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Public Opinion and the Media in German Foreign Policy

Questions regarding the influence of media on public opinion and governments' foreign policy decisions are not new. These ponderings emerged during the early modern period and only increased in number as technology and education improved throughout the nineteenth century. In *Aussenpolitik im Medienzeitalter: vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, a collection of essays covering media and public opinion primarily in Germany, but also in Great Britain and the United States, the authors discuss the connections between public opinion, the media, and foreign policy from the nineteenth century to more recent times. The book has several stated purposes that it successfully fulfills, including analyzing the hypothesis that the media actually influenced policy responses at least indirectly and exploring the extent to which international relations have been affected by the media and public opinion since the late nineteenth century. The contributors' research explores these topics within the context of challenging the "Almond Lippman Consensus," which considers public opinion as unstable and thus unlikely to have a great influence on foreign policy.

The volume is divided into four sections. The first section considers the media's influence on foreign policy from the Crimean War to World War I. The second section covers the period from World War I to the end of World War II. The third analyzes media, public opinion, and foreign policy during the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s, while the final section does the same for the pe-

riod between the late 1960s and the post-Soviet era. Each of these sections includes chapters which cover a specific set of years or events that illuminate the changing nature of the interaction between media, public opinion, and the making of foreign policy decisions.

Following an introduction from Frank Bösch and Peter Hoeres that delineates the purpose of the study and offers a brief outline of media influence on government before the Crimean War, the collection begins with Rolf Ahmann's consideration of the press in nineteenth-century Great Britain. Because journalism's potential as a significant role player in foreign policy essentially began here, it is an apt beginning to the study, or any consideration of the possible influence of modern media. Ahmann's chapter focuses on the role news coverage of the Crimean War had in changing British public opinion, which in turn affected Great Britain's foreign policy. He concludes that British public opinion, relying on the national press for information, prompted the British government to change its stance from pro-war at the outset of the Crimean War to actively opposing increased British involvement in the region as the conflict itself progressed.

In Friedrich Kiessling's contribution, which continues part 1, he looks at the role of public opinion on parliamentary decisions in the long nineteenth century. He argues that European diplomatic observers in general believed that public opinion had a role in parliamentary

decisions, if only by creating a certain atmosphere or “mood” in which decisions were made. Kiessling contends, however, that diplomats went to great lengths to distance themselves from public opinion, often conducting negotiations secretly to prevent the appearance of public opinion dictating their actions. Diplomats instead wanted it to look like they directed public opinion with their decision making. This interest in keeping foreign policy negotiations a discreet endeavor, according to Kiessling, only increased as the public participated more in politics over the course of the nineteenth century.

The last chapter of part 1, from Andreas Rose, discusses the mass media’s role in the public relations between Great Britain and Germany in the years immediately preceding World War I. This contribution focuses on the reactions of media and public opinion to the naval race, which had created considerable tension between the British and German governments. While some officials, such as Bernhard von Bülow, tried to calm the war hysteria, journalists and political lobbyists in favor of naval expansion reinforced the imagery of the imminent danger posed by the other country. Attempts by von Bülow to calm tensions through interviews with British journalists failed to work because the British press and the public viewed such interviews as propaganda rather than genuine efforts at understanding. At the same time, Rose points out, the German press used the British press’s anti-German publications to justify the build up of the German navy. Thus it was the interaction between the British and German presses and publics that created much of the tension in the years immediately before the outbreak of World War I.

The second section of the book looks at the era from World War I to the end World War II. This part begins with Marcus König and Sönke Neitzel’s exploration of the mass media’s role in the German navy’s submarine warfare campaign during World War I. According to the two authors, the press was an important player in this aspect of the war due to its influential role in formulating public opinion. They argue that avid newspaper readers like Kaiser Wilhelm II and others in government believed that the press reflected public opinion and therefore thought that the German public would not accept any sort of compromise in relation to submarine warfare. König and Neitzel contend that the supporters of a continuation of unrestricted submarine warfare used the press as a propaganda tool to make it appear that public opinion was in firm support of the government maintaining an unaltered course. When government officials tried to rid themselves of this pressure from the media, the au-

thors conclude, they ultimately failed and remained on a disastrous course in terms of naval warfare and foreign policy.

Karl Heinrich Pohl’s contribution traces the political career of German foreign minister Gustav Stresemann within the Weimar Republic. Pohl shows that despite Stresemann’s past as a journalist and editor, he had little success in influencing or containing those in the German media opposed to his policies. He had some support from the moderate journals, but the more extreme left- and right-wing newspapers ardently opposed his aggressive foreign policy, which culminated in the Locarno Treaty. Ultimately, according to Pohl, Stresemann proved more than capable as a media-managing politician. This did not, however, prevent the German media’s criticism from affecting his foreign policy, as he had to conduct the successful negotiations for the Locarno Treaty in secret to keep the media and public opinion from openly forcing him to change his view. Once the treaty was announced, however, the German press embraced it and Stresemann’s actions. Thus there was, in the end, mutual satisfaction between Stresemann and the German press regarding his foreign policy. This success came over time as Stresemann learned to guide the press with the government’s Press Bureau and Wolff’s Telegraph Bureau, the news agency which held a monopoly on information from the German government.

