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THESIS

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE TARGETING OF CIVILIANS

by

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MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE TARGETING OF CIVILIANS

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ABSTRACT

As evident by current global events, there is a shift in the role that society has as part of a collective response against the targeting of civilians. Findings suggest that deliberate attacks on civilians expose a vulnerability that can be exploited through media coverage and accompanying narratives. Due to the growing reach of the internet, the killing of non-combatants can now be revealed to the rest of the world almost instantly and makes it more difficult for a government to deny responsibility. The purpose of this study is to determine whether the evolution of media coverage, the role of society, and its current capacity to report an event provide an information advantage against an aggressor. Conditions of global media coverage, domestic coverage, censorship, and censorship circumvention were analyzed across five cases. Coverage of the Nanjing and Tiananmen Square massacres were compared to present day cases of Russia, Iran, and Israel. Although the capacity of the media coverage is insufficient to deter attacks on civilians, global reporting and awareness incentivize action from civilian populations who now contribute to global reporting by documenting and disseminating information. Future research can determine ways to use these narratives to maximize operational effects against an adversary.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
DDoS	Distributed Denial of Service
HRO	Human Rights Organization
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IE	Information Environment
IRGC	Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Corps
ISP	Internet Service Providers
MCDP	Marine Corps Doctrine Publication
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
VPN	Virtual Private Network

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As evident by current global events, there is a shift in the role that society has as part of a collective response against the targeting of civilians. Findings revealed that the evolution of media coverage, the role of society, and its current capacity to report an event provide an information advantage against an aggressor. Due to the growing reach of the internet, the killing of non-combatants can now be revealed to the rest of the world almost instantly and makes it more difficult for a government to deny responsibility. Conditions of global media coverage, domestic coverage, censorship, and censorship circumvention were analyzed across five cases. Coverage of the Nanjing and Tiananmen Square massacres were compared to present day cases of Russia, Iran, and Israel.

The earlier cases were utilized as a baseline to compare the evolution of media coverage across specific milestones such as the adoption of international humanitarian law, growth of the concept of human rights, and wide use of television to report news before the availability of the internet and social media platforms. Present day cases were selected due to their recent or developing events and the wide availability of coverage. These cases were used to analyze the impact that the internet and social media have had on news coverage and reporting. Analysis of civilian death tolls, components of the media's ability to cover the events, the aggressors' response to reporting of the event, and the role of society in enabling the awareness of the public in each case was used to answer the following questions: Is there a casualty threshold for an attack on civilians to be covered globally? Is the capacity of global media coverage deterring deliberate attacks on civilians? What is the role of society in the collection of evidence and reporting of these types of crimes?

Analysis of these cases determined that there is persistent media coverage regardless on the number of fatalities, that the capacity of media reporting does not deter attacks on civilians, and that the role of society in collecting and reporting events is now one that contributes significantly to the media system. Worldwide media coverage All three of these cases showed that there is no death toll threshold for a deliberate attack on civilians to be covered and reported across news media outlets and social media. Unlike

the massacres at Tiananmen Square and Nanjing, in which the aggressors disputed the death toll to downplay the magnitude of the event, present day cases showed consistent coverage regardless of the number of deaths. Additionally, despite a clear evolution in the concept of human rights, capacity of international media coverage, and social media reporting, these cases did not provide evidence to show that those factors are sufficient to deter the deliberate targeting of noncombatants. Russia and Iran continue to use disproportional force against civilians, despite the wide media coverage and criticism, and Israel's objective of eradicating Hamas has been a priority over mitigating the consequences of the high civilian death toll in Gaza. Lastly, analysis of these cases proved that society has an active role, that continues to grow, in the collection of evidence and reporting of attacks on civilians. Global reporting and awareness incentivize action from civilian populations who now contribute to global reporting by documenting and disseminating information. Even in instances in which the aggressor attempted to use denial, disinformation, or restriction of information flow to limit the impact of media coverage on its objective, the civilian population found ways to circumvent censorship and share information to amplify media coverage.

Up until now the media structure had been one of one-way communication between the producers of mainstream media and its consumers, society. However, social media and the internet have changed this structure which now permits the civilian population to participate in the process of documenting, processing, and disseminating information to the rest of the world. In the context of the murder of noncombatants, social media and the internet have allowed evidence of these crimes to be made immediately available to the public, visible, and sharable.¹ The use of social networks to influence political response to the murder of civilians has grown to be effective because it makes it easy to quickly reach large groups of people at a low cost and straight from the source.² The interaction between technology and social response has fueled the growth of global

¹ Wen Tang, "Collective Memory of the Nanjing Massacre: A Case Study on Chinese Social Media—Sina Weibo" (Sweden, Uppsala Universitet, 2018).

² "Media-(Dis)Information-Security," NATO.

social networks, which now have an increasing ability to exploit an aggressor's political vulnerability when crimes against human rights are recorded and shared.

The findings have several implications due to the increasing role of the information domain and the operational effects that the narratives pertaining to the targeting of civilians may influence. Increased use of these narratives, amplified by media coverage, can be used to alienate an adversary, and expose additional vulnerabilities that may affect its ability to achieve the objective. Additionally, media coverage and accompanying narratives show solidarity and support for the victim population. Increased frequency of media coverage pertaining to the targeting of civilians can embolden affected populations to act in ways such as organized protests and further reporting from within affected areas, primarily via social media platforms. These actions can decrease the domestic support of an adversary, amplify the population's dissatisfaction with the actions of its government, and increase the U.S. informational advantage.

