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ANALYSING THE MEDIA IMPACT ON MILITARY OPERATIONS:
THE CASE STUDIES OF THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA AND NIGERIA.

Adedoyin J. Omede

ABSTRACT

The media has over time become an essential mechanism in making available reliable, objective and diverse information about the conduct and management of the business of governance. This is so because the media plays an important role in educating, informing and enlightening the public about government activities apart from its most important role as the fourth estate of the realm. Paradoxically, this function of the media is also in contradistinction to the very essence of national security because of its characteristic and media leakages, which often endanger military operations irrespective of the status of the country, be it a developed country like the United States of America or an emerging democratic entity like Nigeria. Undoubtedly, one cannot ignore the fact that the role of the media involves mostly, the shaping of public opinion and in the process ensure that decision makers become accountable to the public. In the same vein, the point cannot also be overstressed that the media have in recent times, carried out their functions without regard for national security and defense considerations. This study is therefore, an examination of the impact of the mass media on military operations in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan (by the American military) and in the Niger-Delta, Liberia and Cameroon (by the Nigerian armed forces).

INTRODUCTION

The mass media over the past three decades have grown in leaps and bounds. The radio, television and the print media such as newspapers and magazines have continued to shape the way the public perceives government policy and world events. More importantly, with the advent of cable news and

satellite transmission, military operations hitherto conducted under secrecy and surprise are fast becoming an open secret in countries around the world. To this end, the mass media industry has become a global communication network, which offers access to seemingly infinite information. Consequently, the power of the media to define and interpret events and set the context in which public discussion is carried out has become more intense and immense in contemporary times (Hague and Loader, 1999: 42 - 47).

Media coverage of military operations such as the Vietnam war, the Iran contra affair, the Iran- Iraqi war, the Gulf war (1991), the Nigerian civil war (1967 -1970), and the on-going American military operations in Iraq among others, were or have been turned to open sesame by war correspondents. What is more, the dominance of the media by few conglomerate owners such as Ted Turner of the Cable News Network (CNN), Raymond Dokpesi of African Independent Television (AIT) in Nigeria and few other individual media owners have created a situation in which news coverage is carried out in a manner geared towards the satisfaction of the commercial profit of its owners.

In addition, the small capacity for patience among reporters who have deadlines to meet in both broadcast and print media has often produced immediate solutions in cases where delay and deeper thoughts and analysis, would have been the preferable mode of behaviour. Furthermore, the quest for news by the "hungry public" and in particular by journalists who wish at all cost to unravel spectacular and dramatic stories with respect to the military and other issues of national and international importance, have created a situation whereby journalists not only scramble for news about military operations, but also go to the extreme to covet uncensored and

illegal information that is, news leaks about government policies and actions regarding military operations both within and outside the domestic polity of individual state.

From America to Britain, Russia, France, South Africa, Nigeria, Sierra-Leone and indeed all over the globe, journalists have imbibed the tradition and habit of sourcing information from both formal and informal contacts in order to foster action where action may be inadvisable or hasty and in certain instances, to speed the occurrence of events or battles that might better be delayed (Ripley and Slonick, 1989: 213).

No doubt, information is the fuel of democracy, especially in the society where the media plays a major role of educating, informing and enlightening the public about government activities. The media has in the course of time become an essential mechanism in making available reliable, objective and diverse information about the conduct and management of the business of governance. Consequently, the media has become as a matter of objective reality of man's existence, a centre of political action. Unfortunately, the very essence of national security is often violated by some media leakages. The secrecy and surprise associated with military establishments and their operations worldwide, was fast becoming eroded by globalisation, democracy and the freedom of speech and information; and more importantly, by the quest of the public to know the extent to which the government has utilized and committed taxpayers' money and national resources at any point in time.

