly been the case in other military operations. This reliance on air power as a central focus of military operations has become more evident since the First Gulf War, when air power transitioned from the traditional concept of air superiority to a concept of air supremacy. Western armies became so accustomed to air supremacy that no major operation would be considered without the guarantee of such an advantage. Indeed, until the Kosovo war, air power doctrines were developed in consideration of fighting a symmetric and conventional foe. While asymmetric warfare contributed somewhat to the evolution of how to employ air power in an operational sense, it did not fundamentally challenge the core significance of air power for the French. The rapid increase and reliance upon close air support by ground forces in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2009 testify to the relevance of air power. As this case study shows, the question of modern air power in France is not really in the concept of how to use air power but more one of how to communicate and coordinate intentions within NATO. For instance, after that the NGO *Human Rights Watch* made an inventory of all NATO 'blunders' since the Kosovo campaign, two journalists of *Le Monde* commented that in each case where NATO air power was employed the issues surrounding strategic communication were different. For instance, in Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai routinely criticized NATO air power. In

some cases NATO had made mistakes and killed civilians as collateral damage, but most of the time Karzai's numerous allegations about the 'ruthless' use of NATO air power against civilians was nothing more than a mask for a local audience to cover for his domestic political failures. In Libya, although NATO mistakes were few, the local Libyan officials being supported by NATO did not want to cause friction and refrained from criticizing NATO, even when some criticisms might have been valid.⁴⁷

French officials believe that the French public is mature enough to understand strategic stakes linked to air power and its use in war. But, as we see in this study, the problem of modern air power in France is not really in the concept of its use, but more in the concept of how that use is communicated. In any case, the French government seems to be gradually more open and cooperative with journalists within the framework of some significant limits.

The Media on Defence Issues and the Question of Bias

The deployment of French forces in theatres abroad, including deployments to Mali and Central Africa as well as to Afghanistan and the Middle East, have engendered increasing interest in defence and security issues in France. In the run-up to the 2017 election, themes linked to defence and foreign policy issues are being widely evoked by politicians. The growing use of information channels in France that include the major newspapers as well as internet blogging on defence is providing the French public increasing details on defence issues as well as more avenues for debate and discussion.

In major French newspapers, articles on defence issues are usually penned by journalists who are well qualified. Of course, they tend to reflect the political orientation and the agenda of their respective newspapers.⁴⁸ A form of bias may occur when the media members support or oppose a government military policy according to the political stance of the newspaper. Nonetheless, even if sometimes their articles are written in a sensational manner or look like they are

advertising for or against a particular policy, their influence is limited to their usual audience. Recent trends show the daily press losing some readers as some people turn to blogs published by journalists even though the mainstream media sees blogging as an amateur practice without value to the production of information. Yet, these blogs increasingly turn out to be a source of information to readers and they are more reactive than newspapers. There are an increasing number of blogs made by seasoned journalists writing on defence issues such as *Secret-Défense* (Jean-Dominique Merchet⁴⁹) and *Lignes de défense* (Philippe Chapeleau⁵⁰). Their short daily blog posts are followed not only by other journalists but also by officials and people who have a keen interest on defence issues, notwithstanding the political orientation of the authors.

The role of language must not be underestimated, particularly for France. The choice of language used by the mass media may represent a bias towards the group most likely to speak that language or understand it. Unlike other NATO countries that are much more inclined to accept information coming from the *Anglosphere*, France frequently has a divergent view. The *Francosphere* can be more inclined to refuse the English-speaking news dominance that is attributed to NATO's 'bellicose countries', viz. the US and to a lesser extent the UK.

Biases in media are indeed inherent to the construction of the political life in democratic countries. Nevertheless, the intensity of these biases can be problematic. NATO can improve its efforts in dealing with these media biases by understanding the French peculiarities.

Recommendations for France

In 2016, the French public trusts its armed forces. But is this enough to counter disinformation? 'Information plus a denial – it makes two stories for the price of one. And it is always the false story that one remembers.' said the French journalist and writer Yvan Audouard. How does one use air power within the NATO context and communicate this? Some of these recommendations proposed below would help combat these negative tendencies in the media.

1. A French Strategy within NATO

Indeed, the French have a long and complicated history with NATO and there is still a residue – very often not acknowledged – among journalists of anti-Americanism and anti-NATO bias. But it does not mean that they are impervious to any influence coming from the Atlantic Alliance. Quite the opposite. An effective compromise between France at the national level and NATO will have to be found. In this regard, the absence of France at the Joint Air Power Competence Centre is an anomaly. Neither NATO nor France takes any advantage of that aberration. With the full and comprehensive reintegration of France within the Alliance, we hope that it will change.

2. Dealing with Allies and Improving Civil-Military Relations

One problem from the French perspective is that NATO seems to take for granted that all members share similar traditions whereas the French seem to barely understand that its partners have very different traditions. National approaches and doctrines commonly used in NATO operations today are scarcely comprehensible to many Frenchmen. For instance, many in the French armed forces and media do not understand the British culture of mixing humanitarian missions, NGOs, intelligence and communication personnel together in the same operation. Likewise, the existence in the US of a communication staff and support that is comparable to an intelligence section is seen with suspicion. In overcoming the French tendency for ethnocentrism, it might be useful to organize training programmes that gather journalists from all the NATO countries together. Among the French journalistic community, there are very few who are competent to report on defence and security issues and among these few there are almost none who have any deep knowledge of air power. Bringing journalists from a variety of nations and backgrounds together would give the French journalists a wider perspective and understanding of foreign forces and approaches. This is an essential issue, as France must recognize that almost all future operations will likely be carried out in a coalition environment and a lack of understanding of

both national and foreign armed forces and doctrines will certainly result in inaccurate reporting. A NATO-wide training programme for journalists should certainly raise awareness on the issue of disinformation and misinformation and it should also help in increasing journalists understanding of air power. A more international approach to the media by the French media and governments, such as embedding French journalists with American troops or sending German journalists to participate in the training at the *CNE (Centre national d'entraînement commando)* would have only positive effects.

3. Setting up a 'Communication Response Force' against disinformation

The French Defence Ministry should have ready a 'Communications Response Force' that could be activated if the government requests a military option to respond to a national or international crisis. This response force would include service personnel as well as civilian experts with some members having language skills to address the media issues and questions of both Allies and the opposition. The Response Force could include civilian and military experts who serve on a reserve status, to be activated in time of conflict. This Response Force would have the mission of systematically detecting disinformation and misinformation in the international media and responding to it.

4. A Comprehensive Effort to Counter Radical Islam

France and NATO should coordinate their efforts to fight the propaganda and disinformation supporting the radical Islamist ideology on the Internet. A certain category of the French population might be very sensitive to this kind of 'information' which has only as an aim to criminalize France, the US, and NATO. A coordinated NATO response to radical Islamist ideology spread through the various media should be a top priority for both NATO and the French government.

1. The CICDE was set up in 2005. At national level, it is associated with preliminary studies necessary for the design of concepts and doctrines; Designs and updates joint forces concepts and doctrine, literature with an inter-ministerial and combined framework based on prospective studies and experience feedback; Supervises concept experimentations and proposes the adjustments necessary for a constantly evolving environment. At international level, the CICDE represents France in international organizations responsible for designing concepts and conducting experimentations. See the relevant document: Presentation of the

- Joint Forces Centre for Concept Development, Doctrine and Experimentation (CICDE) (<http://www.cicde.defense.gouv.fr/spip.php?rubrique13>).
2. Avant-propos, Discours d'ouverture au colloque CICDE-IRSEM relatif à l'influence des appuis des opérations (juin 2010) in Les Cahiers de l'IRSEM, n°5, Oct. 2010, p. 8 (<http://www.defense.gouv.fr/irsem/publications/cahiers/cahier-n-5>).
 3. This expression is used sarcastically in the book *Armes de communication massive*. Informations de guerre en Irak eds. Jean-Marie Charon and Arnaud Mercier Paris, CNRS éditions, 2003). It is a nod to the expression *Armes de destruction massive* ('Weapons of mass destruction') widely used by Washington to justify the invasion of Iraq.
 4. Joseph Henrotin, 'La Puissance Aérienne: Histoire, Concepts, Opérations, Histoire et Stratégie, n°2 2010, esp. pp. 34–37.
 5. The French White Paper on Defence and National security (2008) states that 'the support of the Nation is the necessary condition for the national security strategy to be effective'. 2008 French White Paper on Defence and National Security (available on www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/CSS-Analyses-46.pdf).
 6. Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, 'Foreign Policy and the Rational Public', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 32(2) 1988: 213.
 7. Loi du 2 juillet 1934 fixant l'organisation générale de l'armée de l'air http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?sessionId=F6FC9DD0FF9699C3F9777437295A9641.tpdjo-15v_3?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006070683&idArticle=&dateTexte=20090814.
 8. Book available and downloadable here: <https://archive.org/stream/laviationmilitai00ader#page/n7/mode/2up>.
 9. 'Instruction provisoire sur l'emploi des forces aériennes de 1947' in Jérôme de Lespinois, ed. *La Doctrine des Forces Aériennes Françaises, 1912–1976*. (Paris: La Documentation française, 2010) pp. 236–250.
 10. In fact, France had always been member of this committee but not as an acting voting member.
 11. France's role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/defence-security/french-defence/france-and-nato/>).
 12. NATO SRATCOM Center of Excellence, About Strategic Communications (<http://www.stratcomcoe.org/about-strategic-communications>).
 13. As a matter of fact, it conveys an impression that there is almost spontaneously skewed information and neutrality could not be possible. Disinformation can be used by all belligerents. It is always tempting for countries to select information or even images in order to reinforce public support for war policy. The aim is both to shield negative images from public view and promote the positive ones. It is very rare that both content and meaning of images or films is the product of happenstance. Furthermore, belligerents might want to manipulate information in order to 'intoxicate' the foe. Nevertheless, there is a huge difference belligerent democracies and belligerent dictatorships: In democracies, there is no permanent and institutionalized strategy of disinformation. This is not the case for dictatorships.
 14. It was the theme of the 29th Congress organized by the International Commission on Military History in Bucharest (2003): War, Military and Media from Gutenberg to Today.
 15. Jean-Bernard Raimond, (1995), *La Politique d'Intervention dans les Conflits: Eléments de Doctrine pour la France*, Paris, Rapport d'information de l'Assemblée nationale n°1950: 21.
 16. Nicolas Chapuis (2015), 'François Hollande: un Discours de Rentrée, Deux Tonalités', *Le Monde*, 8 Sep.
 17. Even if, as Samy Cohen and al. show it, the mode of expression of the public opinion can be different: interest, mobilization and vote. Each of them does not have the same influence on the decision-makers. Samy Cohen, Natalie La Balme and Patrick Bruneteaux, 'Ni Bellicistes, ni Pacifistes, les Français et l'Intervention Militaire Extérieure' in Samy Cohen ed. *L'Opinion, l'Humanitaire et la Guerre: une Perspective Comparative*, (Paris, Fondation pour les Etudes de Défense, 1996) La Documentation française, p. 17.
 18. Samy Cohen, (1986), *La Monarchie nucléaire. Les Coulisses de la Politique Etrangère sous la Ve république*, Paris, Hachette.
 19. See Fiche de synthèse n°47 de l'Assemblée nationale: La déclaration de guerre et les interventions armées à l'étranger (Apr. 2014). <http://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/decouvrir-l-assemblee/role-et-pouvoirs-de-l-assemblee-nationale/les-fonctions-de-l-assemblee-nationale/les-fonctions-de-contrôle-et-l-information-des-deputés/la-declaration-de-guerre-et-les-interventions-armées-a-l-etranger>.
 20. France has conducted a large number of external operations since the end of decolonization, mostly in Africa. Also, numerous French operations have taken place in the Middle East. In the last few years, French interventionism has accelerated: Libya in 2011, Mali in 2013, Operation Barkhane in Mali, Chad, Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso since 2014, the Central African Republic in 2014, Iraq in 2014, and recently Syria, where France had almost intervened following the chemical attacks of Aug. 2013.
 21. See DICOD, *Chroniques de la Défense selon les Français. 30 ans d'Histoire en Sondages*, Paris, 2015. Col Benoit Paris of DICOD is thanked for providing this document. In addition, there is a comprehensive study – dated but still very relevant – on this issue: See Samy Cohen (ed.), *L'Opinion, l'Humanitaire et la Guerre: une Perspective Comparative* (Paris, Fondation pour les Etudes de Défense, La Documentation française, 1996). See also Natalie La Balme, 'The French and the Use of Force. Public perceptions and their impact on the policy-making processes' in P. Everts and P. Isernia (eds), *Public Opinion and the International Use of Force* (London and New York, Routledge, 2006) pp. 186–204.
 22. When these lines were penned (Spring 2016), most officials belonging to these political parties vehemently protested against a proposed law that prepared the full reintegration of France in NATO (<http://www.senat.fr/leg/pjl15-286.pdf>). Since, this law has almost behind closed doors entered into force. The presence of French media and politicians who are deeply anti-US and anti-NATO is not really a problem as their influence turns out to be rather marginal.
 23. (2015), 'Operation 'Serval': une Communication Succincte et Vérouillée', *Le Monde*, 15 Jan. See also (in English): Jean-Paul Marthoz, 'In Mali, a war 'without images and without facts'', CPJ (<https://cpj.org/blog/2013/01/in-mali-a-war-without-images-and-without-facts.php>).
 24. IPSOS for *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 'L'Opinion des Français à l'Égard de la Situation en Yougoslavie', 17 Apr. 1999.
 25. Natalie Nougareyde, 'La Guerre de Nicolas Sarkozy', *Le Monde*, 24 Aug. 2011.
 26. The *Opération Harmattan* primarily involved the air force, but the navy and army also contributed.
 27. David S. Yost, 'France and the Gulf War of 1990–1991: Political-Military Lessons Learned', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 16: 3, 1993, pp. 339–374.
 28. Anthony Cordesman and Abraham Wagner, *The Lessons Of Modern War, Volume IV: The Gulf War*, Westview Press, 1999) pp. 199–200.
 29. Christian F. Anrig, *The Quest for Relevant Air Power. Continental European Responses to the Air Power Challenges of the Post-Cold War Era*, (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 2011) p. 103.
 30. Bastien Irondelle, *La Réforme des Armées en France, Sociologie de la Décision*, (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2011).
 31. 'Le Magazine Américain 'Forbes' Juge l'Armement Français Dépassé', *Le Monde*, 20 Feb. 1991.
 32. Luc Rosenzweig, 'L'OTAN a Perdu la Guerre des Mots et des Images', *Le Monde*, 31 Mar. 1999.
 33. Jean-Marie Colombani, 'Nous Sommes Tous Américains', *Le Monde*, 13 Sep. 2001.
 34. 'La France en Afghanistan: Le Doute de l'Opinion, le Silence des Politiques', *Le Monde*, 26 Feb. 2010.
 35. 'Paris est Favorable à des Frappes Aériennes en Libye', *Le Monde*, 10 Mar. 2011.
 36. Camille Grand.
 37. The Army also contributed with light helicopters.
 38. *Frappes aériennes contre Daesh: 67 % des Français soutiennent l'action de François Hollande* (30 Sep. 2015). <http://www.bfmtv.com/international/frappes-aeriennes-contre-daesh-67percent-des-francais-soutiennent-l-action-de-francois-hollande-918974.html>.
 39. See for instance François Géré, *La Guerre Psychologique*, (Paris: Economica, 1997).
 40. The Service d'informations et de relations publiques des armées (SIRPA) was the service of communication of French armies.
 41. The main problem being that immediate information does not allow the journalists the necessary critical step back. In addition, the identification of journalists to armed forces may skew their objectivity.
 42. In fact, as we have seen, the results were not satisfactory either for journalists or for the military.
 43. On Sep. 2008, the French Air Force opened a French section at the Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates. 250 French troops are pre-positioned there, ready to support other French forces deployed in the Gulf and northern Indian Ocean. In addition, since 2015, the French Air Force has stationed Mirages and Rafales at the Prince Hassan Air Base in Jordan.
 44. See the relevant website: <http://www.ajd-presse.fr/>.
 45. The Cnec (Centre national d'entraînement commando) at Montlouis (Pyrénées-Orientales is in the south of France).
 46. See Nathalie Guibert, 'Contre l'Etat Islamique, l'Armée Active une Cellule de Contre-Propagande', *Le Monde*, 4 Feb. 2015.
 47. Nathalie Guibert et Natalie Nougayrède, (2012), 'L'OTAN Rechigne à Enquêter sur ses Dérapages Libyens', *Le Monde*, 14 May 2012.
 48. Among the daily newspapers, *Le Monde* is on the centre, *Le Figaro* is right-wing, *Libération* is left-wing and *l'Humanité* is communist.
 49. <http://www.lopinion.fr/blog/secret-defense>.
 50. <http://lignesdedefense.blogspot-france.fr/>.



The Italian Typhoons lined up at Exercise Red Flag.

CHAPTER 6

Italy: A Reluctant Air Power?

Dr Eugenio Cusumano

Introduction

Italian political and strategic cultures have been thoroughly permeated by pacifism and anti-militarism. The nationally disastrous outcome of the Second World War and the influence of Catholic teachings converged to foster an enduring distrust towards the offensive use of military force. These cultural traits translated into the establishment of powerful normative restraints against Italian involvement in war, enshrined in article 11 of the Italian Constitution, which states that 'Italy rejects war'. The presence of the strongest Communist party in Western Europe, which received 34 per cent of votes in the 1976 parliamentary election, have also led to a strong suspicion of US motives and the rationale underlying the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Furthermore, the Italian political system has consistently suffered from

fragmentation and instability, which have created a state of 'permanent electoral campaign'.¹

All these factors together inevitably created tight political constraints on the use of military force within the framework of NATO missions. Ground operations such as IFOR, KFOR and to a lesser extent ISAF, however, have benefitted from Italian public opinion's enduring and bipartisan approval for peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. Operations that are inherently offensive in character such as air bombing missions, by contrast, have been especially vulnerable to domestic opposition.² To be sure, Italy has played an increasingly important role in NATO bombing operations, conducting respectively three and seven per cent of total air sorties in the latest missions in Kosovo and Libya. Moreover, the recent 2015 White Book on Italian Defence marks a somewhat revolutionary turning point in Italian military doctrine, acknowledging the need for the Italian armed forces to be prepared for operations across the spectrum and thereby implicitly foreseeing the possibility of air assets' involvement in bombing missions. Nevertheless, as epitom-

mized by the controversy triggered by the acquisition of F35 fighters – criticized as death instruments incompatible with the Italian constitution and values – domestic constraints on the use of air power remain strong.³

For this reason, Italy is an especially important case in the study of NATO air power. An in-depth understanding of Italian perceptions of NATO bombing missions is crucial in order to devise effective strategic communication narratives enabling Italy to fulfil its role within the North Atlantic Alliance. Domestic political constraints may not only prevent Italian air assets from directly participating in NATO bombing missions. Public opposition against the purchasing of combat aircraft and defence spending at large may prevent Italy from providing a meaningful contribution to North Atlantic collective defence. Furthermore, Italy plays an indirect and yet essential role in the projection of NATO air power as a Host Country. Due to the geopolitical position of the Italian peninsula, a large number of NATO bombing missions have been launched from Italian territory. Indeed, the Italian air bases of Aviano and Trapani were the main platforms for NATO air operations against Serbia in 1995 and 1999 and Libya in 2013. Effective strategic communication emphasizing the need and legitimacy of bombing missions to the Italian public is therefore important for the future of NATO air power at large.

This country study will investigate Italian perceptions of air power. The media view and public opinion of Italy's use of air power exist under various legal, cultural and political constraints. The main constraints and the centre of the national debate on air power is focused on how Italy justifies its use of military force abroad. The conditions that shape Italy's view of air power and military force will be outlined in the first part of this chapter. The second part of this chapter provides a historical overview of the Italian engagement in NATO air operations, examining each Italian air operation in detail and looking at the media and public perceptions of the air operations. The third part of this chapter will look at Italian strategic communication with a focus on its air power dimension, examining its

evolution, assets, and limitations. The study will conclude with identifying three policy lessons that are key to devising effective air power communication strategies for Italy. Specific recommendations will be made as to how Italy can better counter disinformation about air power.

Italian Political Culture and Military Power

To understand the Italian public's perceptions of air power, one must first look to Italy's recent history and the core beliefs underlying the public's stance towards foreign and military policy. The purpose of this section is therefore twofold: the first subsection will conduct a concise historical overview of Italian foreign policy since World War II, identifying the main domestic political factors underlying the use of military force in Italy (or lack thereof). The second section will specifically focus on Italian public opinion perceptions of military operations abroad and NATO.

Domestic Political Constraints and Military Force in Italy: An Overview

Italy was a trailblazer in the use of aviation for military purposes. Italian pilots' daring endeavours during the first World War – such as the 'bombing' of Vienna with propaganda leaflets by the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio – boosted national morale and spread into Italian popular culture, epitomizing bravery and modernity.⁴ Most importantly, Giulio Douhet's seminal work marked an important contribution to the strategic reflection on the utility of strategic bombing.⁵ Far from being confined to strategic thinking, bombing operations were repeatedly ordered during the Fascist rule, when Italian aircraft were infamously employed to target civilian objectives in Ethiopia and Spain.⁶ The inadequacy of Italian Air Force during World War II and the disastrous outcome of the conflict, however, marked a dramatic turning point in the history of Italian air power. Between 1943 and 1945, Italian industrial centres and strategic nodes were subjected to heavy area bombing, which caused the destruction of up to 70% of the buildings of certain cities and between 80,000

and 100,000 casualties across the entire country.⁷ The material suffering imposed by the defeat translated into a strong wariness of the use of military force in general and air power specifically. Moreover, the political aftermath of the conflict dramatically influenced the Italian strategic culture and political system.

The experience of twenty years of fascist dictatorship and the key role played by communist partisans in the liberation of the peninsula led to the establishment of the strongest communist party in Western Europe, shaping a political culture with strong leftist leanings. While an analysis of Italian political culture is beyond the scope of this report, two elements are worth noting due to their impact on Italian strategic culture and air power perceptions.

Firstly, Italian post-war political culture has been traditionally characterized by a strong pacifist tendency. Leftist forces combined pacifism with broader anti-militarist feelings, often depicting the Italian armed forces as an authoritarian tool to repress domestic unrest. Far from being an exclusive feature of leftist parties, pacifism was shared by all the main political forces, most notably the Christian Democratic Party, which was in power for over forty years and was deeply influenced by the Catholic Church and its teachings.⁸

This bipartisan wariness of military force was apparent in the Italian Constitution. Most notably, Article 11 of the Constitution states that 'Italy rejects war as an instrument of aggression against the freedom of other peoples and as a means for the settlement of international disputes.'⁹ This strong statement was only moderated by the acknowledgment that Italy agrees 'to the limitations of sovereignty that may be necessary to a world order ensuring peace and justice among the Nations'; encouraging the establishment of 'international organizations furthering such ends'.¹⁰

The latter constitutional statement allowed Italy to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949. Italian NATO membership, initially opposed and eventually begrudgingly accepted by the Communist par-

ty, did not prevent Italian leftist forces from maintaining a strong wariness of US motives and foreign policy. During most of the Cold War, a period when the Italian contribution to NATO was largely limited to static defence of the national territory and the provision of host country support, Italian NATO membership was largely excluded from the public debate. Communists and Christian Democrats agreed on the necessity to avoid harsh political confrontations on foreign policy issues, preferring to focus on a low-profile foreign policy agenda based on pacifism and multilateralism.¹¹

Secondly, the constraining influence of pacifism, codified by Article 11 of the Italian Constitution, was further heightened by fragmentation of the Italian political system and the weakness of the executive vis-à-vis Parliament and other social actors. A distinctive trait of the Cold War-era Italian political system was the very high level of cabinet turnover. During the nearly fifty years of history of the so-called 'First Italian Republic' (1946–1994), 54 cabinets were appointed, 25% of which lasted less than five months. Italy had by far the highest rate of cabinet turnover across NATO countries and was therefore characterized by a state of 'permanent electoral campaign'.¹²

Pacifism, suspicion of NATO and the United States, legal constraints, political instability and an ideologically polarized public opinion all converged to create significant hurdles for the deployment of military forces abroad. After the end of the Cold War, however, the loosening of these constraints allowed for greater Italian participation in military operations, transforming the country from a security consumer to a security producer. The identification of peace support operations in multilateral missions as a bipartisan and legitimate foreign policy tool was paralleled by an increasing public awareness of the relevance of the military instrument, especially when employed for peacekeeping interventions and in multilateral contexts.¹³

The deployment of small military contingents abroad has therefore been consistently used by Italian cabinets as a way to enhance national prestige and

political influence. Decision-makers and military authorities have managed to navigate the abovementioned constraints by largely limiting Italian involvement to operations at the low end of the conflict spectrum, using peacekeeping as a legitimizing discourse to reconcile the deployment of military force abroad with the pacifism and multilateralism underlying Italian political culture.¹⁴

Italian Public Opinion and the Use of Force

Comparatively little research has been done on Italian popular perceptions of foreign and defence matters during the Cold War. Existing scholarship notes that Italian public opinion displayed a low level of interest in international affairs, but citizens' attitude remain stable and supportive of the main tenets of Italian foreign policy over time, including membership in the North Atlantic Alliance.¹⁵

More recent scholarship is divided as to the Italian public opinion's stance on national security policies. There is agreement, however, on some key public opinion tenets. Firstly, support for the armed forces – traditionally low during the Cold War – has more than doubled in the ensuing decades. Hence, Italian public opinion should no longer be considered as inherently anti-militarist¹⁶. The extent to which public opinion supports military operations abroad varies significantly based on the motives justifying intervention, the type of mission and the theatre. A recent study by the Italian Institute of International Affairs (*Istituto di Affari Internazionali*) argues that the public's view of military deployments abroad varies from general lack of interest to outright opposition, noting that the debate on Italian armed forces' involvement in missions abroad suffers from four main shortcomings: it lacks depth, often betraying insufficient knowledge of strategic and military matters; it is 'schizophrenic', as public interest rises as quickly as it declines; it is deeply ideological, as public perceptions are deeply informed by individuals' political leanings; and, finally, it is short-sighted and often influenced by short-term budgetary considerations at the expense of far-reaching strategic considerations.¹⁷

Other studies, however, show that that Italian public opinion assessment on military operations is more consistent than usually assumed and mostly depends on the type of missions Italian forces are considered to be involved in. While usually wary of the involvement of Italian soldiers in combat, the Italian public has consistently supported peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations.¹⁸ Peace operations and humanitarian support are considered the most valuable activities the military can conduct. Broadly speaking, the greater the importance of humanitarian objectives in an operation, the more positive Italian public attitudes towards the mission tend to be.¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, the framework of 'peace missions' has therefore been consistently used since the end of the Cold War to justify and legitimize the deployment of Italian troops abroad.²⁰ Recent scholarship shows that the perceived mismatch between the peace mission discourse used to support military operations and the evidence that Italian troops actually engaged in combat operations is key to explaining the decline in public opinion support for military operations.²¹

To the extent it is validated by the reality of the ground as communicated by the press, the rhetoric of peace missions has successfully legitimized and ultimately enabled Italian involvement in the main multilateral military missions abroad, including NATO missions KFOR, IFOR and ISAF. However, the peacekeeping and humanitarian support rhetoric has best served to support the Strategic Communication efforts of the Italian Army, Military Police (*Carabinieri*) and, more recently, Navy, which have indeed used their involvement in such tasks to bolster their popularity among the Italian public. By contrast, the Italian Air Force is less able to capitalize on such rhetorical tools to justify and promote its activities. Air power assets and missions with a kinetic component tend to be seen as incompatible with this peacekeeping discourse and therefore suffer from much lower public support and a higher vulnerability to enemy disinformation.²²

Figures on Italian public perceptions of NATO reveal the same complex mixture of support for military organizations and opposition against their involvement

in combat, shaped by the enduring pacifist mind-set in Italian political culture. Support for NATO in Italy has increased by 4% over the last 5 years, in stark contrast with several other big NATO nations such as Germany, Spain, Canada, the UK and the US, where the number of respondents with a favourable view of NATO has substantially decreased or remained unchanged.²³ The same survey, however, also shows that Italians' support for NATO betrays an insufficient understanding of the purpose of the Alliance and the collective defence obligation arising from the Treaty. Indeed, only 40% of Italians hold that NATO should use military force to defend its Eastern allies against a Russian attack, while 51% believe it should not.²⁴ To be sure, these figures may be partly explained by threat perceptions (only 44% of Italians see Russia as a major threat), economic interests (Russia is a major market for Italian exports, which has suffered significantly from European Union sanctions against Moscow) and the relatively pro-Russian stance of a relatively large segment of the Italian population.²⁵

Nevertheless, the low level of support for NATO collective defence mechanisms is also associated with the Italian public's enduring scepticism of the offensive use of military force, which still provides strong constraints on Italian decision-makers' ability to engage in NATO bombing-type missions.

