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Research Article

Lifting the Fog of War: New Communications and Human Rights Abuse Reportage in Armed Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

From commercial access to satellite imaging to mobile technologies with video capability, new communication technologies are lifting the fog of war, and opening greater opportunities for transparency and accountability in theatres of armed conflict. This paper looks at the changing paradigms of conflict and post conflict reportage. It focuses on how journalists and citizen reporters are harnessing available digital tools to piece together complex narratives of war that would not have been possible without advancements in global information communication technologies. The paper focuses on recent developments in human rights reportage in armed conflicts and insurrections in Central and East Africa, the Middle East, South and South East Asia.

KEYWORDS: Human Rights journalism, Media censorship, Satellite imaging, War reportage

INTRODUCTION

In his writings on war the German–Prussian soldier and military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, famously wrote "war is merely the continuation of politik by other means". In the treatise on military strategy, *Vom Kriege*, posthumously published in 1832, Clausewitz wrote "... regarded war as an extreme but natural expression of policy, and never regretted that he himself had fought in seven campaigns" (Paret, 1986). If war is an extension of governance, as Clausewitz suggested, then it must be subjected to fourth estate media scrutiny, in much the same way as governments are held accountable and transparent in times of peace.

The news media's ability to produce objective news reports is dependent on the journalists' ability to see the issue from multiple angles and multiple points of view presented by a cross-section of diverse sources. This type of rich fodder has long been lacking in contemporary conflict reportage due to obvious limitations of access, and to use a Clausewitz analogy a 'fog of war' that obscures the journalistic pursuit of a pragmatic reality.

However, advancements in technology from commercial access to satellite remote sensing images or citizen reporters and witnesses on the ground capturing amateur footage on mobile phones, are changing the paradigm of conflict reportage. Such freedoms, albeit limited, are shedding new light on human rights violations and atrocities in armed conflicts. These conflicts, previously shrouded in the fog of war, are becoming increasingly accountable to Fourth Estate scrutiny.

WAR, *POLITIK* AND THE SEPARATION OF POWER

For Clausewitz, the German multivalent term *politik* frequently translated as policy or politics has a wider meaning that the English words used in its place in numerous translations. Echevarria (1995–6) explains the threefold meaning of the word as:

> "First, Clausewitz did intend *Politik* to mean policy, the extension of the will of the state, the decision to pursue a goal, political or otherwise. Second, *Politik* also meant politics as an external

state of affairs, the strengths and weaknesses provided to a state by its geo-political position, its resources, alliances and treaties, and as an ongoing process of internal interaction between a state's key decision-making institutions and the personalities of its policy makers. Lastly, Clausewitz used *Politik* as an historically causative force, providing an explanatory pattern or framework for coherently viewing war's various manifestations over time."

The term, however defined, suggests war to be an extreme yet natural extension of 'policy', and as such it cannot be viewed in apolitical vacuum. It also suggests that the military cannot be given precedence over the government in matters of war. It was this dictum the French Prime Minister Gorges Clemenceau employed when defending his right to direct the country's military affairs despite significant objections from the military. Clemenceau famously said, *La guerre! C'estune chose trop grave pour la confier à des militaires*—"war is too serious a matter to entrust to military men" (Layne and Thayer, 2006).

If war is viewed as an extension of governance, however extreme, then acts of war and armed aggression must also be subjected the processors of democratic accountability. This accountability within the three pillars of government is well documented. While most studies, by their nature are limited to particular jurisdictions, the studies provide significant insight on the separation of powers in initiating, maintaining and terminating armed conflicts. The overlapping legislative, executive and judicial role in the US laws has been of particular academic interest (Ratner, 1970; Rogers, 1971; Yoo, 1996) particularly in the post 9/11 environment (Yoo, 2008). Reiter and Tillman (2002) present a decrease in propensity to initiate conflicts with an increase in "public electoral participation, intra-legislative factors, and a stronger legislature in relation to the executive," perhaps foreshadowing the need for greater public participation in matters of national security.

The twin notions of *Jus ad bellum or bellum justum*—the legal justifications for resorting to war; and *jus in bello* – the rules of engagement or international humanitarian law in times of war, have also been the subject of much academic discussion (Luban, 1980; Klob, 1997; May, 2008), and within the framework of this discussion, it can be argued that the public have a right to know the justness of engaging in conflict and the just conduct of the military.