To enhance our analysis and understanding of the impact of the media on military operations worldwide, the study not only examines some relevant literature on the issue, it also critically dissects the import of media reportage of the military

operations conducted by the United States in both Vietnam and Iraq. What is more, the media coverage of the Nigerian civil war and the Nigerian military's internal operations in Odi, Zaki Biam and the Niger Delta are also modestly examined. The highlights of the case studies though, is the analysis of how media reports can endanger both external and internal military operations irrespective of the status of the country, be it a developed country like the United States of America or an emerging democratic entity like Nigeria.

THE MODUS OPERANDI OF THE MASS MEDIA IN MILITARY OPERATIONS

The mass media has become a force to be reckoned with in both national and international events such as trade negotiations, at peace conferences and in war zones. The purpose of the omnipresence status of the media in almost all human endeavours are mostly "to shape news coverage and either to mobilize domestic support or to communicate directly with foreign leaders and the public" (Deese, 1999: 168).

The issue of availability of objective, reliable, and accurate news about military operations has become a subject of controversy in the contemporary times. This is so because government secrecy about military matters coupled with piece meal daily press briefing by military public relations experts as well as officially packaged news that lacked the dramatic trait required by the mass-media has created a vacuum in which news reporters, correspondents and even analysts resort to clandestine and unorthodox sources of news gathering. In order to enhance the news gathering ability in addition to disseminating news about government policies and activities

to the public, the media (journalists) have more or less resorted to various means (legal and illegal methods), through which their objectives are ultimately realized.

To achieve the quest for meeting deadlines and simultaneously provide dramatic but vibrant news needed to re-shape government policies, the media employ a host of techniques such as news scooping from unofficial sources and then releasing the information as a news item before government has a chance to verify or carry out such policies. The media has also become an unconscious victim of control leaks - a system characterized by the provision of unconfirmed information by government officials as story of the day. Sometimes, officials also use unauthorized channels to send messages. The practice of giving unconfirmed information is quite common among the military that are especially skilful in leaking information that will heighten for example the prospect of getting their budget requests (Ripley and Slonick, 1989:225).

Inadvertently, media coverage of military operations is often two-edge pronged having both its merits and demerits. Leakages before the confirmation of actual military activities in most instances create greater levels of accountability on the part of military decision makers. In other cases, leakages create less confidence in leadership and oftentimes expose the military to the evaporation of public support and the opening up of the very soul of the military in terms of tactics, strategies, weapon systems, force deployments and structure to unnecessary public scrutiny and worse of all, to enemy's knowledge. The impact of the media on military operations for

the purpose of changing government policies is well illustrated by what happened during the Gulf crisis in 1991. During the Persian Gulf crisis of 1990 leading to the war against Iraq in 1991, both the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and the United States officials used the Cable News Network (CNN) as (Deese, 1999:168):

Something of a diplomatic black channel, sending complex signals to each other and to their respective publics at the same time. In 1992, television images of starvation in Somalia helped mobilize an international humanitarian intervention led by a large U.S. military presence. Among the most vivid scene from that operation was one in, which startled marines in war paint hit beaches already secured by television news crews to record the landing.

The impact of these examples on both the Iraqis and American public was that intense media coverage makes press management a must for modern policy makers. In addition, it brought to the fore the domestic relevance of a broader range of foreign policy issues from trade and commerce, the environment, human rights and war.

In their analysis of the media as a factor in international politics, Spanier and Uslamer (1989: 224-227) opined that essentially, the media plays a critical role in transmitting information to the public. The media has impacted immensely on public opinion. This is aside from the effect of the media as a vehicle for presenting alternative views of public officials to the public. The media seeks to affect public opinion and has to a large extent, become a major factor in how people perceive international politics. Hence, both news commentary on television, and stories depicting alternative policies in a positive light could and has indeed, changed public opinion immensely.

Historically, the media has played a major role in endangering military operations particularly in the Northern Hemisphere. For instance, during the Second World War precisely in December 1941 when the United States was forced into war against Germany and Japan, almost immediately the U.S. government instituted media programmes that is, short wave broadcasts to blunt the impact of German propaganda. The programme included the establishment of a new U.S. media service called the Voice Of America (VOA), which debuted in 1942 (just like the Radio 212 purportedly owned by the Germans but was actually owned by the U.S. Army's Psychological warfare branch), made broadcasts about air raids and battles that were kept secret by the Nazi high Command (Dominick, Sherman and Copeland, 1996:253).

