

Rune Ottosen, Tore Slaatta and Sigurd Øfsti

How they missed the big story: Norwegian news media and NATO's military operation in Libya

Kurzfassung: Der vorliegende Aufsatz berichtet über ein Forschungsprojekt zur Frage, wie ausgewählte norwegischer Zeitungen über das militärische Engagement der NATO in Lybien, 2011, berichtet haben. Als Hintergrund der Studie dienen frühere Untersuchungen zur Rolle der Medien in der Sicherheitspolitik, welche gezeigt hatten, dass die Medien in Kriegszeiten gewöhnlich die Regierung unterstützen. Wir analysieren die Fähigkeit der norwegischen Presse, die grundlegenden politischen und rechtlichen Fragen, die mit internationalen militärischen Interventionen im allgemeinen und im speziellen mit der norwegischen Beteiligung an der NATO-geführten Operation in Lybien verbunden sind, aufzugreifen, sie zu diskutieren und dazu Stellung zu beziehen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass rechtliche Fragen zwar zu wenig berichtet wurden, die linksgerichtete Presse und Nischenzeitungen aber eine kritische Opposition zur Regierungspolitik und zu der NATO-Operation eingenommen haben.

Abstract: This paper reports from a research project on how selected Norwegian newspapers covered the NATO-led military engagement in Libya in 2011. As a backdrop we build on earlier research on the role between the media and security policy which had found that in times of war the media in general support the government. We analyze Norwegian newspaper's ability to present, discuss and express opinions on the principal political and legal questions concerning international military interventions in general and Norwegian participation in the NATO-led operations in Libya 2011 in particular. Our findings is that legal issues are underreported but that the left wing press and niche newspapers offer a critical opposition to the government policy and the NATO-operation.

1. Introduction

In this article we discuss the news media coverage and the media debate concerning the Norwegian military forces' participation in the NATO-led operation in Libya in March 2011¹. Important for the political process, and for the debate over the Norwegian military engagement, was the adoption of UN Resolution 1973 prior to the deployment of Norwegian F-16 aircraft. An important concern in the article is how, and to what extent, the news media became an arena for debate and discussion of the principal issues, including whether Resolution 1973 authorised regime change, whether NATO could act on behalf of the international community, and the short- and long-term implications for Norwegian society of the engagement of Norwegian military forces in Libya.

The normative question is whether the news media in Norway lived up to expectations as a watchdog for democratic values in times of crisis. Empirically, we relate this question to three particularly focused investigations: 1) How news stories connected to the raising of the main issues and debates during the intervention; 2) How did journalists access to sources and dependence on politicians in power positions and in the military, influence the framing of the reporting. 3) How, and to what degree, did the news media formulated their particular positions in editorials and other contributions to the debates.

The civil war in Libya developed as part of the 'Arab spring'. Although the situation that arose in Libya was unprecedented and unexpected, the events also have to be analysed in the light of changes in Norwegian, European and international security policy after the end of the Cold War. Since NATO's redefinition of its politico-military mandate, clearly demonstrated in the military intervention in the former Yugoslavia in 1999, NATO's 'out of area' policy has been an integral part of Norwegian foreign and security policy (Linneberg 2001).

Foreign and security policy have always presented awkward dilemmas and demands to a democratic system. Access to vital information and transparency are essential for the parliamentary opposition, for the media and for the public. As was documented during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the political leadership of a superpower can mislead its own people and create support for a war by using false arguments, and the long-term consequences can be loss of confidence by the public, by civil society and by allied countries (Solomon 2005). In a situation where the information is distorted it will be difficult to regain confidence in the short-term and this can cause lasting damage to the confidence the public has in politicians (Taylor 1992). If the media pass on propaganda and disinformation uncritically, the consequence will be lack of confidence in the media as well as in politicians, as was the case in May 2004 when prestigious newspapers such as the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* felt they had to apologise to their readers for uncritical distribution of dubious arguments prior to the Iraq war – a rare example of how editors take responsibility for starting a war on false grounds. Usually the media fail to take responsibility, hiding behind the explanation that they merely 'report the facts' (Ottosen 2008).

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the panel on Journalism and Conflict at the International Association of Mass Communication Research (IAMCR) in Durban July 15-19, 2012.

The political implications of going to war can be dramatic, and therefore the process of decision making and the legal aspects involved are vital to legitimise the action. An international intervention in another country creates many dilemmas, including the battle for control of the flow of information. The political landscape prior to warfare creates new political, cultural and military alliances. The actors involved (and links between them at different levels, as in Allison's classic analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis), show how the relationship between information flow and decision-making processes are influenced and structured in certain ways. Other factors relevant as a backdrop are the geographical distance to the country potentially subject to intervention, not to speak of cultural competence and knowledge about the parties involved (Eide 2002).

There may also be moral implications: As Elaine Scarry has pointed out, it is difficult to fully predict the outcome of military actions before they take place (Scarry 2011). The time factor is important, because the situation demands quick responses. The temptation is to compromise normal democratic procedures in order to attain short-term military and political goals, with the danger of damage to democracy itself in the long-run.

The risk is to sacrifice the time necessary for study and debate of the issues leading to considered decisions. For legal and political reasons, the political rhetoric that will ultimately legitimise the military's involvement is of vital importance. Douglas Kellner has argued that there is a serious risk that hidden political motives will blur the arguments for going to war. The hidden agenda is often defined by a handful of players with limited insight into the complex issues involved, but with firm attitudes, not to say prejudices, that can cause long-term unintended consequences (Kellner 2003).

The arguments for going to war communicated in the media are important for legitimacy and the support of public opinion. As Henrik Thune has pointed out, the politicians and the decision makers in the media have totally different perceptions of media power – the media players tend to underestimate their own power while the politicians tend to overestimate it (Thune 2009). Regardless of the actual power of the media, it is obviously the arena where the political rhetoric is distributed at an early stage, and it thus becomes the arena where long-lasting trust and political legitimacy are created (or lost). Finally, the way the media handle the situation might have lasting consequences for the legitimacy of Norwegian democratic political institutions and for the basic trust between government, parliament, public opinion and the military. Since the media is also a channel for the collective memory of the nation, the manner in which a conflict is defined and framed will live on and influence the way the next conflict is handled (Entman 1993). International image and goodwill which, in the case of Norway, is very closely linked to political stability and engagement for peace and conflict resolution, can be harmed (Ottosen 2005).

The time factor is essential. When a serious decision such as going to war has to be taken quickly we need critical media capable of analysis and of giving a fair picture of the situation and balanced access to politicians, experts, military leaders and informed and engaged citizens. More than ever, the choice of sources is vital. The media must accept the responsibility of having the necessary knowledge of security policy, international relations and international law so as to make their own judgement of the legitimacy of going to war (Kellner 2003).

2. The principal issues

In addition to the democratic issues there are moral concerns and issues of principle involved in international intervention that are relevant to this article:

1. The basis on which the international community has legitimate reasons to act militarily against another country;
2. The extent of, and basis on which, military force may be used against a sovereign and legitimate regime;
3. How one is to calculate the human costs of a possible military intervention.

