

The Role of Media in Covering Peace Operations: A Case of ‘Operation

Linda Nchi’ in Somalia

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Abstract

War coverage has for a long time been challenging due to the unpredictable nature of wars. Specifically, reporting has been a challenge since the media relies on a lot on news given out by the combat forces. In the Kenyan scenario, the Kenya Defense Forces were engaging in a maiden international war. Similarly, the Kenyan media were engaging in their first international war coverage. As the only period that can demonstrate how are has been covered by the media, there is need for studies to be conducted on the role played by the media in covering these wars. Therefore, the principal objective of this study was to determine the role of media in covering peace operations in a case of Somalia otherwise dubbed ‘Operation Linda Nchi’. This study adopted a descriptive research design. The study used Code sheet Schema for data collection and eventual analysis. The study was confined to a content analysis of two leading newspapers in Kenya, the Daily Nation and The Standard. Key findings from the study indicated that the media relied a lot on news from Government agencies instead of residents and eyewitnesses accounts of the combat in Somalia. The study recommends the need for media houses to train and deploy independent journalists for the sole purpose of gathering news independent of the official Government sources. Further, the study also recommends the need to get facts from the ground of the operation and that much needs to be done in terms of training and equipping journalists to beef up war reporting.

Key Words: *Media, Operation Linda Nchi, Kenya Defence Forces*

1. Introduction

Research literature has amply established that mass media plays a major role in the starting, continuation and termination of any war (UNESCO, 1978). This is why we have to continually assess the performance of the mass media in reporting wars and other crises. Such assessments become even more important when the media are handling a war taking place in a foreign country and in which their home governments are directly or indirectly involved or interested (Nwosu, 1987). In such situations, as Paraschos and Rutherford (1985) rightly pointed out, the

mass media are often accused of presenting a biased and inaccurate picture of a war, costly to civilians and combatants alike.

The media in African countries seem to be the guiltiest of the charge of inadequate interpretation; they tended to depend mainly on the stories from the wire services and failed to supply necessary backgrounds, for instance sending correspondents to Angola (Nwosu, 1987). Harsch and Thomas (1977) in their book-length study of the Angolan war reported that there was an unholy marriage between the American press and their government's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) – a situation that can bring about pro-government reporting. A research done on how six USA and British newspapers sourced their news while reporting the Angola Civil War indicated that the New York Times' the Guardian, used as much as 90.3% of its total news space or 65.4% of its total number of items for stories supplied to it by foreign or special correspondents. Only 0.8% of its total number of items was local by line stories, 7.2% were wire service stories and 1.7% was from unidentified sources (Nwosu, 1987).

An operation dubbed 'Operation Linda Nchi' in Somalia started on 14th October 2011 and went on until early June 2012 when the Kenyan forces related to Amisom. The African Union formally took over command of the operation from the Kenyan forces. An overall command was established and the various troops deployed in Somalia assigned various operation sectors to advance on. The KDF troops were assigned the central and southern sectors of Somalia where the objective was to capture Port South Kismayu which was the main base where the Alshabaab operatives launched their operations from due to its strategic location at the Somalia coastline (Ombati, 2011). There was need to provide information to Kenyans on the progress of the operation in Somalia. This is because, Kenyans wanted to know if their sons and daughters were safe in Somalia- a war torn nation.

The issue of print media coverage of war scenarios has been contentious dating back to the first and second world wars, the cold as well as the Vietnam wars. The coverage of these wars raised more questions than answers. The ways and extent to which these wars were covered have remained issues of critical concern. In Africa, several media houses have covered a number of conflicts in a manner that raises doubts with regard to their coverage. In Kenya, the KDF had never engaged in war prior to 'Operation Linda Nchi' in 2011. As a result, Kenyan journalists too were getting first-hand experience in covering the war in Somalia. The study is therefore important to find out how the key print newspapers, the Nation and standard, covered the operation in Somalia.