The tendency to support the military only insofar as it does not engage in combat operations is not unique to Italy. As noted by Peter Katzenstein and many other scholars, the norms and culture of countries have informed the role conception of their military organizations, marginalizing martial virtues in favour of humanitarian values. Countries that were victorious in the Second World War, such as the US, the UK, and France, still emphasize the key importance of combat among military organizations' roles. By contrast, defeated countries with a history of militarism and authoritarianism, such as Germany, Japan and Italy, have developed military organizations that firmly embrace a peacekeeping role.²⁶

As shown in the next section, the predominance of pacifist values has not prevented Italy from using its

air power in support of NATO operations. The constraints outlined above, however, have imposed strong limitations on Italian decision-makers' ability to engage in bombing missions.

Italian Air Power Missions: An Overview

The loosening of both the international and domestic political constraints imposed by the Cold War provided Italian decision-makers with the possibility to engage in a remarkable number of military operations abroad. As of May 2012, Italy had almost 7,000 troops deployed in 25 international missions.²⁷ The armed forces have now become a valuable power projection instrument, or – as stated by the President of the Italian Republic in 2008 – 'the main instrument of Italian foreign policy'.²⁸

As explained in the previous section, national beliefs, perceptions, and political constraints have largely limited Italian military intervention abroad to non-combat roles. This does not mean, however, that Italy has been absent from NATO air missions. Due to its geographic location, Italy has been the most important provider of Host Nation Support to NATO air missions, which found in Italian air fields an ideal avenue to project power into the Balkans and North Africa. Secondly, Italian air assets have provided an important contribution to NATO missions in non-combat roles, such as Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance, air policing, and the enforcement of no-fly zones. Thirdly, Italian aircraft have also played a growing role in kinetic activities such as Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD) missions. Italian involvement in such missions, which started with operation Desert Storm, has increased in magnitude and importance during more recent missions such as Allied Force in Kosovo and Unified Protector in Libya.

This section will briefly review Italian engagement in military operations from 1990 to today. While the analysis will concentrate on NATO air power missions, other operations will also be mentioned in order to map the evolution of Italian strategic communication

and public perception vis-à-vis the use of military force. After briefly recapping the main features of the operations and the involvement of Italian forces therein, the analysis will briefly outline Italian decision-makers' strategic communication and the ways in which the operation has been perceived by Italian media and public opinion. This will provide insights into the extent to which post-cold War Italian military operations are vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation.

Operation Desert Storm

Operation Desert Storm is a crucial turning point in the history of Italian defence policy. For the first time since 1945, the Italian Armed Forces were involved in a military operation abroad. Moreover, Desert Storm saw the Italian Air Force accomplishing its first bombing missions since World War II. Due to the strong opposition against Italian participation in operation Desert Storm by the Italian left and the shoot-down of one Italian Tornado followed by the detention of its crew, an analysis of Italy's contribution to operation Desert Storm is especially important to understanding Italian public opinion perceptions of air power, communication strategies and vulnerability to enemy disinformation.

Italian Participation in the Operation

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the launching of Operation Desert Storm in January 1991 marked a watershed in Italian foreign policy. During the Cold War, Italy largely fulfilled its North Atlantic Treaty obligations by consenting to the presence of NATO bases and missiles to its territory.²⁹ By the end of the Cold War, however, Italian decision-makers found it necessary to look for a new and more proactive role in the North Atlantic Alliance. The blatant invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein, the presence of a clear UN mandate to use force in order to restore Kuwait's territorial sovereignty, and the centrality of the Gulf region to the national interest are key to explain Italy's decision to participate directly in Operation Desert Storm. While small in scale, Italian involvement was

especially remarkable in contrast to the case of Germany, which had a domestic political situation in many respects similar to Italy's but decided not to participate.³⁰

The Italian contribution began with the deployment a Navy Task Force contributing to the enforcement of the embargo. In September 1990, the Italian Air Force Operation *Locusta* – previously only providing air support to the Italian Navy task force – joined the flight unit 'Persian Gulf' at Al-Dhafra airbase. The Italian contribution consisted in 8 Tornados, a G-222 aircraft, and 68 pilots and navigators. Italy also deployed two F104Gs in Turkey for reconnaissance missions under the NATO ACE Mobile Force. It was an embarrassment that Italy was the only participating country that committed no current generation aircraft. Moreover, the Italian aircraft committed to the operation had only a small stock of ammunition, no laser-guided bombs, and lacked sufficient interoperability with allied assets.³¹

Upon the inception of Operation Desert Storm, however, the Italian Air Force unit was given offensive tasks. Between 17 and 18 January 1991, the eight Italian Tornados were tasked to conduct their first bombing mission. AAR was complicated by prohibitive weather conditions and seven of the Tornados involved in the mission were forced to return to the base. The sortie was continued by the only Tornado that had successfully refuelled. After engaging the target, however, the aircraft was shot down by Iraqi air defences. The pilot and navigator, Gian Marco Bellini and Maurizio Cocciolone, were captured by Iraqi forces, detained until the end of the conflict, and released three days after the end of hostilities, after 47 days in captivity.³²

While the downing of an Italian plane on the first bombing mission conducted since World War II had a dramatic effect on Italian public opinion, the Air Force continued its participation in the operation, successfully conducting 31 missions before the end of hostilities in February 1991. Overall, the Italian Air Force conducted 2,326 air sorties, for a total of 4,503 flying hours.³³

Public Perceptions of Operation Desert Storm

The Parliamentary debate surrounding Italian participation in Operation Desert Storm was especially heated. While parliamentary majority forces were in favour of a direct Italian intervention, the hurdles imposed by pacifist and anti-militarist values were extremely high. The Italian Communist Party refused to vote in favour of intervention, opting for neutrality and advocating the need for a diplomatic solution.³⁴ The Pope's call against military solution strengthened the pacifist tendencies of the Christian Democrats and other Catholic forces. Moreover, the fact that the government coalition was formed by five different parties (the so called Pentapartito, comprising Christian Democrats, Socialist Party, Liberal Party, Republican Party and Social Democratic Party) made parliamentary support for intervention especially fragile. Within the tight timeframe of the crisis, the Defence Commissions and plenary sessions of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and Senate voted 39 times in favour of Italian intervention in the crisis.³⁵

Then-Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti had to use extreme caution and several rhetorical devices to ensure that support would not wane, defending Italian intervention as compatible with Article 11 of the Constitution. According to Andreotti, the mission did not consist of war, but merely of an 'endorsement of international laws, enforcing the UNSC resolutions ... the decision to participate, if not averted in extremis by the Iraqi government, is inspired by the second part of Article 11, according to which Italy supports the international organizations whose actions guarantee peace and justice among nations'.³⁶ Likewise, the Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers referred to Desert Storm as an 'international police mission'. In accordance with this interpretation, the Italian parliament was not asked to declare a state of war. According to Miele, the framework of the UN 'police operation' was conceived as an antithesis to the concept of war.³⁷ Despite the attempt to downplay the military dimension of the crisis, a large protest movement opposed the war. The pope condemned military operations in an especially forceful fashion, warning that if the invasion

of Kuwait was unacceptable, an armed response would have catastrophic consequences, paving the way to new violence without solving the root causes of the conflict.³⁸

To further emphasize their stern willingness to avoid the conflict escalating before Parliament and public opinion, Italian decision-makers consistently supported diplomatic solutions and did not refrain from openly criticizing their NATO allies. For instance, after the US bombing of the Amyrah Bunker killed 400 civilians, Virginio Rognoni, the Minister of Defence, openly criticized Washington.³⁹ In order to prevent the criticism that an open involvement in military operations would trigger, the deployment of Italian Tornados to the Gulf was initially justified as necessary to protect the Italian Navy units enforcing the embargo, a task that Tornados, as strike aircraft, were actually ill-suited to execute.⁴⁰ The Foreign Minister, however, attempted to prevent criticism by stating that 'the Tornados are peaceful and they have been used in a peaceful way'.⁴¹

While seen as necessary to preserve domestic support for military operations, the decision to maintain a low-profile approach had serious operational, strategic and political consequences. The ambiguities of the operation – felt by both civilian and military decision-makers – both hindered the consistency of Italian strategic communication and created civil-military relations frictions. For instance, the admiral in charge of the Italian Navy group deployed to the Gulf to enforce the embargo stated in an interview that 'the war could be averted by some more wisdom', and was subsequently removed from his position.⁴²

In order to reduce the perception that Italian aircraft would engage in offensive operations, which would have hindered the decision to support the operation, Italian Tornados did not engage in joint exercises before the starting of the operation. This decision had dramatic operational consequences, as it partially explains their failure to successfully conduct AAR and the subsequent downing of the only Italian Tornado that was left to conduct the mission on the first day of combat.⁴³

While the pilots were eventually released, the aftermath of the first bombing missions severely impacted Italian public opinion perceptions. The crew of the downed Tornado were initially presumed to have been killed in action, but on 20 January the navigator, Maurizio Cocciolone, was shown by Iraqi television with other prisoners of war. His face bore the sign of beatings by Iraqi security forces. Interrogated before the cameras, Cocciolone stated that, 'trying to solve a political problem by military means was folly', and urged Italian leaders to find peaceful, diplomatic solutions to end the conflict. The interrogation of Cocciolone was broadcasted by an Iraqi spokesperson as an enemy propaganda strategy and deserves an in-depth investigation. While Cocciolone's statement were clearly extorted by the Iraqi security forces, it strongly resonated with the pacifist mind-set deeply ingrained in Italian public opinion and political parties and magnified the effect of the Iraqi propaganda and disinformation strategy. Moreover, the fact that Cocciolone was a de facto POW even if no formal state of war had been declared created a legal dispute on the status of the captured Italian pilots and raised further controversy.⁴⁴ In 2011, twenty years after Desert Storm, a parliamentary interrogation was made in response to the Italian pilot Bellini's protest that 'not having its POW captivity legally recognized is a lack of respect towards those who served and suffered ... air power was decisive to win the conflict in a few days and with limited casualties. The failure to acknowledge this hurts me'.⁴⁵

While the downing of the Tornado did not cause parliamentary support for Operation Desert Storm to wane, it severely shaped Italian perceptions of air power and the Italian military in general for the years to come. While the Italian Air Force played a useful role in Operation Desert Storm – especially remarkable due to their out-dated equipment, lack of sufficient joint training and tight political constraints – its involvement caused a devastating backlash against public perceptions of the Italian armed forces. According to Ignazi, Giacomello and Coticchia, 'the negative attitude towards any kind of military epos ... came back with a vengeance'. Public opinion

developed the impression that the Armed Forces were plagued by 'incompetence and inadequacy'.⁴⁶ Consequently, Operation Desert Storm reinforced the perception that the Italian military was ill-suited for and did not need to get involved in combat operations. As summarized by interviews among military officials, neither the Air Force nor the Italian public were yet ready for a direct Italian participation in bombing missions.⁴⁷

The Mid-Nineties: Bosnia Herzegovina

In spite of its negative effects on Italian public opinion, involvement in Operation Desert Storm broke a taboo, creating an important precedent by showing that Italian military forces could engage in combat operations without violating Article 11 of the Constitution.

Subsequently, Italian involvement in military missions abroad steadily grew in the following years. In 1992, Italy participated in the 'Restore Hope' UN mission in Somalia, deploying its land forces in a peace enforcement operation for the first time. While Italian participation in UN peacekeeping in Somalia is beyond the scope of this report, operation Restore Hope is worth mentioning for two reasons. Firstly, the operation was a baptism of fire for the Italian military and public opinion, which experienced the first military casualties since the 1960s. In Somalia, seven soldiers died in hostile action, three in accidents and one from malaria. Wounded personnel would exceed 100. Moreover, Italian involvement – perceived as successful by elite and public alike – reinforced the narrative of Italy as a peacekeeper, wary of engaging in offensive action but excellent at conducting stability and humanitarian relief operations. Secondly, after Restore Hope, peacekeeping operations have re-established Italian support for the military, providing a key legitimization tool for the armed forces and their operations abroad. This narrative, which translated into strong caveats against the involvement of Italian forces deployed to Somalia in any kinetic activities, repeatedly caused frictions with allies. The Italian Command in Somalia consistently refrained from using heavy firepower

and refused to call for air strikes for fear of causing civilian casualties, angering other participating countries.⁴⁸

The disintegration of former Yugoslavia and humanitarian crisis in Bosnia made the use of NATO air power once again indispensable. As a response to the massacre in Srebrenica and the siege of Sarajevo, in August 1995 NATO launched operation Deliberate Force. NATO air operations were a crucial tool of coercive diplomacy, eventually forcing Serbia to subscribe to the Dayton Agreements.

Italian Participation

Due to geographical proximity with the Western Balkans, the crisis in former Yugoslavia was seen with great apprehension by Italian decision-makers and public opinion alike.

Italy contributed to all NATO missions conducted in the Western Balkans in 1995–96 in various ways. Firstly, Italy's role as a host country was indispensable. Airfields located on Italian territory were used by over 350 allied aircraft. Moreover, Italy deployed a large array of military tools, including combat aircraft in non-kinetic roles. The Italian Air Forces were first involved in NATO Operation Deny Flight, tasked with enforcing the No Fly Zone on Bosnia. Italian Tornado and AMX planes conducted 543 sorties, for a total of 1,500 flying hours. At the same time, the Italian Air Force was also involved in Operation Sharp Guard, conducted to enforce the arms embargo between December 1993 and April 1995. In this capacity, Italian Tornados supported the operation by conducting 230 sorties for a total of 267 flying hours. Finally, Italy participated in NATO bombing conducted under the aegis of operation Deliberate Force. Its participation, however, was largely symbolic, as Italian Tornados and AMX only conducted 26 sorties (for a total of 41 flying hours) out of the 3,515 total sorties conducted by NATO forces. Lastly, the Italian Air Force also contributed in a non-kinetic role to operations Joint Endeavour – deploying 8 Tornados and 6 AMX for a total of 1,250 sorties and 3,150 flying hours – and Deliberate Guard – 2,974 sorties and 7,227 flying hours.⁴⁹

Italian Perceptions of Operations in Bosnia

While not negligible, the participation of the Italian Air Force in Bosnian operations was largely low profile and confined to non-combat roles and missions. Italy participated actively in enforcing the embargo and no-fly-zone, but ultimately refrained from conducting bombing missions.

The perceived unwillingness of the Italian public to use its military aircraft in an offensive role – strengthened by the legacy of operation Desert Storm – was used by Italian decision-makers to obtain the exemption of Italian air assets from the conduct of bombing missions. According to polls, however, Italian public opinion was not as wary of offensive action as assumed by its decision-makers. Indeed, survey materials suggests that the Italian public would have welcomed a more proactive involvement of Italian air force in NATO operations.⁵⁰ The low-key nature of Italian approach and the atrocities perpetrated by Serbian paramilitaries in Bosnia did not prevent Italian pacifists from calling into question the utility and legitimacy of NATO bombings. However, public opinion at large did not develop any major criticism against NATO involvement. The powerlessness of UN peacekeepers – blatantly mocked by Serbian forces – and the Pope's call for action reinforced the impression that a more proactive use of military force was needed in order to prevent a genocide.

Public reaction to the Bosnian crisis was crucial to inform the humanitarian intervention narrative that would be used to justify Italian direct participation in bombing operations against Serbia in the wake of the 1999 Kosovo crisis. In that case, however, the stance developed by the Italian public was much more critical of NATO bombing and Italian involvement in air operations faced low public support and strong opposition from several political and civil society groups.

The Late Nineties: Kosovo

The Western Balkans remained a crucial theatre for Italian military operations even after the end of the war in former Yugoslavia. Indeed, Italian peacekeep-

ing forces took a leading role in IFOR and KFOR operations. Moreover, in 1997, Italy autonomously launched operation Alba, conducted under US and NATO auspices to prevent the risk of state failure in Albania by restoring state order and allowing for peaceful elections. The successful accomplishment of the missions further increased confidence in the capabilities of the armed forces.⁵¹ The centrality of the Western Balkans region to Italian national interests and the willingness of the Italian leftist parties in power to show their loyalty to NATO are key to explaining the significant role played by Italian air assets in the Kosovo crisis.

Serbia's failure to sign the Rambouillet Agreement, agreed upon by the International Contact Group to prevent further escalations of violence in Kosovo, eventually pushed NATO to launch operation Allied Force. While a Russian veto prevented the possibility of securing a UNSC authorization, the desire to prevent another humanitarian catastrophe urged NATO to act. The NATO bombing campaign started on 24 March, continuing for 78 days.

Italian Participation

In 1998, the office of prime minister was occupied for the first time by a former communist, Massimo D'Alema, whose premiership was greeted with some apprehension by the US.⁵² By the late 90s, however, the bulk of the Italian left had evolved into a modern social democratic force that would look to UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour's foreign policy as a model, supporting the conduct of armed humanitarian interventions in order to stop gross human rights violations. As a result, D'Alema's parliamentary majority strongly supported NATO operations in Kosovo, providing the most conspicuous contribution after the US. Italian intervention was confronted with strong domestic opposition. The absence of a UNSC authorization and the sizeable role played by the Italian Air Force in the bombing mission magnified domestic criticism, complicating military and civilian authorities' ability to respond to the crisis.⁵³

Even though Italy was offered the opportunity to limit its role to Host Nation Support, Italian authorities de-

ecided to directly commit their air assets in a combat role. Italian Air Forces participated with over 50 F-104, Tornado, and AMX planes, which conducted 1,022 sorties, reaching 2,828 flying hours. The Italian Navy's AV-8B planes stationed on the aircraft carrier Garibaldi also played a role in the operation, conducting around 50 sorties. Overall, Italy was the fourth most contributing country to the operations, conducting around 3% of total sorties. Italian Tornados provided an important role as providers of Electronic Combat Reconnaissance, conducting a large number of SEAD missions to engage Serbian Surface to Air Missiles (SAM). Italian AMXs also conducted Air Interdiction missions, while Navy AV-8B aircraft were used for support and target acquisition tasks.⁵⁴

The role of Italian aircraft was limited to only engaging military targets. Due to domestic opposition and doubts related to the appropriateness of bombing the enemy economic infrastructure, Italian decision-makers decided to refrain from conducting missions against the Serbian communication and energy networks, which were increasingly targeted once it became apparent that air strikes against Serbian military forces would not suffice to force Milosevic to the negotiating table. Moreover, Italy tried as much as possible to reduce the list of bombing targets and was on the frontline in the search for diplomatic solutions. This caused frictions with allies, as epitomized by the criticism from the then SACEUR General Clark, who lamented Italy's and Germany's efforts to restrain the use of air power against Serbia.⁵⁵

Italian Perceptions of Operations in Kosovo

The Italian cabinet, led by D'Alema, decided to support the intervention in Kosovo out of humanitarian imperatives and the willingness to show the Italian moderate left's loyalty to the North Atlantic Alliance and the United States. Italian public opinion, however, was wary of using air power against Serbia. According to a poll conducted few weeks before the air strikes, 68% of respondents argued that the crisis should be solved through dialogue, while only 27% supported the use of military means. At the same time, however,

49% of respondents felt that Italy should support NATO should a bombing mission be launched.⁵⁶

Opposition against the conflict was vocal and heavily mobilized. Once again, parties at the extreme left, such as *Rifondazione Comunista*, unions, and the Catholic Church converged in opposing NATO air bombings. As multilateralism and support for international law and UN-led initiatives have traditionally been a cornerstone of Italian foreign policy, the lack of a UNSC authorization provided an effective discursive weapon against intervention, allowing pacifist forces to claim that operation Allied Force was illegal.⁵⁷ Moreover, several intellectuals mobilized against the conflict. Pacifism and hostility against the intervention spilled over into popular culture after three among the most famous Italian singers – Luciano Ligabue, Jovanotti and Piero Pelu’ – composed a song against NATO bombings. The song, telling the fictional story of an Italian air force pilot deserting not to launch NATO’s ‘holy bombs’, refers to ‘peace as the only victory’, and ask for the names of ‘those who lied talking about a just war’. The song’s video clip, juxtaposing footage of NATO bombings with pictures of injured children and displaced people, is equally telling.⁵⁸

The Italian public’s pacifism, political instability and doubts over the legitimacy of military intervention provided an ideal environment for disinformation and misinformation, spread by Serbian and Russian sources and often propagated by Italian NGOs. Major Italian newspapers and TV channels supported NATO intervention and emphasized Milosevic’s war crimes but also gave ample coverage to the suffering of the Serbian population and collateral damage created by NATO bombings. Likewise, the most controversial bombings, such as those against the Serbian television building and the Chinese embassy, the bombing of the village of Korisa (which caused 87 civilian deaths) and the accidental targeting of the Gdredlica Bridge while a civilian train was approaching – all received extensive coverage. Doubts over the NATO targeting processes and damage assessments were expressed even by moderate journals with pro-governmental leanings. Newspapers with leftist leanings,

including the moderate *Repubblica* – which supported the parliamentary majority – referred to such cases as possible war crimes.⁵⁹ False allegations of environmental terrorism, use of illegal weapons, and the deliberate targeting of civilian objectives found ample resonance in Italian newspapers. Even when the International Criminal Court found NATO innocent of all these charges, *La Repubblica* argued that NATO did not leave The Hague’s court with ‘clean hands and conscience.’⁶⁰

Italian strategic communication was based on giving public opinion a clear sense of NATO’s humanitarian motives by publicizing Milosevic’s war crimes and minimizing the offensive component of Italian Air Force missions. As in operation Desert Storm, the term ‘war’ was deliberately avoided. Italian military operations were labelled ‘integrated defence operations’. Likewise, terms such as ‘enemy’, ‘national interest’, and ‘bombing’ were carefully left aside.⁶¹ Operations started short of a formal war declaration and were not approved by the Italian Parliament, which only discussed the deployment of military personnel for operation Allied Harbour in Macedonia.⁶²

To combat the disinformation and negative campaigns, Public information on Italian participation in NATO air strikes was reduced as much as possible and emphasis was given to the fact that Italian bombing missions were exclusively limited to targeting Serbian military objectives. An interview held by a journalist from *Repubblica* with the Italian Chief of Staff, General Arpino, is telling of Italian strategic communication during the Kosovo crisis. While the journalist tries to focus on the kinetic component of Italian intervention, Arpino deliberately emphasized the humanitarian imperative to stop Milosevic’s war crimes, praising the effort of the Armed Forces by referring to their non-kinetic activities (Host Nation Support, humanitarian relief in Macedonia, Italian Navy patrols). Eventually, the General had to admit that ‘some Italian planes also engaged radar and missile sites that were threatening us’, but kept stressing Italian commitment to precision, humanitarian motives and the search for a diplomatic solution. In spite of the General’s best efforts to shift the focus of the interview away from

Italian participation in bombing mission, the title given to the article was 'Yes, Italian planes have bombed the Serbs'.⁶³

In sum, Italian strategic communication efforts were focussed on downplaying the offensive component of the operation by means of rhetorical ambiguities such as the notion of 'integrated defence' and the withholding of information concerning Italian bombing missions. At the same time, emphasis was given to Italian authorities' relentless efforts to find a diplomatic solution and to the humanitarian motives underlying the NATO campaign. It is unclear whether this form of strategic communication was effective. Disinformation and misinformation regarding NATO bombings found ample resonance among Italian media and public. At the same time, however, the Italian public, initially cautious in its attitude towards the conflict, seems to have grown more accustomed to and ultimately more supportive of NATO bombings. Italian approval for air strikes grew from the 38 per cent of 26 March 1998 to the 55 per cent of 25 June 1999.⁶⁴ Yet, Italian participation in Kosovo bombing missions ultimately left a negative impression in the public opinion. Even then Italian Prime Minister D'Alema himself eventually admitted that 'bombing Kosovo was a mistake'.⁶⁵

After 9/11: Iraq and Afghanistan

The 9/11 terrorist attacks made a strong impression on NATO countries' public opinion, reshaping threat perceptions and public beliefs in the utility of military force. Italy decided to support the United States in both the conflicts carried out within the framework of the Global War on Terror, deploying military forces to Iraq between 2003 and 2006 and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014.