It is beyond the scope of this article to undertake a comprehensive review of all these issues, but we find it interesting to see how the media addressed these principles and complexities in their coverage of the intervention in Libya. At the outset, we can distinguish between three hypotheses. First, we expect there to be forms of simplification that reduce the complexity of the issues raised. Second, we expect there to be forms of naturalisation, where some questions are ignored or are implicitly answered in doxical forms (Bourdieu 1991). Third, we expect there to be ideological positions appearing, in accordance with the newspapers' positions in the media order.

In the quantitative part of our study, we will look closely at how the principal issues emerged in the general news coverage and newspaper debate. We will also check whether the principal considerations are covered in a responsible manner, and to what extent it is possible to conclude whether the media were either critical of, or supportive of, Norwegian participation in the operations. In the qualitative part of the survey we look at how opinions about the warfare are expressed, primarily in the editorials. As we know, the editorial represents the official position of the newspaper and thus gives important signals to the ordinary reader as well as to the political elite.

Our study aims to see how the legal questions are discussed in the media, knowing that there are also other forums where they could be discussed. The most obvious place for these debates is parliament (Stortinget). If debates about the principle arguments for war can be traced to the debates in the Stortinget, it is interesting to see whether they are referred to in the news coverage. If they are not properly addressed in Stortinget, one could argue that the media themselves should raise the legal issues in an analytical manner.

Even though the time of party-controlled press is over, ending in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Bastiansen 2009), the relationship between the political parties and the media remains interesting. It has been argued convincingly that traces can still be found, in the coverage of major political issues, of the political positions held by the party press (Bjerke 2001). Obviously, security policy and foreign policy are such major topics. One could argue that there are both differences and similarities between the political parties and the media as institutions although one feature they have in common is that the leadership in both institutions identifies with the ruling elite, and this is why we rarely see mainstream media opposing the position Norway takes in security policy (Ottosen 2001).

3. Studies of foreign reporting and security policy

One of the earliest contributions in Norway to the study of foreign reporting was by Johan Galtung. By creating the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), Galtung was a pioneer in the field of peace research (Galtung 1961, Slaatta 2010). In a much-quoted article, Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge showed how professional 'gatekeepers' played an important role in filtering information in the news flows from the periphery to the centre and from the global South to the North (Galtung and Ruge 1965). Although this academic contribution has been much discussed, and also disputed, by Stig Hjarvard and others, there is no doubt that the article contributed to a better understanding of structured news flows in international crises (Hjarvard 1995:59-66). Galtung's concerns were also picked up by the McBride report 'Many voices one world' commissioned by Unesco (McBride 1980). The report created immense controversies within Unesco and was a key reason for the US and the UK breaking with Unesco for a period. The McBride report dealt with the problem of how the flows of information generated unequal patterns of power between North and South. Later work by Dayan Thussu, among others, has documented that these configurations are still at work today (Thussu 2007).

Later, Johan Galtung contributed to the academic field of media research with a suggested model for war and peace journalism (Galtung 2002). Galtung's model builds on the dichotomy between what he calls 'war journalism' and 'peace journalism'. Although disputed (see Loyn 2007), the model is useful as research tool as it includes four main points of contrast between the two approaches: war journalism is violence-oriented, propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented and victory-oriented. This is often linked to a dualistic method, a zero-sum game where the winner takes all (as in sports journalism). A potential consequence is that war journalism contributes to escalating conflicts by reproducing propaganda and promoting war (Galtung, 2002 in Ottosen 2010).

In the United States, analytical studies of the media coverage of the 1960s war in Vietnam inspired academics such as Dan Hallin to look at the relationship between the position of the political elite, and the way in which mainstream media covered the war. In his book *The Uncensored War*, Hallin shows how, in their coverage, the *New York Times* and the major television networks remained closely tied to official US perspectives throughout. For too long the media conveyed an idealised image of war, and a shift to more critical reporting came only after the Tet Offensive in 1968 when the US military started to lose ground in the military campaign. Hallin's analysis points out that the media did not report critically until the political elite was split in its views on the war (Hallin 1984: 20).

There are obvious challenges for journalists covering wars in living up to the ideals of a critical press in a democratic society. Since 24/7 round-the-clock live reporting was introduced by CNN during the Gulf War in 1991, the whole concept of war reporting has changed. As George Gerbner put it: 'The boiling point is reached when the power to create a crisis merges with the power to direct the movie about it' (Gerbner 1992:244). The combination of modern media technology and a professional media strategy developed by the US Pentagon, including censorship and control of journalists' access to the battlefield, created a new conditions for what in military terms is labelled 'perception management'. This, combined with Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) targeting Saddam Hussein's soldiers with leaflets and radiobroadcasts in order to demoralise them, brought the whole concept of 'information warfare' to a new level (Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2001). Events happen quickly, with few eyewitnesses, and many non-credible sources create challenges for the reporter in the field. Stories must be told, here and now, and it is not always possible to live up to the normal expectations of the news business such as the double checking of sources (Stroble 1997).

Some studies tend to emphasise the ritual aspect of news reporting, combined with a crucial time factor. The so-called 'CNN effect' is a label often used, defined by Steven Livingston as: '1) a policy agenda-setting agent, 2) an impediment to the achievement of desired policy goals, and 3) an accelerant to policy decision making' (Livingston 1997:3). Other studies emphasise agenda setting more strongly. Maxwell McCombs contributed to the theory of agenda setting by underlining the

influence of news sources and the role of the journalists' perceptions of news values in shaping the media agenda (McCombs 2004). The idea that institutional values and beliefs contribute to the framing is vital for understanding that there are constant factors involved in news coverage, so to speak, regardless of the actual events. In addition to studying professional, journalistic and media-specific factors, we put emphasis on more specific political contexts and the situational factors arising out of the international character of the conflict. As Walter Lippmann and, later, Bernard Cohen put it, we map what controls our attention, and what determines our perception of reality. The maps are mental filters and work in hidden, invisible, adaptations of news information to our perception of established world views. Stereotypes are more likely to be confirmed rather than disproved in the way we interpret events. News can be analysed as new events, but also as old stories in new packaging. 'We' is confirmed in relation to the established 'them', and the story runs its course along the usual track. This way of mapping the world is also essential to Johan Galtung's model for war and peace journalism (Galtung 2002). Enemy images do play a role in constructing the news and are also related to the change in global power relations. In a historical context, radical Muslims, often linked to al-Qaida, have in many ways replaced 'communism' as a new enemy for the West (Ottosen 1995).

To summarise, research suggests there is a pattern when the national news media are adapting to their own country's security policy orientations in the coverage of crises and conflicts. Teun van Dijk's analysis of the coverage of security policy in the Western media shows how editing patterns, where the framing, the perspectives in story telling, and the use of sources supports the existing security policy in a given country (Van Dijk 1998). This is also confirmed by an international comparative study of the coverage of the Gulf War in 1991, which includes media from Norway, Sweden and Finland in addition to the USA and Germany (Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2001). One of the findings from the analysis of over 4,000 news items in this study shows that NATO countries such as Norway and Germany reproduce the American rhetoric in their news coverage to a greater extent than formally non-aligned countries like Sweden and Finland (Ottosen 2008, Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2000). The watchdog function tends to fail when national interests are at stake (Slaatta 2010). In periods where there is national consensus on important security policy, the media often fail to be a critical corrective to the politicians (Bennett 1994).