Lord Hennessy (2000), made the controversial argument that public interest over rode any justification for secrecy in matters of war, "The public interest override should apply because there is nothing greater than peace and war" he told the inquiry. The comments were made in connection to Jeremy Corbyn's question:

> "...is it the end of the world if the public as a whole knows there has been a debate in Cabinet openly and publicly rather than by a series of leaks by various parties that are at war with each other? I will give you an example. Had we known, for example, the extraordinary efforts that the Prime Minister Tony Blair went to over legal advice to the Cabinet in the run-up to the Iraq war, would the Iraq war have actually happened? Would the parliamentary vote not have been different? Was Parliament not entitled to know on that occasion that there was a serious debate about the legality of the war of which we were denied knowledge? We were asked to take a vote on whether Britain should be involved in the Iraq war. It was a pretty seminal decision."

The discussion of public interest, the public's right to such information and the news media's role as the Fourth Estate, in scrutinising and delivering such information to the public must then be discussed within this framework.

THE FOURTH ESTATE AND THE ARMED CONFLICT

The notion of the press as the Fourth Estate, and an integral part of the separation and accountability of power was presented by the English enlightenment philosopher Edmund Burke, and documented by Thomas Carlyle in *The French Revolution and On Heroes, hero-worship and the heroic in history.* Carlyle wrote "Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all" (1841). He further wrote:

"I say often, is equivalent to Democracy: invent Writing, Democracy is inevitable. Writing brings Printing; brings universal everyday extempore Printing, as we see at present. Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making, in all acts of authority... The nation is governed by all that has tongue in the nation: Democracy is virtually *there"* (1841).

In its most abstract form, the Fourth Estate role of the press holds legislative, executive and judicial powers to account, and in moving discussions of public interest out of the corridors of power into the public sphere, enables citizens to engage in public discourse. The preamble to the journalist's code of ethics in Australia sums up this Fourth Estate role as, "(j)ournalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role...They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be accountable." In this respect the success of Fourth Estate scrutiny depends on the independence of the media and its unfettered access to reliable information. As such, fourth estate journalism as the agenda setter must present verifiable pragmatic truths and objective realities as the foundation of discourse.

Structural limitations and impediments to this Fourth Estate role of the press have garnered significant academic discussion. Shultz (1999) addresses the decline of the Fourth Estate's integrity as result of the increased commercialisation of the Australian press, and argues the need to restore news media credibility as a fundamental need in a vibrant democracy. Hadland (2005) deals with similar issues in the South African press, while Belsey notes British journalist have lost credibility to a such as extent that they are seen to push personal or sectional interests. Despite these limitations, the utopian concept of independent and objective journalism continues to be at the centre of the journalistic ideal in western democracies. "Central to the way in which the media/ politics relationship has been conceptualised within liberal democracies are the two inter-related notions of the Fourth Estate and watchdog journalism. These lie at the heart of liberal journalism's professional ideology,"

(Louw 2010). In *Liberty and the News,* Walter Lippmann argues the "crisis in democracy" is in reality a "crisis of journalism" (1920).

If a vibrant and independent Fourth Estate is vital for democracy, then it must have a role to play in scrutinising armed conflict, which after all is an extension of *politik*. However, unfettered media access to armed conflict is fraught with peril, and in reality, unlimited access to information is a rare commodity even in the most accessible of conflicts.

War reportage and the fog of war

The much used term 'fog of war', also derived from the writings of Von Clausewitz, suggests the confusion of conflict and the inability of those immersed in it, to see all aspect of the war. Clausewitz is credited with the notion of "fog and friction", "friction referring to physical impediments to military action, fog to the commander's lack of clear information", although Kiesling (2001) correctly argues that while Clausewitz wrote of the phenomenon of confusion and uncertainty he did not use the words 'fog of war' to specifically refer to this notion. Despite its historical inaccuracy, the notion is perhaps apt, and is frequently used when describing the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous nature of armed conflict.

The twin notions of fog and friction can also be applied to war reportage where, fog suggests the reporters' inability to see all aspects of the conflict, and the friction implies the physical impediments byway of restrictions on access, and official secrecy and censorship.