Lastly, when conflicts breakout and governments target civilians, the world looks to the U.S. government to intervene, whether that is diplomatically or militarily. When this occurs, the official response, to condemn civilian deaths, must be issued immediately and without reservation regardless of who the aggressor is. Delay in response or inconsistent responses across similar events will be highlighted by media coverage and could have an adverse effect on the informational advantage that can be gained with initial reporting. Additionally, careful attention must be paid to particular choice of language used since the narrative will be disseminated across media platforms and in various languages.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

Human rights violations, due to the intentional killing of civilians, occur all over the world yet some are better known than others due to the varying degree of media coverage and ability to circumvent censorship of the events. Due to the growing reach of the internet, the killing of non-combatants can now be revealed to the rest of the world almost instantly and has the potential to generate a significant international response. Even though there may be varying factors such as the scale of the event, geopolitical concerns, or ideological differences, some human rights violations transcend borders and incentivize action domestically and abroad. The killing of civilians can no longer be concealed as effectively as it may have been possible in the past, which is costly to the perpetrator due to the increased likelihood of immediate domestic and global response.¹ The world is witnessing an unprecedented involvement of the corporate sector as companies cease operations in Russia due to the arbitrary killing of innocent civilians.² In Iran, the senseless killing of civilians protesting government abuse is only incentivizing a more powerful resistance despite the government's censorship to exercise internal control and power.³ Additionally, negative effects on diplomatic relations and damage to credibility have the potential to hinder a perpetrator's objective.⁴

The international human rights system has not been a steady part of international law, instead it has had a recent history of rapid change. International human rights are

¹ *World Report 2023* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023>.

² "Over 1,000 Companies Have Curtailed Operations in Russia—But Some Remain," Yale School of Management, February 6, 2023, <https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/over-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain>.

³ "Iranians Protesting Regime Refuse to Back down despite Threats of Arrest and Execution," video, 7:45, PBS NewsHour, January 12, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/iranians-protesting-regime-refuse-to-back-down-despite-threats-of-arrest-and-execution>.

⁴ "Human Rights Abuses Are Not Just Morally Wrong, They Are Also Bad for Business," *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, March 23, 2015, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/opinion-editorial/2015/06/human-rights-abuses-are-not-just-morally-wrong-they-are-also-bad-business>.

established and function through nations however, it is also influenced by additional actors and who can apply pressure to decision makers and processes through lobbying, information exchange, and messaging.⁵ As evident by current global events, there is a shift in the role that society has as part of a collective response against the mass killing of civilians. The ability of the international community to intervene with other methods besides military action is evolving into a whole of society response that may challenge the perpetrator's justification or denial of crimes committed against civilians. Although information technology and social media may be partly responsible for a more wholesome response, there are a variety of factors involved in the decision to act against a perpetrator and whether the response itself is effective in stopping human rights violations. The ability to document and record events real time, instant dissemination of information via any media vehicles available, and ability to counter and circumvent the aggressor's attempts to disseminate propaganda and censor truthful information are significant elements to gaining information advantage. Understanding the factors of a successful response to the mass killing of innocent civilians, will allow the international community to incorporate all effective methods of action against the perpetrator.

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

How has the media coverage of the killing of noncombatants evolved within the information domain in the past century, and how can it be used to gain information advantage?

⁵ Jean-Philippe Béja, *The Impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen Massacre* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 206, ProQuest.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted in 1948 and is the foundation of international human rights law. Article 3 states that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.”⁶ Another major part of international humanitarian law are the Geneva conventions of 1949. The fourth convention specifically protect civilians in areas of armed conflict and occupied territories; article 3 prohibits violence to life and person of individuals not taking part in hostilities. Additionally, two supplementary protocols to the conventions were adopted in 1977 to give greater protections to victims of armed conflicts. Both protocols include articles forbidding indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations.⁷ Lastly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted in 1966. Part III, article 6, paragraph 1 states that “Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” Additionally, paragraph 3 states that in instances of genocide, nothing within the article will authorize a perpetrator to utilize the covenant to detract from the obligations on the prevention and punishment of genocide.⁸

Although the international laws and treaties that protect civilian populations against arbitrary killing were not adopted until after World War II, there were still unwritten norms for the conduct of war well before this period. The reaction to human rights violations resulting in the loss of life has continued to evolve from a time of silence and inaction to a sporadic international response.⁹ The recent evolution of human rights

⁶ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations, 2016), <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

⁷ *The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Their Additional Protocols* (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2016), <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/geneva-conventions-1949-additional-protocols>.