Italian participation in Middle East Operations

The impact of Operation Iraqi Freedom on Italian public opinion is significant and worth mentioning. In 2003, the Italian government deployed an Army and *Carabinieri* contingent to Nassiriya, Southern Iraq, un-

der the framework of operation Ancient Babylon (*Antica Babilonia*). The rules of engagement, equipment and standard operating procedures of Italian forces, officially deployed in a peace keeping operation, proved tragically inadequate.⁶⁶ On 12 November 2003, a truck bomb launched against an Italian base killed 17 soldiers and two civilians as well as nine Iraqis. The fact that insufficient air assets had been deployed in support of Italian forces delayed CASEVAC operations.⁶⁷ The attack in Nassiriya catalysed criticism against Italian involvement, already opposed by the public due to the scepticism towards US motives and the lack of a UNSC authorization. Moreover, operation Ancient Babylon further confirmed that the mismatch between the reality on the ground and the rhetorical devices used in order to secure domestic support for the mission had dramatic operational consequences. In 2006, the new centre-left Italian government decided to withdraw Italian troops from Iraq, but continued to support NATO efforts in Afghanistan.

Italian participated in both the US-led operation Enduring Freedom and NATO's ISAF. While Italian involvement was predominantly based on the deployment of ground forces in a state-building capacity, air assets played a role too. During the first phase, Operation Enduring Freedom, Italian Navy AV-8Bs deployed on the aircraft carrier *Garibaldi* conducted largely non-kinetic operations of air interdiction, close air support, and reconnaissance, conducting 328 sorties for a total of around 860 flying hours.⁶⁸ However, the Harriers that flew from the *Garibaldi* to southern Afghanistan were constrained by rules of engagement that ultimately prohibited conducting any air strikes.⁶⁹ In 2007, the Italian Air Force joined the ISAF Joint Air Task Force (JATF), deploying AMX, C-130J, and Predator MQ1C. AMXs were also deployed to provide air support for Italian forces in Herat. In 2008, four Italian Tornados also joined the German-led Air Base in Mazar-E-Sharif, from where they flew sorties totalling more than 900 flying hours.

As Italian air assets operated under strict caveats and were not carrying bombs, their role was initially limited to surveillance, reconnaissance and target acquisition missions. Starting from January 2012, however,

the Defence Minister's authorization to arm Italian AMX planes allowed for their direct involvement in kinetic operations. Italian aircraft participating in Operation Shrimp Net conducted bombing missions against enemy outposts and communication networks in the Southern Afghanistan districts of Ghulistan and Bakra.⁷⁰ As of the end of 2013, Italian aircraft had conducted 3,031 sorties, flying over Afghanistan for a total of almost 8,500 hours.⁷¹

Public Opinion Perceptions and Strategic Communication

Italian involvement in Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, and ISAF was mainly presented as peace and stabilization missions. The Italian military presence in Iraq suffered from low public support from the outset due to the lack of a UNSC authorization, the insufficiently multilateral nature of the operations, and doubts on the need for and motives behind a military intervention. Italian operations in Afghanistan, by contrast, benefitted from much broader public support, at least initially. According to existing research, the public belief in the peaceful nature of Italian involvement was crucial to ensure public support for the intervention. Indeed, the Italian public grew increasingly disaffected once it became clear that the peacekeeping narrative used to justify intervention was incompatible with the realities on the ground and that Italian peacekeeping forces were actually involved in counterinsurgency operations.⁷²

The involvement of Italian aircraft in bombing missions was key to shaping this shift in public opinion perceptions. By 2011, then-Defence Minister La Russa's attempt to authorize the arming of Italian AMX and Tornados with bombs met strong criticism and failed to secure parliamentary approval. In January 2012, the new Defence Minister (and former Admiral) Di Paola allowed for the arming of Italian aircraft without any parliamentary discussion, providing Italian air assets with the possibility to play a kinetic role during the bombing missions conducted under the framework of Operation Shrimp Net.⁷³ The news that Italian aircraft were involved in bombing missions – diffused by the pacifist NGO Emergency⁷⁴ – occurred at the

time when NATO bombing missions and their alleged collateral damage were exposed to criticism from various sources, including Afghanistan's President Karzai. Consequently, a fierce parliamentary discussion followed. An opposition MP presented a parliamentary question asking the Cabinet to explain why 'arming planes and throwing bombs should help Afghanistan's democratic transition'. Likewise, leftist newspapers emphasized the enormous ethical and political significance of the decision, which should have therefore been previously discussed in and authorized by the Parliament.⁷⁵

When the information about Italian involvement in bombing missions gained widespread publicity, the Defence Minister acknowledged that 'the capabilities of Italian military assets were used to the fullest in order to protect our troops, our Afghan friends and our allies.'⁷⁶ Emphasis was also given to NATO's commitment to precision and the use of depowered bombs in order to minimize collateral damage. This, however, did not prevent the widespread allegations of civilian casualties from finding resonance in the Italian public debate. The lack of sufficient knowledge on strategic matters provided an ideal environment for disinformation and misinformation. The parliamentary and broader public discussion were based on unverified information on collateral damage and friendly fire and lumped together the air strikes conducted by Air Force assets with the combat support missions carried out by Army Mangusta helicopters.⁷⁷

The perceived inconsistency between the peace operation rhetoric used to justify the operation and the involvement of Italian military forces, including air assets, in combat missions impacted negatively on Italian support for ISAF. As a multilateral operation with a strong humanitarian component, Italian involvement in Afghanistan started with broad public support. At the inception of operation ISAF, Italian support averaged 57 per cent, peaking to a maximum of 69.4 per cent in July 2006. By 2012, however, support had plummeted to 35 per cent.⁷⁸ The decrease in Italian support cannot be solely explained by the factors that usually drive down public approval for military operations, such as growing casualties, war fatigue, or

perceived lack of success. Rather, the sharp decline in Italian public support was caused by the perceived inconsistency between the peace operations rhetoric that has traditionally been used to justify Italian operations abroad and the reality on the ground⁷⁹.

Operation Unified Protector in Libya

Due to geographic proximity, security concerns and the activities of the Italian energy sector, Libya was another theatre of NATO intervention at the core of Italian national interests. Initially wary of a military intervention in support of the rebels due to the well-grounded fear that the country would degenerate into chaos and strong diplomatic and economic relations with the Gaddafi regime, Italian decision-makers eventually decided to fully commit their military forces to Operation Unified Protector. Authorized by UNSC Resolution 1973/2011 to take all necessary means to protect civilians and enforce a No Fly Zone, Unified Protector was conducted between 31 March and 31 October 2011.

Italian Participation in the Operation

Operation Unified Protector soon became the largest Italian offensive operation since the Second World War⁸⁰. The Italian contribution, valuable in terms of both quantity of assets employed and strategic importance, was threefold:

Firstly, the Italian Navy directed the patrolling and interdiction operations needed to enforce the UN arms embargo against Libya. Secondly, Italian host nation support was crucial. Seven Italian airfields (Aviano, Amendola, Decimomannu, Gioia del Colle, Pantelleria, Sigonella, and Trapani) were involved in the operations. Moreover, Italy also hosted the Joint Forces Command. The geographical proximity of Italian bases and territory, which was within the range of enemy retaliation, demanded high levels of readiness for Italian forces. Overall, 4,800 military personnel were employed for technical assistance, control of air traffic, and other host nation support activities.⁸¹ Finally, and most importantly for the purpose of this study, Italian Navy and Air Force aircraft participated in bombing

missions to an unprecedented degree. Italian war-planes, the contribution of which was the fourth largest after the US, France, and the UK, conducted 2,113 air sorties, which amounted to around 7 per cent of all NATO missions, for a total of 7,255 flying hours.⁸² The Italian Air Force contribution consisted of F-16, Tornado, AMX and Eurofighter jets. Italian Tornados played a key role in SEAD missions, engaging enemy radars and air defences. Tornados and AMXs were also used to conduct Offensive Counter Air and Strike Coordination and Reconnaissance missions. AMXs, Eurofighters, Predator-B RPA and Italian Navy Harriers were also involved in intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance tasks and Defensive Counter Air Tasks.⁸³

Italian Public Perceptions and Strategic Communication

The legacy of Italian colonialism, the close diplomatic relations entertained with Gaddafi's regime, the opposition of the Catholic Church, and scepticism towards the consequences of a NATO operation all made Italian public opinion wary of military intervention. According to a May 2011 Demopolis survey, 67% of the Italian population were against the bombing.⁸⁴ Leftist and Catholic pacifist forces were especially active in protesting against intervention.⁸⁵

The Italian cabinet, led by Silvio Berlusconi, then suffering from strong domestic criticism and a very weak parliamentary majority, decided to structure Italian strategic communication around the attempt to downplay Italian aircraft's involvement in bombing missions. As with Desert Storm thirteen years before, Unified Protector was labelled as an international police rather than an offensive military operation. As remarked by President Napolitano, 'Italy did not wage war.'⁸⁶ In order to remain consistent with this narrative, information concerning the involvement of Italian aircraft in bombing missions was reduced to a minimum.

Such a strategy ultimately proved problematic. The facts that the majority of air sorties departed from Italian territory and there were a large number of Italian military personnel involved in the operations

made the withholding of information difficult, inevitably causing some leaks and revealing the actual scope of Italian intervention. The navigator of one of the first six Tornados conducting the first air sortie against Libya, Major Nicola Scolari – interviewed by Italian television – stated that they only patrolled the area around Benghazi, because ‘they did not detect radar emissions that would suffice in justifying the launching of missiles against enemy installations.’⁸⁷ This statement clearly suggested that had sufficient radar emissions been detected, the planes would have engaged enemy installations. Consequently, the interview revealed that Italian aircraft had been tasked with conducting a SEAD mission. The declarations of the Italian pilot were not appreciated and, due to his candour, the officer was excluded from future operations. Needless to say, his removal begged further questions and triggered negative publicity. The newspaper *Il Tempo*, for instance, referred to the case as the first instance in which a pilot had been ‘shot down by an interview’, labelling Scolari as the first ‘casualty’ of the Libyan war.⁸⁸

Scolari’s declarations were not isolated. Another pilot, Cmdt. Gabetta, acknowledged before the press that the first SEAD mission of the Italian Air Force had been successful.⁸⁹ Furthermore, a press release appeared on the Italian Air Force website and acknowledged that the Tornados had conducted a SAD mission targeting Gaddafi’s air defence by means of AGM-88 High-speed Anti-Radiation Missiles.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, when questioned in Parliament, Defence Minister La Russa remained vague saying, ‘he could not say whether Italian aircraft engaged targets’. Prime Minister Berlusconi bluntly said that ‘Italian planes did not shoot and will not shoot’, remarking that the goals of the Italian government were humanitarian support and the protection of civilians.⁹¹

Over time, the true scope of Italian air assets involvement in Libya would inevitably be revealed to the public. For instance, a November 2012 article by the press agency ANSA claimed that Italian bombing missions were hidden from the Italian public. Quoting words by the Italian General Bernardis, who delivered a speech during the presentation of the Italian Air

Force volume ‘Missione Libia’,⁹² the article argued that the activities conducted by the Italian Air Force were ‘hidden from the Italian public for political reasons ... to avoid that this information could be used instrumentally.’⁹³ This statement allowed the newspaper to title an article that would have otherwise presented the Air Force in a good light ‘General Reveals: ‘Libyan Military Operations Hidden from the Public.’⁹⁴

Operations in Libya were extraordinarily successful in keeping collateral damage to a minimum. News of civilian casualties and alleged NATO war crimes found some coverage in the press, however. Gaddafi’s family’s decision to appeal to the International Criminal Court in The Hague found some coverage in Italian left-leaning newspapers, which reported NATO’s alleged war crimes in Libya. Newspapers close to the radical left gave ample coverage to NATO’s alleged war crimes. For instance, an editorial published by an *Amnesty International* spokesperson on *Il Fatto Quotidiano* likens ‘the unpunished crimes committed by NATO forces’ to those perpetrated by Gaddafi in Benghazi. After acknowledging that NATO forces made significant effort to reduce collateral damage, the article laments insufficient efforts to conduct investigations and attributes to NATO air strikes the responsibility for the drowning at sea of 1,500 migrants fleeing from the country.⁹⁵

While it may have allowed keeping domestic opposition under control during the crisis, Italian strategic communication in Libya proved problematic. The ambiguities surrounding the nature of Italian air sorties and the contradictions between officers’ and civilian decision-makers’ declarations had a negative impact on public perceptions of a conflict which suffered from low public support from its very outset. Far from successfully downplaying the criticism arising from the involvement of Italian aircraft in combat, the extreme caution of military authorities in releasing any news about Italian aircraft missions conveyed the impression that information was being censored and that Italian military operations in Libya lacked accountability, consistency, and unity of effort. Hence, a very parsimonious release of information may keep public criticism at bay in the short run but is in danger

Mission	Aircraft	Sorties	Flying hours
Iraq & Kuwait	Tornado	2,326	4,503
Former Yugoslavia (ops. Deny Flight, Sharp Guard, Deliberate Force, Decisive Endeavour, Deliberate Guard)	Tornado, AMX, AV8B	5,023	11,973
Kosovo (op. Allied Force)	Tornado, AMX, F-104	1,072 3% of total	2,903
Afghanistan (ops. Enduring Freedom and ISAF)	Tornado, AMX, AV8B	3,259	9,337
Libya (op. Unified Protector)	F-16, Tornado, AMX, AV8B, Predator RPA	2,113 7% of total	7,255
Total		13,893	35,971

Table 1: Italian involvement in NATO bombing missions

of causing negative long-term effects such as increasing scepticism towards official statements, an erosion of public trust for the military, and the emergence of friction in civil-military relations.

Italian Perceptions of Air Power Today

The previous pages provided an overview of Italian Air Forces' involvement in NATO operations conducted since the end of the Cold War. As seen in the table above, the involvement of Italian Air Assets in missions with a kinetic component has been pervasive and has, overall, increased substantially over time.

The involvement of Italian air assets in combat during operation Desert Storm occurred at the time where neither the Armed Forces nor the public were fully ready. The aftermath of the operation, tragically influenced by the downing of an Italian Tornado and the capture of its two pilots, reinforced the image of Italy as a peacekeeping country, strengthening public criticism against air combat missions. Indeed, Italian involvement in ensuing NATO air missions in Bosnia was largely confined to non-kinetic roles. The Italian contribution to NATO air power, however, has eventually grown in scope and ambition, as epitomized by the growing role of Italian combat aircraft in Kosovo and Libya. To give a fully comprehensive and updated pic-

ture of Italian public perceptions of air power, this section will briefly look at the situation after the Libyan conflict, analysing public perceptions and air power Strategic Communication from the end of operation Unified Protector to January 2016.

After the Libyan war, the use of Italian aircraft in large-scale combat roles has disappeared from the political discussion. However, two ongoing debates shed important information on Italian public perceptions of air power and the persisting limitations surrounding its use in bombing missions. Firstly, the controversy surrounding Italian participation in the JSF programme and the decision to acquire 110 (later reduced to 90) F-35 fighters illustrate the negative perceptions of air power the Italian public has. The acquisition of F-35 aircraft, which initially went largely unnoticed by Italian public opinion, became increasingly central in the political agenda in the wake of the financial crisis, achieving political salience in the 2012 parliamentary electoral campaign. Political and civil society forces opposing the acquisition formed a large coalition that engaged in a large and effective campaign, named 'Cut the Wings to Arms'.⁹⁶ The purchasing of the aircraft was opposed not only on the grounds of financial austerity but also based on pacifist and possibly Anti-American reasoning. Due to its capabilities, the aircraft was labelled as a 'death instrument' incompatible with Article 11 of

the Italian Constitution. Moreover, Italian involvement in the programme was criticized as heightening Italian strategic dependence on the United States and hampering the development of similar European projects such as the Eurofighter.⁹⁷ While discussing the comparative effectiveness of different types of aircraft is beyond the scope of the paper, two aspects of the opposition against the F35 debates are worth emphasizing.

Firstly, in spite of the repeated involvement of Italian aircraft in NATO combat missions, a part of the Italian public opinion still considers operations including attacks against ground targets as incompatible with the Italian Constitution and values. This hostility may not only endanger the ability of Italian decision-makers to engage in future NATO air operations but also, possibly, their ability to modernize the fleet and contribute to collective defence in other roles, such as deterrence and the defence of NATO air space. Secondly, while soberly indicating the persistence of a substantial distrust of bombing missions, the 'NO F-35' debate has also provided the opportunity for a more mature strategic debate in the Italian public sphere, traditionally refractory to debating military matters. The attempt to criticize the programme on economic and strategic grounds has provided the defence community with the possibility to stress the importance of air power and the need to modernize Italian combat aircraft fleet before a broader audience that had previously been entirely uninterested in national security.⁹⁸

The opportunity to spread strategic awareness among the Italian public and emphasize the key importance of combat aircraft in today's security environment has been further magnified by the recent publication of the White Book on National Defence (the first in 13 years). The White Book clearly acknowledges the importance of air assets, stressing that Italian Air Forces must be equipped with adequate capabilities in terms of air defence and air superiority, support to the ground and (emphasis mine) **precise, in-depth engagement** ... Italian Air Forces will be tasked to conduct **'high-risk missions against modern air defences'**.⁹⁹ The need for offensive capabilities is

indirectly confirmed by the very goals of the White Book, which foresees the possibility for the armed forces to lead military operations across the spectrum in Italy's near abroad.¹⁰⁰ Given the crucial role of aircraft in combat operations, the White Book ultimately acknowledges that Italian Air Forces must remain ready for the bombing of enemy targets in hostile territory.

The second ongoing debate that sheds important information on Italian public perceptions of air power and the persisting limitations surrounding its use in bombing missions is based on the Italian decision to be the second country after the UK to acquire armed Predator drones from the US. This controversial decision has caused a debate over the moral legitimacy of employing RPA. The Italian press has given ample resonance to the criticism and alleged collateral damage arising from US drone strikes. The accidental killing in a US RPA strike in Pakistan of an Italian national who had been kidnapped by the Taliban triggered a heated discussion on the use of such air assets. Unsurprisingly due to its pacifist leaning, the Italian left-leaning press depicted RPA – often referred to as 'killer drones' – in a negative fashion, highlighting negative issues such as collateral damage, costs and the potential erosion of democratic control over the use of force while giving scant attention to their strategic utility.¹⁰¹

The fact that Italian Predator RPA have been used to engage Islamic State targets in Iraq has further increased public attention towards the phenomenon. The information released by the Italian Air Force on the use of RPA, however, marks an important turning point in its strategic communication. Departing drastically from the very parsimonious release of information on its operations in Libya, the Italian Air Force decided to release ample information on Italian RPA operations by allowing the magazine *L'Espresso* to approach the personnel operating RPA from the Amendola base.¹⁰² Moreover, the Air Force also released unprecedentedly detailed footage of an Italian RPA bombing of an IS checkpoint. This information release goes at length in describing the careful surveillance and target acquisition efforts preceding the engagement of targets and showing the human side of RPA

operators and their best efforts not to be detached from the ground reality.

This section has examined Italian perceptions of air power from operation Desert Storm until today. Next section will briefly examine the evolution of strategic communication, focusing on the transformations brought about by the 2013 Strategic Communication Directive.

Italian Air Power Strategic Communications Analysed

There is increasing awareness in Italian defence circles about the importance of StratCom, culminating in the Strategic Communication Directive issued by the MoD in 2013. This section will review the past and present of Italian air power strategic communication. The first part will map the main institutional actors and organizational arrangements involved in Italian StratCom. The second will recap the main features of Italian air power StratCom. The last part will unravel the latest transformations of Italian strategic communication, investigating its potential impact on public perceptions of NATO air power.

Italian StratCom: Actors and Processes

Italian Strategic Communication is a complex process that involves different institutional actors. As emphasized by Italian Air Force spokespersons, their StratCom activities embrace four different dimensions and audiences. Firstly, communication strategies have to address an *internal audience*, conveying to the armed forces' community a full sense of the importance and objectives of the missions and supporting morale, cohesion and *esprit the corps* among military personnel. Secondly, there is a *national audience*, encompassing Italian civil society, media and public opinion. Thirdly, there is an *international audience*, consisting in NATO allies and third countries, which needs to be made aware of and confident in Italian commitment and capabilities. Lastly, there is a *hostile audience*, which also needs to be taken into account in order to make deterrence convincing, enhance the credibility of

coercive diplomacy and prevent enemy forces from acquiring valuable information. Hence, the audience this paper focuses on – domestic public opinion – is only one, albeit a crucial, target of StratCom, which has to reconcile different and sometimes conflicting dimensions and objectives.¹⁰³

Within the Italian Air Force, there is a bureau specifically designed for media and public engagement – the Public Communication Office. Within the Italian Navy, also relevant to this study insofar as its air assets are concerned, a similar Bureau – the Public Information and Communication Office – is also present. The Public Information bureaus of each military service, however, are primarily responsible for 'tactical' strategic communication, namely media engagement. The main StratCom decisions are made at the Joint Staff or the political level. During military operations, the main elements of StratCom, including which kind of information should be released to the public, are made by the Defence Minister or the Cabinet as a whole. The decision to release minimal information regarding the involvement of Italian air assets in the bombing of Libya, for instance, were made by Defence Minister La Russa and prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. Due to its representative role, the President of the Italian Republic is also involved in strategic communication, and has often actively promoted the armed forces and the importance of conducting military operations abroad.¹⁰⁴

As acknowledged by the latest strategic communication directive, Italian StratCom involves a diverse and multi-layered array of both military and political actors, which makes the establishment of a single, consistent strategic communication shared by all institutional players paramount. This has not always been the case in the past. As extensively mentioned in the previous section, Italy has traditionally justified the use of its armed forces abroad based on a peacekeeping narrative. This narrative, however, adapts to some military services better than others. Indeed, there is evidence that the peacekeeping rhetoric may marginalize the Air Force vis-à-vis other services in the inevitable competition for public attention, financial resources and qualified personnel

that characterizes democratic civil-military relations. In a 2005 interview, for instance, the Chief of Staff of the Italian Army complained that too large of a share of the defence budget was being used for the acquisition of new warships and aircraft, unnecessary for a provider of peace operations like Italy. He then depicted the Army as a 'force for peace', contrasting it with other services whose existence is tightly enmeshed with the concept of 'war'.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the Army and Carabinieri – which naturally play a key role in peacekeeping missions – and the Navy – which is now massively involved in Search and Rescue operations in the Southern Mediterranean sea – the identity of the Air Force is more tightly associated with combat tasks seen as incompatible with the Italian identity.

The Main Features of Italian StratCom

In accordance with the anti-militarist beliefs underlying Italian political culture and the successful employment of a peacekeeping narrative to justify military operations, past instances of Air Force StratCom have been based on downplaying as much as possible the kinetic element of Italian involvement. This has had serious implications on engagement with the media. First, the Italian Air Force has invested substantial efforts into advertising all the non-kinetic missions it has been involved in, ranging from humanitarian airlift to Medevac and air policing.¹⁰⁶ Emphasis has been given, for instance, to the use of air assets to deliver humanitarian aid in the wake of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti or to evacuate victims of the Ebola virus.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, in Italian involvement in NATO air policing missions in the Balkans, Iceland, and the Baltic States, the government has emphasized the important role played by Italian air assets in defensive tasks such as the peaceful protection of the air space of allied countries.¹⁰⁸ For instance, Italian fighter jets have recently been deployed to Šiauliai, Lithuania, under the umbrella of the NATO Air Policing operation.¹⁰⁹ The fact that they successfully escorted Russian aircraft outside of NATO air space has been advertised by the Air Force as an example of their peaceful involvement in crisis management operations.¹¹⁰

The Italian Air Force's willingness to convey the image of 'air policemen' is also apparent in their advertising campaigns. A case in point is a 2013 video advertisement broadcast on Italian TV, where a paper plane folded by a kid excluded from an after-school football game turns into a flying jet, leading all the other children to stop the game and watch. All the other discourses and imagery that are used to promote the Italian Air Force are also devoid of any reference to their engagement in combat and bombing roles. A particularly important concept used in Italian Air Force communication revolves around the notion of sportsmanship, *esprit de corps* and teamwork. The similarity between the nicknames of the Air Force (*Arma Azzurra*) and the Italian national football team (*Squadra Azzurra*) have been used to depict Italian air assets as a peaceful force protecting and representing the whole country. Other narratives used to promote the Italian Air Force emphasize bravery and technological proficiency as key elements, and often involve the use of the Italian Air Force acrobatic team (the Frecce Tricolori) or Italian Air Force Pilots sent to international space missions, such as Luca Parmitano and Samantha Cristoforetti.¹¹¹

While successful in peacetime, this narrative reveals some limitations when Italian Air Assets are involved in NATO offensive operations. In those cases too, Italian decision-makers have presented the use of Italian air assets as a form 'international policing' (as in Iraq in 1991 and Libya in 2011), 'integrated defence' (as in Kosovo in 1999) or 'defence of our troops, Afghan friends and allies' (Afghanistan in 2012).¹¹² This narrative can be sustainable only at the price of releasing minimal information to the public. As shown by the case of both Kosovo and Libya, the use of wording downplaying the kinetic component of Italian involvement and a limited release of official information on bombing missions may succeed in reducing short-term domestic opposition against Italian involvement. These strategies have been seen as necessary to preserve the stability of fragile parliamentary majorities. Such types of StratCom, however, also have negative long-term effects, and have become increasingly untenable for three reasons. Firstly, as forcefully illustrated by the example of bombing mis-

sions in Libya, reducing the amount of information available to the public may have become ultimately impossible. In today's digital communication society, information on air strikes will inevitably leak to the public, especially during missions where a large number of air assets departing from Italian territory are involved. In such cases, ambiguities may inevitably arise as to the extent to which Italian officers can engage with the press and the type and amount of information that can actually be released. The removal of the Tornado pilot who released an interview to the Italian TV and the different versions of the missions provided by the Air Force and the government did not only fail to keep information secret, but also created the impression that Italian operations were lacking unity of command a clear purpose, possibly undermining morale and cohesion within the armed forces.