There is a large volume of academic research on media coverage of contemporary conflicts from Vietnamto Afghanistan.

Vietnamre presented the first instance of mass reportage of an armed conflict, with the US public receiving detailed accounts of the conflict in their evening news. Such unprecedented coverage arguably had a dramatic impact on the public's view of the conflict."Defeat in Vietnam has left the United States deeply divided, and no issue has been more bitterly divisive than the role of the media," Hallin (1989) wrote. He quotes Nixon as saying "(t)he Vietnam War was complicated by factors that had never before occurred in America's conduct of a war the

American news media had come to dominate domestic opinion about its (the government's) purpose and conduct" (Hallin, 1989). In the post-Vietnam landscape, and certainly in more contemporary theatres of conflict, international affairs observers have often raised concerns over the media's ability to influence the conduct of US diplomacy and foreign policy—a phenomenon dubbed the 'CNN effect' (Livingston, 1997; Robinson, 1999, 2002; and Gilboa, 2005).

Since the Vietnam experience modern militaries have focused on toeing a fine line between objective reportage and media access, developing strategies to counter increased restrictions and impediments to free access to information. In this context strategies such as embedding journalists have been topics of considerable academic scrutiny. Pfau *et al.* (2005), argue a content analysis of ABC (American), CBS, NBC, and CNN news during the Iraqi invasion showed embedded network television news stories were more favourable in overall tone toward the military. A large number of studies have also focused on the British military's mishandling of media coverage during the Falkland War, and the effective barring of journalists from the conflict zone (Forster, 1991; Bishop, 1982; and Morrison and Tumber, 1994). These studies stress the importance of independent media access to conflict zones if news media is to be effective in its Fourth Estate role of providing scrutiny and accountability of public institutions and governance.

Limiting access to the conflict: Increased friction

While many studies have focussed on the framing and ideological dimensions of conflict, journalists regularly face physical restriction in the form of travel restrictions and intimidation, preventing them from seeing the conflict from multiple angles. In her research on the Kosovo conflict, Riegert notes "The atmosphere in Montenegro was 'very intimidating' for the BBC journalists working there. Several of the Norwegian journalists mention problems with visa from the Yugoslavian authorities as a major problem," (Riegert, 2002 In Höijer, Stig and Rune, 2002). Höijer, Stig and Rune (2002) note both the Norwegian and British journalists had problems with access, sourcing and intimidation in all of the main areas covered by journalists Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo. The Article 19, report on the

conflict in the North Caucasus notes similar restrictions on journalists covering the conflict in Chechnya. "Restriction of travel to Chechnya makes it extremely difficult for journalists to report on the region. New regulations were adopted by the Russian Information Centre (Rozinformtsentr) in August 2004, requiring journalists to apply for accreditation directly from the Ministry of Internal Affairs."

Stephen Grey wrote in the UK Guardian, journalists in Afghanistan "find it almost impossible to reach and report from the frontline of the conflict". The comments were made in reaction to the lack of reportage on the death of thirteen solders in Helmand province in May 2009.

The examples of media restrictions are countless in contemporary theatres of conflict, and all serve the same purpose of limiting independent accountability of military action. This in turn forces media reportage to become myopic – engulfed in the 'fog of war'.

Penetrating the fog with a view from the heavens: use of satellite images in reporting conflict

The dwindling access to conflict zones, necessitates alternative avenues of news gathering if the news media is to fulfil its Fourth Estate commitment of ensuring accountability in armed conflict. The commercial availability of satellite images of conflict zones provides one such non-conventional source of information.

In their somewhat fancifully titled paper The first space war Anson and Cummings (1991) wrote "The Gulf was the first occasion on which a full range of military space system was used in a conflict against another power." Powell (1998) argues the cosy superpower duopoly between the US and USSR collapsed "when the French entered the space reconnaissance business and began to treat it as a business by selling satellite images," (1998).

Palmer claims the American Broadcasting Corporation used Landsat satellite images as far back as April 1985 to show images of the Iran–Iraq border, but the use of the technology developed even further when the French commercial satellite company Satéllite Pour l'Observation de la Terre, SPOT offered 10 meter images to commercial users in February 1985. Two

months later SPOT and Landsat satellite images were extensively used to report on the Chernobyl nuclear disaster (1992, p.165). At the commencement of the Gulf War in August 1990, SPOT Image Corp, refused to sell images of Kuwait to the news media, while ABCTV was able to procure images from the Soviet satellite agency Soyuzkarta (1992).