⁸ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1966), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

⁹ Katarina Tomaševski, *Responding to Human Rights Violations, 1946–1999* (Netherlands: Brill Nijhoff, 2000), <https://brill.com/display/title/10694>.

and the growing disgust against the deliberate killing of civilians has been accompanied by a decline in armed conflict, both in the number of events and in the scale of each incident. Some literature suggests that this trend is attributed to humankind's ability to engage in more effective reasoning which has in turn, resulted in moral advances that restrict the use of violence.¹⁰ Alternate explanation provides the introduction and integration of civilian immunity as the primary contribution to the decline in massacres. This moral and legal construct against the intentional killing of civilians has made it more difficult for the perpetrators of these crimes to justify their authorities. Yet, despite the norm of civilian immunity and the overall decline of violence, there are persistent incidents of perpetrators murdering civilians without punishment or criticism.¹¹

In examining the paradox between international human rights law prohibiting the killing of civilians and the persistence of human rights violations, it is important to discuss the varying response to these events. Since the emergence of human rights organizations (HRO), many have advocated for the expansion of human rights and the improvement of its practices. This has resulted in the transformation of how human rights advocacy and information have been framed and prioritized over time. Almost all information produced by HROs in response to human rights violations is an attempt to expose a perpetrator's action, against moral and legal constructs, to the public.¹² However, shaming, as a method to gather and disperse information on human rights violations to improve public awareness, has been inconsistent. Literature on the response by HROs argues that some countries are targeted with shaming campaigns while others are mostly ignored. Research suggests that countries in areas with higher HRO resources and/or surrounded by states that support human rights, will stand out more than those surrounded by other perpetrators and in areas with fewer HRO resources. Furthermore,

¹⁰ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (London: Penguin Publishing Group, 2012).

¹¹ Alex Bellamy, *Massacres and Morality: Mass Atrocities in an Age of Civilian Immunity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26–50, Alexander Street.

¹² Baekkwon Park, Amanda Murdie, and David R Davis, "The (Co)Evolution of Human Rights Advocacy: Understanding Human Rights Issue Emergence over Time," *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 3 (September 1, 2019): 313–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718808315>.

states who ratify and support human rights treaties can engage in “social camouflage” to conceal human rights concerns, while those that are unwilling are easier targets in the efforts by HROs to make an impact on the global perception with regards to human rights violations.¹³

Historically, the international response to mass killings has been slow and ineffective in preventing human rights violations while they are occurring. In the absence of action for timely response, legal action after the fact has been utilized as an attempt for accountability. However, international tribunals rarely result in punishment and at best, only achieve minimal deterrence of future violations.¹⁴ As an alternative to criminal prosecution, there has been an increase in the use of the “truth commission” approach. Rather than pursuing criminal punishment, this approach seeks to compile all details pertaining to the violation to include, the sequence of events, the role of the actors involved, and what the motives for the actions taken were.¹⁵ The collection, validation, and dissemination of information as a response to human rights violations has grown into the idea that even without desirable results, there is a duty to expose the truth. Reporting by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, legal sources, journalism efforts, and official documents from governmental organizations, has dramatically increased the availability of information in the past few decades. However, the coverage of civilian killings is not distributed equally; some countries are scrutinized more than others due to the visibility of violations and the degree of access to media and outside observers. Additionally, the perpetrator’s response to reporting- by denying the events, altering their interpretation, or justifying the actions- is a common strategy used to reject the legitimacy of the truth.

¹³ Sam R. Bell, K. Chad Clay, and Amanda Murdie, “Join the Chorus, Avoid the Spotlight: The Effect of Neighborhood and Social Dynamics on Human Rights Organization Shaming,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 167–93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717727829>.

¹⁴ W. Michael Reisman, “Legal Responses to Genocide and Other Massive Violations of Human Rights,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 59, no. 4 (1996): 75–80, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1192191>.

¹⁵ Stephan Landsman, “Alternative Responses to Serious Human Rights Abuses: Of Prosecution and Truth Commissions,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 59, no. 4 (1996): 81–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1192192>.

Official response by a state is also an option for the international community, often in the form of military intervention or diplomatic action. However, military response is often seen as a measure of last resort since it can be unfeasible or may exacerbate mass killings or prolong the armed conflict. As an alternative to military employment, economic sanctions are utilized by policy makers to effect change. However, quantitative research on the effectiveness of economic sanctions to impact ongoing genocides has found them to be ineffective even when combined with other policy options.¹⁶

B. PRIOR RESEARCH

There has been some academic literature examining the relationship between small forces and large military powers engaged in asymmetric conflict and analyzing the factors of why the more capable force loses against insurgents engaging in guerrilla warfare. However, although the murder of noncombatants is discussed as a factor of an overall strategy, these theories do not analyze the effects that media coverage has on the political capital of the perpetrator and the information advantage that can be attained from the unrestricted coverage and dissemination of the events across the world. Andrew Mack argues that the use of unconventional warfare, by the weak, to prolong a war will logically lead to relative interests and political vulnerability for the strong. As the political capital wears thin, there will be an increase in widespread opposition to conflict at home.¹⁷ Ivan Arreguin-Toft builds off Mack's theory to propose that the interaction of actor strategies in a conflict is a better predictor of the outcome. He explores this theory through the development of hypothesis for distinct strategic interactions, one of which involves barbarism, the targeting of noncombatants. Although barbarism might prove to be an effective military strategy, history has shown that if the objective is political

¹⁶ Matthew Krain, "The Effect of Economic Sanctions on the Severity of Genocides or Politicides," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 88–111, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2016.1240516>.

