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HOW MEDIA INFLUENCES FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS IN GLOBAL POWER STRUGGLES

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Media significantly shapes foreign policy by influencing how states interpret political events and international crises. During the Arab Spring, Western coverage framed the uprisings as democratic movements, encouraging foreign governments to support opposition groups in Egypt, Libya, and Syria. In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Western media largely emphasizes Russian aggression, while Russian outlets highlight NATO expansion as the primary threat, creating two competing geopolitical narratives that guide diplomatic and military decisions. The 2016 U.S. election demonstrated the strategic use of digital media, where Russian-linked actors employed fake accounts, bots, and targeted disinformation to polarize voters and influence political outcomes. Across these cases, media functions as an active instrument that shapes public opinion, legitimizes state actions, and impacts international decision-making.

Keywords: Strategic Narratives; Foreign Policy; Media Influence; Soft Power; Geopolitical Communication; Disinformation; Propaganda; Cyber Warfare.

Introduction. Media functions as a strategic instrument shaping the foreign policies of major states. Both traditional and digital platforms are employed by governments and international organizations to influence public opinion, justify policy decisions, and steer diplomatic relations. Social media facilitates real-time narrative control, whereas traditional media continues to frame events and set agendas, thereby shaping global perceptions. The representation of crises, such as the Arab Spring or the Russia-Ukraine conflict, significantly informs international responses and military assistance. Moreover, ethical challenges, including censorship, propaganda, and disinformation, affect the integrity of international reporting. This study examines media's role in foreign policy through agenda-setting, framing, and soft power, drawing on case studies such as the Russia-Ukraine war and US-China relations [1; 15].

The Role of Media in Foreign Policy. The media influences political and public agendas by publicizing specific events and presenting them via security, human rights, and economic lenses. Western media portrayed the Arab Spring as a democratic movement, creating international support for opposition groups, whereas regional state-controlled channels depicted it as foreign-instigated destabilization. In the Russia-Ukraine war, Western media emphasizes Russian aggressiveness, while Russian outlets portray NATO expansion as a security danger. Social media amplify these effects by disseminating propaganda, misinformation, and manipulated content, influencing public opinion, diplomatic reactions, and foreign policy decisions. By dominating narratives, media has soft power, influencing how governments, international actors, and the general public view and respond to global crises.

Agenda-Setting and Framing. The media decides which topics receive political and public attention by emphasizing specific occurrences and presenting them via lenses like security, human rights, and economic effect. Western media coverage of the Arab Spring portrayed the protests as democratic movements, resulting in worldwide backing for opposition groups, whilst state-controlled regional outlets portrayed the same events as foreign-instigated destabilization, affecting how governments responded. In the Russia-Ukraine war, Western media highlights Russian aggressiveness and abuses of sovereignty, whereas Russian outlets portray NATO expansion as a security concern, justifying military participation. These consequences are amplified by social media's rapid dissemination of pro-

paganda, disinformation, and manipulated content, which shapes domestic and international views, influences public opinion, and has a direct impact on foreign policy decisions. The use of agenda-setting and framing in both traditional and digital media reveals the strategic importance of information in influencing political goals and determining global crisis responses. [19]

The Role of Digital Media and Cyber Warfare. Digital media has evolved as a critical tool in modern information and cyber wars, serving as both a strategic communication platform and a vehicle for influence. States, intelligence agencies, political organizations, and non-state actors are increasingly using platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram to spread propaganda, rally public support, and undercut rivals. Unlike traditional media, which relies on editorial oversight and fact-checking, social media allows for quick, unfiltered information transmission, often circumventing verification and accountability procedures. The 2016 US presidential election demonstrates this phenomena, as Russia-linked entities used coordinated networks of bots, phony accounts, and targeted adverts to distort public perception, polarize voters, and disrupt democratic processes. Similar techniques were used during the Syrian Civil War, when internet media helped recruit troops, spread misinformation, and impacted international diplomatic positions. The speed, reach, and opacity of social media magnify the strategic potential of digital information operations, transforming online spaces into geopolitical battlegrounds and highlighting the growing convergence of technology, politics, and global security.