Basing his argument partly on comments made by ABC's Mark Brender (1993), Powell notes one of the "early client(s) was ABC News". Mark Brender[1], ABC's defense producer, realised such imagery could revolutionise television news and quickly began buying images of places that had forbidden ABC camera crews. World News Tonight began showing pictures of secret military installations in North Korea, weapons plants deep inside Iran, and mysterious laboratories in the Russian heartland," (Powell, 1998).

Satellite imaging was increasingly used by the news media to report inaccessible theatres of conflict in the past two decades. Jo Ellen Fair and Lisa Parks (2001) claim the 1994 humanitarian crisis in Rwanda was better reported through the combination of 'on the ground' news footage and both satellite and aerial footage. They argued that while television footage was able to provide a human face to the crisis, the aerial images were able to visualise the horror of the mass exodus of civilians out of the conflict zone. In 2000,TheNew York Times used two satellite images to prove the Russian Government had "literally pulverised" Grozny in a "withering air campaign" between December 1999 and February 2000, after the paper failed to secure passage for its journalist (Begleiter, 2002). Commenting on the humanitarian crisis in Darfur in 2003 Straus wrote, "Satellite images show many areas in Darfur burned out or abandoned. The majority of the attacks have occurred in villages where the rebels did not have an armed presence …" (Straus, Jan–Feb 2005).

The international media's use of satellite images to cover the final days of the Sri Lankan War, and the use of satellite images to report communal violence in Myanmar are two contemporary examples of the ongoing use of remote sensing technology in reporting armed conflict and alleged human rights abuse in conflict.

Use of satellite images during the final days of the Sri Lankan civil war

The Sri Lankan government claimed victory over the banned terrorist outfit, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in May 2009, ending one of the most protracted conflicts in south Asia.

On January 21 2009, the government declared a 35.5sq km no-fire zone in the Vallipunam region within the Tiger control region, ostensibly to provide a safe haven for civilians – although it was presumed the retreating Tigers were among them. This zone was overrun by government troops as they moved further into Tiger territory. A second 14sq km safe zone was declared on February 12, 2009, which was further reduced to just two or three square kilometres by May 8. While an estimated 150,000–200,000 civilians managed to escape, a further 100,000 were estimated to be trapped with Tiger cadre within the May 8 safe zone—a small strip of land surrounded by the Nanthikadal lagoon on one side and the navy-controlled ocean on the other. While the LTTE claimed the civilians willingly stayed with the Tigers, the government alleged, perhaps more plausibly, they were being used as human shields. Both parties accused the other of deliberately harming civilians.

The advancing government troops denied independent media and many aid agencies access to the safe zone, which prevented independent reportage of the crisis both from a news and humanitarian documentation level. In its 2010 annual report, The Freedom House reported "coverage of the war zone in northern Sri Lanka became almost impossible," during the final stages of the armed conflict between the Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE.

> "Journalists were restricted by bans on physical access to the area, some of which remained in place after the war's end. For example, reporters were denied entry to cover local elections held in Vavuniya and Jaffna in August. Media

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[1]Comments are based on Brender, Mark. (1993, February). The technological and legal implications of journalists' use of satellite imagery, Technology Seminar, Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, New York.

access to government-run camps for displaced civilians was also restricted, with journalists only allowed to visit select portions of certain camps at the government's discretion. The facilities held over 450,000 people at their peak, and most remained in the camps from May to December," (Freedom House, 2010).

The report also noted:

"In 2009, visas for a number of foreign correspondents, including Ravi Nessman of the Associated Press, were not renewed as a result of their coverage, forcing them to leave the country. Other foreign news teams were deported, including a three-person team from Britain's Channel 4 News that was expelled in May following attempts to cover events in the war zone" (Freedom House, 2010).

The travel restrictions prevented independent verification of information for the conflict zone, and all news was either channelled through the numerous government portals, or via unverified LTTE videos. In this context the international, media turned to satellite images for 'conclusive' evidence of military attacks, and a number of satellite images of the no-fire safe zone became the centre of a number of news reports alleging the Sri Lankan forces violated the safe zone.