Secondly, once the use of Italian aircraft in offensive missions is found out, initial attempts to withhold that information may have especially negative effects, magnifying the misleading impression that air power is involved in large scale combat operations and providing a formidable weapon to anti-militarist groups and narratives. During the conflicts in both Afghanistan and Libya, for instance, criticism against Italian involvement grew stronger once the argument that Italian military involvement was being kept secret could be made. Such an argument could give support and credibility to the claims that bombing missions had taken place against the will of the public, without Parliamentary approval, and in violation of the Italian Constitution.

Thirdly, releasing little or no information gives free rein to misinformation and enemy disinformation strategies. Due to anti-militarism, the lack of knowledge about defence matters in the Italian public, the large presence of Italian NGO workers abroad, and the fragility of the Italian political system, Italy is especially vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation. The broader Air Power and Disinformation project converges in noting that silence and dissimulation are the worst response when countering disinformation. Not releasing information in a timely manner may mean

losing the initiative, forcing Italian officials to release information when it is already too late and disinformation has already shaped the perceptions of a large segment of the public.

The Present and Future of Italian StratCom

The latest institutional initiatives on Italian Strategic Communication reveal that the problems outlined above have not gone unnoticed in military circles.

The 2013 Guidelines for the Communication of the Italian MoD state that 'the armed forces need to better explain the reasons behind their involvement in international operations ... shared among all the institutional actors'. Such a new narrative – essential in a country displaying strong anti-militarist feelings such as Italy – is all the more important at a time in which financial austerity makes defence spending particularly unattractive. As acknowledged by the president of the Republic, there is a need to 'react against disinformation and polemics targeting the military instrument'.¹¹³

The 2013 MoD Strategic Communication Directive attempts to tackle these imperatives by establishing a new approach to StratCom, streamlining and integrating all its components. Such a new approach is also considered necessary in order to connect Italian policy with NATO doctrine, most specifically to the 2009 NATO Strategic Communications Policy. In regards to military operations abroad, the Italian StratCom directive identifies three key objectives:

- Illustrating the reasons underlying the involvement of the Armed Forces abroad;
- Using all the means available to explain why the involvement of armed forces abroad is essential to national security; and
- Increasing the awareness that Italian involvement in military operations abroad has contributed to the prestige and prosperity of the country.

The directive also stresses that, due to its crucial importance, strategic communication should be con-

sidered on an equal footing with all operational functions and should be included into operational planning from the outset.¹¹⁴

Several elements are identified to make strategic communication more effective:

- Centrality to the decision-making and operational planning process;
- Credibility;
- Consistency and sustainability;
- Accuracy, clarity, and timeliness; and
- Transparency and respect for the public.

Lastly, the Directive also acknowledges the central importance of social media and the subsequent need to introduce organizational changes, explaining, for instance, that based on the need to engage with social media and deliver responses in real time, communication authority should be decentralized.¹¹⁵

The points forcefully stressed in the directive have important implications for the way information on air power has been delivered to the public. The emphasis on credibility, consistency, transparency, accuracy, and timeliness should mark a clear departure from previous policy of releasing a limited amount of information. The extent to which the new StratCom directive will be implemented remains to be seen. Indeed, Air Force officers understandably keep stressing the importance of caution when releasing information on air strikes to the Italian public. However, the decision to provide the press with detailed materials, including a video footage, of Italian Air Force RPA operations against the Islamic states is evidence of a more proactive media engagement strategy based on explaining the importance of carefully planned offensive missions and the relentless effort to select appropriate targets and avoid collateral damage that underlies NATO countries' use of air power. Such forms of communication provide excellent examples of successful media engagement. This strategy also pre-emptively tackles criticism of RPA operations and possible related disinformation strategies by releasing information rather than withholding it.

Conclusions and Key Policy Lessons

Italian involvement in NATO air operations has steadily grown over the last twenty years. Consequently, Italian strategic communication has also changed, adapting to the challenge of explaining the increasing involvement of Italian air assets in NATO missions and countering the growing array of misinformation and disinformation strategies. The comprehensive analysis of the Italian case suggests three key policy lessons that are relevant for decision-makers and military planners, both in Italy and in other NATO countries.

Firstly, the Italian case is a forceful reminder of the crucial importance of effective communication in today's military operations. Failure to engage in an effective form of StratCom may have disastrous consequences that go beyond preventing Italian air assets from providing a meaningful contribution to future NATO missions. As demonstrated by the hostility to the purchase of F35 aircraft, public opposition against air power may prevent important NATO partners like Italy from modernizing their aircraft fleets and contributing to collective defence. Moreover, Italian airfields have been crucial in three out of five of the latest NATO bombing operations and will remain key to projecting NATO capabilities in any crisis theatre in the Balkans, North Africa or the Middle East. In an extreme scenario, strong domestic opposition against NATO air operations might prevent Italy from fulfilling its host nation support duties. Popular protests against the expansion of the Vicenza airbase or the building of a Mobile User Objective System (MUOS) in Niscemi, Sicily, already demonstrate that strong domestic opposition against airbases may hinder Italy's key role as a host nation.

Secondly, establishing integrated StratCom at the NATO level is important. However, effective strategic communication is context-specific and requires cultural awareness. Hence, NATO members should remain free to devise forms of strategic communication that best resonate with their publics' opinions, perceptions, and beliefs. Awareness of the rift between members that are more accustomed to the use of military force and members that have developed

a wariness of combat operations is especially important. The type of StratCom that takes place in the US, the UK or France – where the public is much more used to and less critical of bombing missions and combat operations at large – would not work in countries like Germany or Italy, which require different, more low-key communication strategies. Hence, a single, one-size-fits all NATO Air Power StratCom would be unfeasible or undesirable.

Thirdly, the pacifism that is deeply ingrained in Italian political culture still imposes tight constraints on Italian decision-makers. Consequently, the peacekeeping discourse that has underpinned past instances of military intervention abroad remains an important tool to legitimize the use of military force. The predominance of a peacekeeping discourse to justify the involvement of the armed forces abroad has shaped a type of strategic communication that downplays the involvement of Italian units into missions that the public may see as incompatible with the peacekeeping narrative, such as offensive air operations. The attempt to legitimize Italian air assets as a force for peace cannot, however, occur at the price of not releasing information to the public. Indeed, this strategy has become increasingly untenable due to the growing involvement of Italian air assets in NATO missions, the pervasiveness of information in the age of digital communication and the subsequent proliferation of enemy disinformation strategies. The 2013 Strategic Communication directive and the latest examples of media engagement mark the inception of a new approach based on a larger, more proactive release of information to explain the reasons underlying the resort to military forces and the measures undertaken in order to ensure that no collateral damage occurs. While caution obviously remains essential when releasing sensitive news related to on-going military operations, proactive media engagement strategies are ultimately better suited at gradually legitimizing air power in the eyes of the Italian public than previous attempts to remain consistent with a peacekeeping narrative even at the price of minimizing the amount of information available and providing inconsistent messages to the public. The impression that information is being withheld from the

public may magnify criticism against Italian military operations, increase scepticism against official military statements, erode public trust in the armed forces, create civil-military relations frictions, and further undermine public beliefs in the utility and legitimacy of air power.

Finally, the present revolution in digital communication has not only made an increasing amount of information available to the public but has also multiplied the possibilities for enemy disinformation strategies to affect Italian public perceptions. Russian propaganda and DAESH's proficiency in using digital platforms are cases in point. In such contexts, minimizing contact with the Italian media will simply leave the Italian public more vulnerable to foreign sources of information and enemy propaganda. A more proactive communication strategy that engages media and the public by disclosing timely and accurate information on air strikes will ultimately be more effective in preempting disinformation and misinformation, spreading knowledge of the importance of offensive air operations and securing sufficient support for future involvement in the projection of NATO air power.

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German Tornado parked with NATO AWACS, Ämari Air Base, Estonia 2015.

CHAPTER 7

NATO, Strategic Communication and Germany

Dr Philipp Fraund

Public opinion surveys in eight major NATO nations over the period 2009 to 2015 show an alarming decline in public support for NATO. Public support for NATO declined in seven of the eight NATO nations (Poland, Italy, France, UK, Spain, Germany, Canada, US), but Germany saw the greatest decline in support of NATO, from 73% support to 55% support between 2009 and 2015.¹ Of course, any decline of support for NATO in key countries should be a matter of grave concern to the Western alliance. However, the precipitous drop in German public support for NATO (Germany being the only nation polled with a double-digit drop in support) shows that the relationship of Germany to NATO is in deep trouble. At the core of the problem is the question of what Germany should do

about supporting military operations outside its own borders.

Germany plays an important role in any debate about NATO. This chapter will focus on several questions. How do the German people view their own military and what do they think about deploying forces on NATO operations? How does the German media cover the German military? What are the primary public issues concerning the use of German air power and how does the media portray this? What are the strengths and weaknesses of German strategic communications in presenting the Bundeswehr and its operations to the public? For Germany, the focus is less on the use of air power but more on the use any military force at all in support of NATO operations. This chapter will develop some insights as to the main problems of strategic communications between the military and the public, especially in terms of supporting allied operations. Through these insights, one can present some recommendations to improve the state of strategic communications about the German military.

Beginning of Cold War and the Foundation of NATO and West Germany

The history of the Federal Republic of Germany and its armed forces begins with the end of World War II. On 7 May 1945 Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allied Powers. Germany's unconditional surrender symbolized the utter defeat of the German Wehrmacht and with it the unconditional capitulation of the whole Nazi regime and state, thus paving the way for a postwar Germany and society. A directive to the Commander in Chief of US Forces of Occupation, issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), summarized and clarified the Allied objectives for this first phase of post-hostility operations:

[...] It should be brought home to the Germans that Germany's ruthless warfare and the fanatical Nazi resistance have destroyed the German economy and made chaos and suffering inevitable and that the Germans cannot escape responsibility for what they have brought upon themselves. Germany will not be occupied for the purpose of liberation but as a defeated enemy nation. [...] The principal Allied objective is to prevent Germany from ever again becoming a threat to the peace of the world. Essential steps in the accomplishment of this objective are the elimination of Nazism and militarism in all their forms, [...] the industrial disarmament and demilitarization of Germany, with continuing control over Germany's capacity to make war, and the preparation for an eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis [...].²

To achieve this task and to form a new democratic and postwar society it was necessary to reeducate Germans and teach them the core principles of democracy. These efforts to reeducate the German public were based on the 'three D's': Decentralization, Demilitarization and Denazification.³ The Allied Control Council issued its law No. 46, declaring the end of German militarism and insisting that Germany would be rebuilt as a democracy. A break with Germany's past was considered essential for the rebirth of a 'new' West Germany, and, in this light, the Western Allies had to

reeducate German society. The German public was reeducated through free elections, democratically organized parties, and the media. The United States emphasized its commitment and support for West Germany and German society. The 'Marshall Plan' (3 April 1948) was an important signal which had a great impact on the morale of Germans and the Germany's economy.⁴

The first Nuclear Test by the Soviet Union and the Berlin Blockade of 1948/49 revived the discussions about West Germany's contribution to European defence.⁵ Europe's defence was a task for the newly founded NATO and, within that organization, the United States was responsible for strategic air defence, while Western European states were responsible for the defence of European soil. However, the role of West Germany within NATO's defence system needed to be addressed. If West Germany stood on the side of the West, then West Germany would also have to be defended.⁶

The Americans supported a German contribution to the defence of Europe for several reasons. They wanted Western Europe to determine its own future someday, and to reach this goal Europe needed West Germany as part of its security alliance. The rearmament of Germany would further strengthen the US policy of 'Containment'⁷ by strengthening a front line state in the Cold War and so deterring the Soviet Union. In essence, the reintegration of West Germany into the Western security defence system was crucial in order to allow the US to withdraw its armed forces from Europe at a future time. It would also reinforce and secure West Germany's political orientation towards the West.⁸

Germany and NATO During the Cold War (1949–1990)

With the proclamation of the German Constitution on 23 May 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany was founded. In its first years the Federal Republic could only exist with the help of the three protective powers.⁹ In fact, the three Western Allied powers considerably limited the sovereignty of Germany. As a result,

the first German chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, had to discuss his decisions with the three Allied High Commissioners.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it was Adenauer himself who was responsible for the formulation of a German security policy. He was convinced that communism in combination with the Soviet expansionism presented the most dangerous threat for the West.¹¹ Against this backdrop Adenauer pursued two main objectives: First, by stabilizing the newly founded democratic state and its integration into a united and strong Europe, secondly, by maintaining close ties and strong relationships to the United States and NATO.¹² Adenauer proved to be a master of strategic communication. In press conferences where many foreign correspondents were present, he outlined his views on a European defence policy. Yet, rather than demanding the creation of a German armed forces, he initiated the idea of a German contribution to multinational European armed forces. This way he could openly speak about Germany's defence policy without upsetting the Western Allies. Above all, he managed to appease French concerns about a powerful Germany with its own armed forces.¹³ This was crucial, since one of the main objectives in French politics was to have 'security from Germany'.¹⁴

Since the rearmament of West Germany remained a sensitive foreign and domestic issue, Adenauer had to secretly pursue his plans to build up German armed forces. Yet this situation quickly changed when North Korea attacked South Korea on 25 June 1950. If the North Korean aggression had been orchestrated by the Soviet Union, then it would also be within the realms of possibility that the East German government could initiate a similar offensive.¹⁵ The Western allies were alarmed by the events in Korea, but even more so by the fact that East German military units had been created within the Soviet Zone of Germany. At the meeting of the foreign ministers on 19 September 1950, in New York, they declared the situation in East Germany as a 'situation of great concern'¹⁶, and made clear that in case of an attack on West Germany or West Berlin, the Western allies would defend those territories. The Federal Republic of Germany, although still not a fully sovereign state, had essentially become a NATO member state. Never before had NATO made

it so explicit, but since then the defence of West Germany and West Berlin had become a primary objective for NATO: "Between 1949 and 1989, NATO's mission was confined to checking a potential Soviet run on Central and Western Europe – and deterrence and defense were its driving themes."¹⁷ Despite NATO's commitment to defend West Germany as early as 1950, it would take another 5 years until West Germany would formally join NATO in 1955.

The Foundation of the German Armed Forces in 1955 – Unpopularity of the Armed Forces

The foundation of the German armed forces in 1955 was a necessary step in order to be fully part of the NATO defence system. And yet, large parts of West German society were highly critical or even strongly opposed to the creation of the German armed forces. They feared that Germany could once more be able to start a war from German soil. 'Never again' (meaning never again a war on German soil) became the Leitmotiv for many Germans. It was a lesson learnt from history. This change of attitude in Germany society also showed that the policy of demilitarization pursued by the Western allies was successful.¹⁸ As a result, when the first defence plans were proposed by the Adenauer government, Germans heavily opposed conscription and '[...] many of them [the German public] resisted the call to arms with the cry "Ohne Mich" (Leave me out)'.¹⁹ But despite considerable opposition from large parts of German society, the German armed forces were founded, and the first 101 senior officers were sworn in on 12 November 1955. The date was chosen carefully and loaded with symbolism as the founding date coincided with 200th anniversary of the birth of Gerhard von Scharnhorst, the great Prussian military reformer.²⁰ Of the many prominent military personalities, which could have served as role models – Gerhard von Scharnhorst was chosen as a founding father of the German Armed Forces. With his ideals of a 'union between people and army', Scharnhorst fitted perfectly into the new image of the German armed forces, which was built on the concept of 'Innere Führung' (Inner Guidance).²¹ Nothing should remind the people of

the Wehrmacht, in which soldiers were sworn to serve the 'Führer'. Now, soldiers were sworn in to defend Germany and its constitution. As 'citizens in uniform'²², soldiers were given all rights and responsibilities of a German citizen, which also meant the right to question decisions of their superiors. The objective of these measures was to prevent the newly founded army to again become 'a state within the state', as it happened in the 1920s with the Reichswehr.²³

The process of building a new army with new traditions was long and politically difficult. It would not be easy to win the trust of the German society, and at the same time, to overcome political obstacles. There was first of all the question of the name of the new armed forces. Everyone was careful not to make references to the past and a total break with the past was paramount if the new armed forces would have the full support of the society. Recruiting soldiers posed a further challenge. Although there was no shortage of volunteers, of the 260,000 men who volunteered in the first year, only 175,000 men were fit for service. Recruiting more soldiers from the border guards failed as only 9,500 men were willing to transfer to the Bundeswehr.²⁴ The German Ministry of Defense had to prohibit press photographers from taking photos of recruiting stations in order to protect potential soldiers from facing 'difficulties, if their employers or their colleagues learned through press photos about their interest of joining the army'.²⁵ This drastic measure reflected the often negative attitude of German society towards their armed forces.²⁶

When the first 1,500 recruits were presented to the public in mid-January 1956 the event was far from a glorious moment. General Schmückle, who had been recently appointed as a major in the Bundeswehr noted that the scene looked, 'more like a funeral than a baptism'.²⁷ The lack of equipment, proper uniforms, suitable housing, and adequate salaries did not make the army an attractive institution to join. Moreover, soldiers faced a high level of disapproval in society. In some cases when soldiers wore their uniforms in public they were insulted, spat at and – in some cases – beaten.²⁸

The procurement of military equipment for the armed forces was a further challenge in those early years. Public means were small and public protests loud.²⁹ The first weapons came from the stocks of the US forces. But soon the Bundeswehr had to acquire new equipment in order to fulfill its requirements for NATO.³⁰ These acquisitions were troubled by scandals, for example, as the decision to purchase the Lockheed F-104G 'Starfighter' illustrates. The decision to buy the Lockheed F-104G 'Starfighter' was made in order to replace the outdated fleet of the German Air Force's North American F-86 'Sabre' and Republic F-84 'Thunderstreak' fighters. The new aircraft should be a multi-role combat aircraft, which could operate in concert with a ground-based missile defence system. For this purpose the fair-weather fighter of the USAF (United States Air Force) was converted into an all-weather ground-attack, reconnaissance, and interceptor aircraft. The first F-104 squadron was 'combat ready' in June 1962. Apart from getting a multi-role aircraft, another reason for purchasing the F-104G was its capability of carrying nuclear weapons. This capability would have allowed German officers to become co-decision-makers in case a nuclear strike would have been necessary. In this case, German Starfighter pilots would have flown sorties in order to deliver American nuclear weapons. Since this 'nuclear sharing' was one of the core factors in German defence doctrines, the purchase of this aircraft was, in the end, a political decision. In the following years the German Air Force ordered in total 916 Starfighters. Of these 916 aircraft, about 300 crashed.³¹ Due to the high loss rate the German Press soon gave the Starfighter the infamous nickname 'Widowmaker' ('Witwenmacher'). Each crash of an F-104G received considerable media coverage and, unsurprisingly, most of the press reports on the Luftwaffe were negative. In consequence, not only did the Starfighter get some very bad press, but the German Air Force also suffered from a negative media view. In March 1970, Lieutenant (JG) Joachim von Hassel died in a fatal crash of his F-104G. The case received considerable attention from the media not only because of the personal tragedy, but because this particular dead pilot was the son of Germany's then Minister of Defense, Kai-Uwe von Hassel. In fact, the minister had replied in response to the crit-

ics of the Starfighter that he had such faith in the design and technical capabilities of the plane that he would not hesitate to allow his son to become a Starfighter pilot.³² The last Starfighters were taken out of service in Mai 1991 at the end of the Cold War.

Germany and NATO's Double Track Decision – Cold War Anti-Military Protests

During the Cold War it was clear that the Soviet Union would do everything it could to break up NATO. As the historian Gerhard Wettig observed, 'From the very start, the USSR directed its efforts at eliminating NATO. The principal target was West Germany, the inclusion of which in the alliance was invariably deemed crucial'.³³ NATO's presence, and the role of Germany within NATO, were heavily scrutinized by the students' revolt of the late 1960s, in which Germany's politics, but in particular its foreign and security policies, were questioned and usually condemned. A certain anti-Americanism became part of those debates because many students were also busy protesting the American war in Vietnam. Since NATO was widely seen as an institution dominated by the United States, those protests were also directed against NATO's role in the Cold War, and thus the role of West Germany in the alliance system.³⁴ The peace-movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s was the result from those student protests. Before this the German armed forces had been a major focus of the protests against a (re) militarization of Germany. Yet now the focus shifted to a broader political goal: disarmament as the foundation for peace and stability in Europe. The massive public protests in West Germany against NATO's Double-Track Decision of 1979 marked a peak of protests against the American presence in Germany as well as against NATO.³⁵

Those protests happened across Europe. For example, 400,000 people protested against the decision in Amsterdam. Still, Germany was the main centre of protests. The scale of the protests was unprecedented, as protesters were able to mobilize large parts of the German society. The earlier 'Leave me out' movement and peace protests had been relatively small. For the first

time in the history of West Germany, there was a major public debate about the direction Germany's foreign and security policies should take. In 1981 300,000 Germans gathered in Bonn to protest against the Double-Track-Decision of NATO – one of the biggest demonstrations in Germany in the 1980s. With the 'cooling down' of the Cold War in wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the threat of Nuclear Armageddon had been ignored by large parts of the population. With the rise in East/West tensions in the mid 1970s, many people were suddenly aware that Europe, especially Germany, would be the nuclear battlefield in a Third World War. Thus, many Germans preferred a policy that can be summarized as '*better red than dead*'.³⁶

Also in the mid-1970s many grass roots movements were founded in Germany. The work of these new social movements focused on disarmament, the protection of the environment, and on the discrepancies between North and South. With the discussion of the Double-Track-Decision many of these movements began to protest together. In 1983, new Pershing II missiles, a significant upgrade from the Pershing 1A missiles that had been stationed in Germany for more than a decade, were deployed to a US Army installation near Mutlangen, a small town in southern Germany. Mutlangen, became synonymous with the protests against the rearmament of NATO. New research, using documents available from Stasi and other Warsaw Pact intelligence services made available since the end of the Cold War, show that much of the protest activity against the Double-Track decision had been organized, controlled and supported by East Berlin and Moscow.³⁷ A significant hard left force developed in Germany that was far more supportive of Russia than of NATO.

Germany Grapples with Continuing NATO in the Post-Soviet World (1990–1998)

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the Reunification of Germany in 1990, the end of the Warsaw Pact in 1991, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Cold War came to an end. As a result, NATO as the only surviving multinational defence alliance also had to

adapt to a new political environment. In October 1993 the American delegation to NATO proposed a 'Partnership for Peace' programme (PfP) at the meeting of NATO ministers of defense. The main purpose of this initiative was to create trust between NATO member-states, on the one hand, and states in Europe and the former Soviet Union, on the other hand.³⁸ German intellectuals critically commented on this programme. In their opinion NATO had lost its *raison d'être* with the end of the Cold War. In times of a *détente*, a collective security organization would be the wrong signal to the rest of the world. They further argued that NATO would now operate outside the limits that had been defined in the North Atlantic Treaty.³⁹ From the government's view, while the end of the Warsaw Pact meant the end of an existential threat for Germany, the enlargement of NATO was nevertheless seen as essential for Germany's security policy. It allowed the building of a *cordon sanitaire* between Germany and Russia. The enlargement of NATO provided peace, prosperity and stability to these new Eastern and Central European member states, which was also seen positive for the development of the EU and OSCE.⁴⁰

Germany, NATO and Out of Area Deployments

Before the German unification in 1990, the use of military force for purposes other than self-defence was an absolute taboo in German defence politics. Consequently, no German soldiers participated in the Persian Gulf War of 1991. The only missions where the Bundeswehr participated were humanitarian missions led by United Nations. For instance, the Bundeswehr had one of its first out of area deployments in Cambodia as part of the UNITAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) mission in 1992.⁴¹ As part of the UN-mediated peace-process the German armed forces operated a field hospital in Cambodia's capital.⁴² Due to its strictly humanitarian character, the mission was never disputed in Germany.

Yet, at the same time, a debate emerged about Germany's participation in future UN peace-keeping missions. The debate was not so much about a new security policy after reunification, instead it was a debate

about lessons from the past on one side, and the heightened expectations of Germany's partners and allies on the other side. The debate was dominated by the use of keywords like 'Germany's historical responsibility' and 'moral responsibility'. The debate divided Germany's political landscape not only along party lines – between the centre right and the left – but was especially a debate within the left.