4. Norway and international interventions in a historical perspective

4.1 Media consensus on security policy

There has traditionally been a high degree of consensus among Norwegian politicians on security and foreign policy. In the Norwegian political parties there has always been a solid majority in favour of NATO membership (Ottosen 2001), with the exception of the Socialist Left Party (SV), but since the party joined the government in 2005, there has basically been no opposition to established security policy in the Stortinget and since the 'out-of area' policy was established in 1999 there has been consensus and support for NATO military operations. The media has also been supportive, and only a few dissenting voices have been expressed in the debates and op.ed pages in niche newspapers such as *Klassekampen*, *Morgenbladet* and *Ny Tid* (Helseth 2007). During the Cold War, NATO strategy was limited to the European theatre but after the Warsaw Pact was dissolved in 1991 NATO looked for a new role outside Europe. This paradigm shift was little discussed in the media in a critical manner (Linneberg 2001). The 'out of area' policy was first put to the test during 'Operation Allied Force', with the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. There were hardly any politicians in the Stortinget, apart from a couple of SV representatives, who expressed opposition to Norwegian participation in these operations (Helseth 2007). There was little critical reporting in the mainstream about the operation – an exception was *Aftenposten*, which supported the bombing, but reported critically on the lack of formal proceedings in parliament prior to it. In this instance, it was discovered that no written communication on the matter occurred between parliament and government. Only one party group undertook a formal vote on the endorsement of the action, and no formal vote took place in the Stortinget which approved Norway's participation (Ottosen 2002:38). As we will come back to later, *Aftenposten* carried a related article on the lack of formal proceedings in the prelude to the bombing of Libya.

4.2 Post 9/11

After the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, Norwegian politicians expressed their support for the so-called 'Global War on Terror' doctrine (GWT). A mild request by the Norwegian foreign minister, Thorbjørn Jagland, that the US should show restraint in its retaliatory attack on Afghanistan in November 2001, to spare civilians, caused an immediate response when the *Washington Post* raised questions about whether Norwegian politicians 'could be trusted'. After this, no leading Norwegian politicians expressed doubt in their support for the United States (Ottosen 2009).

4.3 The Media reflects elite views

As has been said in this article, the mainstream media rarely oppose the government position when national forces are involved in international warfare. Bennett shows that the sources used by the mainstream media in such cases usually support the argument of government officials and their press spokespersons (Bennett 1990:116). Only when the political elite is split is there a space for dissent in the media. This phenomenon is confirmed in numerous studies, and is also expressed in a comparative study of coverage, by many countries, of the invasion of Iraq. European media were divided between those, on the one hand, who joined the 'coalition of the willing' with the United States and Britain, and opponents of the war, with Germany and France as the most outspoken voices. The secretary of defence in the United States, Donald Rumsfeld, contemptuously labelled them the 'old Europe'. In the British press, as well as in many other countries, this split in the elite also paved the way for different voices among the media (Nohrstedt and Ottosen 2005). In Norway, these differences in attitudes can be exemplified by differences in opinion in leading newspapers such as *VG* and *Aftenposten*. Traditionally, these two papers have agreed upon most security policy issues, but they were divided in their attitudes towards the invasion of Iraq in 2003; *Aftenposten* supported the Bondevik government position against the war, but *VG* regretted that Norway did not support our most important ally, the United States (Ottosen 2009).

4.4 Little debate on Afghanistan in Norwegian media

Norway's military involvement in Afghanistan has rarely led to widespread political debates on fundamental issues related to Norway's participation. Once again we have seen that unanimity in the Stortinget creates little debate in the public space. For many years, the media did not contribute to the critical debates on the principles of Norwegian participation in NATO operations. Several studies reveal that the media, generally, showed little willingness to discuss these international legal issues (Ottosen 2010). Many journalists have written critically about issues related to human rights violations in the GWT, such as the treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, but this censure is not linked to Norwegian participation in the warfare in Afghanistan (Rosslund 2006). One hypothesis is that most of the Norwegian coverage has been dominated by the journalists who were embedded with the Norwegian armed forces. One recent study of the information strategy of Norwegian defence forces shows that from the military point of view their strategy had been successful in the sense that the journalists travelling together with armed forces tended to adopt the main points of the information strategy in their reporting (Ottosen 2011), and one of the consequences has been that Norwegian media coverage has been dominated by upper echelon sources, with Norwegian politicians and military sources largely dominating the framing of the stories (Moen 2009, Nordby 2009). The Afghan civilian population has rarely been at the centre of attention in the media coverage. If we compare the coverage when Norwegian soldiers have been killed with the coverage of the loss of Afghan civilian lives, we find that it follows a pattern of what Noam Chomsky calls 'worthy' and 'unworthy' victims (Chomsky and Herman 1988, Fondenes 2011). A new critical dimension to the coverage came when the freelance journalist Anders Sømme Hammer settled in Afghanistan and created his own network of sources and reported in a more critical and independent manner (Hammer 2010). Also, some documentary film makers in Denmark and Norway – and even some soldiers who documented their experiences through frank storytelling, in books not approved by their bosses – caused a debate that one normally thinks the mainstream media themselves should have initiated (Ottosen 2010).

5. Underreporting the legal issues

One consequence of this lack of critical perspectives has been that media have, to a large extent, ignored the legal issues involved in the GWT. One of Norway's most prominent experts in international law, Professor Geir Ulfstein, has publicly claimed that Norwegian politicians have dealt with the legal aspects of GWT in a superficial manner (we will add that this disapproval also should include the media). Ulfstein has, in particular, disparaged a government white paper from 2008 on defence policy, claiming that its handling of international legal issues is superficial (based on Ottosen 2008). The lack of critical perspectives among politicians as well as the media was evident in the prelude to the bombing of the former Yugoslavia in 1999, where Norway provided military support to the bombing (in the form of air support functions) even though the warfare had no UN mandate. Ulfstein refers to the statement of the then prime minister, Bondevik, in Stortinget on 18 March 1999, in which he authorised the use of force. On this occasion, Bondevik referred to Security Council Resolution 1199, a report from the UN secretary general, and a statement by the president of the UN Security Council. According to Ulfstein, the reason Bondevik had to rely on these three documents was that he realised that none of them individually offered a legal basis for the use of military force. Ulfstein also refers to the Independent Kosovo Commission which stated that the war was illegal, but could still be justified because it stopped ethnic cleansing by the Serbs. The Norwegian government's lack of a legal basis for military action was, according to Ulfstein, repeated after 9/11, when the US chose not to seek a UN mandate before attacking Afghanistan, but instead relied on the argument of the right to self-defence. Norwegian politicians insisted that the attack on Afghanistan was in line with international law, and the media did not challenge the politicians' interpretation (Ottosen 2005, 2007). Ulfstein believes that the government's lack of clarity on these legal

issues can create dangerous precedents. In a broadly-based article in the academic journal *Lov og rett*, and in an article in *Aftenposten*, Ulfstein has analysed the international legal argument for the use of self-defence as a basis for the attack, and he warns against using Security Council Resolution 1368 as an argument for long-lasting warfare in Afghanistan. It is worth noting here that Norwegian politicians have on numerous occasions, and without critical follow-up questions from reporters, used Resolution 1368 in a way Ulfstein has warned against. Ulfstein also doubts that there is a legal basis for the activation of Article 5 of the NATO Charter, the key argument used by politicians to justify Norway's participation in the warfare.