¹⁷ Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (January 1975): 175–200, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009880>.

control, it usually backfires.¹⁸ Lastly, Jeffrey Record builds on the theories of Mack and Toft to discuss the effects that external assistance can have on the power relationship between the weak and strong. He continues that although a superior will and strategy is required for the weak to win, substantial external assistance is required to convert those into victory.¹⁹

C. MILITARY DOCTRINE

Joint Publication 3-04 describes information advantage and relevant terminology. Informational power is described as “the ability to use information to support achievement of objectives and gain an informational advantage.” JP 3-04 describes information advantage as “the operational advantage gained through the use of information for decision making and its ability to leverage information to create effects on the information environment (IE).” the use of the term ‘information advantage’ has also increased recently across joint doctrine.²⁰

There are numerous mentions of information advantage in recent defense publications. The 2016 Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment declares its purpose as laying out a path for the DOD to gain advantage in the IE. The 2018 NDS mentions information advantage and the 2018 Joint Concept for Operating in the IE focuses on the requirements for gaining and maintaining an information advantage. Additionally, both Marine Corps and Army concepts focus on information advantage. Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 8 defines this term as an “exploitable condition resulting from the ability to generate, preserve, deny, and project information more effectively than another.” It discusses three types of information advantage,

¹⁸ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753212868>.

¹⁹ Jeffrey Record, “Why the Strong Lose,” *Parameters (Carlisle, Pa.)* 35, no. 4 (2005): 16–31, <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.2281>.

²⁰ *Information in Joint Operations*, JP 3-04 (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022).

“systems overmatch, prevailing narrative, and force resiliency, to achieve objectives and impose an opposing will on an adversary.”²¹

D. GAPS IN LITERATURE

Although there are various options for the international community to respond with to mass killings of civilians—military intervention, criminal prosecution, truth reporting and fact-finding, naming and shaming, and policy—further research on the comprehensive use of these tools needs to be done. Research on the effectiveness of any one of these individual responses is insufficient due to the collective international response when human rights violations occur. Additionally, there are no recent studies that explain why international response itself is inconsistent and often ineffective, despite what should be an objective response to the deliberate killing of civilians. Lastly, the use of the internet to disseminate narratives, photos, videos ,and even hashtags, are being used more effectively to protests human rights violations.²² The increasing power of these narratives, which are mobilizing the world into action against perpetrators such as Iran and Russia, need to be researched in order to understand how they are impacting traditional response methods and their effectiveness in hindering perpetrator’s ability to continue to violate human rights.

²¹ Chris Paul, “Information in Joint Operations” (IO4300 lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, October 4, 2023).

²² “Hashtags, a Viral Song and Memes Empower Iran’s Protesters,” *BBC News*, November 2, 2022, sec. Middle East, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-63456599>.

III. METHODOLOGY AND CASE SELECTION

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the evolution of media coverage pertaining to the targeting and killing of civilians. It utilizes events through a series of milestones, that have advanced worldwide coverage and reporting, such as internationally recognized human rights laws, growth of Human Rights Organizations (HRO), expansion of the internet and social media, and the shift in the media reporting structure which now includes society as a firsthand reporting mechanism. These milestones have impacted media reporting elements of global coverage, internal or aggressor coverage, censorship, and censorship circumvention.

B. HYPOTHESIS

This thesis suggests that the evolution of the media coverage of deliberate attacks on civilians, by a government and its military, has resulted in a shift in power that yields an information advantage over the aggressor. This hypothesis will be tested through an analysis of the civilian death tolls, components of the media's ability to cover the events, the aggressors' response to reporting of the event, and the role of society in enabling the awareness of the public. Lastly, this thesis will attempt to answer the following questions: Is there a casualty threshold for an attack on civilians to be covered globally? Is the capacity of global media coverage deterring deliberate attacks on civilians? What is the role of society in the collection of evidence and reporting of these types of crimes?

C. RESEARCH APPROACH AND CASE STUDY SELECTION

The right to life and prohibitions against the arbitrary killing of civilian populations are protected under the UDHR and the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, as well as its supplementary protocols adopted in 1977. These laws have evolved since the conclusion of World War II and were used to define the scope of violence in selecting five cases that violate the protection of civilians against indiscriminate attacks; cases prior to World War II will be included to serve as a baseline comparing international

response prior to and after the adoption of international humanitarian law. Research will focus on analyzing events resulting in the killing of civilians due to actions of a government and its military.

Qualitative research will be conducted to analyze the collective media coverage and response to human rights violations against civilians and resulting in the loss of life, through time. The Nanking Massacre, Tiananmen Square Massacre, Russian invasion of Ukraine, the death of Mahsa Amini and Iran's response to ensuing protests, and the Hamas-Israel conflict will be used to conduct a comparative analysis of the varying elements of media coverage. These elements include international coverage, domestic coverage, denial and censorship, and actions taken by civilian populations to enable media reporting. Selected cases will cover a time frame that extends from 1937 to the present day. However, certain periods, such as World War II, were excluded due to the number of events resulting in mass loss of life. While the magnitude of human rights violations during this period generated a vast, global response, it would be difficult to attribute it to single events without excluding other ones that contributed to actions against the perpetrator.

By comparing cases across time, this thesis will be able to analyze the effects that certain milestones have had on the perspective of global audiences and media coverage. Such events include the adoption of the UDHR, the Geneva conventions, to include revisions, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the creation of NGOs in support of human rights. Also included will be the evolution of mass media due to technological advancements—such as the availability of television in the 1950s, internet in the 1990s, and social media platforms in the last 15 years.