The Kenyan media undertook a maiden role of reporting war involving the Kenya Defence Force and the Al-shabaab. Being their first such assignment, challenges were insurmountable including the propensity to have relied on official sources of news to inform the public on 'Operation Linda Nchi'. The study attempts to inform how the Kenyan media to be specific and in this maiden task covered the war in Somalia. The findings of this research will be used as a basis for future research since it endeavored to fill the knowledge gap brought out in the problem statement. It will also be used by policy makers such as the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Information and Communication in making guidelines for change in media institutions and others that shape public opinion with regard to news gathering and reporting. The research will be important to the KDF with regard to developing measures that will endeavor to provide

information sought by the media for the interest of the Kenyan citizens. To the general public, the research will give them an insight towards the nature of the news reporting and gathering with regard to how it was done in Somalia. The research will also aid media players in formulating policies to guide regulation of reporting during war times.

Media as a tool is very crucial in any society. It influences the society- either positively or negatively. In this case, media will be used to give detailed account to the society and public at large who are eager to know the events taking place in Somalia. As the information is given to the public, they will take it with much ease and no doubts. This is dangerous especially if the information is not factual and just based on 'hear- say'. Intervening variable include the Military which often employs propaganda, censorship, military politics among other strategies to try and weaken their enemies as well as give morale to their troops and Kenyans who are closely following the events. The principal objective of this study was to determine the manner and extent to which print media covered the Kenya Defence Forces incursion on Somalia, otherwise dubbed 'Operation Linda Nchi'.

2. Methodology

This study used the descriptive design. Nachimias and Nachimias (2007) notes that descriptive design is achieved through studies designed to generate data and information that describe current status of organizational programmes or projects for example current trends, performance, relationships and practices that exist in relation to the phenomenon under study. This design was appropriate for this study since it captures a diverse range of information pertaining the trends and characteristics we see in media, the military and the general audience.

Three expert members of the Kenya Defense Forces were interviewed using interview schedule. Their experience, age, religion, occupation and gender were recorded. The key informant information given was analyzed against a thematic criteria developed. The interviews were crucial since they helped the researcher understand how media relied heavily on information from the government officials rather than locals or eye witness accounts. This was so because of the volatile nature of the operation Linda Nchi which could not allow journalists venture into the active combat zones to collect news for fear of being targeted by Al-Shaabab.

A total of 180 newspapers were collected spanning 3 months (from 1st October 2011 to 31st December 2011 a period of 90 days) of both the Daily Nation publication and the standard. Purposive sampling was then used to select specific news articles for study. A total of 269 articles were obtained as the sample.

Table 1

<i>Article distributed this month</i>					
The Standard			The Daily Nation		
October	November	December	October	November	December
43	64	19	49	74	20
Totals: 126		Totals: 143			
Grand Total: 269					

Data was collected through interview schedules and a developed code sheet. The researcher evaluated and coded the information from both the Daily Nation and the Standard print newspapers with the exact same criteria and using the same code sheet achieved a comparison platform. The schema was used to code the evaluation parameters between both the standard and the nation newspapers. The articles were considered separately each day and assigned a category based on structural differences.

Table 2

Distribution of content sources

Name of the newspaper	e.g. The Standard, The Daily Nation
Story Types	e.g. News, Editorial
Journalistic Sources	e.g. Eyewitnesses, Military Sources
Geographic Location	e.g. Kenya, Somalia
Story Placement or Positioning	e.g. Headline, Back Page story
Photography	e.g. Photo, No Photo
Subject Categories	e.g. Actual War, Arms Supply

In this study, qualitative data was collected through content analysis. Three expert members of the Kenya Defence Forces were interviewed using interview schedule. The University of Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library was the source of study materials that is the secondary sources (books, magazines, journals and newspapers). The DEFSHE and IPSTC-Karen Libraries as well as the DSC- Karen Library were instrumental while conducting the study. The study embodied literature reviews and case studies. Expert interviews were also conducted in the barracks where a few military members who participated in the operation were interviewed to get to understand their views on the media coverage.

This study employed content analysis- newspaper accounts which were analysed. An in depth analysis of the two leading newspapers (The Daily Nation and the Standard Newspaper) was done. A comparative study between the Daily Nation and the Standard newspapers was also done. A code sheet schema was developed where the selected variables between the Standard and the Daily Nation were recorded. The data obtained from this study was analyzed

quantitatively and qualitatively and presented in form of charts and graphs as well as descriptive narratives.