The German Social Democratic Party (SPD), a proponent of leftist values in the German parliament, was caught between Scylla and Charybdis: In order to solve international crises they had to emphasize the instruments of negotiation, cooperation, and integration. For the SPD a 'morally responsible' policy was based on principles such as democracy, human rights, and the respect for international law. So how could the use of force be justified and in which contexts? At the 1991 party convention of the SPD where the delegates had to vote for or against a German participation in UN peacekeeping missions, former Chancellor Willy Brandt, and Egon Bahr pushed the Social Democrats to vote in favour of those missions. Yet restrictive caveats were attached to those missions, namely that the use of force for peace-keepers should only be allowed in self-defence, all parties in the conflict had to agree to the deployment of UN peacekeepers, and the German parliament had to approve each peacekeeping mission. That meant that every other form of out of area deployments, like UN peace-enforcement missions were rejected.⁴³ Thus, from the very beginning of Germany's decision to participate in out of area military operations, each mission would be surrounded by numerous caveats and strict conditions that made the use of armed force virtually impossible except in *extremis* and to defend German forces. This policy – as incompatible that it may be with holding a leading role in NATO – is still characteristic of the German approach to out of country operations.

A much more controversial deployment of the Bundeswehr was Germany's participation in the UNOSOM II Mission (United Nations Operation in Somalia II) in 1993. When the 1992 UNITAF (Unified Task Force)⁴⁴ had come under hostile fire, the United Nations Security Council created UNOSOM II with a much more

robust mandate. The scope of the mission not only authorized the use of force for self-defence, but also asserted the right to use military force if necessary in order to secure the implementation of the missions' objectives.⁴⁵ For the SPD, the wider scope of UNOSOM II pushed limitations of the rulings of the 1991 party convention. In the course of heated debates in the German Bundestag the SPD asked the German Federal Constitutional Court whether or not such a deployment was constitutional. The SPD argued that the deployment of German soldiers within the framework of UN peace missions with a robust mandate was unconstitutional. The Federal Constitutional Court ruled such deployments were constitutional as long as the German Bundestag voted in favor of such a deployment – and voting before the beginning of a military operation.⁴⁶ This decision of the Federal Constitutional Court was crucial for all future out of area missions Bundeswehr mission as it allowed the participation in more broadly defined military operations abroad.

Germany and the Conflicts in the Balkans 1990s – Germany's First Use of Air Power Since World War II

While the fall of the Iron Curtain led to a peaceful transformation of states in Eastern Europe, South Eastern Europe was different. The disintegration of Yugoslavia was followed by the outbreak of civil wars in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Kosovo. These conflicts created new challenges for NATO and the Bundeswehr. European states and societies were confronted with horrible crimes happening at their doorsteps. The shock and disbelief, that something terrible like that could happen again in Europe, can be seen in a statement by the then German Minister of Foreign Relations, Klaus Kinkel: 'We are talking about human beings, we are talking about children, women, old people, innocents. It shocks us, revolts us; in the end, however, we are powerless, impotent. And that is embittering.'⁴⁷

As the violence in Yugoslavia increased, in Germany the parliamentary opposition consisting of Social Democrats, Greens, and the former Communists, were united in their call for using political and economic measures to increase pressure on Belgrade. Yet, since

Belgrade notoriously broke or ignored cease-fires, it was soon clear that sanctions alone would not end the killings. Gunter Verheugen, foreign policy expert of the German SPD, asked in frustration: 'With hindsight we are forced to ask the self-critical question whether, in this situation, we ought not to have done more than send protest after protest to Belgrade.'⁴⁸

The United Nations decreed a no-fly-zone over Bosnia and Herzegovina, and as early as October 1992 NATO was monitoring violations of the no-fly-zone.⁴⁹ The no-fly-zone was monitored by AWACS planes stationed at the NATO airbase at Geilenkirchen in Germany. As a part of NATO the AWACS crews were composed of airmen from various NATO member states. NATO began with the enforcement of the no-fly-zone over Bosnia and Herzegovina as operation 'Deny Flight' on 12 April 1993.⁵⁰ The German contribution to 'Deny Flight' was substantial, since 500 of the 4,500 soldiers who were involved in this operation were Germans. Yet, even with the vote of the UN Security Council in favour of the no-fly-zone, the German contribution became increasingly controversial in Germany. The argument was proffered that German military personnel were indirectly and involuntarily involved in a combat mission because information that AWACS planes gathered would later be used for military operations by NATO's fighter jets. The German coalition government was split over the question of constitutionality of the German contribution to the mission. While the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) believed the mission to be constitutional, its coalition partner, the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP), believed the mission to be unconstitutional. In consequence, the government had to turn to the German Constitutional Court to ask for a ruling in the AWACS case. On 8 April 1993 the Constitutional Court decided that the AWACS could take off with German crew members on board. The ruling considered the political consequences of a withdrawal of the German crews as serious and would undermine a UN-approved mission. Thus, the German court allowed German airmen to continue to serve on the AWACS.⁵¹

The German Armed Forces were also present with a naval force as part of NATO's naval mission 'Maritime

Guard' (1992–1993) and 'Sharp Guard' (1993–1996). The primary objective of both missions was to impose a naval blockade against former Yugoslavia in order to prevent all warring sides from receiving supplies of small arms as well as heavy weapon systems.⁵² After the atrocities in Bosnia and Herzegovina the argument 'never again', which had been the guiding principle in Germany's foreign and security policies for the past decades, resurfaced and received a new interpretation in the context of South East Europe. The German government argued that the use of military force might sometimes be necessary in order to stop an aggressor, or to prevent a large-scale violation of human rights and of international law. This argument was repeated by the then Minister of Defense Volker Rühle: 'The concentration camps in Germany were shut down by soldiers and not by diplomatic declarations! Again, in the future it may be possible to stop the deepest immorality only by using soldiers. In such cases the deployment of military means is required on moral grounds.'⁵³ By using the powerful picture of the Holocaust and extermination camps, which were deeply engrained in Germany's collective memory, the government redefined defence policy with greater clout. There was also a realization behind the reorientation that the cautious approach in crisis management, such as economic and political sanctions, or monitoring no-fly-zones, could not end civil wars. Yet starting a full-scale military operation was not a political option for Germany as the past cast long shadows that could not be easily ignored in any discussion about the deployment of the Bundeswehr. Painful memories of war crimes committed by the Wehrmacht during the Second World War in Yugoslavia made a deployment of German soldiers unimaginable for many in Germany.⁵⁴

In March 1993, the UN established a humanitarian airlift mission to relieve the urgent needs of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially in the besieged city of Sarajevo. USAF C-130 and German Air Force C-160 transport planes operated the airlift.⁵⁵ When the United Nations announced that German cargo planes would join the allied efforts in bringing relief to the civil population, Serbian leader, Ratko Mladic, announced that he wanted to bring down

every single German plane. Although Mladic's statement posed a direct threat to the crews of the German cargo planes, the mission itself was never publicly criticized in Germany.⁵⁶

The Srebrenica massacre in July 1995 showed that not even the United Nations could prevent ethnic cleansing and mass murder.⁵⁷ The events in Srebrenica forced the left in Germany, especially the Green Party, to rethink their position towards the use of force. Peter Schneider, a journalist working for the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, wrote in retrospect about the uncompromising attitude of the German pacifists: 'I recall only with agony how German peace lovers during the years of the ethnic mayhem in former Yugoslavia turned their heads away from the images of dismembered, lacerated, murdered women, children, men, and, cold-heartedly pronounced their mantra: under no circumstances should one intervene with military force.'⁵⁸ After Srebrenica it was increasingly difficult for the German left to ignore what had happened in front of their eyes. The scale of the atrocities and mass murder in Srebrenica surpassed all human imagination – diplomacy and economic sanctions could not prevent the massacre of Srebrenica from happening. In light of those events, the self-image of the left was fundamentally shaken, and the debate turned towards a new interpretation of Germany's historical responsibility. The slogan 'never again' received a new interpretation, and turned into 'never again Auschwitz'.⁵⁹

The Dayton Agreement⁶⁰ signed on 21 November 1995⁶¹ symbolized the end of the war in Bosnia. One of the agreement's core elements was the creation of a NATO-led peacekeeping force. IFOR (Implementation Force), was created by a resolution of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).⁶² The main objective of IFOR was to enforce a demilitarized zone between the belligerent parties. It would create a secure environment to allow the return of refugees. To meet the goals of the agreement the UN Security Council provided IFOR with a robust mandate. This mandate, based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter, authorized the prompt and comprehensive use of military force in order to suppress any breaches of the cease-fire that had been negotiated in the Dayton Agreement.

Germany contributed military units to the creation of IFOR. The German contingent consisted of approximately 4,000 soldiers and included Luftwaffe cargo aircraft to support the mission as well as Tornado fighter jets. IFOR was a turning point for Germany on the issue of force deployments. Before Srebrenica and the Dayton Agreement it was – for historic reasons – unthinkable to send German troops to former Yugoslavia. Now, as part of IFOR, German troops were sent there and IFOR was provided with a mandate that included the use of force for self-protection as well as for mission defence. The IFOR mission went beyond what the German population was willing to accept. A public opinion poll from July 1995 showed that 40% of the German public was in support of a German contribution to IFOR, while 56% opposed sending German soldiers to former Yugoslavia.⁶³

The poll also showed that the German government was not able to communicate to the German public the reasons why it was necessary to contribute German forces to IFOR. Furthermore, it showed that the political debates had little effect on the German public.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the German parliament voted on 6 December 1995 for Germany to contribute to IFOR, ignoring the results of the public opinion poll. Of the 656 members of the German parliament 543 voted in favor, 107 against, and 6 members of parliament abstained from voting.⁶⁵

When the mandate of IFOR came to an end on 20 December 1996, IFOR was replaced by the United Nations Security Council with SFOR (Stabilization Force).⁶⁶ SFOR was also a NATO-led mission with its main objectives '[to] deter hostilities and stabilize the peace, contribute to a secure environment by providing a continued military presence in the Area Of Responsibility [...], target and coordinate SFOR support to key areas including primary civil implementation organizations, and progress towards a lasting consolidation of peace, without further need for NATO-led forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina [...]'.⁶⁷ For the first time the Federal Republic of Germany contributed not only medical and logistics support troops, but also combat troops. As part of a French-German brigade, a 1,500 men strong armored unit was deployed

to Bosnia.⁶⁸ With the deployment of combat troops to Bosnia, German politics broke with the past. And yet, the strong resistance within the German society towards Germany's new role in international politics meant that the debates still turned around the same topics as in the past, namely that of 'Germany's historical responsibility' and 'never again Auschwitz'.⁶⁹

Germany and the Kosovo Crisis – German Air Power in a Combat Role

The Dayton Agreement brought the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina to an end. Both missions, IFOR and SFOR, guaranteed the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. They also guaranteed to monitor the peace process closely. Yet former Yugoslavia still resembled a powder keg. Kosovo was a hot spot and it was only a matter of time until the situation exploded.⁷⁰ With the winding down of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina many Serbian irregular fighters, who had fought in Bosnia, joined the anti-terror-forces of the Serbian Ministry of Interior in 1995.⁷¹ The Kosovo liberation movement UCK (Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës) started a guerilla war against the Serbs. The excessive use of force by the forces of the Serbian security forces enraged the UCK and escalated the violence. The United Nations Security Council condemned on 23 September 1998 the violence in Kosovo.⁷² As a result of the UN resolution, NATO issued an Activation Order for Limited Air Response and Phased Air Operations in order to back the resolution. The German Air Force pledged to send 14 Tornado fighter jets in the ECR (Electronic Combat/Reconnaissance) version.⁷³

The UN resolution increased the pressure on Milošević, to hold talks with the independence movement for Kosovo in the French city of Rambouillet. But negotiations ended with no result. On 22 March 1999 NATO issued the order to start 'Operation Allied Force'. Between 24 March 1999 and 10 June 1999 NATO launched air strikes against the Serbian security forces and its infrastructure. Roughly 1,000 aircraft, under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Wesley Clark, were engaged in the conflict with Serbia. From March to June 1999 NATO planes flew about 38 000 sorties against targets in Ko-

Kosovo and Serbia. The German Luftwaffe launched more than 200 AGM-88 High-Speed-Anti-Radiation-Missiles (HARMs) against Serbian air defence positions as part of that mission.⁷⁴

As 'Operation Allied Force' was a NATO operation that was not clearly backed by a corresponding resolution of the UN Security Council, some German peace-activists argued that the lack of UN backing made the Kosovo mission a violation of international law. However, for the German government this was an invalid argument. Several UN Security Council resolutions had called for a termination of hostilities and set limits on the number of Serbian troops in Kosovo. However, no specific UN resolution had passed specifically to justify the NATO mission.⁷⁵

In October 1998 a new German government was elected. Previously the government was a coalition of Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the FDP. The new government was a coalition of the SPD and the Green party. The new government wanted to adjust the foreign and security policy of the former government. In general, the old and the new governments agreed in supporting actions taken by the UN Security Council and NATO. Yet, one of the coalition partners of the new government, the Green Party, faced a dilemma as rejection of the use of military force was a fundamental dogma of the Green Party. Many members of the Green Party were deeply rooted in the peace movements of the 1970s and 1980s and, as a result, the same debates erupted within the Green Party as within the SPD years earlier. The Green Party was internally divided between a fundamentalist ('Fundis') faction and a realistic ('Realos') faction. The 'Fundis' firmly believed in the pure doctrine and immutability of the Green values, especially the slogans 'never again war' and 'never again Auschwitz'. This conflict between the 'Fundis' and the 'Realos' had characterized the history of the Green Party since its foundation in January 1980.⁷⁶

During the election for the German Bundestag in 1998 the Greens tried to appear united. The opposing parts of the party tried to reach a compromise in stating that the use of military force would only be the ultima ratio. However, the compromise fell through

during the party convention and the delegates of the party convention voted instead for a much stricter formula: The use of military force was not allowed until all civil efforts proved fruitless. Even under these circumstances, a resolution of the UN Security Council was a precondition for the use of military force. Despite the Green Party becoming part of the coalition government, the conflict on the use of military force remained within the party: For fundamentalist Greens it was unthinkable to vote in favour of using military force. When the German parliament had to vote on German participation in a NATO-led mission on the basis of UNSC resolution 1199, half of the representatives from the Green party voted against.⁷⁷ During the debate in the Bundestag German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, a member of the Green party, argued from the 'Realo' point of view of his party, that: "Never again Auschwitz" is the historical admonition to prevent genocide. This is – without claiming that the catastrophe in Kosovo is equal to Auschwitz – the reason for my position."⁷⁸ The parallel between the keyword 'Auschwitz' and the situation in Kosovo in 1999 led to discussions within Germany's left. It also illustrated that Germany – with its past – could not abstain from responsibility to prevent ethnic cleansing and mass atrocities. The political debate had reverberations in the commentary sections of German newspapers, but it did not lead to a national debate within German society.⁷⁹ In June 1999 Slobodan Milošević agreed to a deal that mandated the withdrawal of Serbian security forces from Kosovo and, more importantly, Milošević had to agree to a NATO-peacekeeping force (KFOR), to monitor the process.⁸⁰

Evolution of Germany's Participation in NATO Operations

IFOR, SFOR and KFOR marked the beginning of a new era in which NATO was used to provide peace and stability to countries at the periphery of NATO's own territory. In German politics, the years between 1991 and 1999 marked a transition from a policy of military non-participation to full participation in out-of-area crisis management. The transition was not a smooth one. The German left implemented the transition only gradually and with hesitation. With the reinterpretation

tion of the 'never again' argument and Germany's international responsibility the step towards a more positive view of the use of force to prevent violence was taken. Preventing violence, mass atrocities and ethnic cleansing could also contribute to a peaceful and unified Europe. In this new era threats against peace and stability were no longer posed by states or alliance of states but rather by non-state actors, such as terrorist groups. Those changes forced NATO to adapt to a new security environment, and in fact not only NATO, but also every member state. Consequently, the 2011 edition of Germany's defence policy guidelines state:

*'Today, risks and threats are emerging above all from failing and failed states, acts of international terrorism, terrorist regimes and dictatorships, turmoil when these break up, criminal networks, climatic and natural disasters, [...] as well as from possible threats to critical infrastructure such as information technology. [...] Crises and conflicts can occur at any time, at short notice and without prior warning and may require a rapid response even over large distances.'*⁸¹

Although the German government acknowledged the changes for their defence and security policy, little happened in terms of equipment and procurement for the German armed forces. When budget cuts were needed, the Bundestag often reduced the defence budget first. The low priority of the military over years meant a decline in German military capabilities. German military spending and capabilities have declined dramatically since the end of the Cold War. In 1988 German spent 2.5 % of its GDP on defence. As of 2015, the figure is 1.2% - way below the minimum expected of a NATO member nation.⁸² The lack of material today has reached dramatic levels as the recently published report by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces (Wehrbeauftragter des Deutschen Bundestages), illustrates: Of the 114 Eurofighters of the German Air Force, approximately are 38 operational. The others are being upgraded or are simply non-operational. Missing spare parts are the reason that only 29 of the total of 93 Tornados fighters are operational. These examples are only the tip of the iceberg, but those are the main reasons why the German Air Force is not fully operational.⁸³ In the NATO context, the defence policy guidelines say that '[the] effectiveness of

*the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is based on military integration and mutual political solidarity with our partners'*⁸⁴ and yet, the German government is hesitant in showing political solidarity with other NATO member states.

For the formulation of Germany's security and defence policy, the support of the public is essential. But in Germany the relationship between the public, politics, and the armed forces is an especially difficult one. Strictly humanitarian missions have never been opposed by the public. The public, however, is skeptical of missions with unclear – and potentially dangerous – objectives, as the example of UNOSOM illustrates. The demilitarization of Germany after the Second World War turned Germans into a peaceful and post-heroic society.⁸⁵ Moreover, the fear of casualties from hostile action is another reason for their scrutiny. In the case of Somalia, the Bundeswehr was sent in support of an Indian contingent, but when those Indian troops never arrived in the German Area of Responsibility (AOR), the Bundeswehr gave this deployment a completely new turn: Instead of providing logistical support for the Indian contingent, the German soldiers began to aid – in the framework of spare capacity – to help the Somali population. This kind of development aid – German soldiers, who were building schools and drilling wells – became a kind of master narrative for the German armed forces. A narrative, which was used again, when the Bundeswehr was deployed to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, Overseas Military Operations and German Opinion

On 12 September 2001, one day after the attacks against the World Trade Center in New York shocked the world, NATO – for the first time in its history – activated Chapter V of the North Atlantic Treaty:

'The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United

*Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.*⁸⁶

In the evening of 11 September 2001, the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, had declared the 'unconditional solidarity' of the German people with the United States.⁸⁷ This declaration was – at this early stage – at first a declaration to express sympathy with the American people.⁸⁸ When the US started 'Operation Enduring Freedom' (OEF) on 7 October 2001, Germany was not yet part of this coalition to destroy the rule of the Taliban over Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the German government pledged to contribute units of the Bundeswehr to support OEF. This contingent of maximum 3,900 soldiers consisted of a NBC defence unit, medical personnel, Special Forces, air transport capabilities, and naval units.⁸⁹ According to State Minister in Germany's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ludger Vollmer, the deployment of this NBC defence unit was not to counter a real threat. In fact, the intention was to give the German deployment a more impressive look.⁹⁰ Except for the Special Forces unit, the German contribution consisted only of supply and logistic elements. The contribution may be seen as halfhearted, and yet the German contingent allowed the US to regroup forces to cover the more violent south. In that sense, the German contribution was useful. However, it is important to note that, from the beginning, Germany refrained from sending specifically combat aircraft to Afghanistan. The German Air Force contribution in the war included a flight of reconnaissance planes, some transport helicopters and some transport planes. Thus, the use of air power in the strike role was not an issue for Germany – as it was for NATO allies such as the UK and France.

The shock and horror of the events of 9/11 did not last long in the German public. When the first news about civilian casualties and the use of cluster-bombs reached Germany, the anti-war sentiments began to resurface, 'The residual of the German peace movement appeared to recover from its long post-Srebrenica shell shock. As a number of anti-war demonstra-

tions were staged in major German cities the image of a trigger-happy and adventurous America re-emerged in the German public discourse.'⁹¹ In order to rally public support, the German government, with the support of the conservative opposition, emphasized Germany's role in international politics, and its international responsibility, the requirements of partnership and international reliability.⁹² Terrorism was a threat to all mankind from which no nation could abstain from fighting.⁹³

By 13 November 2001 units of the Afghan Northern Alliance, with the support of US Special Forces, drove the Taliban out of Kabul.⁹⁴ The UN resolution 1386 the UN Security Council paved the way for a NATO-led operation to enable the newly formed Afghan government to regain their capability to govern Afghanistan.⁹⁵ The main objective of this International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and assist the Afghanistan in rebuilding its government institutions. In the first stage of its mission, the AOR of ISAF was limited to Afghanistan's capital Kabul and its vicinity. The German parliament voted on 22 December 2001 in favor of contributing troops to ISAF. On 31 December 2001 the first German troops, which consisted mainly of paratrooper units, were deployed to Afghanistan.⁹⁶ The main contingent followed by mid-January 2002, which formed part of the Kabul Multinational Brigade (KMNMB).

In 2003 the UN Security Council decided with resolution 1510 to expand the AOR of ISAF to the remaining parts of Afghanistan. The aim was to support the efforts of the Afghan government to provide stability and security to other parts of the Afghan state.⁹⁷ Germany was put in charge for one Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the Afghan city of Kunduz.⁹⁸ Two years later, in June 2005, the Bundeswehr took command over the Regional Command North, which was located in Mazer-e-Sharif at Camp Marmal. For the following years, RC North remained the AOR for the Bundeswehr.

In March 2007, the German parliament agreed to the deployment of six Tornado fighter jets in the RECCE (Reconnaissance) Version, which had been demand-

ed by their NATO partners in support of the overall mission in Afghanistan.⁹⁹ The deployment of the Tornado fighter jets was heavily criticized by media and political figures. As in Kosovo, they argued that the results of the reconnaissance missions were directly used for bombing attacks of American or British forces in the South of Afghanistan.¹⁰⁰ Despite the public criticism, the deployment of these reconnaissance Tornados was a political measure to respond to growing criticism by other NATO states. While the intensity of fighting steadily increased in the South of Afghanistan, where American, British, and Canadian soldiers were stationed, the North remained comparatively calm. Other NATO partners hoped that Germany would engage in the AOR of RC South where the tough counterinsurgency fight was continuing. Germany declined to leave the North. In fact, the many caveats that the German government imposed on the German contingent of ISAF became an increasing burden on the other NATO partners.¹⁰¹

Between 2005 and 2009 the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated. The American and British forces, stationed in the South, saw heavy fighting with heavy casualties against a reinvigorated enemy.¹⁰² In the AOR of the German led RC North, the insurgent activity also increased. When the Germans had arrived in Kunduz in 2003, the soldiers soon called it 'Bad Kunduz' (German for spa) because Kunduz was a comparatively quiet place in this war torn county and Kunduz was relatively safe in 2005 and 2006. The German soldiers spent most of their time constructing schools, and on various engineering projects. In short, they avoided hostile action. However, in May 2007 three German soldiers were killed by a suicide bomber in the Kunduz market. The German forces increased their security measures as a result of the incident. By 2009, the Taliban had returned to the Kunduz province and regained ground with little effort. In some districts the Afghan National Forces lost control. Hampered by their caveats that kept them from patrolling or seeking the enemy, the German soldiers were seen as 'cowards' by the Afghan population.¹⁰³ The Bundeswehr carried out some operations with the Afghan Army, but after securing villages did not keep forces there – allowing the Taliban to quickly return.¹⁰⁴

The civilian casualties by airstrikes of the allied forces in Afghanistan often led to an outcry in the media, but more importantly from Afghan President Karzai. German politicians also used the accounts of aerial casualties to criticize the mission. In summer 2009 the American commander in Kabul, General Stanley McChrystal, changed the rules of engagement for allied fighter and bomber pilots in order to minimize civilian casualties. On 4 September 2009 the German commander of the PRT Kunduz, Colonel Georg Klein, received advanced warning from intelligence sources that the Taliban had planned attacks against the German Camp in Kunduz, using tankers full of gasoline. Later that day, he received news of two high-jacked tankers, stuck on a sandbank in the Kunduz River. When he received further information that insurgents were in close vicinity of the two tankers, he ordered an airstrike against those two tankers, and two F-15s of the USAF dropped bombs, which hit the tankers and killed over 100 (possibly as many as 140) civilians, who had tried to steal the gasoline from those two tankers.¹⁰⁵

The incident was like a shock wave felt in Germany. It deeply upset politicians and the public. The response of the German and international press was enormous and their judgment of the incident devastating. For the first time since 1945, a German officer had ordered an airstrike, and as a result of it, civilians had died. While the public judgment of the incident was devastating, military officials ruled that the German officer who had ordered the airstrike was not guilty. After this incident the German government could no longer ignore that a war was being waged in Afghanistan. Indeed, for years the government had carefully avoided using the word 'war' in the context of Afghanistan. Thus, the incident demanded an adjustment to the political and military reality.¹⁰⁶ As *Der Spiegel* magazine noted, Germany had lost its 'innocence'.¹⁰⁷ While politicians continued to avoid the word 'war' in the political debate, the German government gradually equipped the Bundeswehr with heavier weaponry.