In a BBC report on May 13, 2009 headlined "Sri Lanka images prove damage", human rights groups including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International accused the Sri Lankan armed forces of using heavy artillery fire in the densely populated safe zone, despite continued assurances they would minimise civilian casualties. The report said a satellite imagery analysis commissioned by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International showed crater marks consistent with "heavy shelling" and considerable population displacement between May 6 and 10.

The report said "satellite images taken on 10 May after a night of reported heavy fire were compared with images of the same area taken four days earlier. By comparing before-and-after satellite images, we were able to see a significant movement of the region's human population, suggesting widespread displacement,"

said Lars Bromley of the American Association of the Advancement of Science (Interview 2009). "We also saw destroyed structures and circular, crater-like features consistent with widespread shelling. One area which had been packed with tents and other structures in the earlier photo was virtually empty in the image taken on 10 May" (Bromley 2009). However, the BBC report conceded that while the damage was consistent with "heavy shelling" it was not possible to ascribe culpability. The report came a day after the rebels accused the army of shelling a field hospital in the safe zone killing 49 civilians.

Bromley's study of the satellite images was also picked up by the New York Times in a May 14 story headlined "Under attack and on the move in Sri Lanka's conflict zone." The report said: "an analysis of satellite images taken of an area where an estimated 50,000 civilians are trapped shows evidence of shelling near civilian shelters." The New York Times reproduced some of the satellite images which detailed civilian movement through an analysis of a shift in temporary shelters in the region. The article also showed enlarged segments of the satellite image clearly identifying craters caused by shelling between May 6 and 10.

Both news stories were based on a study conducted by the American Association of the Advancement of Science (AAAS) published on May 12, 2009, which was subsequently cited by a number of human rights organisations including Human Rights Watch. According to the AAAS, high-resolution commercial satellite imagery collected by Digital Globe's World View and Quick Bird satellites including World View scenes collected around 11.00 local time on May 6 and May 10, 2009 were used in the analysis. In addition to these images, an earlier scene collected from the Quick Bird satellite on May 9, 2005 and a scene from the Geo Eye satellite Ikonos, acquired on March 23, 2009, was also used to verify pre-conflict conditions in the conflict zone.

This use of satellite imagery provided readers and viewers with information and analysis of heavy artillery fire in the safe zone, which would otherwise have gone unseen and unquestioned, given the absence of camera crews on the ground in the north. In this respect, the technology allowed clear evidence of the shelling to be broadcast to the world despite Sri Lankan government

efforts to limit coverage of the war zone.

The coverage however comes with a caveat, in that the highly interpretive nature of the imagery interferes with the news consumers' ability to draw commonsense conclusions, and as such narratives—such as the Sri Lankan military's alleged use of heavy artillery in the safe zone—remains a matter of dispute. Nonetheless, the media coverage of such matters adds to the cumulative knowledge of a conflict that was sparsely reported.

Use of satellite images in reporting widespread communal violence in the Myanmar's state of Rakhine

Simmering ethnic tension between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities in Myanmar's western state of Rakhine, formerly Arakan, escalated into communal violence in June 2012. The bitter communal violence saw widespread attacks on the Rohingya and a predictable crackdown on media access to the region. In September 2013, Associated Press reported it had become the first news organisation to be granted access into Rakhine more than a year after communal violence erupted in the region in June 2012.

The trend in Rakhine ran counter to the relaxation of media control in other parts of Myanmar. The Freedom House Annual Report noted:

> "Yangon-based journalists were able for the first time in 2012 to cover events in some ethnic minority areas, such as the fighting between government forces and minority guerrillas in Kachin State. However, interethnic tension remained a sensitive topic, especially in Rakhine State, where violence between Buddhists and ethnic Rohingya Muslims broke out in June and again in October. The government issued directives against coverage of the situation and maintained a close watch on journalists traveling to the region," (Freedom House, 2013).

The committee to protect journalists (2013) reported:

> "Journalists working for local and foreign news agencies were confronted by weapon-wielding mobs, some led by Buddhist monks that blocked them from reporting on the riots.