Ethical Challenges in International Journalism. Journalists reporting on international conflicts encounter a complex array of ethical challenges, including bias, censorship, propaganda, misinformation, and threats to personal safety. Investigative journalism that uncovers governmental abuses, war crimes, human rights violations, or civilian suffering is crucial for transparency and global accounttability, yet it frequently faces political manipulation or suppression. Governments and military authorities often seek to control narratives to maintain legitimacy or strategic advantage, imposing restrictive regulations, surveillance, or legal threats that limit reporters' autonomy. Misinformation, whether deliberate or accidental, can escalate conflicts, influence foreign policy, provoke military action, or mislead both domestic and international audiences. Embedded journalism, where reporters operate alongside armed forces, creates additional ethical tension: while granting access to operational insights, it risks producing narratives that favor the military perspective, underrepresent civilian harm, and compromise impartiality. Furthermore, digital platforms amplify the ethical stakes by accelerating the spread of unverified content, deepfakes, and propaganda, challenging journalists to maintain accuracy and credibility. Addressing these challenges requires robust ethical standards, verification protocols, professional independence, and institutional accountability to ensure that international journalism contributes responsibly to informed public discourse and evidence-based decision-making in global conflict contexts. while granting access to operational insights, it risks producing narratives that favor the military perspective, underrepresent civilian harm, and compromise impartiality. Furthermore, digital platforms amplify the ethical stakes by accelerating the spread of unverified content, deepfakes, and propaganda, challenging journalists to maintain accuracy and credibility. Addressing these challenges requires robust ethical standards, verification protocols, professional independence, and institutional accountability to ensure that international journalism contributes responsibly to informed public discourse and evidence-based decision-making in global conflict contexts. [18]

Facts on Media's Role in Foreign Policy. The Arab Spring demonstrates how media framing shapes international responses. Western media characterized the uprisings as democratic movements, prompting sanctions, political backing, and military action, whereas regional state-controlled media viewed them as foreign-initiated destabilization. The Russia-Ukraine war displays the media as a battlefield, with Western media stressing Russian aggression and Russian outlets presenting NATO expansion as a security danger, influencing domestic and international policy. Social media amplify these impacts by rapidly disseminating propaganda, misinformation, and altered content. The 2016 US presidential election demonstrates the use of digital platforms for geopolitical influence, with Russian-affiliated actors using bots, trolls, and targeted information to polarize voters, weaken trust in democratic institutions, and manipulate public opinion.

Arab Spring and How Media Showed It. The Arab Spring was an example of how media framing affects global politics. Western media framed the uprisings as legitimate democratic revolutions cente-

red on citizen mobilization, human rights, and authoritarian repression. The interpretation of the movements was compatible with Western normative values and thus gave rise to significant public pressure on governments to act in their favor. Consequently, such states such as the US, UK and France adopted measures which included diplomatic denunciation of regimes, sanctions and – in the case of Libya- direct military occupations under the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

Simultaneously, regional and state-controlled media in states like Syria as well as Egypt (prior to 2011) and Saudi Arabia offered a contrasting account: the narratives put forth suggested the uprisings were foreign-designed campaigns for destabilization aimed at weakening regional states. These conflicting accounts in the Middle East created friends and foes and defined which governments supported and opposed intervention. Therefore, the Arab Spring illustrates how the media can internationalize internal protests, affect foreign policy decision-making, and modify geopolitical alignments [16].

Media War in Russia-Ukraine Conflict. The information environment serves as a parallel battlefield in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, a clear example of this. Russia is often portrayed as an aggressor by Western media that disrupts international law and continental stability. The framework supports measures like sanctions, military aid to Kyiv, and increasing NATO's presence in Eastern Europe. Western news reports on war crimes, civilian suffering and Russia's strategic goal help ensure ongoing domestic and foreign support for long-term funding for Ukraine.

In contrast, Russia's state media have framed the conflict in terms of NATO encirclement, claims to historic territory, defense of Russian-speaking people, and the need to limit Western geopolitical encroachment. This story helps the Kremlin to defend its military actions and to mobilize the domestic public for a long war. Through its propaganda, Russian media also delegitimizes the Western institutions by presenting the war as part of the struggle against the U.S. hegemonic order.

Social media further intensifies this information war. Claims of the battlefield misinformation, deepfake videos, and emotionally manipulative content got spread through channels, anonymous accounts and more. These constantly updating real-time narratives change diplomatic thinking, global public opinion, and how non-aligned states like India, Brazil, and South Africa position themselves [5; 22].