In a speech to the Oslo Military Society in 2003, the professor of law, Ståle Eskeland, discussed the international legal basis for the Norwegian participation in military operations such as in Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003. He claimed that all these military actions represented a violation of international law, as well as of the Norwegian constitution. Eskeland argued that there is a danger that Norway can be held accountable by the International Criminal Court (ICC) even if Norway physically can not be linked to war crimes and atrocities (Ottosen 2009:218-220). Eskeland elaborates this argument in the recently published book *Den mest alvorlige forbrytelse* (The most serious crime). With rigorous legal arguments, he describes a picture that challenges the Norwegian political elite's self-understanding and reasoning about Norway's role in Afghanistan and Libya (Eskeland 2011: 130-140). The media have shown little interest in the legal arguments raised in the book.

6. UN resolution 1973 and the NATO attack on Libya

The dramatic political uprisings and revolutions in North Africa in the winter of 2011 caused the fall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and eventually spread to Libya (and other countries), and the opposition in Libya took up arms. After taking control over the oil-rich eastern part of the country the government forces of Gaddafi fought back and there was soon a stalemate. After the accusation that Gaddafi threatened to kill protesters 'house by house', he tightened his grip on Tripoli and moved east. It is disputed whether this actually meant that Gaddafi planned a general attack on the civilians in Benghazi, but the fact that the media framed it in this manner paved the way for reaction from the UN (Tunander 2011). The UN Security Council gathered on 17 March and ended up by adopting Resolution 1973 and implementing a no-fly zone over Libya to protect the civilian population from being attacked by Gaddafi's planes.

The situation in the prelude to NATO's bombing of Libya in the spring and summer of 2011 was different from the examples we have mentioned here from Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan. As was the case before the Gulf War in 1991, there was a UN resolution authorising the attack. The media's inability to deal with international legal issues in an independent and critical manner was once again tested when shortly after the resolution was adopted, NATO took control over the military operation in a way that provoked important players such as the Arab League and the African Union.

The main points of Resolution 1973 were as follows:

- A request for an immediate ceasefire and an end to the violence against civilians;
- A no-fly zone over Libya;
- Permission to use 'all possible means' to protect civilians;
- A declaration that Resolution 1970 will remain in force (discussion included a ban on the import and export of weapons to and from Libya);
- Affirmation that all assets owned by or controlled by the Libyan regime, shall be seized and the value returned to the people. (UN 2011)

Resolution 1973 was adopted by ten votes. Russia, China, Brazil and India abstained. South Africa voted in favour, but worked actively towards a ceasefire as soon as the NATO bombing began, indicating that those who were behind the original decision were not united behind NATO's follow-up of the decision.

The Libyan operation was also discussed within NATO. Norway and Denmark supported the decision and participated in the bombing. Other countries like the Netherlands, Spain, Turkey and Poland refused to participate (Lodgaard 2011). A review of the debate in the UN Security Council prior to the resolution shows that even the countries that spoke for it put clear limits on the interpretation of its text. The minutes of the debate prior to its adoption show that a majority of the speakers were clear on its limitations. Lebanon's speaker stressed that the text should not lead to the occupation of 'one inch' of Libyan territory by foreign forces.

The Norwegian political scientist Sverre Lodgaard (2011) has stressed that the formal basis on which NATO relied for the bombing lies in the interpretation of Section 4: 'To take all necessary measures, notwithstanding paragraph 9 of Resolution 1970 (2011)'. This, combined with paragraph 7 which reads: '... nor shall [no-fly zones] apply to flights authorised by paragraphs 4 or 8, nor other flights which are deemed necessary by states acting under the authorisation conferred in paragraph 8 to be for the benefit of the Libyan people ...'.

When NATO took over the operation, it caused reaction from the African Union and the Arab League, and protests from major powers like Russia and China. NATO made its own and unilateral interpretation of what benefits the Libyan people. The long-term outcome of this could be that through its own interpretation of Resolution 1973 NATO has undermined possibilities for future action of the UN to prevent humanitarian disasters and attacks on civilians under the principle of 'the responsibility to protect' (UN 2005). This was clearly the case when Russia used its veto to stop a UN resolution to impose sanctions against the regime in Syria in February 2012. Norwegian media have shown little willingness to see these two events in relation to each other.

7. The content analysis of the Libyan coverage

By searching in the database Retriever we have found that 'Libya' was mentioned 2213 times in the period from 10 March to 10 August in the following newspapers selected for this content analysis: The dailies: *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *VG*, *Klassekampen*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Bergens Tidende*. The weeklies: *Ny Tid* and *Morgenbladet*. By using several keywords in the search,¹ we found a more limited range of 314 articles that specifically referred to, discussed or mentioned Norway's participation during this period. The content analysis is based on this narrowed selection.