In this study, the researcher used mixed (qualitative and quantitative) approaches of data analysis to provide the researcher with an ideal method needed for descriptive explanation. The Excel Programme was used in analyzing quantitative data. The method assisted the researcher to establish the status of the problem under investigation. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze and generate findings which helped in making comparison while qualitative data, statistical summaries were used to communicate the nature of the information. The analyzed information was presented in form of diagrams, percentages, charts, graphs, tables and descriptive narratives.

3. Results

3.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics

Three expert members of the Kenya Defense Forces were interviewed using interview schedule. The following are the demographic Characteristics of the three expert respondents interviewed in Somalia:

Table 3
Demographic information of the respondents

	Demographic Factor	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3
1.	Age	50 Years	54 Years	38 Years
2.	Gender	Male	Male	Male
3.	Level of Education	Graduate	Graduate	Graduate
4.	Religion	Christian	Christian	Christian
5.	Occupation	Military Officer	Retired Mil. Officer	Military Officer

Two of the Key Informants (KI) was of the age of fifty years and above while one of them was of the age of 38 years. Regarding the gender, all of the key informants who took part in the study were male. With their educational level, all of the KI were graduates. About their religion background, all of them were Christians while regarding their occupation, two of the KI were military officers, while only one was a retired military officer.

3.2 The Role of Media in Covering Peace Operations

3.2.1 Sourcing for News

The study sought to establish how the media acquires the news it publishes. Both interviews and Newspaper publications were analyzed and the data generated reflects the source of news that media published. A lot of news published was as a result of Government officials who include the police, military. The Daily Nation emerged as the Daily which relied to some extent on journalist own views. Eye witness accounts were deemed to be limited as a result of fear to go to the active combat field to collect news from locals.

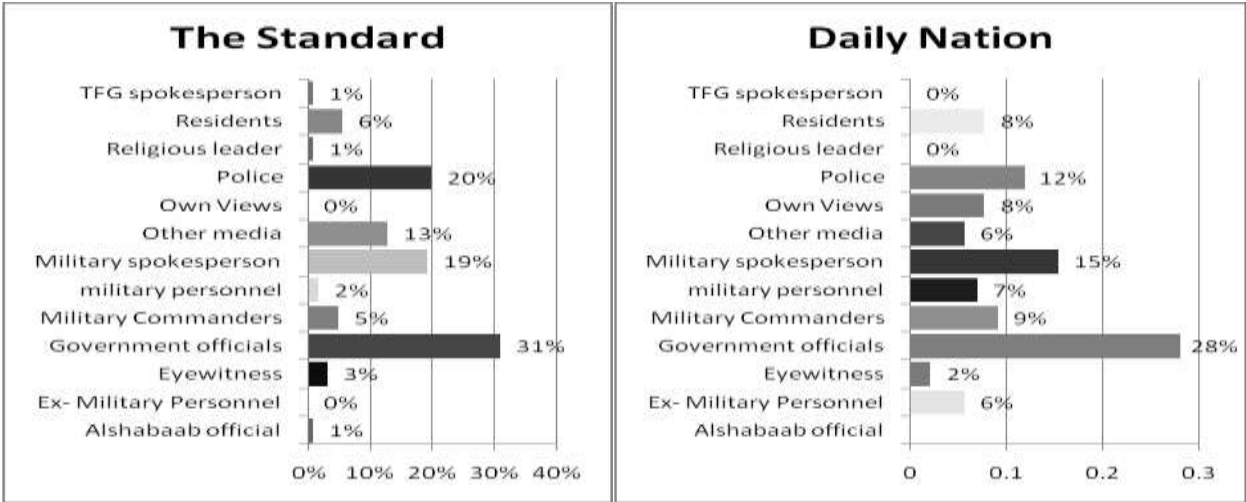


Figure 1 News Sources

As evident in Figure 1 above, the media relied heavily on government officials, the military and the police as their main sources of news. It was established that 77% of the news sources were from the government agencies that is the government officials, the military and the police. The military contributed 26% of the news. The Daily Nation in this case relied substantially on government agencies for information. Up to 73% of news originated from government officials, the military and the police. Only 8% of news items were from the local people of Somalia. Comparatively, the Standard Newspaper relied more on Government news sources compared to the Daily Nation as evident in Figure 3.1