The real purposes of the VOA and Radio 212 was to cause confusion and dissension in enemy military ranks. On one occasion through its leakage policy, the two radio stations (VOA and Radio 212) misdirected a convoy of German trucks behind Allied lines where they were captured. It is important to note that though most of the clandestine stations vanished when the war ended yet, other stations were created in their stead. In 1952 for example, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was created to replace the VOA. However, the USIA was reoriented and restructured to intensified propaganda and act as psychological deterrents to communism (Dominick, Sherman and Copeland, 1996:253).

In the Middle East, the media had also been known to endanger military operations especially in the 1970s to 80s.

The operations of clandestine stations also helped surge the magnitude of leakages in military operations. For example, when the Iran – Iraq war broke out (Dominick, Sherman and Copeland, 1996:258):

The Iraqis operated the clandestine Al-Iraq Voice of Al-Qadisiyah designed to reach dissident Arabs in Iran. The Iranians on their part also sponsored a clandestine radio that broadcast to Iraq – The Voice of the Iraqi Islamic Revolution. Clandestine stations also cropped up during the 1991 Gulf war.

The on-going discussion logically brings to the fore a newer dimension to the impact of media on military operations. The activities of government and state leaders in providing information leakages about opponents or enemies is a phenomenon fast becoming a “recurring decimal” among states within the international system. It would therefore not amount to an overstatement to assert that government ownership of media organizations as well as its relationship with private media outfits have created a backlash on government itself.

The erstwhile strategy of propaganda and the deliberate “dropping of information about the other side” typical of the cold-war era or in particular crisis situation (like the Gulf in 1991) but with emphasis on seeking to maintain the status quo, ensure a favourable balance of power; and above all, ensure a preponderance of power over others. Unfortunately, with the advancement in technological innovations, the magnitude of news sourcing and the media's ability to provide news (at all cost and by whatever means) to the public, has assumed astronomical and unimaginable proportions.

The impact of the media on military operations in contemporary times is further enhanced by the emergence of

global electronic communication networks, which make instantaneous and dramatic coverage of events possible from almost anywhere on planet. The new wave of technology has diminished to a large extent the secrecy and officialdom often associated with the grey world of threats, promises, wars, espionage and diplomacy (Cutler, 1984:113)(Larson, 1988:283).

The impact of technology on media leakage of military operations has become so intense due to speed and portability of communication equipment, combined with a public fascination for live, saturation events coverage. These factors have forced officials to make calculations based on the publicity surrounding their actions. The policy options that may be adopted by policy makers as a result of media impact are in most cases "hasty, ill-conceived, damaging to future options, or tempered by domestic opinion rather than long term state interests (Deese, 1999:171). Another area of relevance in terms of technology is Internet leakage. The Internet is a veritable source providing direct channel to the population over the years and has become a mechanism for sending unfiltered messages to the public (Hague and Loader, 1999:50).

In spite of the media's impact on providing information to the public, the fact has also been established that majority of such information are not backed by fact and are in most instances acquired from illegal channels to manipulate and cause confusion among the populace. To back this assertion, Ripley and Slonick (1989:200) quoting Walter Lippman explained the many implications associated with unauthorized information when they opined that:

Men who have lost their grip upon the relevant facts of their environment are the inevitable victims of agitation and propaganda. The quack, the charlatan, the jingoist, and the terrorist can flourish, only where the audience is deprived of independent access to information. But where all news come as second-hand, where all the testimony is uncertain, men cease to respond to truths, and respond simply to opinions. The environment in which they act is not realities themselves, but the pseudo -environments of reports, rumours, and guesses. The whole reference of thought comes to be what somebody asserts, and not what actually is.