7.1 The sample

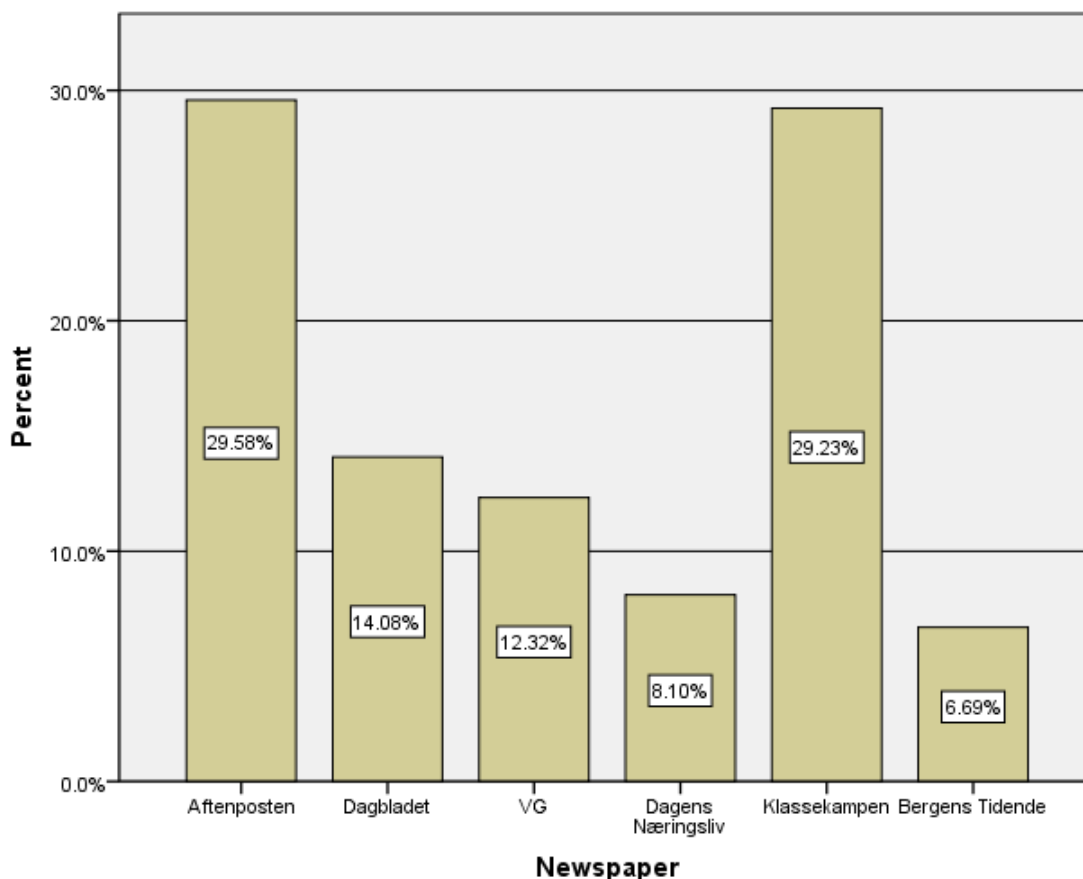


Figure 1: Total sample of 314 articles, divided into newspapers (the weeklies *Ny Tid* and *Morgenbladet* are not included in the figure for methodological reasons).

Seen in the light of the dramatic situation that Norwegian aircraft and pilots were involved in the bombing, and the length of the period, we consider 314 articles to be a low number. Sixty-four per cent of the articles in the sample are news articles,

1. The search words were the following : (Norway or Norwegian), participation, Libya (Norway or Norwegian), Military Operations, Libya (Norway or Norwegian), assignments, Libya (Norway or Norwegian), commitment, Libya "Norwegian bombs", Libya "Norwegian planes", Libya.

while the remaining 36 per cent are equally divided between the other four genres: editorials, feature articles, editorial comment and opinion pieces. As shown in Figure 1, the desire and ability to raise the principal questions clearly is highest in *Klassekampen* and *Aftenposten*.

Within the sample of 314 articles, we coded whether the articles were expressing support or criticism for Norway’s participation (cf. Figure 2). In 40 per cent of the news articles a position on the principal issue of Norway’s participation was not taken, even though this was the subject of the article to a greater or lesser degree. After a more thorough analysis it also became evident that 10 per cent of the sample did not deal primarily with Libya and Norwegian participation.

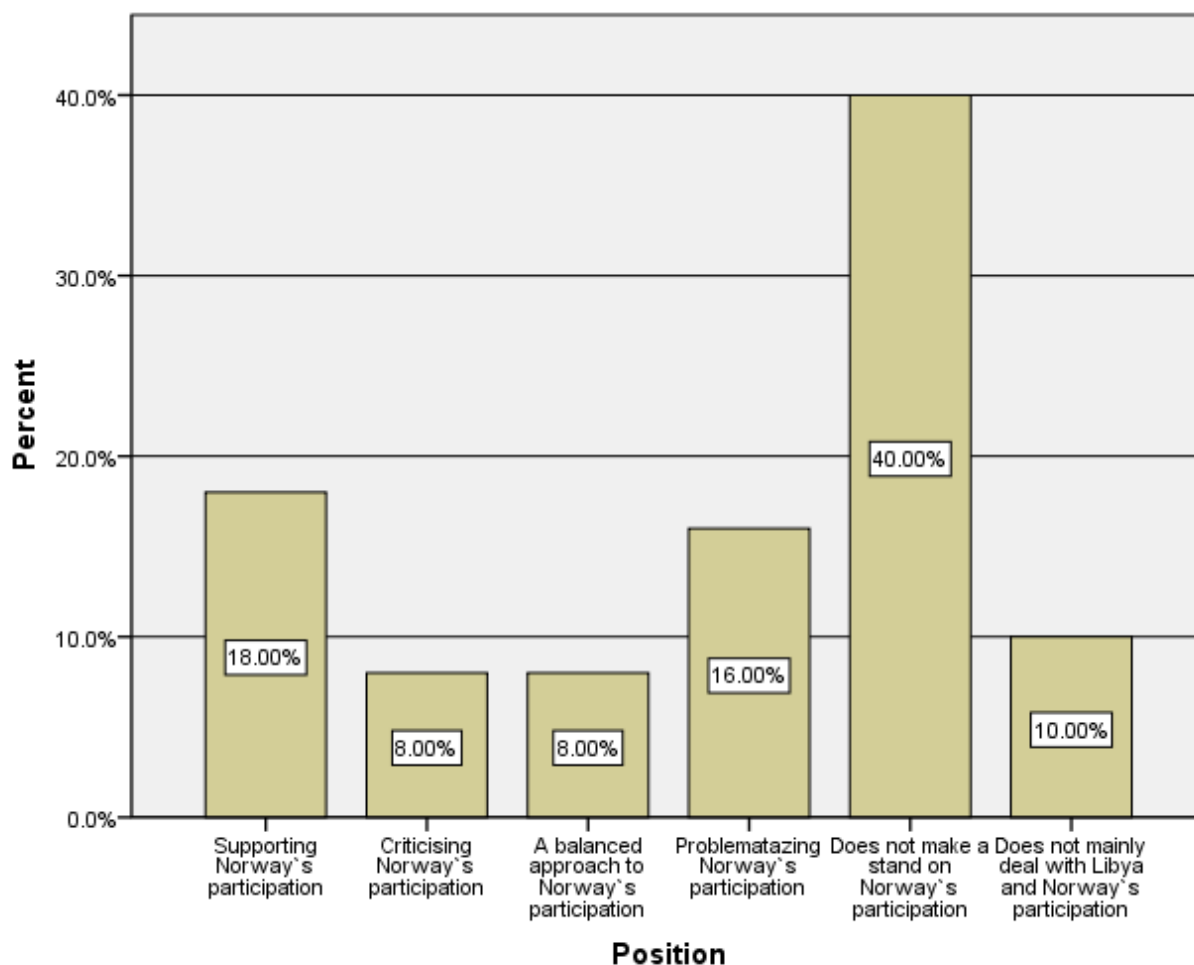


Figure 2: Position on Norway’s contribution to the warfare

Even though the news articles in general have a neutral tone, 18 per cent were coded as ‘supportive’ to the participation of Norway. Of the remainder, 8 per cent are ‘balanced’, 16 per cent are ‘problematizing’ and 8 per cent are ‘critical’.

Looking at the weekly niche newspapers, we see that ten of the articles in *Ny Tid* and 20 of the articles in *Morgenbladet* in the period 10 March to 10 August discussed the principal issues involved. Here we also find that news articles form the largest single category (33 per cent of the articles). As with most weekly newspapers, there is a higher proportion of opinion pieces and commentaries than in the daily newspapers.