3.3 Strategies the Media used in covering the Operation

The study sought to establish how media covered the operation ‘Linda Nchi’. A Content analysis of the Newspapers by both the Daily Nation and the Standard was done thus yielding the data. Various themes were developed to analyse the three respondents’ interviews. Various forms of how news were employed were analysed which included: media used editorials, news features, letters to the editor and news formats to drive home the message on the war which was being waged in Somalia.

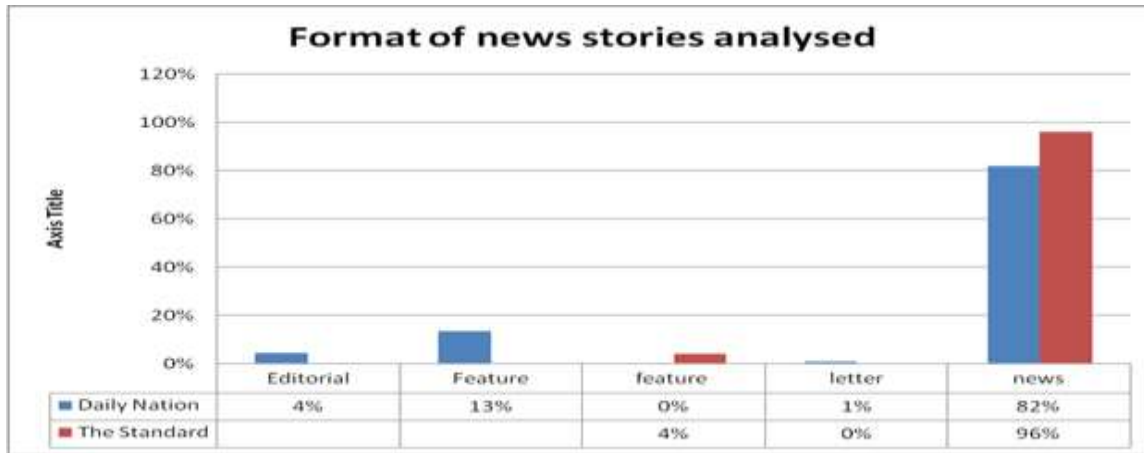


Figure 2 News format (n=269)

As indicated in Figure 2, it is clear that the *standard* newspaper covered the operation mainly in the form of news items (96%). This shows the prominence which this newspaper apportioned towards this operation. This was meant to keep the audience abreast with the news with regard to the war front. However, little was done to provide in depth interpretation of the events in the war front.

The Daily Nation too apportioned most of its reporting of the war to news items (82%). The Daily Nation devoted a bit of its time in trying to interpret news on the war in the form of editorial and feature stories. However, compared to the Standard, the Daily Nation gave less news coverage on the war compared to the Standard Newspaper as evident in Figure 3.2 above.

As illustrated in the chart below, it was found out that, the media presented various themes about the war in Somalia. The news handled a variety of subjects from diverse view points. There are those articles which discussed extensively on the actual war others did consider the aspect of arms supplies to Somalia among other themes. These themes in one way or the other did set the agenda for the war.