To analyze media coverage prior to WWII, I will be using the Nanjing Massacre in 1937–1938, which resulted in the mass murder of tens of thousands of Chinese civilians by the Imperial Japanese Army.²³ The significance of examining this event is that they occurred prior to the creation of international organizations, such as the United

²³ “Rape of Nanjing: Massacre, Facts & Aftermath,” History, November 9, 2009, <https://www.history.com/topics/asian-history/nanjing-massacre>.

Nations (UN), and prior to the adoption of international humanitarian law and human rights law such as the UDHR and the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Furthermore, the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and massacre of student led demonstrations in China by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) will be used to analyze the media coverage after a period in which television sets were available to most households in the world and the concept of human rights had advanced dramatically. Events leading to the evolution of this concept include the creation and adoption of international human rights law and the establishment of NGOs, such as Amnesty International in 1961 and Human Rights Watch in 1978, which may have had an impact on the coverage of human rights violations resulting in the loss of life of civilians.²⁴ Finally, present day cases were selected to analyze the evolution of the overall global media coverage to these crimes after the invention of the internet and the availability and widespread use of social media platforms for communication in what has become the information age.

In addition to academic literature covering these events, sources of information will be obtained from formal investigations conducted by the UN, government appointed agencies, reporting from NGOs, coverage by mainstream media outlets, and social media posts. The cases were selected to include varying factors such as scale and motive. Analysis of these events will look to identify trends in the collective response to the unjustified killing of civilians and attempts by the perpetrators to conceal the actions or deny the crime after the fact.

²⁴ "Tiananmen Square: What Happened in the Protests of 1989?," *BBC News*, December 23, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48445934>.

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IV. CASE 1: THE NANKING MASSACRE

A. INTRODUCTION

On December 13, 1937, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, the first troops of the Imperial Japanese Army entered the city of Nanking, the capital of the Nationalist Chinese at the time. Under orders by General Matsui Iwane, Commanding General of the Japanese Central China Front Army, the Japanese took and destroyed the city. In what would eventually become one of the worst massacres of the twentieth century, Japanese troops engaged in a campaign of mass killings with a death toll estimated to be between 200,000 and 300,000 people.²⁵ Most of those murdered were unarmed combatants, POWs, and civilians, including infants and the elderly. Tens of thousands of Women were brutally gang raped, tortured, and killed. In addition to the systematic killings, Japanese troops looted the city and burned over a third of the buildings.

These acts were unnecessary for the Japanese troops to achieve their objective and were primarily the result of the violent nature of the Japanese military. The way the killings and rapes were executed, with cruelty and aggression, were even more appalling since they continued for over six weeks after they city was secured, and victory was achieved.²⁶ Japanese militarism taught their soldiers to be loyal to the emperor and cultivated a culture of cruelty that looked down on other races and considered killing to be heroic. The city of Nanking was the capital of China and of political, economic, and cultural value and it was of strategic value to the Japanese, to attack it. Japanese headquarters instructed General Iwane to use available forces and spare no sacrifice to accomplish the goal.

In addition to the military culture of the Japanese and the strategic importance of Nanking, there are several underlying causes that led to these events. Although those two

²⁵ “Nanjing Massacre | History, Summary & Facts,” *Britannica*, August 14, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Nanjing-Massacre>.

²⁶ Joshua A. Fogel, *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 11–69.

factors can be said to have played an important role into the atrocities that unfolded, they are not enough to explain the incident since there were other cities, such as Shanghai, which were of equal importance yet did not witness the same level of brutality as did the citizens of Nanking. One of those factors was the unorganized withdrawal of Chinese troops which eventually resulted in 90,000 soldiers that remained behind after the city fell to the Japanese. Those who were immediately captured or surrendered were lined up and killed by machine guns within 72 hours under an order to kill all prisoners. Those who weren't captured or killed, merged into the civilian population, and gave the Japanese an excuse to search for Chinese soldiers among non-combatants.²⁷

There is a general belief that discipline of Japanese troops fell apart and led to chaos that resulted in rape torture and murder. However, the discipline of troops never faltered; there were no reports of troops deserting their units and westerners who remained in the city were spared. Rather, discipline was maintained and necessary to sustain the efficiency in which these acts were committed. Officers not only ordered their troops to commit these atrocities, but they also took part in them. Women were separated and forced to wash clothes during the day while being raped repeatedly at night. Soldiers were organized into teams to loot stores and raid libraries and temples in search of rare and antique items of value. Prisoners were organized in groups and killed by machine guns in mass killings overseen by officers.²⁸

B. WESTERN MEDIA COVERAGE

Though limited in size, the ability of foreign diplomats and journalists to witness and document first-hand accounts of these crimes made it possible for the rest of the world to become aware of these tragic events. Despite mass evacuations of foreign diplomats and nationals from Nanjing, also known as “Nanking,” there were some who stayed voluntarily and witnessed the atrocities committed by the Japanese. Members of the International Committees of the Nanjing Safety Zone and the International Red Cross,

²⁷ Robert Sabella, Feifei Li, and David Liu, *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 43–44, ProQuest.