The reason that few of the news articles in the dailies express criticism is, to a large degree, connected to the use of sources. Approximately 65 per cent of all sources used in the articles are Norwegian politicians and Norwegian military, most of whom express clear support for the warfare. Norwegian politicians from the so called red-green alliance (Senterpartiet (agrarian center party), Arbeiderpartiet (AP) (The Labor party) and Socialist left (SV) are frequently used as sources. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre (AP), Minister of defence, Grete Faremo (AP) and various Socialist Left (SV) politicians all contribute to create a supportive impression. In their interviews, Gahr Støre and Faremo are unconditionally supportive of Norwegian war efforts, whereas politicians from SV are more nuanced in their comments. Bård Vegar Solhjell is widely known as a SV politician and MP at the time, in favour of the war, while other local and less well-known politicians

in the party express less sympathetic views. SV's head of international affairs, Petter Eide, is commonly used as a critical source. In the news articles using Norwegian politicians as sources and which take a critical or cautious approach, SV politicians are referred to. SV thus seems to be a divided party on this issue. Hardly any Libyan sources are used in the articles. To summarise: most of the articles do not take a position on the principle of Norway's participation. Among the articles that do, 26 per cent are supportive or balanced, while 24 per cent are critical or nuanced.

To take this further, there were few news articles that explicitly expressed a clear position and few of those were either unmistakably critical or obviously supportive. The most common framing is a certain ambiguity; most of the articles categorised as critical also showed a sort of understanding for the intervention and most of the articles that expressed support raised questions at the same time. One example here is an article in the left wing daily *Klassekampen* on March 22: 'SV rally in favour of bombing' – despite the title, the overall impression is that it is neither clearly in favour or against. The following quote is a representative example of a balanced approach in the daily news reporting: 'I am critical of the government's decision of Norwegian participation, but understand that this happened because we had a UN resolution,' says head of the party in Sør-Trøndelag county, Elin Quick Haug Berntsen.'

Another example is from the liberal *Dagbladet* on 27 April: 'Gaddafi's headquarters in Libya bombed.' The article is about a supposedly successful bombing by a Norwegian plane. Grete Faremo, a Norwegian colonel, and a NATO spokesperson, were used as sources. Given these sources, all positive to the bombing, the journalist's disapproving approach still leaves a balanced impression: 'On one side you have this quote from Colonel Petter Lindqvist at the the Norwegian armed forces operational headquarters. Although the Norwegian aircraft dropped over 200 bombs during 130 bombing raids in Libya, he says that they have no indications that civilian lives have been lost.' The journalist then asks the critical follow up question: 'But why did Norwegian planes bomb Gaddafi's headquarters, Gaddafi is not supposed to be a target?'

Among the letters from readers, and opinion pieces, three times as many articles (nine) are critical or nuanced than supportive or neutral (three). These articles are also much clearer in their stand on Norway's participation in Libya, and it is easier to categorise them than the news articles. One example is the commentary article 'A foreign policy mistake' (*VG* April 27) by Asle Toje. He writes: 'It is striking that the Stortinget endorsed the use of force in such a complex situation. I refer here to the fact that we know little about the rebels and that we really do not know who we support.'

Where a news story is usually balanced and describes various aspects of a case, opinion pieces and chronicles are based on the writer's personal opinion and so it is also natural that in these cases a clearer message appears. It is interesting that a war that has full support in the Stortinget is met with unambiguously unfavourable arguments in opinion pieces and commentaries from an informed public. The critical voices are often people with a special interest in and expertise in the subject they write about. Among the authors in our sample are an example of this from Ivar Johansen (a local politician from SV in Oslo) and, as already mentioned, the international leader in SV, Petter Eide. On the other side we have opinion pieces by the foreign minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, from Dag Henriksen (a major in the Norwegian army and a lecturer at the school for the air force in Trondheim), and Karsten Friis, a senior adviser at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) All have a solid academic background and are qualified to discuss the war in Libya.

7.2 Editorials

It was often difficult to determine whether the editorials were clearly supportive or clearly critical of Norway's participation. The same goes for the many of the editorial comments. None of these comments is directly unfavourable. An almost equal number are supportive, neutral or nuanced.

In the period 10 March to 10 August we found a total of 20 editorials which referred to Libya. Five of these, however, did not raise the issue of Norway's participation. Among the 15 which did, three were clearly critical, three nuanced and nine supportive. All the three that were clearly critical came from *Klassekampen*, whose leftist political profile allows it to be more unsympathetic than the other newspapers. We will return to the editorials in the qualitative analysis.

7.3 Coverage over the whole timespan: Phases and peaks

Most articles that discuss the principal aspects of Norway's participation were written in late March (21-22 March), the time when the Norwegian soldiers left for Libya to take part in the war (cf. Figure 3 and 4). The second peak in the material is around 10-11 May as a follow-up when, on 9 May, the foreign minister and the minister of defence reported to the Stortinget on the operation and the Norwegian participation in Libya. On the same day it was announced that Norway had never categorically objected to any target in Libya (this referred to the fact that the Norwegian military had the right to a veto if asked to bomb a target they found ethically problematic – the so-called 'red card').