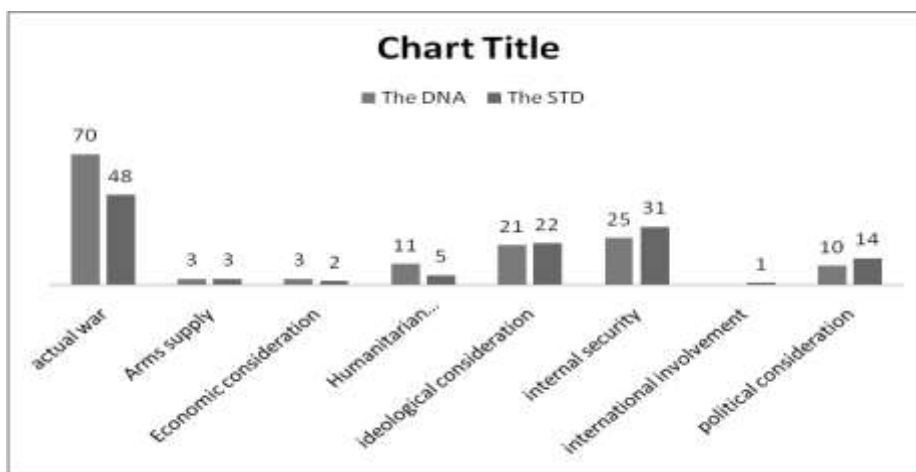


Figure 3 Themes in the News Stories

The actual war narrations of the occurrences during the war were majorly covered in the news articles analyzed. 118 of the articles analyzed reported on the actual war with the Daily Nation covering more on the actual war (70 articles). On Ideological and humanitarian considerations, the Daily Nation had 32 articles compared to the Standards' 27 articles (Figure 3.3).

3.4 Influence Kenyans in Supporting War Initiatives in Somalia

The study sought to establish how the media influenced Kenyans to support the war initiatives in Somalia. In analyzing this, the influence was examined on how it positively or negatively influenced Kenyans.

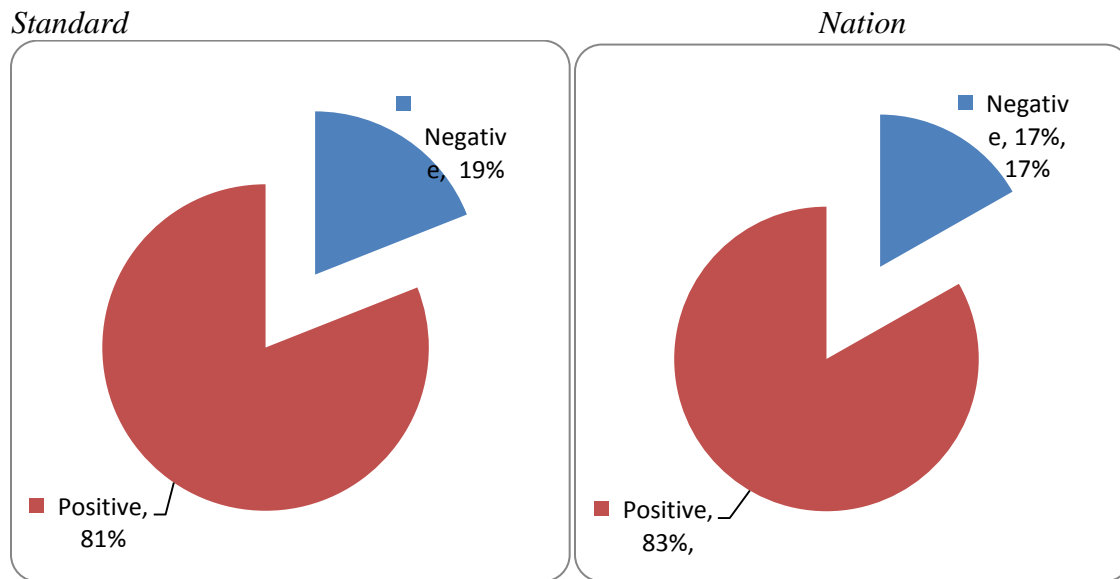


Figure 4 Directionality

From figure 3.4 above it is evident that most messages dwelt on the positive side of the war 81% and 83% for the STD and the DNA respectively. Negative stories accounted for only 19% for the STD and 17% for the DNA respectively. The positive stories narrated on how the war was taking a successful trend, how the KDF troops were triumphing over the Alshaabab and the importance of fighting the war. While the negative ones were reporting contrary to that.