On 2 April 2010, three German soldiers were killed in Charrah Darreh. A company clearing roads was attacked and CAS (Close Air Support) was called by the

PRT commander. Yet, the fighter jets could not use their weapons without threatening their own forces. In the meantime, US Army helicopters rescued the wounded under enemy fire. As the fighting continued two more soldiers were killed and three wounded.¹⁰⁸ When the flag-draped coffins returned to Germany the government had to admit that Afghanistan was definitely more than a humanitarian relief action.¹⁰⁹ The incident prompted the then German Minister of Defense, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, to speak of 'war like conditions'. The Bundeswehr followed suit, arguing that the conditions in Afghanistan were, under international law, not regarded as a war. Hence the cumbersome expression.¹¹⁰ From a public relations point of view, this battle was a complete disaster for the Bundeswehr. Not only had three German soldiers been killed but a German armored vehicle had been destroyed and the Taliban had gained a victory. By this time the German public strongly opposed the deployment of German armed forces to the Hindu Kush.¹¹¹ The German government did not seem to be able to explain why it was necessary to send German troops to Afghanistan and this weakened not only the German efforts to bring peace and stability to their AOR, but also weakened NATO's efforts in bringing peace and security to whole of Afghanistan.

Attempts to initiate a public debate on Afghanistan were doomed to be neglected. On New Year's Day 2010, for example, the chairwoman of the Protestant Church in Germany, Margot Kässmann, tried to provoke such a debate in Germany. 'Nichts ist gut in Afghanistan' ('Nothing is good in Afghanistan')¹¹² was a headline for a paragraph in her sermon. These words were repeated in the evening TV news as well as in the newspapers. Instead of sparking a debate, Margot Kässmann received very negative reactions from the public. These reactions ranged from attacks against her political position from almost all political parties to open letters in German newspapers.¹¹³ Even the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, Reinhold Robbe, wrote such an open letter in the German newspaper *Die Welt* in which he backed the German soldiers serving in Afghanistan.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the necessary (and long overdue) public debate about the scope, sense, political direction as well as the po-

litical legitimization about Germany's military engagement in the world never truly kicked off.

The example of the German involvement in Afghanistan as part of NATO's ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) shows clearly what will happen if the government is not willing or able to clearly communicate its objectives.¹¹⁵ The government portrayed Germany's ISAF mission for a long time as a kind of humanitarian relief action – until reality hit them. Various polls taken during the Afghanistan conflict show that the mission was highly unpopular with the German public.¹¹⁶ However, other surveys taken during the war also showed a population largely uninformed and disconnected with the military. On the one hand, a survey in 2008 noted that 70% of Germans had a 'very positive' or 'fairly positive' view of the Bundeswehr. While two-thirds of those surveyed were against the Afghanistan mission, 67% had a positive view of the Bundeswehr's humanitarian work. But on the military side, only 47% saw the German military action as having a positive role in the fight against terrorism.¹¹⁷ Although the German public was strongly against the Afghanistan mission in most polls, a 2008 study also found that half of the Germans polled admitted they knew little or nothing of the German mission in Afghanistan.¹¹⁸ Other polls show that the Germans see the Bundeswehr as relevant and have a good level of trust in the Bundeswehr. A 2013 poll by TNS/Emnid showed a high level of trust in the Bundeswehr with 86% of Germans believing the Bundeswehr is relevant. Over 70% see the Bundeswehr as trustworthy. Yet the same survey also showed a high level of ignorance about the Bundeswehr. As a volunteer force the Bundeswehr has employed a national slogan for its national advertising campaign – 'Wir. Dienen. Deutschland' (We. Serve. Germany.) – yet only 14% of the Germans interviewed could identify that slogan as being connected to the Bundeswehr.¹¹⁹

As the Afghanistan operation came to a close for Germany a majority of Germans polled were against *any* service of German forces outside of Germany.¹²⁰ A study of the Pew Center in 2015 surveyed the public in eight NATO nations and found that 58% of Ger-

mans polled believed that Germany should not use force to assist a NATO ally in case of open invasion and only 38% of Germans believed that Germany should use force to defend an ally from attack. German support for military action to defend from an attack was the lowest of the eight countries surveyed.¹²¹ Yet another Pew Center Study of 2016 surveyed public opinion in 11 NATO nations in terms of general opinion of NATO as an organization. This later poll found the German public strongly supportive of NATO with 59% of the public having a generally favourable view of NATO with only 30% of the public having an unfavorable view of NATO.¹²² This does not likely show a shift from in public opinion over one year, as the 2016 poll did not ask about willingness to use force. Rather, one sees the German public strongly supporting NATO as an international organization but at the same time skeptical of NATO's central purpose as a collective defence organization. One can see a parallel with the German public opinion surveys that showed strong opposition to the Afghanistan mission while, at the same time, the respondents admitted to knowing little about the mission. This series of generally contradictory positions held by the public, and the consequent lack of public support for NATO and for military operations other than the defence of Germany, indicates that there is a serious problem in the German government's strategic communications to the German public and a serious problem in the public's weak understanding of the role of the Bundeswehr and the place of the armed forces in German policy.

Germany and the Libya Conflict – No Air Power and No Support for NATO

During the 'Arab Spring' a civil war broke out between the forces of the Libyan regime and various insurgent factions. With the increasing violence and the rapidly rising number of civilian casualties, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1970 on 26 February 2011.¹²³ In this resolution the UNSC called for the termination of the conflict and imposed economic sanctions as well as travel bans for members of Libya's ruling family. The resolution was proposed by France, the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany.

Less than two months later, on 17 March 2011, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1973, which had been proposed by France, Lebanon and the United Kingdom.¹²⁴ This resolution called for an immediate ceasefire and for a termination of all violence against civilians. Furthermore, the resolution imposed a no-fly-zone over Libya and authorized the United Nations '[...] to take all necessary measures, [...] to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory [...]'.¹²⁵ This resolution was adopted with the votes of most NATO nations including France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Among the states which abstained from voting was Germany, accompanied by Brazil, China, India, and Russia.¹²⁶ It is still not clear, why Germany abstained from the vote, and the official explanation of Chancellor Angela Merkel raised more questions than it answered, 'We unreservedly share the aims of this resolution. Our abstention should not be confused with neutrality!'¹²⁷ One of the reasons why Germany abstained from the vote could be that they did not agree with the means, in particular the no-fly zone over Libya, to achieve the objectives formulated in the resolution.

The response of the media on Germany's vote in the UN Security Council in March 2011 was very negative.¹²⁸ The German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* wrote about 'Chaotic days in German Foreign policy'.¹²⁹ The Spanish newspaper *El Pais* doubted the reliability of the German government in international crises, while the Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* wrote that Germany had managed to isolate itself.¹³⁰ The German decision not to engage itself in any military operation against the regime in Libya also weakened NATO's position as well as its operational capabilities. All German units that had been deployed before Germany's vote in the UN had to be withdrawn. Moreover, the German Navy withdrew its vessels from the Mediterranean and the German crews serving in NATO's AWACS planes were withdrawn as well.

The files of the government decision-making in this case are not open to the public so we have no idea why Germany acted as it did. Pulling German aircrews

from NATO aircraft was certainly an act that undermined Germany's allies. It is likely that, after such strong public disapproval of the Afghanistan operation, the government feared negative fallout from the press and public. If Germany had decided to support the Allied mission it certainly would have had to go to a parliamentary vote and then, if that passed, the government would have faced lawsuits over the legality of any support. It is likely that the government considered all these issues when making a decision. The Libya case is a prime example of the extreme caution that all German governments apply when considering any use of force.

The German Media and Public on Air Power and RPA

The one aspect of air power that has been extensively discussed in the German media is RPA, commonly (but inaccurately) called drones. The media reporting and discussion on RPA is primarily about the American use of drones in combat, but the German public is brought into the issue because Americans have based and operated RPA from German soil and Germans participate in NATO operations, such as Afghanistan, in which RPA are used. Moreover, the German government has acquired RPA and has budgeted a considerable sum for their procurement. This makes the acquisition and employment of RPA a controversial topic in the German press.

The reporting on RPA by the major German newspapers has often been emotional and shows a strong anti-American prejudice. A major story on RPA by *Die Zeit* in 2012 noted: 'In America the war by joystick is extremely popular.' They compared RPA to the Maxim gun used on natives in colonial wars and said that Germany's acquisition of the Euro Hawk surveillance RPA was 'the most spectacular new weapon of the German armed forces since the "Big Bertha" cannon' of World War I fame. *Die Zeit* journalists also argued that RPA killed civilians to militants at a rate of fifty innocent civilians killed per each dead militant. The article provided links to information about the different RPA models used by NATO forces, but ended the article with a warning that, since it was technically possible

to have RPA that flew and engaged in combat without any human involvement (that is not the case now), that the public should be concerned about war being completely robotized.¹³¹

Major media stories on RPA stress the civilian losses from them. Another *Die Zeit* story reported a 2016 US Intelligence study on the use of RPA against terrorists. The study concluded that 2,581 militants had been killed and as many as 116 civilians between 2009 and the end of 2015. Such a casualty ratio would be evidence that the policies to limit civilian casualties are taken seriously (fewer than 5% being civilian collateral losses). But the headline emphasized the civilians: 'Intelligence Report: USA kills more than 100 civilians in drone attacks.'¹³² *Der Spiegel*, a national news magazine, wrote in 2015 an exposé about the USAF's Ramstein Air Force Base being used as a control point for some RPA operations.¹³³ Other German journalists picked up on *Der Spiegel* article, one labelling the Ramstein operations as being the heart of 'America's Deadly Drone War'.¹³⁴ In 2015 when four USAF RPA personnel authored an open letter opposing the use of RPA strikes the issue became national news in Germany with high sympathy for the dissident personnel.¹³⁵

The issue of having RPA and controlling them from Ramstein Air Force Base (in Germany) has, predictably, led to lawsuits in Germany and legal action to try to inhibit the American military operations. With the story out that the US military did have RPA operations at Ramstein a German peace activist sued in the Federal Court to have the Ramstein activities shut down as violations of German and international law. Yet, the German courts ruled against the activist.¹³⁶ Soon another lawsuit was filed in a German court by a Somali who claimed that a US RPA strike controlled out of Germany killed his father, a camel herder. The lawsuit claims that Germany has joint guilt with the Americans for the killings by drone. Yemenis who have lost relatives to RPA strikes have also tried the German courts to stop RPA operations. So far, they have not succeeded.¹³⁷ However, the issue of the legality of using RPA in air strikes on terrorists is a highly popular theme in the German media, with a negative position

being the most prominent.¹³⁸ In any case one can expect that any use of RPA – be it for collecting intelligence or be it for the use of force – will face lawsuits, legal battles and a negative press in Germany.

Insights on Germany, the Armed Forces and Public Opinion and the Media

The Bundeswehr and the Media

The complex history of post-war Germany reveals how difficult it is in Germany until today to have a public debate about the role of Germany in international politics and, more generally, about Germany's foreign and security policy. In a broader context, this also affects Germany's role within NATO as a security alliance. Thus, over the past decades, debates occurred mainly in the commentary sections of German newspapers, an area of the media in which the general public did not show a lot of interest.

The relationship between media and armed forces is always a difficult one as Commander Arthur A. Humphries noted in his 1983 article in the *Naval War College Review*.¹³⁹ Humphries analysed the Falklands War public affairs and came to the conclusion, 'War is something we train for with the hope of never having to do it. Public affairs in crises is something we often do but rarely, if ever, train for. Public affairs elements must be incorporated in military exercises in such a way that every level of command has to deal with the problem.'¹⁴⁰ While referring to Western armed forces in general, Humphries observation also applies to the German context. In other words, the German media and the German armed forces are basically operating within different, and largely contrary, belief systems. Many soldiers see journalists as liberal, anti-military and far less patriotic than themselves.¹⁴¹ Consequently, soldiers are always very careful when they have to talk to journalists. Yet, on the other hand, the soldier's behavior towards the journalist makes the latter even more critical and curious in their reporting about military topics. The armed forces are often caught between a dilemma that is common to Western socie-

ties and civil/military relations: On one side, due to operational and bureaucratic considerations, the soldiers are highly constrained when it comes to talking about military operations, and on the other side, the public has a fundamental right to be informed about military operations. This often brings the armed forces in a difficult position.

The relationship between media and armed forces is further strained by the fact that it is not a single public relations office from the Bundeswehr as a point of contact. Instead, the Bundeswehr offers on its internet platform a 23-page document, which lists a variety of offices, subordinate departments and regional services as point of contacts.¹⁴² That may make it a bit more difficult to find the right person to speak to about a specific subject. Very few of the personnel in the Bundeswehr, who are responsible to handle media inquiries, have any journalistic training or experience. In fact most public relations positions are filled with soldiers and officers, who have to do that job as part of their rotation in their military career. For them, the priority is to do their job well but also not to hinder their careers. So in effect, many of them act hesitantly in order to avoid any negative record, which could hinder their future career. This reveals a fundamental problem for the German armed forces and its public relations. The lack of officers with professional competence in media relations, and the countless numbers of point of contacts within the Bundeswehr, make it difficult to communicate effectively with the public, and to bring their point of view across. Instead, the press and public affairs policy of the Bundeswehr often appears chaotic, hesitant and inconsistent.

Admittedly, the task of telling the public what the Bundeswehr is doing on a day-to-day basis is not always easy. The long chain of command and the bureaucracy often result in late press-releases, which means that they are no longer of interest for the media. If a press-release in December reports about something that has happened in October, it will fail to generate any interest for the media or the public. This is exactly what happened in December 2004, when the Press Section of the German Army issued a release about a successful rescue-mission in Afghanistan,

which had taken place two months before, namely in October 2004.¹⁴³ As a result the news went unnoticed. Had the German Armed Forces informed the press shortly after the event, they could have achieved two things: A positive echo in the media, and public attention for their deployment to Afghanistan. Particularly the latter would have demonstrated to the German public that the German Armed Forces accomplished important missions in Afghanistan.

The Lack of a National Dialog on Defence Issues

Germany has been mostly on the periphery of NATO operations. It made relatively small contributions to the 1999 air campaign as well as to ISAF air operations in Afghanistan, and declined to support the Libya operations – all while hedging the German operations with numerous caveats. With the limited engagement of the Bundeswehr there has also been much less public interest in the armed forces. Unlike the British newspapers, where one finds a great deal of reporting on the armed forces, German media interest in the Bundeswehr issues is relatively low. The German media does not have many experts in any of the key topics related to security policy in general and on the Bundeswehr in particular they can draw from. After the Cold War era and the waning security threat posed by the Soviets, the public became even less interested in security policy or the German Armed Forces. Journalists admitted under the condition of anonymity that the ‘Bundeswehr’ as a topic is too complex, and the readership is not interested in reading about it. Hence, the media is very reluctant to cover such issues. The fact that only few journalists are experts in reporting about security policy, may explain why there is little public debate about it. Where the media does report reluctantly about issues concerning Germany’s security policy and the role of the German armed forces in today’s society, the coverage can often be tinged with emotion and sensationalism. Indeed, this is characteristic of the coverage of drones – one of the few military topics that excite the German media. The lack of media coverage means the German public gets a very narrow picture of the German armed forces.

It is a major finding of this study that, unlike other major NATO nations, Germany lacks any serious national discussion on defence issues and the role of the armed forces. Indeed, the lack of a national debate and informed discussion on military matters ought to be of grave concern to the Bundeswehr and the government. Part of the problem is the lack of serious academic study of military affairs in German universities. With a national tendency to favor pacifism since World War II, outside the Bundeswehr University and Bundeswehr institutions, there is little place for military topics at civilian universities. In all of Germany there is only one professorship of military history. While there are several university departments and institutes for peace studies, there are only a few places where security policy is studied – and those studies focus more on foreign policy and internal security than on the military.¹⁴⁴ Germany has many world class think tanks and these definitely have a strong influence on policy, but again, there are no civilian think tanks that concentrate on the military and certainly none that make air power their focus. Think tanks like the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik (German Institute for Foreign Affairs) and Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit (German Institute for Politics and Security), both in Berlin, do some excellent academic studies of foreign policy, Russia, the Middle East and other key policy concerns, but the German academic interest avoids the military topics. The lack of think tanks that specialize in the military issues, or university faculties that focus on the military, means that journalists have no easy access to military specialists who might provide advice or commentary. A journalist in London can easily contact a major think tank like RUSI (Royal United Services Institute), or the War Studies faculty at Kings College London (or one of the several top War Studies programmes in the UK) and have access to real expertise on military studies. A German journalist has no such easy access to expert analysis on military matters.

Anti-Military Sentiment – A Fact of German Politics

As noted at the start of this chapter, the existence of very strong pacifist sentiment among the German

population has been a major factor in civil/military affairs since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany. Through the Cold War the anti-war movement (sometimes Soviet supported and controlled) was large and well-organized and consistently opposed any military measures of the government. The mainstream parties (SPD, CDU) supported a strong armed forces, but often faced a good deal of internal opposition to various defence programmes. Still, for the first forty years of its existence, West Germany did not have to deal with any debate about fighting outside its own territory. Thus, when conditions changed at the end of the Cold War, Germany was reluctant to adapt to the new requirements to support security on the periphery of NATO and to support allied operations. Without an immediate threat, Germans have never truly confronted the need to support security in Europe. Indeed, Germans have been highly resistant to calls to support NATO operations.

One can expect that any time Germany considers an operation outside of Germany there will be legal challenges and a strong public sentiment to not participate. Drones are an important issue to the peace activists and the left and any acquisition of drones, any German use of them, or even allowing drones on German territory will ensure protests and legal action and concern from politicians. This is largely because the drones have been characterized as civilian-slaughtering weapons – and this theme is readily repeated in the mainstream media.

The nature of the German government also makes any German contribution to collective defence difficult. German governments are mostly coalitions, and driving a firm policy or approving the use of force will almost always run into opposition from coalition partners – just witness the objections of the Greens to any German participation in the Kosovo conflict in 1999. Thus, for any German government carrying out its international obligations to NATO and to international security is a tough proposition. More than most countries, Germany needs a better means of communicating with the military, media and public.

Recommendations

These recommendations can be seen as a kind of basic rule for conducting public affairs in times of war. However, they are also basic rules for conducting StratCom in both times of peace and times of war.

1. Building Credibility, Confidence, and Trust among the Public

The most important set of values in StratCom is credibility, confidence, and trust. If one loses credibility and confidence it is impossible to conduct a successful StratCom operation. The only problem is that every single measure within this operation must obey this principle. If only one message during such an operation does not comply with this set of values and is identified by the media or the public, then this set of values can be damaged. The lasting effect of damaged credibility and confidence cannot be underestimated. Rebuilding credibility and confidence takes a long time and is hard work. It takes courage to communicate, also the negative news, and to talk honestly about them. It might seem politically undesirable, but, in the long-run, trusted relationships will outweigh the political desirability. The relationship between politics, politicians and the military is a complex one.¹⁴⁵ In an ideal world, military StratCom operations are linked to a similar political campaign. In reality, military and political interests often collide. Politicians often tend to trade in long-term goals for short-term achievements, which can be useful in a re-election campaign.

In the German case, credibility, confidence and trust as essential characteristics, which define the relationship between the media and the military but also within the broader political context, needs to be built more strongly. All parties need to engage more actively in making this relationship work with the goal to improve communication overall.

2. Having one visible spokesperson for the military

In the case of Germany, instead of having a variety of spokespersons for the military, there should be only one person speaking for the German Armed Forces as well as for the German Ministry of De-

fense. This spokesperson should be like an anchorman in the TV news, and maintain good relations to the press and act as a public face, which is recognizable for people. The main purpose of an 'Anchor' is to act as interface to the audience, which allows the audience (press and people) to develop an emotional relationship to the 'Anchor'. This relationship should ideally develop over time into a trustworthy and credible relationship.¹⁴⁶ The person needs to be highly competent with unimpeachable integrity. Only then may messages be communicated clearly, leading to them being understood and accepted by the general public. In order to achieve this and to improve the effectiveness of the public affairs department, the German Armed Forces must start training staff officers in journalism. Working on public affairs should not be a career barrier for these officers. The job description for a Public Affairs Officer of the US Army may serve here as a good example, describing the duties and responsibilities as follows:

'[...] The Army Public Affairs Officer's (PAO) primary responsibilities are to assess the public affairs situation, advise senior leaders on public affairs issues, and assist them in making well-informed decisions, and translate the decisions into effective public affairs operations. PAOs plan and execute communication strategies to achieve desired objectives, and evaluate the effectiveness of the programs. The PAO analyzes the situation, anticipates issues, assesses implications, and develops comprehensive operations to meet the news and information needs of internal and external audiences. The PAO also facilitates media relations with domestic and international news media. The PAO supervises photo-journalists and broadcasters who create information for print, broadcast and digital media. [...]'¹⁴⁷

The duties and responsibilities may require adaptation to the German context, but it offers a way to think about how to develop a programme to train Public Affairs Officers for the German Armed Forces. In order to train military personnel, especially officers assigned to the public relations, there should be mandatory training about media military relations in special officer courses. Media and public relations training might include a brief internship with a German media company. Officers

assigned to media relations can learn how journalists work. Furthermore, the military and media will get to know each other better. In further media training officers can learn how to give effective interviews and to organize and conduct press briefings. Training in media affairs should not just be for specialist public affairs officers. The United States Army Command and Staff College course includes a requirement that every student act as a press spokesman and field interviews with real journalists during major training exercises. The filmed student interviews are later viewed with press experts with a full critique given. In short, the American policy is to train every officer, when necessary, to be able to respond to the media.

3. Improve the government efforts in explaining the role of German Armed Forces in today's security environment to the public

The military has to be visible and approachable for the public. Hiding behind garrison walls does not help to make the public understand the Bundeswehr's mission and operations. In order to build up relations to the public, 'open house days' are a good starting point for showing the public what the Bundeswehr does. The annually open house day of the German government in Berlin, where the German Ministry of Defense is also opening its doors, is a great success. In the German military there is the tradition of military exercises to show invited guests the abilities of the Bundeswehr. A larger cross section of the public and media to include local political leaders, teacher, businessmen, union representatives and so on might be invited to attend these Bundeswehr exercises. Such events also provide soldiers a chance to better connect with the public. In the end, it's all about measures to build public trust.

4. Improve the relationship between the military and the German Press

Journalists must be invited by the German Armed Forces to visit bases in order to receive an orientation about the capabilities of the Armed Forces. This is especially important for the Air Force as many journalists can understand infantry and tank units, but the capabilities of highly complex aircraft and control systems are not as easily understood.

Communicating the capabilities of the Air Force is crucial for explaining to use of air power to the media. The media plays a key role in communicating how the air force is used. Since the use of drones – in the context of targeted killings – is a highly critical issue in Germany, the use of drones for surveillance must be explained to the public. Embedding journalists into military units might work in countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom. In Germany, with its complex history, embedded journalists are less likely to work as some factions of the public would compare them with the propaganda units of the German Wehrmacht in the Second World War – and this is not the picture the Bundeswehr wants to draw.

5. Creating Conditions for a National Dialog on the Military

The lack of informed public debate is one of the most serious problems the German military faces. There are several actions the government might take to help improve the public understanding, and especially the journalists' understanding of the military. First of all, the government ought to encourage the German and European aircraft companies to fund a civilian think tank on air power. Such an institute would provide the German media a place for expertise and research and would have more freedom to comment on air power issues and offer analysis than a government think tank. The government, universities and corporations should also consider setting up civilian think tanks that specialize in military affairs. Finally, there ought to be more academic study of the military at the university level. That a country of Germany's size has only one civilian university chair for military history shows just how far the military has been forced out of the academic world. If there is to be a solid and informed public debate about the military, there should be chairs of military history and security studies at the major German universities.

1. See: "Views of NATO and its role are mixed in U.S., other member nations", Pew Center Report, 28 Mar. 2016.
2. Foreign Relations of the United States, Vol. III, Diplomatic Papers, 1945, European Advisory Commission, Austria, Germany, eds. Slany, William; Glennon, John P., Houston, Douglas W.; Sappington, N. O.; Kent, George O. (Washington, Government Printing Office 1968), Document 351 (Directive to Cdr in Chief of United States Forces of Occupation (Clay) Regarding the Military Government of Germany (JCS 1076)), see also Gaddis, John L. 2000. The

United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941–1947. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 121–125; Jackson, Patrick T. 2006. *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 118–124; Large, David C. 1996. *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, p. 17–20; for the reaction of Clay and its aides see in detail Gimbel, John. 1968. *The American Occupation of Germany: Politics and the Military; 1945–1949*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, p. 1–2.