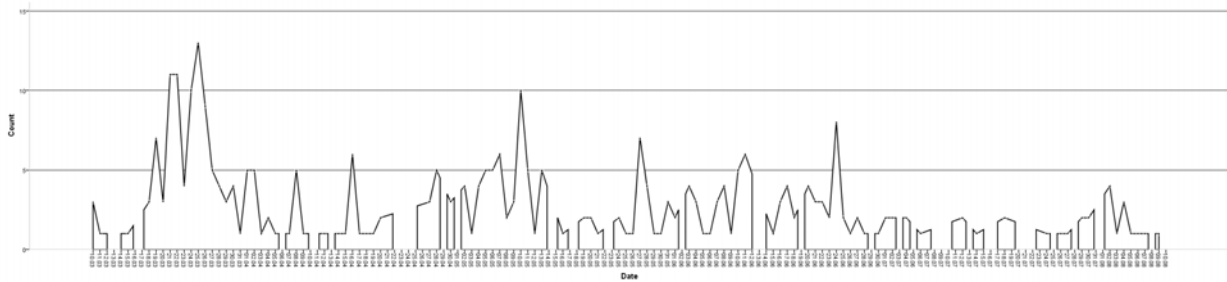


Figure 3: The number of news items day by day from 10 March to 10 August

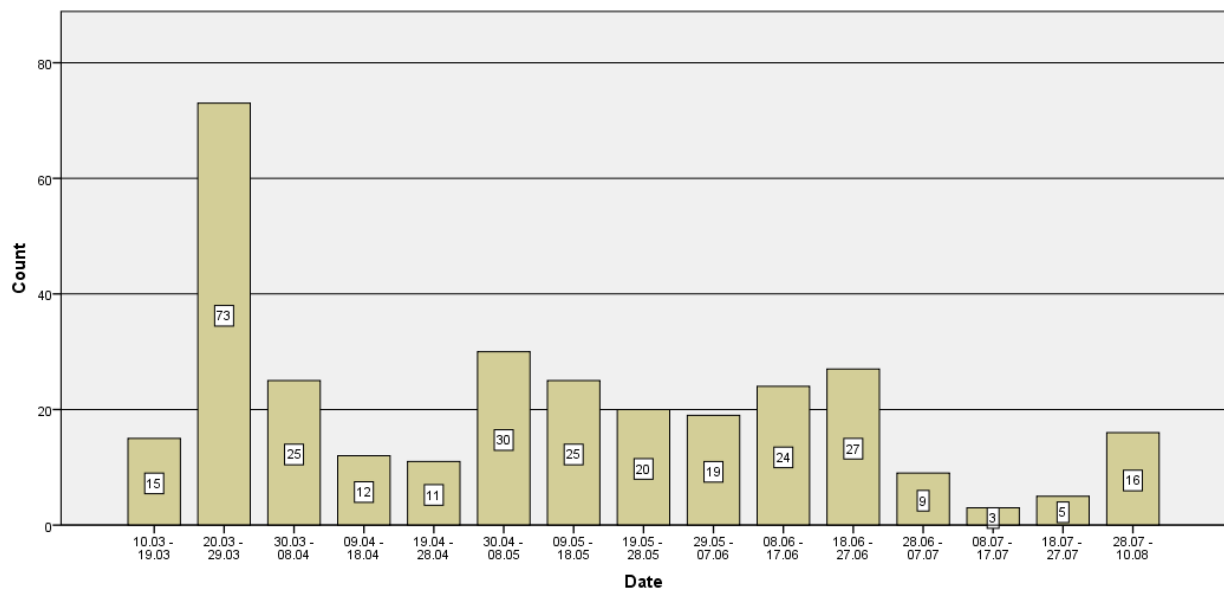


Figure 4: Number of articles by date

As mentioned, the debate reached a peak on 21 March, when the first Norwegian pilots took part. This meant that during the period 21-26 March 58 articles altogether were published raising issues about the participation of Norway in Libya. Norway's withdrawal from Libya on 1 August, on the other hand, received very little attention. There were no articles on that day, whereas one might think that this would have been a suitable moment for critical reflection. On the next day, 2 August, there are four articles dealing with Norway's participation. One possible reason for this lack of interest in Libya might be the dramatic events in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July, when the government building was blown up and the Labour Party's youth camp attacked, with 77 people killed.

But also, in the days, weeks and months prior to 22 July the participation of Norway received little attention in the Norwegian press. There would probably have been more attention to Norway's withdrawal from Libya had it not been for the terrorist attacks on 22 July but, in the wider context, we still believe that this dramatic event had little impact on how the Norwegian media covered the Libya story.

The peak in the coverage on 10 and 11 May is a follow-up of the foreign minister's and defence minister's reports to the Stortinget on 9 May. This proves the point in the introduction that the media tend to reflect the agenda of the political elite. Other minor peaks occur on 27-28 April when it had become known that the Norwegian aircraft had bombed Gaddafi's residence in Tripoli and an attack on the Libyan state-controlled television station had taken place. There was also a small peak on 11 June, when it was announced that Norway would pull its aircraft out of Libya on 1 August. If we ignore the period during the peak at the end of March, the fact that Norway was involved in warfare in another country received little attention in the media overall. Probably, some of the reasons for this can be found in the consensus (described earlier) of the political parties and in the Stortinget. The warfare became a daily routine and thus not news worthy.

7.4 The death of Gaddafi and NATO's exit

In addition to the period 10 March to 10 August 2011, we examined the Libya coverage in the same newspapers during the period 21-24 October and the period 29 October to 1 November 2011. The first period was chosen because Gaddafi was found and killed by a mob on 20 October. We wanted to see how the media coverage went in the aftermath of this event, given the controversial circumstances surrounding his death. We chose 29 October to 1 November because on 28 October the NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen declared that NATO would end its warfare in Libya on 31 October at 23:59. He described the operation as one of the most successful in NATO's history. We wanted to see if this was used as a basis for the media to reflect over his statement and whether the editorials discussed some of the issues of principle involved.

In the period 21-24 October, we found 105 articles that dealt with Libya and Gaddafi's death. None of them took up the question of the participation of Norway in Libya and Norway's potential responsibility for the events surrounding Gaddafi's death. In the period 29 October to 1 November, we found 14 articles that dealt with Libya. Two of them took up the question of Norway's participation, one questioned Norway's contribution and one expressed support. As mentioned, it was announced on 28 October that NATO would end its operation. But only five of the 14 articles in the following days specifically mentioned that NATO had withdrawn. Two of these were briefs, two mentioned it in passing. Only *Aftenposten* took it up as a major theme, but without explicitly saying whether it was right or wrong to withdraw.

We have also looked at all the editorials in these newspapers in these two short periods, regardless of the keywords. In the first period (21-24 October) there were six editorials about Libya, while 18 were about completely different topics. Five of these six were published on 21-22 October. Of these, three were supportive, one nuanced and one unfavourable (*Klassekampen*). One did not address the participation of Norway at all. In the second period (29 October 29 to 1 November), none of the 22 editorials dealt with Libya. No one commented on NATO's withdrawal or mentioned the participation of Norway.

7.5 Qualitative review of editorials

We conducted a qualitative analysis of 15 editorials in the first period. Space here is too limited to go into detail about all of them. There is generally a tendency for editorials to be more positive at the beginning of a conflict; later, critical questions are raised, and a more nuanced debate takes place as the campaign draws out over time. Many articles comment negatively about the way the government's information strategy is handled, without expressing criticism of Norway's participation. One of the issues mentioned was the secrecy surrounding the targets picked out to be bombed.

Dagbladet's editorial on 4 June carried the title 'Norway as war nation', arguing that the military action was legitimate, but that the decision to participate was taken the wrong way: the decisions should have been discussed more openly and in greater depth (the background to this was that the politicians handled the decision to send in Norwegian forces in an informal manner on the telephone during the Easter holiday, revealed by the investigative reporter in Per Anders Johansen in *Aftenposten*). Once again we see that the media with a few exceptions have problems dealing with the legal issues *Dagbladet* writes: 'Military action against Libya is legitimate because it is safely anchored in a United Nations resolution. The same cannot be said about the political process at home.' *Dagbladet* does not refer to Resolution 1973 and the issue of whether NATO's warfare really was about regime change. *Klassekampen* is the only of the dailies in the sample that clearly expresses a disagreement with both the government and the Stortinget.

Of the weekly newspapers, *Ny Tid* and *Morgenbladet* both criticised Norway's participation in Libya, *Ny Tid* in all the three editorials during this period, and *Morgenbladet* in one of its two editorials. *Ny Tid* is also much clearer in its condemnation than any of the other papers. The following quote from the editorial 'A victory without winning', published on 25 March, exemplifies this: 'It was a primitive war of aggression, seemingly without an aim. There is a quarrel about is going to manage the operation, and complete confusion within the NATO countries about what is the goal of the operation is, and what kind of power one should use ... How the coalition government, and especially the leadership of the Socialist Left (SV), can so easily include Norway in such a confused NATO mission is a mystery ...'

This shows the importance of the niche newspapers as a key factor in the public debate. They focus on topics that are not presented in the mainstream press.

On 19 March, *Aftenposten* ran an editorial with the title 'Important to prevent civilian casualties in Libya'. It describes Gaddafi's recklessness and is clearly supportive of Norway's participation in the warfare. It also has a focus on the UN mandate:

Norway has always underlined that the necessity of an action must be based on the support of the Security Council and that it must be justified by the need to protect the Libyan population against their own government. These conditions are now fulfilled. In our opinion it is natural for Norway to respond positively to a request to contribute militarily...