HOW THE MASS MEDIA CAN ENDANGER MILITARY OPERATIONS: THE CASE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

The United States of America is one of the world's major countries that had engaged (and is still involved) in various types of overt and covert military operations world - wide. The country is also a democratic state in which freedom of speech and expression is not only enshrined in the constitution but is also practised in reality to a large extent. The point of convergence of keeping official silence or secrecy about military operations have become blurred by the freedom of the media to publish issues presumed to impact on the lives of the mass of the people.

Experiences of how the media has shaped public opinion, peoples' perception and even government actions and foreign policy objectives in the United States abound. From Vietnam to Korea, Grenada, Iraq, Somalia and others, the Americans are involved in one military operation or the other. A major thrust of these operations however, is the crusade to enshrine the now popular "American Democratic Global Agenda."

The question that keeps recurring in any analysis of media impact on military operations is if democracy is what the United States seeks to enshrine through engaging in overt or covert military operations to depose or remove despotic or

errant regimes, then, how can one reconcile the quest for secrecy in these operations with the democratic tenet of freedom of speech upheld by the U.S media, but with particular regards to military operations? To answer this question, we shall attempt an analysis of certain military operations undertaken by the U.S. and how the media had impacted on such operations.

The Vietnam War was the first in the series of the United States baptism of fire into the enormous role the media has found itself as the watchdog of government action and inaction. The Vietnam experiment saw the United States' deploying troops and materials to Vietnam. The conduct of the war witnessed certain military actions that were considered inhuman, abnormal and absurd. The slaughtering and massacre of a whole village, counter-intelligence activities by double agents, as well as raping of women and children and others.

To limit the inhuman treatment of non-combatants and prisoners of war held by the American troops, the American media embarked on an intense television and radio broadcast across the United States. The intense media coverage of the war eventually led to the American withdrawal from Vietnam. The media war against the US military operations in Vietnam also led to a conviction among policy officials in the Defence Department and State Department that "the U.S. military defeat and eventual withdrawal from Vietnam resulted, in part, from critical media coverage of battlefield activities as well as, the sympathetic coverage of opposition to government policies at home" (Bennet, in Deese, 1999:168).

In another dimension, the media also played a critical role in shattering the pre-Vietnam consensus and support for the

government among the public. In fact, public support declined more precipitously for the war in Vietnam in no small part because (Spanier and Uslaner, 1989:223):

The fighting was brought home to Americans' living rooms every night. The violence, including massacres such as that in My Lai, turned many viewers against the war. As with Vietnam, the constant media exposures served to highlight the President's inability to resolve the issue.

The military operation in Vietnam affected the psyche of the American people through media broadcasts such as television, radio wire telecast, and others. What is more, the deployment of war correspondents to Vietnam also resulted in situations whereby journalists that is, war reporters interacted with both the combatants and non-combatants on both sides of the divide. The rapport so generated enabled the people to express their minds on issues of atrocities and human rights abuses committed by U.S troops. The beauty of such newsgathering was the transmission of information through wire and cable to media headquarters in the United States.

The government on its part considered publications emanating from such underground news scoop as leakages because the reporters even though they considered themselves as impartial observers, yet, the point could be advanced that the correspondents never discussed the authenticity of the information with the American government. Arguably, leakages of this sort are published in anticipation to pre-empt official reaction during crisis most especially when the reporters have not been able to interview their usual sources

before filing a story (Bennet, 1999:178).

During the Gulf crisis in 1991, the media operated on an entirely different level than the Vietnam period. The emergence of global economic communication networks makes instantaneous and dramatic coverage of events possible from virtually every nook and cranny of the earth. With the use of high tech gadgets like video-phone and video-wire making possible live coverage from war zones, the issue of leakages has thus become diminished, as almost all the operations were brought to public attention, even, when the planning for such operations were at their preliminary stages (Deese, 1999:170).

In order to forestall a repeat of the media impact as witnessed during the Vietnam period and at the same time minimize leakages, the U.S Army Public Relations Department embarked on its own opinion shaping mechanisms through a combination of (Bennet: 169):

Persuasive messages with little competition or rebuttal delivered on a daily basis to the living rooms of the United States citizens through a mix of smoothly run daily press-briefings coordinated between Washington and Dhahran, officially guided press-pool tours to approved news sites, and well-produced daily video handouts.