3. See Krüger, Dieter. 1993. *Das Amt Blank: Die schwierige Gründung des Bundesministeriums für Verteidigung*. Einzelschriften zur Militärgeschichte 38. Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, p.14.
4. The "Marshall Plan" (also known as "European Recovery Program") had been developed by the American Secretary of State George C. Marshall, printed in Hanhimäki, Jussi, and Odd A. Westad. 2003. *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. p. 121–122.
5. See Wiggershaus 1979, p. 327; Greiner 1982, p. 139.
6. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Vol. III, eds. Stauffer, David H.; Sampson, Charles S.; Rose, Lisle A.; Corbett, Joan Ellen; Aandahl, Frederick; Bernbaum, John A. (Washington, Government Printing Office 1977), Document 512, (The Secretary of State (Acheson) to the Acting Secretary of State, 9 May 1950).
7. For the ideological basis of the „Containment“ policy see Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, Vol. VI., Eastern Europe, The Soviet Union, eds. Churchill, Rogers P.; Slany, William (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1969), Document 461 (The Chargé in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State), see also Kennan, George F. 1947. "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." *Foreign Affairs* 25 (4): 566–82.
8. See Fraund, Philipp. 2002. "Die Anfänge der Bundeswehr vor dem Hintergrund der internationalen Lage 1949–1953." *Magisterarbeit, Universität Konstanz*, p. 69; Trachtenberg 1999, p. 51.
9. For the history of Germany after 1945 until 1990 see Eschenburg, Theodor. 1981. *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Die Jahre der Besatzung 1945–1949*. With the assistance of K. D. Bracher, T. Eschenburg, J. C. Fest and E. Jäckel. *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*/hrsg. von Karl Dietrich Bracher, Theodor Eschenburg, Joachim C. Fest, Eberhard Jäckel 1. Stuttgart, Wiesbaden: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt; Brockhaus; Schwarz, Hans-Peter. 1981. *Die Ära Adenauer, 1949–1957: Gründerjahre der Republik. Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*/hrsg. von Karl Dietrich Bracher, Theodor Eschenburg, Joachim C. Fest, Eberhard Jäckel 2. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt; Weber, Jürgen. 2002. *Kleine Geschichte Deutschlands seit 1945*. München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag.
10. On Chancellor Adenauer see Schwarz, 1991.
11. See Schwengler, Walter. 1997. "Der doppelte Anspruch: Souveränität und Sicherheit. Zur Entwicklung des Völkerrechtlichen Status der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–1955." In *Wirtschaft und Rüstung: Souveränität und Sicherheit*, edited by Werner Abelshäuser and Walter Schwengler, 187–566. *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik, 1945–1956* 4. München: Oldenbourg, here p. 352–353.
12. See Wiggershaus 1979, p. 332; Rautenberg, Hans-Jürgen, and Norbert T. Wiggershaus. 1977. "Die „Himmerroder Denkschrift“ vom Oktober 1950: Politische und militärische Überlegungen für einen Beitrag der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zur westeuropäischen Verteidigung." *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* (1): 135–206; Gersdorff, Gero v. 1994. *Adenauers Außenpolitik gegenüber den Siegermächten 1954: Westdeutsche Bewaffnung und internationale Politik. Beiträge zur Militärgeschichte* Bd. 41. München: R. Oldenbourg, p. 55–94; 275–312, 341–343.
13. See in detail Wiggershaus, Norbert T. 1982. "Von Potsdam zum Plevan-Plan: Deutschland in der internationalen Konfrontation 1945–1950." In Foerster, Greiner, Meyer, and Rautenberg. *Von der Kapitulation bis zum Plevan-Plan*, 1–118, here p. 30–45; Gersdorff 1994, p. 230–274; Gehler, Michael. 1988. "Ein Wiedervereinigtes und Blockfreies Deutschland mit Nationalarmee und die französischen Kommunisten im Jahre 1952." *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* (2): 75–104
14. Wiggershaus 1982, p. 38.
15. See Rautenberg and Wiggershaus 1977, 140.
16. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Vol. III, eds. Stauffer, David H.; Sampson, Charles S.; Rose, Lisle A.; Corbett, Joan Ellen; Aandahl, Frederick; Bernbaum, John A. (Washington, Government Printing Office 1977), Document 589 (Decision of the Foreign Ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France With Regard to Germany, New York, 19 Sep. 1950).
17. Simón, Luis. 2014. "Back to Basics" and "Out of Area." *The RUSI Journal* 159 (3): 14–19.
18. See Speidel 1977, p. 480–488; Keller, Patrick. 2012. "Germany in NATO: The Status Quo Ally." *Survival* 54 (3): 95–110; p. 98; Zimmermann 2012, 146–147.

19. Large 1996, p. 1.
20. See Large 1996, 243.
21. Speech by Minister of Defense, Theodor Blank, at the occasion of Inauguration of the first officers of the German Armed Forces, Archive of the Cristian Democratic Union, St. Augustine, Pressepolitik, File I-088-001.
22. For the origins of the term see in detail Zimmermann 2012, p. 187.
23. For an in depth view see Donald Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces*. (Princeton/N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983). See also Zimmermann, John. "Zwischen Reformern und Traditionalisten: Aushandlungsprozesse zum Traditionsverständnis in der Bundeswehr." In *Sonderfall Bundeswehr? Streitkräfte in nationalen Perspektiven und im internationalen Vergleich*, edited by Heiner Möllers and Rudolf J. Schlaffer, 295–312. Series Sicherheitspolitik und Streitkräfte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 12. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014) .
24. The terms "Bundeswehr" and "German Armed Forces" are synonymous.
25. o.A. 1955. "Rekrutierung." *Der Spiegel*, 11 Dec. 1951.
26. See Large 1996, p. 243–245.
27. Schmückle, Gerd. 1982. *Ohne Pauken und Trompeten: Erinnerungen an Krieg und Frieden*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, p. 105.
28. See in great detail Schmückle 1982, p. 102–134, see also Wulforst, Traugott. 1999. "Der "Dank des Vaterlandes" in Sozialpolitik und -verwaltung zur Integration ehemaliger Wehrmachtssoldaten und ihrer Hinterbliebenen." In Müller and Volkman, *Die Wehrmacht, 1037–57*.
29. For the buildup of the German Air Force see James S. Corum, "Starting from Scratch: Establishing the Bundesluftwaffe as a Modern Air Force, 1955–1960." *Air Power History* 50 (2), 2003: 14–30; See also James Corum, "Building a New Luftwaffe: The United States Air Force and Bundeswehr Planning for Rearmament, 1950–60." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27 (1) 2004: 89–113.
30. See Kollmer, Dieter H. 2002. *Rüstungsgüterbeschaffung in der Aufbauphase der Bundeswehr: Der Schützenpanzer HS 30 als Fallbeispiel*. Stuttgart: Steiner, p. 133.
31. The reasons for this unprecedented series of accidents are too complex to be discussed here. See in detail: Siano, Claas. 2011. "Die Beschaffung des Waffensystems F-104G Starfighter im Spannungsfeld von Militär, Politik und Wirtschaft." In *Die Luftwaffe in der Moderne*, edited by Eberhard Birk, Heiner Möllers, and Wolfgang Schmidt, 177–203. *Schriften zur Geschichte der Deutschen Luftwaffe 1*. Essen: Mönch, p. 177–203; Schlieper, Andreas. 1995. "Die Wechselwirkung Taktik - Technik - Mensch: Die Einführung des Flugzeuges F-104G in die deutsche Luftwaffe und die „Starfighterkrise“ von 1965/66." In Thoß and Schmidt, *Vom Kalten Krieg zur deutschen Einheit*, 551–82.
32. *Time Magazine*.
33. Wettig, Gerhard. 2009. "The last Soviet Offensive in the Cold War: Emergence and Development of the Campaign against NATO Euromissiles, 1979–1983." *Cold War History* 9 (1): 79–110, p. 79.
34. See Ahlers, Conrad. 1962. "Bedingt abwehrbereit." *Der Spiegel*, 10 Oct.
35. See Nehring, Holger, and Benjamin Ziemann. 2012. "Do all Paths lead to Moscow? The NATO Dual-Track Decision and the Peace Movement - A Critique." *Cold War History* 12 (1): 1–24; Heidemeyer, Helge. 2011. "NATO-Doppelbeschluss, westdeutsche Friedensbewegung und der Einfluss der DDR" In *Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung: Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss in deutsch-deutscher und internationaler Perspektive*, edited by Philipp Gassert, Tim Geiger, and Hermann Wentker. *Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte Sondernummer*. München: Oldenbourg; Gassert, Philipp. 2011. "Viel Lärm um nichts? Der NATO-Doppelbeschluss als Katalysator gesellschaftlicher Selbstverständigung in der Bundesrepublik." In Gassert, Geiger, and Wentker, *Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung*, 175–202.
36. Quoted after Gassert 2011, p. 178.
37. See Gassert 2011; Richter, Saskia. 2011. "Der Protest gegen den NATO-Doppelbeschluss und die Konsolidierung der Partei Die Grünen zwischen 1979 und 1983." In Gassert, Geiger, and Wentker, *Zweiter Kalter Krieg und Friedensbewegung*, 229–46; Ploetz, Michael, and Hans-Peter Müller. 2004. *Ferngelenkte Friedensbewegung? DDR und UdSSR im Kampf gegen den NATO-Doppelbeschluss. Diktatur und Widerstand Bd. 6*. Münster: Lit, p. 83.
38. See Borawski, John. 1995. "Partnership for Peace and Beyond." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 71 (2): 233.
39. See Arnold, Hans. 1993. "Irtum Nato." *Der Spiegel*, 1993. 38.
40. See Keller 2012 p. 98–99.
41. UN Security Council, Resolution 745 (1992) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3057th meeting, on 28 Feb. 1992, 28 Feb. 1992, S/RES/745 (1992), available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f1600.htm> (last access 31 Jan. 2016).
42. See in detail Fraps, Peter K. 1995. "Deutscher Sanitätsdienst unter der Flagge der Vereinten Nationen – Kambodscha 1992/93." In Thoß and Schmidt, *Vom Kalten Krieg zur deutschen Einheit*, 645–54.
43. See Dalgaard-Nielsen, Anja. 2006. *Germany, Pacifism and Peace Enforcement. Europe in Change*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 51–52.
44. UN Security Council, Resolution 794 (1992) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3145th meeting, on 3 Dec. 1992, 3 Dec. 1992, S/RES/794 (1992), available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f21137.htm> (last access: 31 Jan. 2016).
45. UN Security Council, Resolution 814 (1993) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3188th meeting, on 26 Mar. 1993, 26 Mar. 1993, S/RES/814 (1993), available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f21143.html> (last access: 31 Jan. 2016).
46. Federal Constitutional Court of Germany, BVerfGE 90, 286 – Out-of-area-Einsätze.
47. Quoted after Dalgaard-Nielsen 2006, p. 54.
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142. <http://www.bmvg.de/resource/resource/MzEzNTM4MmUzMzMyMmUzMTM1MzMyZTM2MzEzMDMwMzAzMDMwMzAzMDY5NmE2YzI3MzA3ODY3N2EYMDIwMjAyMDIw/160118-iA-Verzeichnis-Ldl-Internet.pdf> (last access: 18 Jan. 2016).
143. *Presse-/Informationszentrum des Heeres*, Pressemitteilung 20/2004, 16 Dec. 2004.
144. Institut für Sicherheitspolitik at Kiel University is one of the few university programmes that deal with security. But that one also focuses more on foreign policy and terrorism than military issues.
145. See in detail Roth, Günter. 1990. "Das Verhältnis von Politik und Kriegsführung: Ein Streifzug durch die Militär- und Kriegsgeschichte." In *Ideen und Strategien 1940: Ausgewählte Operationen und deren militärgeschichtliche Aufarbeitung*, edited by Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, 11–66. Operatives Denken und Handeln in deutschen Streitkräften 3. Herford: Mittler.
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Three NATO airmen briefing the media on the NATO Air Policing Mission at Šiauliai Air Base, Lithuania, 2015. Educating the media in Air Power is an important mission for NATO.

CHAPTER 8

Summary: NATO Air Power and Disinformation

Dr James S. Corum

NATO today faces an array of major foreign and military policy challenges. In the Middle East and North Africa, Western nations have to contend with major terrorist groups that have carried out attacks in NATO nations in recent years. In the Ukraine, an aggressive Russia has already annexed the Crimea and is supporting armed groups in the Eastern Ukraine. The security situation for NATO nations is serious. NATO responded at the Summit in Wales in 2014 with an action plan to enhance NATO's ground and naval forces and develop a new quick reaction force. NATO is committed to an improvement in its collective deterrence capability.¹

However, it is not enough for NATO to simply improve its forces and response capability; it is also important to clearly communicate NATO's policies and the intent behind its actions. As its members are democratic na-

tions, the actions taken to improve NATO's military capabilities will require the support of the public in those member states. Moreover, NATO requires not only effective communication with its own populations but also with the international audience to keep them informed of NATO's policies and intentions. Finally, there are states and groups strongly opposed to NATO that routinely conduct information operations against NATO. Having effective strategic communications also means that we have to counter the disinformation of adversary groups and states that seek to undermine the alliance.

Key Lessons from the Case Studies of Conflicts and Anticipating Future Disinformation Campaigns

Chapters one and two of this Study noted the ways that disinformation is used against Western air power. A central lesson learned from recent NATO operations reveals the critical role of communications in conflict with state and non-state actors. Afghanistan provides a good case study of this principle. As noted in chapter two of this study, Taliban insurgents, unable to

counter the effects of kinetic air power with military means, have effectively used propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation to drive a wedge between the Afghan population and their government, which is supported by NATO forces. The Taliban have cleverly created situations in which civilian beliefs about collateral damage and casualties have become central issues in the information war and have eventually led to severe restrictions to the employment of air power.

Long term planning and strategy requires anticipating the actions of NATO's opponents. In this study, Russia and non-state Islamic radical movements are the two major forces aiming to undermine NATO nations and NATO's partners. Both Russia and radical Islamist non-state movements are employing long term information/disinformation campaigns to help secure their advantages and to weaken NATO's resolve to act. The threat to NATO from information/disinformation campaigns originating from these quarters can be anticipated using the history of the last two decades, covered in chapter two.

Anticipating Russian Disinformation: As noted in chapter two, Russia justifies its aggressive foreign and military policy in several ways, using key themes and methods of disinformation and information operations that are similar to those used during the Cold War. The main Russian themes and methods – the illegitimacy of NATO and NATO states and accusations of Western aggression paired with the manufacture of disinformation and distribution of false stories to confuse the issues – are distributed by the Russian State using a mix of state and social media (government employees posing as concerned citizens on social media). They employ information as one of the major weapons in modern conflict.

Russia, concerned with NATO's air power advantage, makes NATO air power a target of disinformation. We can anticipate that, in the future, Russia will characterize any attempt by NATO to establish a defence against ballistic missiles as a highly aggressive and hostile act, threatening to Russia and to world peace.² Russia may claim that any NATO exercises or air policing in Eastern European NATO nations is a provoca-

tion and threatening to Russia.³ Russia may also claim that any NATO support to the Ukraine or the stationing of any NATO forces in Eastern Europe is illegal under international law. Indeed, Russia is a great supporter of lawfare. Russian anti-NATO and anti-air power themes will be repeated to two key audiences with minor variations: the first audience is sympathetic groups in the West who can be expected to support the Russian position with little criticism and who will pass on the Russian positions; the other audience for Russian disinformation is their own public. Anti-NATO themes will be repeated in a more virulent form to the Russian public to stir up emotional support for the Russian regime by making the Russian people feel that are directly threatened. Russia will present itself as a victim of the West to both audiences.

The same Western organizations that supported the Soviet Union in the Cold War remain reliable and predictable Russian allies in any current and future environment. Russia will likely act to openly or covertly buy support from European political parties, organizations, and NGOs. Fortunately, Russian information operations in the long term will remain credible with a limited number of individuals in the West, though some media will continue to give them credence. However, Russian strategic communications themes, as well as its readiness to silence internal critics, will likely play well in the developing world. One can note that RT Russia's Arabic language programming is watched far more than the US State Department's Arabic language media in the Middle East. Even if the public in the West is not likely to be convinced of the Russian message, Russia will still likely gain support in developing nations, making NATO efforts in these nations more difficult. Lacking the right strategic communications organizations to mount and coordinate a response to well-supported Russian information campaign, the ability of Western nations to respond is limited.

Anticipating Radical Non-State Group Disinformation: The groups that have been fighting NATO nations, such as the Taliban, DAESH, and assorted others, have developed their disinformation and information themes along some very clear and consistent

lines. Because of this, we can be fairly sure of how NATO's enemies will portray NATO air operations. As air power is a primary means and enabler of NATO's military operations, it will remain a primary target of the radical disinformation campaign. The themes that will be used against NATO air power are:

1. NATO air power kills are indiscriminate and it specifically target innocent civilians.
2. NATO's use of air power is illegal and uses illegal means and methods. The use of RPA will be consistently described as 'targeted assassinations' and characterized as illegal under international law. Indeed, any use of NATO air power will be characterized as a violation of international law and no matter which NATO ROE are used, any death of a civilian caught in the crossfire will be labelled a war crime. Radical groups will continue to violate international law by using human shields to protect their headquarters and fighting units and thus gain from NATO strikes in two ways. Either NATO will refrain from striking legitimate military targets to protect civilians or NATO will strike the target and dead civilians will be shown to the world media as proof that NATO attacks innocents. Lawfare will be practiced against NATO, with lawsuits filed by anti-NATO groups and individuals (who may be subsidized by anti-NATO non-state actors).
3. Radical groups will claim victim status. Even the most violent of terrorists will be characterized by various media and anti-NATO groups in the West as being forced into terrorism and 'radicalized' by oppressive Western governments. The use of human shields and strategies that ensure innocent civilians are killed in NATO operations will also tie into the claim of victim status. Terrorist groups will be characterized as underdogs, acting in self-defence against an aggressive West.

The general public in Western nations is not likely to believe such themes (depending on the nation and national traditions as noted in the country studies) and, generally, these themes will have decreasing resonance in Western nations thanks to the massive brutality employed by radical factions. However, over time, the constantly repeated themes are likely to

have negative effects. Some in the public will begin to take the repeated anti-air power themes seriously. Many anti-NATO themes will be broadly repeated in academia, among Islamic groups, and by some NGOs. These sources will provide the anti-air power themes with some credibility.

Strategic Communications and its Relationship to Air Power

Understanding and anticipating the use of information and disinformation operations by NATO adversaries as noted above provides the basis for developing the appropriate strategic communications policies, doctrine, resources, organization and training to the counter adversaries' actions. Decision makers, ranging from the high political to tactical levels, need to be fully aware of how military activities, especially those involving the use of force, may communicate strategically and influence target audiences' way of thinking and behaving. Public understanding or misunderstanding can affect the operational environment and, for air power, this is particularly important. While air power gives NATO a military advantage, adversaries will attempt to undermine its use by characterizing that use as indiscriminate, likely creating disinformation to do so. This may challenge Alliance unity and determination, as disinformation / misinformation often targets the public opinion of member states. In order to protect Alliance cohesion and preserve its commanders' freedom of action, it is crucial that the Alliance's Strategic Communications objectives are carefully considered and crafted and that they are understood at all levels of policy, planning and implementation, ensuring the development of effective and coherent communications.

Lessons on Strategic Communication and Air Power from the Country Studies

The JAPCC study on disinformation campaigns and air power asked key questions about five major NATO nations involved in NATO air operations: How does the public understand air power? What does the public

understand about RPAS? How is air power portrayed in the media? What is the national vulnerability to disinformation? What are the positive and negative lessons of national and NATO employment of air power over the last two decades? The five country studies in *Mitigating Disinformation Campaigns against Air Power* provide important insights as to how the public in NATO nations perceive air power. These insights provide a useful foundation for developing a StratCom strategy to better communicate regarding the use of NATO air power. Maintaining support for NATO air power among the public is of central importance to maintaining the Alliance's effectiveness.

The first and most important thing to note about the country studies is that the Western public – to varying degrees – knows little about air power, or about RPA, or about the conduct of military operations in general. This lack of public and media knowledge is a key finding of this study. The US and British country studies have pointed out numerous instances of the media ignorance of air power and the military in general. The US, British, and German studies also indicate that the media's ignorance of military and air power issues have had, in several instances, important effects on policy. There have been some studies on the subject of public knowledge of military affairs and these have been noted in the American and German country studies. In cases where public knowledge has been measured, the results show that the public understanding is low.

As examined in the country studies, public and media understanding of RPA was especially low. Media publications, in particular, reflect a basic lack of research and lack of understanding of RPA operations. This study has identified several common themes presented in the Western media about the use of RPA in the strike role: First is that RPA strikes are of questionable legal authority under international law and there are no strict legal controls on their use; second, that unmanned aircraft are inherently less accurate than manned aircraft; third, that RPA are indiscriminate and cause excessive civilian casualties and damage; fourth, that killing terrorists with RPA strikes endangers and enrages the local population and simply cre-

ates more terrorists. This study took all four of the common media themes and found they are highly inaccurate. RPA are certainly legal under traditional laws of war (international humanitarian law) and it is only by using new treaties under international human rights law (treaties never designed to be used to regulate armed conflict) that one can object to their use on legal grounds. The idea that RPA are less accurate than manned aircraft is simply untrue. RPA are carefully employed and do not cause high levels of civilian casualties or collateral damage. Finally, chapter four provides evidence that directly contradicts the popular notion that using RPA helps recruit new terrorists. The study focussed heavily on RPA and their portrayal in the media, as this is one of the most contentious issues in employing air power today. The acquisition of RPA and their increasing use in several roles is an important part of NATO air power today and will be more important in the future. The study team believes that it is imperative that NATO vigorously oppose attempts to employ 'lawfare' to restrict the use of RPA and that NATO make the education of the media about RPA a priority.

A significant finding from all the country studies is that the public's view of employing air power, or military power, is directly tied to the general state of civil/military affairs of the country. In lieu of knowledge about air power, the public will tend to make judgments on military operations and the use of air power on the basis of general trust, or lack of trust, in their armed forces. In this aspect of civil/military relations, the armed forces of Britain and the United States are in an advantageous position. In both the US and UK, decades of polling data and opinion surveys show that the military remains one of the most trusted and respected institutions of the nation, with a level of trust that far surpasses that of political leaders and the media. The American public has an exceptionally high regard for its armed forces. In American public opinion studies going back to the 1950s, the military always scores high on the list of respected institutions.⁴ When there is a clear national threat to the UK, such as DAESH's threat of terror attacks against Britain, the public's response is to support the use of force.⁵ What this means is that, when US and British forces are

committed to a conflict, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that the military will operate in a proper and legal manner and will take due account of the laws of war and the need to minimize casualties. The military is trusted as a professional institution that is representative of the best of the nation.

Although there are minorities that oppose the use of military force, and air power in particular, these groups have little effect on swaying the majority of the public from their support for the armed forces. Yet, in Britain and the US, support for the forces does not readily translate into support for a specific conflict. The Iraq and Afghanistan operations were supported by the public at first but support steadily declined over time. In each case, the loss of public support for a conflict had little to do with disinformation, but was based on a public perception of whether the operation was successful and whether there was an end in sight.

A major reason for the positive state of civil/military relations in Britain and the United States, which translates into general support for air power, is the culture of debate that surrounds security affairs and the use of force. The American and British political systems require the consent of Congress or Parliament to undertake military action and, because of this, military operations are a major theme of national public debate.⁶ The country studies show that in a healthy civil/military culture the public will support national and NATO military action and even tolerate significant casualties among deployed forces when there is a clear *casus belli*. Conversely, military operations that cannot be clearly tied to the national interest and defence of citizens (from terrorism, for example) invariably have weak support from the public and even that support will erode very quickly. After fifteen years of conflict in the Middle East, the American and British publics have grown cautious about any open-ended military commitments. Still, the US and UK country studies show that the use of air power against terrorists is strongly supported by the public.

The importance of a healthy civil/military culture and the tradition of a broad national debate when committing military forces to an operation is further high-

lighted in the contrasts shown between the US and UK on one hand, and Germany and Italy on the other hand. The German and Italian case studies show that holding a national public debate about employing military force is not part of the civil/military culture of those nations. The lack of a true national debate on defence issues also means that the publics in Germany and Italy tend to be even less informed on military issues and air power than those in the United States and United Kingdom.⁷ In both Germany and Italy, any use of combat forces in support of NATO operations will likely be strongly opposed by political factions and will have weak public support. In Germany and Italy, there are political problems with using the armed forces for anything other than humanitarian missions. Therefore, Italy and Germany face a dilemma when deciding whether to participate in NATO combat operation.

The country study authors note that the current state of civil/ military relations in Germany and Italy remain poor and both countries have serious problems in presenting their armed forces in a positive manner to the public. The outcome is that, under any scenario, German and Italian public opinion tends to be much more brittle in regards to supporting military operations by their national armed forces and by NATO.

Among the countries studied, France is something of an outlier. France is less bound to NATO, having stayed out of the NATO Command Structure (NCS) for more than three decades and only recently having returned to full military cooperation. France has a strong leftist and pacifist movement and anti-American sentiment motivates a sizable minority. On the other hand, France has a tradition of supporting military intervention in NATO and national areas of interest, to include North Africa. France is more willing than Italy or Germany to commit forces to direct combat operations and sends its forces on missions with fewer caveats. The French military also enjoys broad public confidence today. The terrorist attacks in Paris in January and November of 2015, which killed 130 civilians and wounded hundreds more, have hardened French opinion in favour of a strong military response in the fight against DAESH and Islamic

terrorism.⁸The recent French air strikes against DAESH (2016–2017) are also strongly supported by the French public. When there is a clear threat to the nation's citizens, France can be expected to show considerable resolve.

In three of the five countries studied (US, UK France), we see a strong bond of the military with the public and strategic communications policies that support this. The biggest problem in all of the countries studied in terms of air power is the general ignorance of the public as to how air power works, what its capabilities are, how air power operations are planned and carried out, and what the rules governing air power and warfare are. This vast public ignorance about air power translates into general opposition to RPA, a perception based on ignorance as to what RPA are and what they do. Thus, there is a clear mandate for the major NATO nations to improve the public's understanding of the military and of air power.

The terrorist attacks in 2015 in Paris and in 2016 in Brussels changed the European dynamic on fighting radical Islamist terrorists in the same way the 9/11 attacks changed American attitudes. DAESH has threatened more such terror attacks on Western nations, making conflict with radical forces in the Middle East now a simple matter of national defence. As these terror threats are quite real, one can expect that the Western European public will be more supportive of their armed forces, more concerned with military affairs, and readier to support overt military action against terrorist groups that pose a direct threat.

The five country studies emphasize the importance of building a strong civil-military relations culture. When that culture is lacking and when countries fail to have a debate on national security involving the broader public, support for national defence and NATO operations will be lower than in nations with strong civil-military relations and an active national security debate. In a weaker civil-military culture, the public will also be more vulnerable to disinformation and misinformation. Some aspects of the national culture that encourage opposition to air power are intrinsic and not likely to be changed – for example, the high level

of German pacifist sentiment. But other aspects of the civil-military relations can be improved by developing a culture of national debate on security issues and by allowing the military a greater voice in the national debate. All five country studies show that the public needs to understand the role of NATO in Western defence better and that each nation needs to improve and develop its strategic communications in regards to educating the public about air power. All of the country studies provide some practical recommendations in their national context for improving national strategic communications in terms of air power and support for NATO. While some of these recommendations respond to particular national conditions, many of them are also linked to the broader recommendations for NATO put forth in this Study.