Radio Free Asia reported on Friday that a group of armed Buddhist monks threatened a group of nine journalists, including one of its reporters, who were photographing monks as they damaged a mosque. The monks put a knife to one journalist's throat and seized and destroyed the memory cards from two reporters' digital cameras, the report said. The journalists were eventually allowed to seek refuge in a nearby Buddhist monastery, from where they were later evacuated by police.

The Democratic Voice of Burma, an independent TV broadcaster and online news provider, reported that sword-wielding rioters threatened one of its reporters and deleted footage from his camera. The Associated Press reported that a Buddhist monk who covered his face placed a foot-long dagger at the throat of an AP reporter and demanded he hand over his camera. The AP report said the photographer handed over his camera's memory card."

In this restrictive media environment, the international media turned to satellite images procured by human rights groups. In April 2014 the international human rights group Human Rights Watch reported the group had identified 27 'unique zones of destruction' in 5 of 13 township affected by violence since June 2013. The satellite images showed the "destruction of 4,862 structures covering 348 acres of mostly Muslim-owned residential property" (Human Rights Watch, April 22, 2013).

In late October Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported large scale destruction in on the eastern edge of Kyaukpyu city in Myanmar. The images compared satellite images of buildings and dwellings from an image taken on March 9, 2012, with one taken on October 25, 2012 the day after the purported attack on the coastal town (Human Rights Watch, October 27, 2012). In November the group released more images of the Pauktaw township; villages of Yan Thei in the Mrauk-U township; Myebon township; and the regional capital of Sittwe (Human Rights Watch, November 17, 2012). The October 27 images were picked up by a number of international masts including the London Times (Byers, 2012), CNN (Kocha, 2012),

the UK Observer (Beaumont, 2012), British Channel 4 (Channel 4, 2012); and the BBC (2012).

The use of satellite imagery in the coverage of atrocities in Myanmar, not only highlight the use of remote sensing imagery by the news media but it also demonstrates how human rights organisations have bypassed the mainstream press in presenting 'news' to the public via web based publications. While detailed analysis of this is beyond the scope of this paper, it demonstrates a synergistic collaboration between the media and their one time sources, in producing 'news' in the digital media landscape.

Homemade videos and mobile phone footage

While satellite images provide a bird's eye view of conflict, it can be argued that they also strip away or ignore the human horror of conflict. Thussu and Freedman (2003) argue that satellite images and computer generated graphics—the 'high tech war reporting' that has gained momentum since the first Gulf War in 1991—have dehumanised the true horrors of war, that the personal tragedies and brutality are overlooked by big picture coverage. This is where images and video footage gathered by non-journalist observers on the ground can contribute to comprehensive reportage, by filling the gaps and reporting conflict from among the population at street level.

There is significant academic research focusing on how governments and militaries shape the visual images of armed conflict (Zelizer, 2004; Moeller, 1989; and Taylor, 1991, 1998). Griffin's analysis of photographic war coverage of the 'war on terror' in American news magazines supports the "idea that news photographs prime and reinforce prevailing news narratives rather than contribute independent or unique visual information" (1999, p.399). Andén-Papadopoulos argues mainstream press images to be relatively sanitised, and claims the development in technology has enabled the capture and distribution of "imagery of violent international conflict that has not been created or disseminated by mainstream media" which is "exploding onto these new non-filtered public spheres" (2009).

Pantti (2013) argues "Digital camera and video enabled mobile phones have become essential in making political

struggles visible in the media" (p.2). She argues "Syrian anti-government activists repeatedly contrasted the invisibility of the 'Hama massacre' of 1982 with the visibility and global audiences' new technologies bring to the current conflict," (p.3). Stein argues international media were able to bypass Israeli travel restrictions in to the Gaza zone during the 2008–9 conflict, by relying on citizen testimony via digital communication. "As a result, the voices of citizen-journalists and bloggers were given greater prominence" (Stein 2012).