MEDIA IMPACT ON MILITARY OPERATIONS: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

A classical analysis of the impact of the media on military operations in Nigeria can best be analysed within the framework of the activities of the Directorate of Propaganda which was the media wing of the Biafran Army during the 1967 – 1970 civil war in Nigeria. Massive massacres of the Igbos residing in Northern Nigeria precipitated a civil war, which

pitched the Federal Republic of Nigeria against the secessionists of the Biafran Republic, especially the Igbos.

The declaration of independence by Biafra on May 30, 1967 and the subsequent attempt to attract world attention to the plight of the Igbo and the alleged genocide perpetuated by the Federal Government of Nigeria, led the Biafrans to utilize extensively the media not only to internationalise the conflict but also, to seek diplomatic recognition for its cause and above all, limit the operations of a "total war" declared against it (Biafra) by the Federal Government.

To achieve its aims, the Biafran Directorate of Propaganda in conjunction with a Geneva public relations firm - Mark Press News Feature Services, embarked on a grand design, which orchestrated the fear of genocide, a strategy intended to (Onu, in, Stremlau, 1977:113):

Confirm and instil in the public's mind that nothing short of a sovereign Biafra could guarantee security of life and property... it (Biafra) terrorized the home public and alarmed and alerted the world for it conjured up an image of the Nazi regime and its entire Jewish victims.

The impact of the Biafran propaganda on the Federal Government operations during the civil war was not only extensive, but also had far reaching consequences not only on how the civil war was conducted by the Federal Army, but also impacted enormously on how the world reacted to the situation in Nigeria then. Some of the media impact on the military operations during the Nigerian civil war, are listed in the following paragraphs:

The Biafran Directorate of Propaganda developed and carried stories of atrocities that accused Federal troops among other things of systematically desecrating holy places and raping

Catholic Reverend Sisters. These stories received widespread press coverage in Europe and America and the propaganda's success was hailed as "unparalleled in the history of communications in modern societies" (Stremlau, 1977:115 - 116).

The propaganda also accomplished the task of reminding the outside world that it would be extremely difficult for the Biafran government to compromise its autonomy through negotiations with the Federal government. The media campaign also led to the mobilization of foreign support for an unconditional ceasefire and a reduction in arms sales to the Federal Government. It also encompassed a new quest for diplomatic recognition, which to the dismay of Nigeria and her allies, succeeded in disrupting African solidarity.

More importantly, the press coverage particularly the press Conferences held by the then Ivorien Head of State, Houphouet Boigny, drew the world's attention to the "inexplicable and culpable indifference of the whole world to the massacres which have been taking place in Biafra for more than ten months (African Scholar, 1968:10-13). Not only did the Biafran case become an international issue, it also provided a catalyst for public opinion and provided a new secular legitimacy for the church - led campaign on behalf of humanitarian intervention (Stremlau, 1977:139).

In terms of military operations, the Federal side headed by General Yakubu Gowon (rtd) found itself under intense international media searchlight. By implication, Gowon

became disoriented and tolerated a surprising degree of decentralization in military operations, a situation that would have been an anathema under normal circumstances. This decentralization, albeit confusion, amidst the top hierarchy of the Federal Army resulted in a situation whereby (Stremlau, 1977:44):

Divisional commanders not only made tactical decisions, but also behaved like feudal barons, quarrelling over supplies, attacking without prior consultations, and ignoring orders from Lagos. Gowon's style of leadership seemed to believe that if he ignored difficult problems long enough they would resolve themselves.