4. Discussion

Findings show that the media relied heavily on government officials, the military and the police as their main sources of news. It was established that 77% of the news sources were from the government agencies that is the government officials, the military and the police. The military contributed 26% of the news. This aligns with studies by Harsch and Thomas 1977 whereby in their book-length study of the Angolan war reported that there was an unholy marriage between the American press and their government's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) – a situation that brought about pro-government reporting. If the media relies so much on government officials for the source of their news, then the media risks presenting pro-government news.

Results from the study show that 118 of the articles analyzed reported on the actual war with the Daily Nation covering more on the actual war (70 articles). On Ideological and humanitarian considerations, the Daily Nation had 32 articles compared to the Standards' 27 articles. This corresponds with a research done on how six USA and British newspapers sourced their news while reporting the Angola Civil War indicated that the New York Times' the Guardian, used as much as 90.3% of its total news space or 65.4% of its total number of items for stories supplied to it by foreign or special correspondents. Only 0.8% of its total number of items was local by line stories, 7.2% were wire service stories and 1.7% was from unidentified sources (Nwosu, 1987).

From the results on influence, the study established that it is evident that most messages dwelt on the positive side of the war 81% and 83% for the STD and the DNA respectively. Negative stories accounted for only 19% for the STD and 17% for the DNA respectively. The positive stories narrated on how the war was taking a successful trend, how the KDF troops were triumphing over the Alshaabab and the importance of fighting the war. While the negative ones were reporting contrary to that. This agrees with research by Paraschos and Rutherford 1985 who rightly pointed out that the mass media are often times accused of presenting a biased and inaccurate picture of a war which gets costly to civilians and combatants alike.

The media, by presenting largely positive news about the war in the form of steady progress by KDF against the Al-Shaabab, yet there were immense challenges in form of resistance by the militia, did present an inaccurate picture of events taking place at the battlefield. This was the same case where the American media kept on presenting positive news about the war in Vietnam while on the battlefield there were immense casualties suffered by the American forces. The media had sought to influence the Americans towards thinking positively about the war in Vietnam only to come to realization later that America had suffered immensely in the war in terms of human and materiel casualties.

5. Conclusion

From the literature review done, it is clear that the relationship between the military and the media has never been friendly. It is riddled with mistrust, suspicion and dishonesty. As the military strives to provide information that it deems right to give out, the media wants to dig more into it. This strains the relationship of the two institutions. Hence the military practices gatekeeping of information given out to the media. The media keeps on agitating for the information that they feel they need from the media. They set the agenda in the public domain to try and rally support to push for the information they want.

Therefore if such is the kind of a relationship that there exists, then it is rather inconceivable on how to expect the media to be fully furnished with war events as they fully unfold. It is important for the media to devise ways and means of getting access to information without relying on Government officers and agents since they can only get news which promote the government agenda.

It is evident that the media relied heavily on government agencies for news as illustrated in the previous chapter. The government officials, the military and the police were the main sources of information on the war. By the fact that these agencies censor information before giving it out to the media, it is possible that the information that was being divulged was that one which these agencies thought was palatable to them and not necessarily exactly what transpired in the battlefield. Having relied heavily on news easily made available to them, it was possible that the media was at some point fed on propaganda which was being traded by the KDF and Alshabaab. The media devoted a lot of time towards influencing Kenyans to believe in the resolve of undertaking the war. This was evident from how they devoted a lot of front news pages and photos to make the public believe that the war was going to be short and the KDF troops were on the top of the situation. The media neither showed the audience any resistance faced by the Kenyan troops nor the casualties suffered by the KDF as purported by Alshabaab.

The research found out that most news were done and reported from Kenya, little was done from Somalia which raise the issues of credibility of the news that were presented to the public. The media was embedded with the fighting troops and so opted to remain in the tactical centres rather than find out what was going on in the live combat areas. This might have allowed the thriving of propaganda at the war front.

The research also found out that, as the media played the role of agenda setting, the military played the role of a gatekeeper. The media really needed information to satisfy the needs and wants of their audiences while on the other hand, the military kept on insisting on responsible journalism. This shows that the military was ready to give out information that did not bear on their operational integrity which could portray them in a bad light. The military did not want information that could turn the hearts and minds of the Kenyans against them.

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