NATO Policy and Resources for Strategic Communications

In their declaration after the Strasbourg/Kehl summit, the leaders of NATO member countries underlined the increasingly importance for the Alliance to communicate 'in an appropriate, timely, accurate and responsive manner on its evolving roles, objectives and missions. Strategic communications are an integral part of our efforts to achieve the Alliance's political and military objectives'. Following that pledge, in 2009 NATO released its Strategic Communications Policy followed in 2010 by the Strategic Communications Concept that sets out the framework within which Strategic Communications planning and execution should be conducted by NATO military forces.

At their summit in Wales in September 2014, the leaders of the NATO member countries stated that, 'it is essential that the Alliance possesses the necessary tools and procedures required to deter and respond effectively to hybrid warfare threats, and the capabilities to reinforce national forces. This will also include enhancing strategic communications, developing exercise scenarios in light of hybrid threats, and strengthening coordination between NATO and other organizations, in line with relevant decisions taken, with a view to improving information sharing, political consultations, and staff-to-staff coordination.'⁹

Challenged by the increasing complexity of the information battlefields during the last decade of conflicts, many NATO bodies and nations have developed significant national capabilities and understanding in fields such as Public Diplomacy, (Military) Public Affairs, Information Operations (Info Ops) and Psychological Operations (PsyOps). While some progress has been made, particularly at the operational level, more synchronization between disciplines within a coherent doctrinal framework would help the Alliance to achieve more interoperability on multinational operations and could transform Strategic Communications into a tool that is more effective in helping to achieve political and military goals.

In terms of NATO strategic communications, although agreed policy and doctrinal documentation exists for the military contributors to NATO Strategic Communications in the form of Military Committee (MC) Documents and Allied Joint Publications (AJPs), the AJPs are not fully integrated and lack a comprehensive, overarching point of view. The NATO StratCom policy illustrates the difficulties of getting an ambitious policy at the level of 28 nations. NATO must address this issue and discuss how the current policy should be improved and whether a long and painful process of ratifying and then reviewing an 'AJP for Strategic Communications as a capstone doctrine in line with policy'¹⁰ is truly required. It may be that other flexible and adaptable solutions such as directives (ACO 95-2, SACEUR directive on StratCom) would be a more effective approach.

Having strategic communications policies and doctrine in place clearly does not solve all the problems indicated in this study. For example, '(e)nsuring information and communication aspects are placed at the heart of all levels of policy, planning and implementation and fully integrated in the overall effort'¹¹ will require adequate resources and additional capability and more effective use of StratCom resources.

In terms of overcoming the shortage of trained and experienced personnel, a combined effort of all available resources is required. 'Pulling communicators into a grouping can produce critical mass and would enable a more effective integration in delivering effects,

more influence from the side of communicators and might open up opportunities for growth in numbers and seniority. At the same time, key principles – such as Public Affairs Officers having direct access to commanders for Public Affairs issues – can still be respected.'¹² However, while pooling resources can be a step forward, the need for well-trained public affairs staff is high and the present supply of experienced public relations officers is not likely to meet the demand for them even for peacetime exercises, much less a conflict scenario. It will be essential for NATO nations to ensure that additional StratCom and public relations personnel are available to support future operations.

What Do Recent Conflicts Teach Us About the Relationship of Strategic Communications and Air Power?

Recent allied operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya have underlined that foreign policy goals cannot be achieved by military power alone. The common refrain that allied forces should also seek to win 'hearts and minds' as a means to deliver enduring peace and stability speaks to the importance of non-military means and 'soft' power in connecting with populations both at home and abroad. Strategic communications, correctly understood, are an integral part of this approach.¹³ NATO's air power must be part of, and effectively contribute to, this effort.

All of the above mentioned operations and actions against DAESH show that strategic communications are a critical aspect of air power and will be critical determining the success of future Allied operations. They reveal the importance of justifying and minimizing the impact of civilian casualties to public. This has to be done against the backdrop of hostile forces and ability to exploit and exaggerate the issue of civilian losses. Strategic communications must be able to communicate the fact that civilian casualties and collateral damage are inevitable results of war, along with refugees and Internally Displaced People. Today the failure to properly communicate and to develop a convincing near real time estimate of events and effects can negatively affect air operations.¹⁴

Since the enemies that NATO and Western coalitions have faced in the last two decades are well below NATO in terms of military capability and have limited ability to contest NATO in the air, they aim at the NATO's most vulnerable point – the will of the people. If enemy groups and nations cannot defeat NATO in the air, they can do the next best thing: they can conduct information campaigns that categorize the use of air power as an inhumane means of waging conflict so as to make it politically impossible for democracies to use. The strategic effect is the same. Thus, information campaigns that use disinformation and misinformation are a central element in any radical group strategy when fighting NATO.

Preserving Credibility through StratCom and Public Diplomacy

Based on the case studies performed for this study, while NATO and its member states speak of the importance of effective strategic communications, in practice their public diplomacy efforts tend to be fairly reactive and are often focused on communicating existing programmes and priorities. There is an urgent need to significantly enhance the communication of NATO's strategy to the general public. Indeed, improving transparency and understanding between NATO's military forces and the public is essential, particularly if members want to build support for reversing the long decline in defence spending that the Western nations have seen over the last two decades. NATO needs to support its member states in building the public argument for the Alliance's relevance and to explain why the policy resource and burden sharing decided on at the 2014 NATO Summit is essential to best meet the current security challenges of the Alliance.¹⁵

However, presenting the facts to the public is insufficient. During the past decade of operations in Afghanistan, ISAF forces learned how imperative it is to counter the media narratives of adversaries. Winning the support of locals required ISAF, alongside the Afghan government, to be an agile and effective communicator of its progress, intentions, and objectives while simultaneously refuting the arguments articu-

lated by the Taliban and other insurgent groups on the ground.¹⁶ In general, part of the Western problem is the issue of trying to communicate across cultures. As addressed in chapter two, when one faces major cultural differences, the best means to overcome them is to work with local authorities and support their information operations with funding and technical support so that they can craft the message in terms of their own culture.

Russia's behaviour with respect to Ukraine has also underscored the urgency with which member states (supported by NATO) must become more effective at 'offensive' public diplomacy, well beyond the capabilities developed for Afghanistan. Russia used major global media outlets to propagate its narratives in order to gain legitimacy for its illegal annexation of Crimea as well as its aggressive behaviour against the Ukraine.¹⁷ The thus-far mostly one-sided narrative needs to be challenged.

Although improving NATO's StratCom capabilities is a necessary step, it must be accompanied by a shift in mind-set regarding the role and centrality of public diplomacy. Relations with publics and, critically, members of parliaments, must be prioritized as a central, rather than ancillary, effort. Without a strong public understanding of NATO's value, Alliance and national leaders will be unable to compromise on some national issues to realize the full benefits of coordination. A robust and comprehensive public relations strategy will be necessary to underscore the Alliance's political credibility, Alliance consensus, and the international legitimacy of any actions taken. The public relations strategy will have to respond and refute the public narrative of adversaries and effectively communicate the intentions and objectives of NATO's response to the general public.

In many respects, NATO's mission, which in the immediate post-Cold War period suffered from a lack of a defined threat, is now much clearer. With Russia increasingly aggressive on several fronts, the need for NATO to serve as a defensive alliance is now obvious. DAESH not only challenges the stability of that region but has also encouraged major terror attacks in

Western Europe and threatened more.¹⁸ The spill over from Middle Eastern conflicts now means that Western Europe and North America face credible threats to their homelands, a situation that reinforces the need for NATO in the eyes of the public and also provides NATO with clear Strategic Communications themes that centre on defence of citizens. For the first time in two decades, the West openly faces a security challenge that requires a robust response using all national and Alliance means, to include all elements of national power (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic). The effective employment of these means requires a robust strategic communications campaign.

Recommendations – The NATO Response to Disinformation

Key Principles for NATO Strategic Communications

The interplay of public support, media coverage and strategic communication is something that has not drawn much attention and research over the last decades, yet it is a reality that lies at the heart of any use of military force and, in particular, of the use of air power. This study concludes that the confluence of strategic communications and air power is a priority that needs to be addressed in a thorough and systematic way. Following are some general principles and specific recommendations drawn from the material examined by this study:

1. Emphasize Human Rights in the NATO Message

One of the most important principles for NATO and Western nations to follow in future operations is to emphasize the human rights aspects of the conflict. This is the area where NATO has the advantage, as NATO enemies are normally factions and countries with no regard for human rights. Failure to obtain and maintain public support for military operations is directly related to the moral justification for war.

The Western nations are currently involved in military operations conducted against DAESH and other radical Islamic movements. From North Africa, where France is helping governments to

combat Islamic radical insurgencies, to Syria and Iraq, where several NATO nations are conducting active air operations against the Islamic State, NATO nations are involved in shooting wars. The conflicts in which Western nations are involved are against enemies with horrendous human rights records. DAESH carries out war crimes of the most appalling nature – mass executions of prisoners, beheading civilian aid workers, murdering families of ethnic minorities, capturing women as sex slaves for their fighters, destroying ancient monuments – and films these actions, publishing the films in an international strategic communications campaign to terrorize enemies and to win adherents. It would be very hard for DAESH to mount a credible campaign against NATO nations on the basis that air operations are against international law. But the crimes against humanity that DAESH carries out must be carefully recorded and fully exposed to the international public in response to DAESH's disinformation campaigns.

2. Document Enemy Violations of Human Rights

In all future conflicts NATO should deploy sizable media teams to record and publicize the human rights abuses of the enemy and should bring this before the public immediately and continually. We cannot expect the media to cover such stories in depth and to provide the analysis.

A review of the air power stories in the JAPCC data base show that stories, or allegations, of NATO inflicting civilian casualties gets more play in the Western media than well researched and factual stories of deliberate Taliban or insurgent attacks on civilians. It is essential that the media double standard be challenged and that NATO officials work to see that the news of Taliban or Al-Qaeda or DAESH actions against civilians is covered.

3. Ensure Transparency of Communications

NATO and national strategic communications should be more transparent and open. All NATO campaigns should be followed with detailed and public after action reports that present a comprehensive analysis that does not gloss over mistakes and failings. Such reports need to be led by experts who work outside the defence ministry chain of command and who can ensure objectivity and

public credibility. NATO and the national forces that participate in a combat operation should contribute to fund the post-conflict comprehensive analysis.

4. Challenge the Lawfare Movement

NATO also needs to publically and aggressively challenge the lawfare movement and uphold the traditional Law of Armed Conflict rules of using force. The lawfare movement, using civilian casualties as a justification, has moved not only to outlaw air munitions that are needed for future conflicts but is also trying to establish the rule that ANY loss of a civilian or civilian collateral damage is a war crime. While NATO takes exceptional care not to harm civilians in operations, any effective warfighting in the future must allow for unavoidable collateral damage and losses to civilians.

The Alliance needs to make clear the distinction between humanitarian law (the traditional laws of armed warfare) and human rights law in cases of modern conflict. If NATO states allow the human rights law to be applied, as well allowing a double standard and failing to aggressively record, sanction, and prosecute groups and countries that violate the traditional laws of armed warfare by using tactics such as human shields, then conducting military operations – especially air operations – in the future will be made exceptionally difficult if not impossible. This is why expanded legal and media teams are necessary to support the NATO missions. Any state or group should be fully prosecuted as war criminals for using the human shield tactic, which will require extensive evidence gathering. Legal and moral responsibility must be placed on the terrorists and states that offend international humanitarian law, not on the forces that serve to protect international law.

5. Don't Oversell Air Power

Air power is NATO's great advantage, but airmen must resist the temptation to oversell air power as the best or only solution. Public misconceptions of air power capabilities have been widespread since the 1991 Gulf War. While precision munitions have done much to limit casualties, wars without civilian casualties, or bombing without targeting mistakes or equipment failures should not be promised. Air

power can be the decisive weapon against conventional armed forces, but the problem of targeting irregular groups and forces is much more difficult. If air power is oversold as an easy and quick solution and then fails to deliver, the public backlash will hurt the credibility of the military and of NATO. In a democracy, the one thing armed forces need to preserve is their long term credibility with the public.

6. Understand that NATO has a Problem with Public Opinion and Air Power

NATO must recognize that it has a problem with strategic communication and in justifying itself to the general public. The Pew Survey conducted in eight NATO countries in the summer of 2015 provides some alarming data. Answering the question as to whether their country might use force in case of a Russian attack upon a NATO nation, in only the US and Canada did a clear majority favour a military response. In the UK and Poland a strong plurality agreed with the use of force (49% to 37% in the UK, 48% to 34% in Poland), but in Germany, France and Italy majorities responded that their country should not react with military force in case of a Russian attack on NATO.¹⁹ That the public in some key NATO countries do not understand the fundamental requirement for NATO collective defence means that NATO needs a fundamental revision of its strategic communications framework. NATO needs to commit far more resources and effort to basic communication with the public, ensuring that there is a broad understanding of why the organization exists and what collective defence means for all of its members.

7. Recognize the Need for a Specialist, Strategic Information Organization

An important lesson learned during the Cold War was the need for capable, specialized information agencies to lead the battle for strategic communications. In the United States there was the US Information Agency (USIA), an agency independent of the Departments of State and Defense that had ample resources and specialist knowledge to engage in the information battle against the Soviet Union and communist nations. Since the USIA was disbanded in the 1990s the US strategic com-

munications programme has faltered and is disorganized, lacking focus, and is slow to respond effectively to issues such as the rise of DAESH and Russian aggression. The simple solution would be to revive the USIA to lead the information operations and strategic communications in twenty-first century conflicts. A similar approach for NATO is also recommended. A focused strategic communications organization programme could also provide aid, assistance, and expertise to support local governments to carry the core message of respect for human rights and opposition to terrorism and oppressive regimes.

Spending the money and allocating resources for a strategic media campaign should have a high priority in any future military or peace enforcement operation. The payoff of a properly planned and supported campaign could be winning the support of the population and lessening the attacks on government or Coalition forces. Increasing the chance for victory is worth spending money on the media.

Educating the Public and Media

1. Educating the Media about Air Power

One finding of this study is that the general public knows very little about air power and its role, mission and capabilities. The public knows even less about RPA and how they are used. In a democracy, this low level of public understanding about national defence is unacceptable. An effective first step to educating the public would be to educate members of the media, who will then be able to pass that knowledge on to the public through accurate reporting. To facilitate this education process, NATO should develop a short (three- to four-day) course to educate members of the media about air power, which can be taught at major NATO airbases in Europe and in the US. Political leaders should be invited to attend as well. Every course should provide a basic overview of how air forces are organized and current NATO air doctrines. The attendees should be briefed on air capabilities, see aircraft, visit a flight line, and see how an air unit operates in a daily environment. At the end

of the course, having been exposed to the NATO targeting process, air planning methodology, and the tight controls under which NATO conducts air operations, the participants should be shown specific examples of disinformation and will see how the enemy uses disinformation. While the logistics of hosting such a course are daunting, the 'air power for media' courses would serve as an effective introduction for any personnel who might serve as embedded journalists. In any case, the cost of such a course should pay for itself in terms of strong public knowledge and support.

2. Educate the Public on RPA

RPA have a bad reputation with the public because they are portrayed as impersonal and indiscriminate killers. They are also seen as incompatible with democracy, because the (incorrect) perception is that unaccountable military contractors are given control over the lethal use of force. Air forces need to show how RPA operators work and how missions are carried out. While the public cannot necessarily be given specific operational details, they can be shown the careful teamwork that goes into the process of identifying an enemy target and the process by which the coordination is made to launch the mission. Emphasizing the non-kinetic roles of RPA in surveillance as well as search and rescue could help change the public attitudes on drones.²⁰ Basically, the public needs to know that whether RPA or manned aircraft are used, missions are carried out according to strict procedural guidelines and based on thorough intelligence provided by a team of people. When the public sees the human side of the people who operate the RPA and combat aircraft as well as the teams that provide the intelligence and get the planes and RPA into the air, it will be much harder for any media campaign to vilify such operations. In addition to working with the media, the major NATO air forces should develop their own documentary films for the public showing the basics of the targeting process.

3. Improving BDA

This will likely require some changes in NATO air forces' organization, doctrine, and resources. However, better BDA will provide an operational

advantage as well as a StratCom advantage in the future. Improvement in BDA should have a high priority. A key goal of this effort should be to ensure that BDA imagery can be released as quickly as possible to the public, allowing a rapid response to any disinformation.

4. Develop Training Programmes for Military and Defence Ministry Personnel

Decision-making in a rapidly changing environment, in which decision makers are at odds with the press with respect to time, is a huge challenge. The media is operating on a 24-hour news cycle, while the military leader needs time to analyse, to respond, and to direct action. Strategic leaders and war fighters must learn to better make decisions in real time within the context of a complex dynamically changing environment with regards to strategic communications. The only way to achieve this competency is continued realistic training. In the face of less time to react and think, strategic leaders must develop the skills to distinguish between decisions that must be made now and those that can wait. NATO officers and officials need much more training in information operations and in the nature of disinformation and countering disinformation. As disinformation will be a feature in future conflicts, learning to counter it must be a focal point of strategic-level training.

Doctrinal Recommendations – NATO Doctrinal Principles

It is important that NATO and national forces participating in an operation have the same message. This kind of cooperation should be encouraged by doctrine stressing StratCom in NATO planning, training and exercises. Only by routine inclusion of StratCom in exercises will the ability of Strategic Communications agencies to work together and synchronise the StratCom message develop and improve.

Information Operations must be proactive, not reactive. We must assume that every NATO air strike and every military operation will be challenged by disinformation from the enemy. We can also assume that every air strike will be challenged on legal grounds.

Therefore, NATO needs to make information about NATO air operations rapidly available to the public. This information should be accompanied by information about the targets and groups struck.

Declassification and Rapid BDA

NATO senior leaders should allow selected staff officers to supervise the declassifications process within the BDA system to make strike imagery available as quickly as possible. This will likely require the detailing of additional personnel to speed the process. NATO and NATO nations should loosen the declassification rules and be ready to make strike imagery available to the media immediately to counter disinformation. This should become a tenet of NATO air operations doctrine and air operations centre standing operating procedures. The media Team (discussed below) should post the declassified imagery on a website set up for the public. It should be assumed that the enemy will claim that every bomb strike has hit innocent civilians, so the speed and accuracy of NATO's BDA information and imagery is key to proactively refuting enemy disinformation.

Emphasize the Main Message

NATO is fighting some really bad people who violate human rights. This has been the case of NATO operations Western coalitions for more than twenty years. NATO operates under the traditional rules of war and has the highest respect for human rights. The leaders and groups NATO is fighting are groups that employ terrorism and violate human rights on a massive scale. These messages must be emphasized regularly and across the Alliance through a coordinated strategic communications programme driven from the highest levels of NATO leadership.

Strategic Communications and Campaign Planning

In the campaign planning before the Bosnian, Serbian, and Libya air campaigns, there was little preparation to carry out information operations in support of the air campaign. The weakness of the planning

process for such contingency operations has been a NATO problem for two decades and NATO needs to do much more to anticipate likely conflicts and develop media as well as military strategies.

NATO air planning should anticipate the opposition's disinformation and media campaign and should provide an immediate counter narrative. Prepared with extensive information on the enemy, especially the human rights violations known to have been committed by them, NATO and national intelligence agencies should vet intelligence to protect sources and acquisition methods. After review, the intelligence agencies should maintain redacted intelligence summaries that will be available to the public on NATO and national operational websites. These summaries should provide information on the enemy, their leaders, and their human rights records. In cases of air strikes that target a leader or group, the report presented to the media should be linked to the vetted NATO intelligence summaries of the group's terrorist actions and war crimes.

Concept for an Operational Media Team

Upon initiating a major operation that involves, or is likely to involve, combat operations, NATO and supporting nations should have a specialist media-focused team available to support the senior Public Affairs officer for the operation. The media team should consist of trained personnel to manage public releases, maintain liaison with the civilian media, maintain the NATO websites and accounts for the operation, and supervise the editing of imagery and media released to the public, among other functions. The media team should present a daily public account of major events, including air strikes and all air operations. The media team should monitor the media to collect enemy disinformation and prepare responses accompanied by visual and print media to be made public on the operational and NATO websites.

The media team could also include specialist contracted personnel to provide a full range of media advice and support to local allied governments so that

they can communicate effectively with their own population and work with NATO strategic communications to counter the adversary narrative. While some of these proposed media team functions are currently accomplished by public relations staffs, the critical factor is that doing all of the actions in a coherent and synchronized manner will provide significant public relations advantages over the piecemeal approach that is currently employed.

Impact of these Recommendations

Implementing these proposals will require additional national and NATO funding and will require additional training, specialized staff and information technology. However, fully funding and resourcing these recommendations will certainly not cost as much as a major weapons or equipment upgrade. Providing the full resources to improve NATO information operations and to combat the disinformation campaigns of adversaries will be an investment that will have a positive long term strategic impact. Kinetic action is important and NATO should have the best training and personnel and equipment possible to carry out combat missions. However, winning the information war is also important and, in cases of low intensity conflict and opposing non-state forces, it becomes even more critical. Effective strategic communication is a very important tool. If these recommendations are fully implemented, for relatively little cost NATO can have a greatly enhanced ability to respond effectively to the information and disinformation threats to the West. NATO leaders recognize that effective strategic communications are one of the essential tools tool in overcoming NATO's adversaries – it is up to them to take action to make effective Strategic Communications a reality.

1. NATO Headquarters, NATO Readiness Action Plan Fact Sheet, Dec. 2014.
2. See RT the stories in Russian media: 'Pentagon Policy is to encircle Russia with ballistic missile offense' RT video 2009 <https://youtu.be/4BSJO17Em8>; 'Shield Happens: Russia Readies the rockets', RT 3 May 2012; 'Russia alarmed by S. Korea-US contacts over THAAD: ambassador', Korea Times, 2 Feb. 2016.
3. 'Eastward Expansion? NATO stages record drills in Estonia amid Ukraine unrest', RT 12 May, 2014.
4. Gallup Poll: Confidence and Institutions, 2–7 Jun. 2015. Gallup.Com.
5. 'Strong and consistent public support for RAF air strikes within Syria', YouGov.UK, 25 Nov. 2015. In British polling the British public approved air strikes against DAESH 59% to 20% opposed.

6. In the British May 2015 national elections the issue of keeping the Trident nuclear deterrent was, and still remains, a major election issue. The Labour Party lost the election and continues to lose support partly due to its stance of being largely opposed to the UK's nuclear deterrent.
7. A survey of major US, UK, German and Italian newspapers indicates far fewer news stories on defence matters in Germany and Italy.
8. In the aftermath of the Paris terror attacks of Nov.2015 recruitment for the French military and French Police skyrocketed. See NBC News, 'French Military Enrolment Triples after Paris Terror Attacks, 5 Dec. 2015; New York Times, 'Paris Attacks have Many in France Eager to Join the Fight,' 26 Nov. 2015.
9. Wales Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales from 4 to 5 Sep. 2014, para 13. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nato-summit-2014-wales-summit-declaration/the-wales-declaration-on-the-transatlantic-bond>.
10. Military Concept for NATO Strategic Communications (MCM-0085-2010).
11. ACO 95-2, SACEUR directive on StratCom.
12. Ibid 9.
13. Strategic Communications and National Strategy A Chatham House Report, Paul Cornish, Julian Lindley-French and Claire Yorke.
14. The Air War Against the Islamic State: The Need for An "Adequacy of Resources", Anthony H. Cordesman 29 Oct. 2014.
15. Increasing national defence contributions and doing more to share resources and burdens were a policy decisions noted in the declaration of NATO nation leaders at the Sep. 2014 NATO Summit in Wales. See Wales Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales from 4 to 5 Sep. 2014, para 13. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nato-summit-2014-wales-summit-declaration/the-wales-declaration-on-the-transatlantic-bond>.
16. See 'We have met the Enemy and he is us': An Analysis of NATO Strategic Communications: the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, 2003–2014, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Riga, 2015.
17. For an overview of the Russian information ops in the Ukraine see, 'Executive Summary: Russian Information Warfare against Ukrainian State and Defence Forces', NATO StratCom Centre for Excellence, 2015.
18. "New ISIS video shows Paris attackers committing prior atrocities, threatening UK," Fox News, 25 Jan. 2016.
19. "NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid", Pew Research Center, 10 Jun. 2015. See p. 5.
20. Gen. (ret.) Stanley McChrystal, Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World (New York: Penguin, 2015).

ANNEX

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAF	Army Air Forces	JAPCC	Joint Air Power Competence Centre
AAR	Air-to-Air Refuelling	JATF	Joint Air Task Force
AJP	Allied Joint Publication	JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
AOR	Area of Responsibility	JDAM	Joint Direct Attack Munition
AIRRA	Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy	JDN	Joint Doctrine Note
BDA	Battle Damage Assessment	MoD	Ministry of Defence
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
C2	Command and Control	NCS	NATO Command Structure
CDU	Christian Democratic Union	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	NPG	NATO Nuclear Planning Group
DoD	Department of Defense	OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
EDC	European Defence Community	ORHA	Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Aid
FAF	French Air Force	PAO	Public Affairs Officer
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Area	PfP	Partnership for Peace
FDP	Liberal Democratic Party	PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
HARM	High-Speed-Anti-Radiation-Missile	RAP	Readiness Action Plan
IHL	International Humanitarian Law	ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance	RPA	Remotely Piloted Aircraft
		RPAS	Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems

SAM	Surface to Air Missiles
SGDN	Secrétariat général de Défense nationale
SPD	Social Democratic Party
StratCom	Strategic Communications
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WMC	Weapons of Mass Communication



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