²⁸ Fogel, *The Nanjing Massacre*, 11–69.

as well as a handful of individuals with no affiliation to these committees, were responsible for the first accounts about the massacre that made it to the west. Among the 42 people who stayed back, there were five journalists, four American and one British.²⁹

These journalists documented the events and made strong efforts to send their reports for publishing despite the collapse of the city. All five journalists were able to depart Nanjing on American, British, and Japanese naval vessels between December 15–16, 1937. Archibald Trojan Steele utilized USS Oahu’s radio facilities to send a cable to the *Chicago Daily News* which resulted in the first newspaper article, “Japanese Troops Kill Thousands,” on December 15 Chicago time, to the rest of the world.³⁰ In his article, Steele described the situation as one of extreme panic and confusion followed by ‘systematic extermination’ of thousands of innocent lives. He mentioned that the last thing that they saw as they left the city was a group of a few hundred Chinese being murdered next to knee-deep piles of dead bodies. Using words such as butchery, slaughter, smoldering mass of flesh and bones, and massacre, he went on to write three more articles, one in December and two in February of the following year. In his last article, Steele wrote, “this may be war to the Japanese, but it looked like murder to me.”³¹

Articles by the other four journalists, as well as several foreign correspondents in other areas of China, followed shortly after December 15 and were published by the *Seattle Daily Times*, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Springfield Daily Republican*, the *New York Times*, *Reuters*, and the *Oregonian*. In his *New York Times* report from December 18, 1937, Frank Tillman Durdin analyzed that by destroying the city and murdering its population, the Japanese were reinforcing the very hatred and anti-Japanism that they

²⁹ Suping Lu, *They Were in Nanjing: The Nanjing Massacre Witnessed by American and British Nationals* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), chap. 1, ProQuest.

³⁰ Archibald Trojan Steele, “Japanese Troops Kill Thousands; ‘Four Days of Hell’ in Captured City Told by Eyewitness; Bodies Piled Five Feet High in Streets,” *The Chicago Daily News*, December 15, 1937, 1.

³¹ Archibald Trojan Steele, “Reporter Likens Slaughter of Panicky Nanking Chinese to Jackrabbit Drive in U.S.,” *The Chicago Daily News*, February 4, 1938, 2.

claimed were fighting to eliminate in China.³² The five correspondents were responsible for bringing the reality, of what was going on in Nanjing, to the rest of the world.

C. JAPANESE CENSORSHIP

To control further information flow from Nanjing and salvage the image of the Imperial Japanese Army, after a handful of westerners were able to leave the city, the Japanese placed restrictions on travel to and from the city resulting in limited media coverage. Reports had to be smuggled out to Shanghai through various channels to protect the anonymity of the authors. These reports resulted in the first accounts to be published in China, by the North-China Daily News.³³ The difference between the content of the two editorials, published on December 25, 1937, and January 21, 1938, showed that the initial events reported were just the beginning and what was hoped to have ended quickly, had evolved into a pattern. In addition to the restriction of travel, there was a strict censorship imposed by the Japanese, which prevented foreign correspondents in China from sending cables or mail pertaining to witness accounts from Nanjing. The Japanese set up a censorship office within the cable company building and restricted any communication that had the potential to harm the image of the Japanese military.

To circumvent Japanese censorship, and after several failed attempts to send cables to London, the atrocities being committed were carefully documented by foreigners and eventually smuggled out of China. The book *Japanese Terror in China* was an example of one of the results of the smuggled documents. In another successful example of bypassing censorship, George Ashmore Fitch, an American in Nanjing, smuggled eight reels of negative movie film when he was allowed to leave the city via a Japanese military train in February 1938. The film, which documented the reality of what was happening in Nanjing, was captured by an American missionary. Fitch eventually

³² Suping Lu, "The Nanjing Atrocities Reported in the U.S. Newspapers, 1937–38," Readex, April 12, 2012, <https://www.readex.com/readex-report/issues/volume-7-issue-2/nanjing-atrocities-reported-us-newspapers-1937-38>.

³³ Lu, *They Were in Nanjing*, chap. 3.

made his way from China to Washington, D.C., and discussed the events with State Department officials. He then went on a tour all over the U.S., which was covered by local newspapers, to give speeches and show the film footage.³⁴ These examples showed that despite heavy censorship, reporting of the events was possible by consolidating pieces of evidence.

D. JAPANESE COVERAGE AND PROPAGANDA

Before its news broke out to the west, the capture of Nanking was initially celebrated widely across Japan by the government and its people. Japanese newspapers covered the story and even included photos of the incidents before the rest of the world denounced the acts at the hands of the Japanese army. Eyewitness reports by Japanese correspondents depicted the Chinese as inferior people and the actions of the imperial army as just. One newspaper, the *Japanese advertiser*, even covered the details and head count of a decapitation contest involving two Japanese officers in a manner to be celebrated.³⁵

The actions taken by the Japanese show an attempt to protect a political vulnerability from the dissemination of the facts rather than from availability of media coverage. Although there were over a hundred Japanese journalists in Nanjing, the Army's media censorship quickly prevented those covering the events from writing anything unfavorable about Japan. The Japanese censorship guidelines for newspapers was issued in September 1937 and contained several articles concerning media coverage. Some of these articles stated that any coverage unfavorable to the Army was subject to censorship and that reports or photos giving the impression of torture of Chinese citizens would be disapproved.³⁶ Tatsuzo Ishikawa, correspondent for *Chuo Koron*, wrote a story depicting the main characters in accordance with the reality that he witnessed; engaging

³⁴ Lu, "The Nanjing Atrocities Reported in the U.S. Newspapers, 1937–38."