Conclusively, the media coverage of the Nigerian Civil War impacted tremendously on the Federal government's reaction to the Biafran "intransigence". First, the international attention drawn by the media reduced the intensity of the violence and the duration by which the Federal troops could carryout "total-war" and extensive collateral damage against symbolic infrastructure in Biafran held territories. This is why General Gowon claimed that Government attacks were mere "Police action" especially at the beginning. Again, the media focus had the effect of limiting the number of Western countries that could carryout arms sales in favour of Nigeria. Britain declined to sell arms to Nigeria, for a long time while the United States similarly rejected Nigeria's request to purchase arms (Stremlau, 1977:79).

The rejection to sell arms to Nigeria by the British and American authorities was what led General Gowon to purchase from the defunct Soviet Union a Squadron of twelve

(12) reconditioned MIG-17 fighters and another 29 trainers. The effect of the arms bought from Moscow proved to be “unsuitable for military conditions in Nigeria and as instrument of terror probably did more to consolidate Biafran resistance than to weaken it” (Stremlau, 1977:80).

Between 1970 when the war ended and 1979, Nigeria was ruled by an array of military governments up till 1979 when a civilian administration was enthroned. Between 1983 and 1999 however, the nation was administered by series of military rulers, until the present democratic dispensation took off in May 1999. The period under military rule witnessed an orgy of struggles between the Media and the military. Most of the issues of the day were characterized by corruption, poverty, inconsistent policies on transition to civil rule, and heightened level of mal-administration on the part of the military oligarchy.

Efforts by the media to change the psyche of the military towards adopting democratic principles of governance resulted in the print and electronic media featuring stories on issues of security and defence which in most cases infringed on operations conducted by the Nigerian military. The phenomenon of media coverage can be found in the publicity the media attracted to the May 16, 1981 Nigeria Cameroon border crises in, which five Nigerian soldiers were killed by Cameroonian gendarmes.

Government's slow response to the Cameroonian's intransigence was well highlighted by the media. The media acting as a vanguard but in conjunction with organised

pressure groups and political parties, called for a military action against Cameroon. Indeed, the mass media especially the newspapers were the most ardent advocates of the military opinion (Nweke, 1990: 407).

The attention of the mass media impacted also on the minds of Nigeria academics. For instance, Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi, a former Director General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) Lagos in reacting to the media analysis of the government lukewarm response to the Cameroonian attacks called for a total over-hauling of the Nigerian armed forces in order to make them (military) formidable and the best on the African continent (Omede, 2001:125).

To buttress his argument, Akinyemi asserted with special reference to the Cameroonian attacks that (New Nigerian, 1981:1):

Events on the continent are beginning to point at military might rather than moral suasion as the arbiter of intra African affairs... hence we (Nigeria) would be foolish not to make ourselves strong enough.

The vociferous critique and the wider publicity generated by the Nigerian mass media over the Cameroonian attacks in 1981, and those of September 1995 as well as the attacks of February and April 1999, led the Federal Government to demand an apology and compensation from Cameroon. The media pressure also led in a large part, to the deployment of Nigerian troops along the Nigerian - Cameroonian border. Specifically, during the heat of the 1994 hostilities with Cameroon, Commanders of military formations on the Nigerian side of the border were given directions to use their initiatives in mustering, men, arms, material and "quick-action" to counter further threats from Cameroon (Omede, 2001: 125 - 130).

In addition to the deployment of troops, the media attention also exposed the level of international third-party involvement in the covert military operations between Nigeria and Cameroon. The mass media for instance, continually during the period carried out news analysis, editorials and opinion write-ups about the French involvement in the Nigerian Cameroon crisis. For example the French deployment of troops that is, about thirty (30) crack paratroopers accompanied by a four – man military crew to Cameroon, was given a headline slot by “The Guardian” (The Guardian, 1994:1).

From the foregoing analysis, it is observable that the content analyses of the media coverage of the Cameroonian attacks on Nigeria brought to the fore, the inadequacies of the Federal Government albeit the armed forces in protecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Nigerian Federation. The media also focused on the lack of firmness, and indecisiveness in government foreign policy stance. The media went further to expose the inability of commanders of military formations around the nation's border areas to take action without unnecessary administrative delays.