U.S. Elections 2016 - Russian Social Media Influence. During 2016 The 2016 U.S. presidential election marks a tipping point in the use of digital media as a geopolitical tool. Russian-affiliated groups, including the Internet Research Agency (IRA) used coordinated networks of bots, trolls, and fake news websites to infiltrate American online spaces. The aim was to discredit the electoral process, while supporting one candidate and undermining faith in democracy, which should ideally bring about a modus vivendi among rivals.

Through algorithmic recommendation systems on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, these actors exploited divisive content to manipulate voter emotions by spreading polarising content related to race, immigration, security and political corruption. Tools for targeted advertising facilitated foreign actors to micro-target American voters through propaganda suited to their beliefs, creating echo chambers that fostered extremism and inhibited cross-political discussion. [12].

The Mueller investigation and subsequent congressional reports found these operations to be a coordinated foreign policy effort to influence U.S. politics. The incident showed how democracies are susceptible to technological manipulation while digital platforms such as social media now function as sites of international war.

Conclusion. Media has a big hand in forming what people think about things. It steers political choices and even affects how countries deal with each other. Both old school outlets and online ones use it like a tool for strategy. Leaders in politics and whole governments grab hold of media to push their stories forward. They build up backing at home and spread their reach around the world. Still, all this fake news and twisted info keeps spreading fast. That includes stuff from governments controlling the message and even deepfakes made by AI. These things really hurt the honesty in journalism and make folks doubt what they hear. Tech for talking to each other changes so quick these days. It gets harder and harder to tell real facts from lies. So media smarts turns into something everyone needs, from regular people to those making rules. We have to push for media places to own up to what they do. They need clear ways of working and sticking to right ways of reporting. That helps keep open

talks in democracy going strong. It keeps crowds in the know and lets decisions come from solid proof on the world stage.

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STRATEJİ NƏQLLƏR: MEDİANİN QLOBAL GÜCLƏRİN XARİCİ SİYASƏT QƏRARLARINA TƏSİRİ

Media dövlətlərin siyasi prosesləri və beynəlxalq hadisələri necə dəyərləndirdiyinə birbaşa təsir göstərir. Ərəb Baharı zamanı Qərb mediası hərəkatları demokratik mübarizə kimi təqdim etdiyindən bir çox dövlətlər Misir, Liviya və Suriyada müxalifətə dəstək verdi. Rusiya–Ukrayna müharibəsində Qərb mediası Rusiyanı təcavüzkar kimi göstərir, Rusiya mediası isə əsas təhlükəni NATO genişlənməsi ilə izah edir. Bu iki ziddiyyətli narrativ diplomatik qərarlara və hərbi addımlara ciddi təsir edir. 2016-cı il ABŞ seçkiləri sosial medianın siyasi manipulyasiya üçün geniş istifadəsini nümayiş etdirdi; botlar, saxta hesablar və dezinformasiya seçicilərin davranışını dəyişdirdi. Bu nümunələr media vasitələrinin ictimai rəyə, dövlət legitimliyinə və beynəlxalq siyasətə real təsir gücünü göstərir.

Açar sözlər: strateji narrativlər; xarici siyasət; medianın təsiri; yumşaq güc; geosiyasi kommunikasiya; dezinformasiya; təbliğat; kibermüharibə.

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СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЕ НАРРАТИВЫ: ВЛИЯНИЕ МЕДИА НА ВНЕШНЕПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ РЕШЕНИЯ ГЛОБАЛЬНЫХ ДЕРЖАВ

Медиа формируют внешнюю политику, определяя восприятие международных процессов и конфликтов. Во время Арабской весны западные СМИ представили протесты как демократическое движение, что побудило ряд государств поддержать оппозицию в Египте, Ливии и Сирии. В конфликте России и Украины западные источники подчеркивают российскую агрессию,

тогда как российские медиа акцентируют угрозу со стороны расширяющегося НАТО. Эти противоположные нарративы влияют на дипломатические решения и военную стратегию. Выборы в США 2016 года продемонстрировали использование цифровых платформ для политического вмешательства: боты, фейковые аккаунты и дезинформация воздействовали на общественное мнение. Примеры подтверждают роль медиа как инструмента, влияющего на восприятие событий и международные решения.

Ключевые слова: стратегические нарративы; внешняя политика; влияние медиа; мягкая сила; геополитическая коммуникация; дезинформация; пропаганда; кибервойна.

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