³⁵ "Genocide in the 20th Century: Rape of Nanking 1937–38," The History Place, 2000, <https://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/nanking.htm>.

³⁶ Journalistic Historian, "Psychological Warfare II: Japanese Propaganda," *The Nanjing Massacre* (blog), January 5, 2021, <https://medium.com/the-nanjing-massacre/psychological-warfare-ii-japanese-propaganda-4f816550f57b>.

in murder, looting, and rape. This story, which was published on February 17, 1938, contrasted the heroic image of soldiers as portrayed by general Japanese media covering Nanjing. As a result, the Ministry of Interior prohibited the sale of the magazine and charged Ishikawa and his editor with smearing the image of the Imperial Japanese Army. Ishikawa was later sentenced to four months in prison and was suspended from publishing for three years.³⁷

In addition to the strict censorship imposed, the Japanese attempted to promote positive images of the city and its citizens. Propaganda also aimed to discredit the accounts of atrocities being circulated in the United States which resulted in criticism and condemnation against Japan. Pictures of cakes and apples being given to Chinese prisoners were taken and in other instances, the Japanese army invited journalists to take pictures of the Army giving food to Chinese children.³⁸ These reports and images were used to give the Japanese population an image of peace being restored in Nanjing. In response to western coverage, the Japanese circulated a narrative to discredit the various sources responsible for reporting this information. A Japanese newspaper, Osaka Mainichi, wrote articles in English that suggested that Japan was not responsible for the war and its goal was peace. Additionally, there were several journalists, who were employed by the Japanese, that claimed that stories of atrocities were exaggerated lies and questioned the credibility of the reports.³⁹

E. CHINESE COVERAGE AND PROPAGANDA

When Japan attacked the city on December 13, there were no Chinese journalists in Nanjing and there were no detailed reports available within the country for a couple of weeks after the invasion. However, despite the lack of information and reporting from inside the city, journalists from the Central News Agency managed to interview soldiers

³⁷ Journalistic Historian, “Fall of Nanking II: What Japanese Journalists Witnessed,” *The Nanjing Massacre* (blog), January 5, 2021, <https://medium.com/the-nanjing-massacre/fall-of-nanking-ii-what-japanese-journalists-witnessed-c0b5147b68a1>.

³⁸ Journalistic Historian, “Psychological Warfare II.”

³⁹ Journalistic Historian.

who escaped from Nanjing once they arrived in Xuzhou, resulting in very brief reports being published in other cities. The first detailed media coverage in China occurred after an English newspaper in Shanghai, *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*, published an article which summarized the events published in American newspapers. This article was translated and printed by several different Chinese newspapers. The first detailed eyewitness accounts by Chinese citizens, who escaped, were not published in newspapers until January 9, 1938, almost a month after the start. Directed by the Central News Agency, the events in Nanjing were printed in Chinese by *Hankou Zhongxi Daily*, *Dagong Daily*, *The Central Daily*, *Xijing Daily*, *Saodang*, *Shenbao*, and *Xinhua Daily*.⁴⁰ The coverage in China, in both English and Chinese, was repeatedly denounced by Japanese spokesmen despite the heavy criticism directed at Japan, for the actions of its army and the authorities' censorship over cables intended to be sent abroad by foreign correspondents in Shanghai.

The Chinese continuously relied on American reporting of the event to conduct their own media coverage and used The Guomindang's centralized international propaganda system to generate antiwar propaganda. The board of information was founded in November 1937 and was made up of two subdivisions focusing on domestic propaganda and foreign publicity. Once they found out about Nanjing, from foreign sources, the Chinese believed that it could win foreign sympathy if atrocities committed by the Japanese were successfully publicized.⁴¹ However, due to Japanese control of all news transmission facilities in Nanjing and Shanghai, collecting evidence in Nanjing and communicating it to the rest of the world proved to be difficult. The international Department of the Board of Information relied on westerners to conduct propaganda abroad since they became eyewitnesses of the events. Some of these individuals offered propaganda services to China or even became long-term propaganda agents.⁴² Much of

⁴⁰ Suping Lu, *The 1937–1938 Nanjing Atrocities* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2019), chap. 9.

⁴¹ Journalistic Historian, "Psychological Warfare I: Chinese Propaganda," *The Nanjing Massacre* (blog), January 5, 2021, <https://medium.com/the-nanjing-massacre/psychological-warfare-i-chinese-propaganda-932f8bc39521>.

⁴² Shuge Wei, *News under Fire: China's Propaganda Against Japan in the English-Language Press, 1928–1941* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), pt. III, ProQuest.

the initial reporting came from foreign correspondents because it was believed that coverage from neutral sources would be more credible than those from Chinese sources.

The Chinese international department was responsible for providing funding and assistance to westerners seeking to publicize the atrocities in Nanjing. among those was Fitch, who smuggled film from Nanjing, whose tour of the U.S. to give speeches and show the footage, was funded by the Chinese. Another individual working closely with the international department was H. J. Timperley, who was paid to compile eyewitness accounts and publish them into the book titled, *Japanese Terror in China*.⁴³

F. CONCLUSION

Ability of the Japanese to identify the damaging effects that the facts from Nanjing would have on its image, allowed it to restrict travel of witnesses and control the information being reported. Due to actions taken by the Japanese and despite efforts of a handful of journalists and various newspapers, the events in Nanjing did not become immediately known to the public and global response was delayed. The media coverage of the atrocities committed did not yield an information advantage against the Japanese as the facts were disputed. The number of civilian casualties in Nanjing was effectively debated by the Japanese, a debate that continued decades after the fact.