Various international operations undertaken by the military particularly the Liberia and Sierra Leone peacekeeping operations received their own share of media coverage. The analyses of the various military activities such as tactics, logistic requirements, welfare and the weapons capability profile of the Nigerian military received a whole barrage of media attention. The intense media coverage had double impact on the military. On the one hand, media focus on the

inadequacies of the military had a trigger effect in which military planners sought remedies to observed problems in their field operations. On the other hand, media attention on the peace support operations like the Liberian case for instance, exposed to the rebel the various flaws in tactics, strategies and the weapons profile of the Nigerian-led ECOMOG troops. These undue exposures created great opportunities for the rebel groups such as the Charles Taylor-led NPFL, to embark on pre-emptive raids and surprise attacks against ECOMOG troops; and both military authorities and government found such media reports to be unpatriotic, dangerous and insensitive to the national interest, and regional stability and security.

The content analysis of the various media coverage (newspapers and magazines) particularly the African Guardian (1999; September 11 and 1992, September 20), The African Concord (1993, June 26 and 1990, June 25), The Daily Times (1992, October 30), and a host of other publications, attracted public attention to series of issues that eroded public support for the Liberian operation. Some of the media-focused issues that cropped into the peoples' psyche at the time centred on African Guardian (1999; September 11 and 1992, September 20), The African Concord (1993, June 26 and 1990, June 25):

- Nigeria's involvement in Liberia with special focus on the cordial relationship between the former Head of State General Babangida (rtd). and late President Samuel Doe of Liberia.

- The politics of Anglophone/Francophone divide among ECOWAS leaders.
- The changing of the ECOMOG mandate from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement.
- The catalogue of the impressive arsenal of the NPFL rebel forces as well as the analysis of the highly ambiguous ECOMOG artillery.
- The carnage and orgy of human massacres carried out by the rebel forces as well as the occasional reprisal attacks conducted by the ECOMOG soldiers.

In fact, media publicity over the capture, interrogation and the ultimate killing of Senegalese troops by the NPFL rebel group eventually led "to the withdrawal of the Senegalese Contingent from the ECOMOG peacekeeping operations in Liberia on June 14, 1992" (Omede, 2001: 194).

In addition to the foregoing, the media also drew public attention to the wastefulness of both human and financial resources. The expose carried out by the Financial Times of London (The African Guardian, 1992: 23) on the millions of dollars expended on the Liberian operation generated a lot of furore both at home (in Nigeria) and internationally on the issues of red-budgeting, extra-budgetary spending and the opportunity costs of such military spending. This notwithstanding, the media, (during the peace process in Liberia), also orchestrated to the whole world the positive contributions of the ECOMOG. Praises and accolades were poured on African Leaders and the Nigerian Leader in Particular. The media also commended various commanders and troops, who participated in the Liberia and Sierra-Leone military peace support operations. In short, the media turned

ECOMOG soldiers into heroes and saviours. The positive and the earlier critical review by the media not only boosted the morale of the military, it also led the armed forces to look inward and embark on series of reforms that will in future contribute to the effectiveness of role in ensuring the security of both Nigeria and other sister African nations.

The media effect on security operations embarked upon by the military since the inception of the present Obasanjo administration in 1999 has been intense and highly vociferous. The democratic space and accompanying press freedom and the fundamental right of every person to express and publish his opinion thereon, has brought the issue of media coverage of matters such as national security and defence to another level of controversy and antagonism. Perhaps one could reiterate that the new wave of democracy and the application of modern technology such as the Internet, e-mail, videophones and cell-phones are factors enhancing the greater focus on military operations in the country.

Various military operations in Nigeria between the period of 1999 -2003 like those of Odi, in Bayelsa state (1999); Zaki Biam in Benue state (2001); and the on- going joint military operations task force in the Niger Delta have attracted unparalleled media focus, which in turn has drawn the attention of the international community on a scale never before witnessed in the history of Nigeria.