Batty (2011) notes the Arab Spring uprisings played a crucial role in solidifying the mainstream media's reliance on amateur footage. "Al-Jazeera's citizen media service Sharek received about 1,000 cameraphone videos during the Egyptian uprising against Hosni Mubarak," Batty wrote. He also quoted the Guardian's Head of Social Media, Riyaad Minty saying:

> "Post Egypt, in places like Libya, Yemen and Syria, citizens posting online have been the primary lens through which people have been able to see what is happening on the ground.
>
> Now our main stories are driven by images captured by citizens on the street, it's no longer just a supporting image. In most cases citizens capture the breaking news moments first. The Arab spring was really the tipping point when it all came together."

Editor in chief of BBC Arabic, Faris Cour said:

> "On the rare occasion journalists got access to Syria, they were accompanied by the authorities, so the unrestricted user content balanced the coverage. During the last year it became the norm, people realised the situation demands this and it's impossible to rely on professionals" (Batty, 2011).

Aday *et al.* claim "key satellite television networks, such as Al Jazeera, relied on citizen-generated video footage, often disseminated via social media, to cover protests" (2013).

Andén-Papadopoulos examines how perceptions of war and the conventions of war reporting, change as new media technologies allow soldiers to upload personal

views in homemade videos from the frontlines in Iraq and Afghanistan. He notes "first hand testimonials by soldiers offer the public uncensored insights into the experience of warfare and may provide the basis for a questioning of the authority and activity of US foreign policy," (2009). Andén-Papadopoulos' study demonstrates how alternative narratives of individual soldiers are bypassing official filters to reach a mass global audiences. These alternative narratives are not only challenging authoritative narratives in conflict reportage, but are also creating post war narratives of accountability. One of the starkest examples is perhaps the ongoing media attention surrounding video footage showing alleged war crimes committed by Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan armed forces during the final stages of the conflict in north and eastern Sri Lanka. Video footage dated May 3, 2009, posted by the Sri Lankan defence forces web portal defence. lk and ultimately uploaded to YouTube, reportedly shows "footage of terrorists in civilian attire firing at both security forces and fleeing hostages by a pedal gun fixed to an armour-plated 'Unicorn' type vehicle. In the background, civilians brought to build earth bunds are forced to camouflage the vehicle with leaves and branches. The video clearly shows another LTTE cameraman who is positioned to video any form of military retaliation towards the terrorists, taking cover among the civilians brought to forced labour" (Ministry of Defence, 2010)[2]. Armed forces claimed 58th Division soldiers recovered the footage from a dead Tiger cadre.

On August 25, 2009 Britain's Channel 4 broadcast what it claimed to be footage of government soldiers executing eight men at point-blank range. The trophy footage allegedly taken by a Sri Lankan soldier and then handed over to the exiled journalist for Democracy in Sri Lanka group, has been verified by a UN panel as being authentic and rejected by the Sri Lankan government as a 'fabrication'. On October 31, 2013 Channel 4 released another video showing government forces arresting prominent LTTE cadre and 'Tiger propagandist' Isaipriya. The video cast doubts over the military claim that she had died in the battle, instead suggesting the

woman was captured and summarily executed.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that a free and independent press is a crucial component of democratic accountability. If "war is merely the continuation of *politik* by other means", and if it is a "natural" (albeit, extreme) "expression of policy" then Fourth Estate media scrutiny must extend to conduct in armed conflict. This accountability is arguably even more important in asymmetrical and protracted conflicts where the boundaries of war and peace blur.

Within this context, the news media must be seen as vital component of the *politik* of war, where the reliability of the information provided by the media becomes crucial in the public decision making process that determines public support or opposition for a given conflict. If the public's ability to make informed decisions is based on the quality and veracity of information it has access to, then the need for a well-rounded media narrative is apparent.

Considering the complexity of armed conflict, the possibility of reaching a transcendental truth is perhaps as unlikely as terminating all conflict, but a pragmatic truth offered by the news media allows for better, if not complete, understanding of the nature of conflict, and perhaps in more practical and pragmatic terms, accountability in such times of extraordinary violence. As Friedrich Nietzsche argued if, "there is only a perspective 'seeing', only a perspective 'knowing' and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes we use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity' be (Owen, 1995).

Technological advancements that have enabled a bird's eye view of the conflict via satellite imagery, coupled with the frontline images of conflict captured on portable devices such as mobile phone by those involved in the battle, offer a kind of 'seeing' that is unparalleled in the history of conflict reportage.

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[2]The footage was made available via YouTube in May 2009

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