Again we see an inability to look critically at whether the text of Resolution 1973 is respected, and if the real purpose of the action is regime change.

In another editorial, on 27 May, *Aftenposten* took a more critical approach, but not on the issues mentioned above. The censorship under the title 'Cracks in the glossy image' was based on NATO reports, concluding that the NATO-led air operation, 'Unified Protector', was not as effective as one would wish. The editorial also condemned the government for its restrictive information strategy.

... [the] bombing is unsuccessful. This is information that NATO has supplied us with ... Norway uses 300 million in a war operation, we do not know the impact of it. We should really have learned this. It was learned during the experience with Kosovo and Serbia in 1999.

The criticism is primarily directed at the authorities for not sharing more information about what Norway is doing in Libya. The decision to participate is still supported, albeit in a more cautious tone than at the beginning of the period.

8. Conclusions

Our study shows how the roles of the media easily can become problematic when the nation 'rallies round the flag' and a government decides to participate in a military conflict. On a general level, one can ask whether the media lose their independence when they contribute to national unity. If the national interest is a part of a doxa, to use Bordieus's expression, we will question the media's ability to be a critical corrective in the democratic process. When a unified national assembly fails to look critically at its own war effort, it is dangerous if the media fail in fulfilling their expected role as a watchdog and instead follow a pattern similar to that which Johan Galtung has described as war journalism.

Most people expect news coverage to be more or less neutral. Our study, however, shows that framing news is also a way to take a position by highlighting some issues and ignoring other. This position is not one dimensional, as documented in the analysis. The coverage in *Aftenposten* shows that critical and supportive coverage can exist side by side. *Aftenposten* succeeded in educating the public on the informal – and thus irresponsible – way that Norway was brought into the war. But it failed to go into the text of Resolution 1973 and to investigate whether NATO had violated its mandate by not including the African Union and the Arab League in the military and political process. The way the opposition was brought to power, and the lack of dignity in the way Gaddafi was removed and lynched by the mob, can backfire in the long-run.

Will historians looking back on the regime change in Libya judge us for sending our soldiers to a battlefield where innocent people have also been killed? In this article we have documented that politicians, as well as the media, lacked the will to look critically at the legal basis for NATO's 'out of area' policy. In addition, only 'humanitarian' arguments were presented as justification for the intervention in Libya. Norwegian newspaper readers were told that we could not sit still and see Gaddafi slaughter his own people. Alarming reports from Amnesty International and other human rights groups came out of Libya in September 2011 and February 2012, and according to *The Guardian* those brought to power by the bombing lack the ability to live up to the democratic expectations which were partly created by the media themselves:

Amnesty International said it visited 11 detention camps in central and western Libya in January and February 2012, and found evidence of torture and abuse at all but one. Nobody is holding these militias responsible, Donatella Rovera, senior crisis response adviser at Amnesty International, said. The UN's top human rights official, and Amnesty International have urged Libya's government to take control of all makeshift prisons to prevent further atrocities against detainees.

The Guardian also quotes the UN high commissioner for human rights, Navi Pillay, who said on 27 January: 'There's torture, extra judicial executions, rape of both men and women' (*The Guardian*, 16 February 2012).

In an editorial on 19 February 2012 under the headline 'Libya must not become a lawless society', *Aftenposten* refers to this report and mentions Norway's role in the warfare: 'Assisted by substantial attack from numerous NATO countries, not least from Norway, the national transition government came to power. Since then a lot has got wrong.' What *Aftenposten* does not do is to reflect upon its own support in this matter. Why are the media which supported the military campaign unable to take responsibility for getting these people into power or look at its own position in the process? But it would be wrong to place all the blame on the media. As is stated in the introduction to this article, in troubled times the media are seldom able to look critically at their own country at war when the politicians have failed to do so in the first place.

To conclude, our main contention is that the media lacked the ability to go more deeply into the principal questions involved.

1. It is striking that none of the editorials (with the exception of *Klassekampen* and niche newspapers) find it natural to refer to the critical voices who opposed the war. They also ignore the fact that the news articles were based almost exclusively on sources from the Norwegian military and political elite, and mainly those who supported the war.
2. Instead of using resources to produce discussion and debate, editors left this to the debate articles and letters from

readers. We have to ask why they did not choose to use editorial resources to develop journalism that absorbed dissenting views in the day-to-day framing. We are left with the suspicion that Norway per definition is looked upon as a 'good-doer' and the media lacks the will to see ourselves through the eyes of others.

3. A number of articles discuss and condemn, as mentioned, the government's information strategy and lack of openness about the military operation, but do not go deeply into the legal basis for the operation. Thus we missed a critical evaluation of whether or not the text in UN Security Resolution 1973 was respected.

We must also question whether the coverage, all in all, reflected the seriousness of the situation. Norway dropped nearly 600 bombs on Libya. By 19 April 2011, Norwegian F16 pilots had fired at least 12 per cent of all the bombs hitting Gaddafi's forces (*Aftenposten*, 19 April 2011). Our findings suggest that the consequences of Norway's warfare were underreported. One explanation for this is the lack of critical voices among the politicians. Although some such voices within the Socialist Left Party (SV) were quoted, they were so few that they almost disappeared into the silent majority.

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On the authors:

Rune Ottosen is professor in journalism at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences He has written extensively on press history and media coverage of war and conflicts. He is co-editor with Stig Arne Nohrstedt of several books, the latest *Global War – Local Views: Media Images of the Iraq War*. In 2008 Ottosen published *VG, Saddam og vi. Et kritisk blikk på nyhetsdekning av kriger og konflikter*. In 2010 he was one of the editors and co-author of the four volume *Norwegian Press History, Norsk Presses historie (1767-2010)*. eMail: rune.ottosen@hioa.no

Tore Slaatta is professor and Dr.polit. at the Department of Media and Communication, at the University of Oslo, and has since the 1990s been working on research concerning European public sphere and the role of transnational journalism, and financial journalism in the Nordic countries (with Peter Kjær, 2005). Slaatta directed research on media power within the Norwegian Power and Democracy Program (Makt- og demokratiutredningen), observing among other things, the increasing importance of digital media (Digital makt 2002) and recent developments within Norwegian journalism and media institutions (Den norske medieorden, 2003) in a field analytical perspective. More Recent research interests are concerned with the field of cultural production and the relationships between art, cultural politics and the cultural industries.

eMail: tore.slaatta@media.no

Sigurd Øfsti has studied media science at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and at Lillehammer University College. In 2009 he started a masters degree in journalism at the University of Oslo and in 2011 he completed his studies delivering a thesis on how Norwegian journalists use the microblogging service Twitter. Aside his studies he has been working in the local Norwegian newspapers "Drammens Tidende" and "Moss Avis". After finishing his master degree he worked as a scientific assistant, and since 2011 he has been working as a political journalist in the local Norwegian newspaper "Smaalenenes Avis".

eMail: sigurdofsti@hotmail.com