The Zaki - Biam military operation in Benue state was portrayed by the media (newspapers and weekly magazines) as a reprisal attack on groups who killed soldiers on mission to the area; while the Odi operation in Bayelsa state in 1999, the Ohoror operation in Delta state (Operation Restore Hope) of 2004, the Odioma attacks in Bayelsa state of February 2004 were considered as combat operations against hostile enemies who constituted breaches to the nation's security and fledging

democracy (The News, February, 2004; NewsWatch, March 14, 2005). The point being made is that media coverage and analysis of the various operations undertaken by the military between 1999 and 2005 in Nigeria (The Tell, March 15, 2005); (Human Rights Watch, 2003); and (ThisDay, October 23, 2001) tend to be slanted against the government. The highhanded handling of civilians regarded as security breaches has impacted negatively on the military. People perceived the military as anti-people and the current level of civil-military relations in the country is at an all time low.

Apart from its coverage of military operations, the media had also turned its flashlight on militarily sensitive issues bordering on national security but which does not necessarily involve the deployment of troops. Examples of such media focus on such military related issues abound and include, the issue of the decadent state of military barracks around the country, welfare packages for members of the Nigeria armed forces, the issue of defence contracts and supply of logistic items for the military, the incidence of bomb explosion at the Ikeja cantonment on May 22, 2003 (The Tell, June 23, 2003) the controversy surrounding the payment of military Pensions in Nigeria (The Tell, July 26, 2004) the various media attacks on the person of the President, the Third-term agenda, as well as and the attempt by certain sections of the media to "continually destroy facts and misrepresent the present administration to the innocent public" (ThisDay, September 5, 2005).

The focus on these highly sensitive security issues by the Nigerian media has been described as an hallmark of a vibrant and often critical media sector which stands in the forefront of its "constitutional role of upholding the people's right to know and forcing public officials to be accountable to the electorate" (The Tell, September 20, 2004). In spite of its role as a watchdog, the media has also been criticized for its overly and

unnecessary criticisms of the government. Reuben Abati for instance, in his appraisal of the media since the new democratic dispensation in 1999 opined that some media practitioners have not come to terms with the reality that practising journalism within a democratic framework calls for a new rule of engagement requiring new techniques and different kinds of attitude (The Tell, September 20, 2004).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Attempt has been made in this study to examine the impact of the mass media on military operations as a phenomenon of interest in contemporary times. While one cannot doubt the role of the media in shaping public opinion and in the process ensure that decision makers become accountable to the public, the fact cannot also be overstressed that the media in recent times in some areas have carried out their functions without due regard for national security and defence considerations.

Military operations such as the ones conducted by the Americans in Vietnam and Iraq were exposed to unimaginable media barrage, which impacted both positively and negatively on the final outcome of such misadventure. What is more, the mass of the people are in most cases exposed to horrific photographs and other visual images that ultimately impact on their judgement either in favour of the government or the enemy forces. Most importantly, the surprise and secrecy hitherto associated with military operations have, due to advancement in technology become open sesame. As a matter of fact, it is difficult for any government to label any policy or operation as "national security". This is so because

information leakages, news-scoop and “guerrilla” sourcing for information have become the order of the day, but this development has to be watched in Nigeria given our level of development, and other factors. There are military statistics and activities that should not be exposed especially where these concern our relations with other countries.

Nigeria as a country is not spared the explosion and incursion into military operations. The analysis of the media impact on the Nigeria civil war, the Nigerian-Cameroon Border Crisis, as well as internal security operations in certain parts of the country such as Zaki Biam, Odi, and the Niger Delta have been highly covered by the media. Yet, we posit that the Nigerian media has in the past couple of years, expended much of its energy and resources on the negativities associated with military operations within the country. Other positive aspects of the people, the military and even the country should be highlighted. Consequently, one cannot but align with the view, which states that (Tell, 2004: 21):

If it is only stories of ethnic violence, religious mayhem, tribal conflicts that are pointed out in our newspapers and broadcast on our airwaves, while we down play tourism potentials, attractive national heritage sites, then, There is little doubt that our country would be seen as crisis-ridden, and bound to violence in most capitals of the world.

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