In the final chapter of part 2, Bernd Söseemann examines the Nazi government’s use of the German press as a propagandic tool to influence German public opinion in regards to Nazi foreign policy. According to Söseemann, the Nazi government tried to promote the concepts of peace and a “New Europe,” using media propaganda not only to influence its domestic public but also to garner support from foreign publics. Before the war, the government wanted the press to focus on Germany’s peace efforts, while during the war it desired a focus on the benefits of a Nazi-dominated “New Europe” that it hoped would gain both domestic and foreign support. Despite their best efforts, however, the Nazis could not control the press with their own propaganda and thus the public received other interpretations of Nazi foreign policy and not just the image portrayed by the Ministry of Propaganda.

Beginning with an essay from Hermann Wentker, the third part of the volume considers the role of the media in foreign policy during the early decades of the Cold War. Wentker argues in his chapter that the SED, the ruling Communist Party of East Germany, had such significant

control over foreign policy that the public alone could not shape those decisions. Although it was not influenced by its own public, however, Wentker contends that the East German government was heavily swayed by foreign publics and presses, especially those of West Germany. Wentker discusses this situation in the context of peace processes occurring between the West and East German governments during the Cold War. The East German government, Wentker concludes, ultimately sought legitimacy for its rule from its own public through foreign media, but this strategy met with little success since it could not heavily influence the foreign press or publics.

In the next chapter of part 3, Jurgen Dinkel looks at the Non-Aligned States' attempt to create their own news pool in order to promote a better image of those countries at the international level. According to the author, the Non-Aligned States of Asia and Africa needed their own news information sources in order to counter the negative portrayal of those postcolonial states by the Western media, which focused on corruption, revolution, and violence. The governments of the Non-Aligned States contended that this view was incorrect and prevented big business and others from wanting to invest there. Ultimately this attempt to create a Non-Aligned news pool independent of Western agencies failed, according to Dinkel, due to the influence of foreign and domestic politicians interested in maintaining the dominance of Western news agencies over what information the media delivered in those areas.

The final essay of part 3, from Ariane Leendertz, considers the effects of the media on the changing nature of transatlantic relations during the 1970s. Here, the author considers the shift in US foreign policy following events such as the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, both of which helped lead to a "crisis of confidence" that prompted an altered relationship between the United States and Western Europe. The perceived decline in US confidence and power, Leendertz argues, impelled Europe to assert more independence in terms of foreign policy. In this process, the media played a significant role in influencing and displaying public opinion in both the United States and in Europe by challenging governmental control over the information provided.

Part 4 begins with Peter Hoeres's discussion of the media's influence on the debate over nuclear weapons during the 1960s. The position of Germany in these conversations was important due to its location between East and West in Europe. The German media, according to Hoeres, played a significant role in educating the public

about key aspects of the nuclear debate, which in turn influenced how the public viewed those discussions. Ultimately, he concludes that the public played a role in preventing the West German government and its allies from acting freely. This involvement, however, did not determine diplomatic negotiations, which the media and the politicians agreed needed to be done in secret without public interference.

Tim Geiger's essay considers the effect of public street demonstrations on foreign policy decisions in the Federal Republic of Germany. To do this, Geiger traces the increase in the importance of the peace movement in the Federal Republic as a consequence of concern about NATO's Double-Track Decision. The decision, dating from December 12, 1979, stipulated that NATO would place mid-range and ground-based ballistic missiles in Western Europe if attempts to negotiate an agreement with the Soviet Union to reduce the number of intermediate nuclear missiles within Europe failed. This decision prompted a large-scale movement against nuclear armament in West Germany. When NATO first conceived of this plan, according to Geiger, street protests led by the peace movement had little influence on the federal government's foreign policy decisions. In the medium and long term, however, the media, in cooperation with the peace movement, forced government leaders to defend their decisions in a way they never had to before.

Manfred Görtemaker's chapter in part 4 discusses the role of the media in the new "Berlin Republic" following the reunification of Germany. Görtemaker contends that in the new environment of postunification Germany, the public and the media were more aware of their role in foreign policy, in particular the effect polls could have on policy decisions. The foreign policy of the "Berlin Republic," according to Görtemaker, remained the same as it was during the Bonn Republic. He demonstrates this continuity by analyzing the public and media's responses to potential military intervention during the Balkan wars, following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and with respect to NATO's involvement in Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In these contexts there was considerable doubt in Germany about whether the military's involvement was necessary, which in turn limited the government's ability to send troops if it had wanted to. Eventually, however, the government's hesitancy to act with military force in the given situations aligned with public opinion as illustrated in polls. Thus the press, with their reporting on the climate of opinion, created an environment in which public opinion could and did influence the

German government to be more passive.

The final contribution in part 4, and the volume as a whole, comes from Henrike Viehrig. Here, the author looks at the “CNN Effect” and its role in German foreign policy decision making. Viehrig argues that public opinion and the media do not have a definitive role in the future of German foreign policy because public opinion itself cannot decide if it should actually have a role in foreign policy decision making. At the same time, however, the German government is more likely to adhere to the wishes of public opinion in shorter-term, less critical situations. Drawing on approaches from political science to analyze the survey data available, however, Viehrig concludes that despite an increase of coverage of foreign policy situations, the media also has not had a decisive effect on short-term foreign policy formulation.

Any attempt to analyze the effects of public opinion and/or the media on a government’s foreign policy is fraught with problems, such as how to assess what the public actually is thinking as a whole or how seriously a government takes the media’s publications. In this work, however, the authors’ contributions and the selection of examples provided offer compelling arguments about when and where the media and public opinion can and will influence governments’ foreign policy decisions. The inclusion of social scientific techniques and data sources only serves to emphasize the strength of these contentions. This is true especially in the sections that cover the more recent events of the last two decades. Ultimately the work is an intriguing and useful addition to the historical literature regarding the influence public opinion and the media have on government foreign policy.

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