During WWII, government authorized accounts of Nanjing in Japan denied the mass murder and rape that occurred in Nanking due to the damage that the truth would cause on their image and objective in the region. Decades later, and despite the evidence and witness interviews that made its way out of the city, there are some that continue to claim that no atrocities were committed in Nanjing. These individuals include conservative nationalist elements within Japan's political structure as well as university professors.⁴⁴ Even in Japanese textbooks as of 1995, which have to be authorized by its ministry of education, there was selected language that reports the occupation of Nanjing

⁴³ Wei, pt. III.

⁴⁴ *The Nanking Atrocity, 1937–38: Complicating the Picture*, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2009), chap. 15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1x76dqr>.

but fails to mention who the perpetrators were or show any evidence of criticism.⁴⁵ In 1997, the instant bestseller, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* was published by Iris Chang. Despite instantly selling hundreds of thousands of copies and becoming one of the primary sources of the events, Japanese scholars criticized the book as Chinese propaganda full of lies. Recent debate pertaining to the book and the events are relevant because it has been linked to the perceptions of Japan as it continues to avoid responsibility for its actions during the war.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Christopher Barnard, “Isolating Knowledge of the Unpleasant: The Rape of Nanking in Japanese High-School Textbooks,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 22, no. 4 (2001): 519–30.

⁴⁶ Erik Ropers, “Debating History and Memory: Examining the Controversy Surrounding Iris Chang’s *The Rape of Nanking*,” *Humanity (Philadelphia, Pa.)* 8, no. 1 (2017): 77–99, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2017.0003>.

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V. CASE 2: THE TIANANMEN SQUARE MASSACRE

A. INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1970s, there was an increase in the influence of international human rights norms, institutions, and advocacy groups in diplomatic affairs. Partly due to Deng Xiaoping's, China's leader from 1979–1989, strategy of reform and opening, the Tiananmen Square Massacre put China's vulnerability to international pressure concerning human rights, on full display. Because of the media coverage and the images displayed on international television, the tone of the human rights system towards China shifted to one of confrontation.⁴⁷

On June 3–4 of 1989 the PLA entered Tiananmen Square, in Beijing, China, with the purpose of ending mass pro-democracy demonstrations. The PLA's use of force against unarmed civilians led to the death thousands, many of whom were college students. The peaceful demonstrations begun on April 15, 1989, when college students gathered in the square to demand broad political and economic reforms by protesting corruption and inflation. The demonstrations evolved beyond that of college students and with the participation of workers and ordinary Chinese citizens from Beijing and the rest of the country, it quickly reached over a million people. As protests continued, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interpreted the demonstrations as a direct challenge to its rule and implemented martial law on May 20. Protests continued and the Chinese Government took military action to suppress demonstrations and imprison its organizers and leaders.⁴⁸

B. CHINESE STATE MEDIA AND CENSORSHIP

By utilizing the PLA to engage in a propaganda campaign to limit the coverage of the massacre, the CCP indirectly acknowledged the political impact that the democracy

⁴⁷ Béja, *The Impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen Massacre*, 206.

⁴⁸ "Tiananmen Square, 1989," The Historian of the U.S. Department of State.
<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/tiananmen-square>.

movement, and subsequent massacre of innocent civilians had on the Chinese government. Positive accounts of the 1989 movement were initially covered and publicized through Chinese outlets, global news outlets, student-controlled radio stations, and word of mouth. Initially low, the percentage of negative accounts associated with the movement increased once martial law was implemented and mainstream media outlets were directed to cover the CCP's side of the story by government officials. This resulted in a decrease, and eventual disappearance after June 4, of positive and neutral accounts of the movement from national media coverage. Lu Chaoqi, the first deputy editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily* permitted the journalists on duty to write a report on what was happening on June 4. However, before the report was printed, a CCP representative contacted him and prevented the paper from reporting the truth about the protests.⁴⁹

During the events that unfolded June 3–4, domestic media outlets such as *People's Daily*, China Central Television (CCTV), and China Radio International were criticized and punished for attempting to accurately report the events and others were threatened with losing their job if they did not communicate the narrative supplied by the CCP. The CCP Propaganda Department issued a report that blamed the *People's Daily* for making statements and mistakes in its reporting. This resulted in the restructuring of the outlet which was to be managed by new leadership. CCTV was accused of insubordination and of inability to maintain control. Two of its anchors were fired for dressing in black and expressing sadness while reporting the crackdown of the protests. On June 4, at 6:25 A.M. China Radio International broadcasted announcements of the events to the rest of the world, for the first time. It described the events as tragic and stated that several thousand innocent people had been murdered. Furthermore, it asked listeners to protest the horrible violations of human rights against Chinese citizens. The individual deemed responsible was later transferred and investigated, while all employees

⁴⁹ Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pt. Two, ProQuest.

working under him were forced to write detailed criticisms about themselves.⁵⁰ These events were the beginning of a pattern that increased government control over the press.

Chinese television was used to further restrict reporting and administer punishment against protesters. Images of arrested individuals being handcuffed and led into interrogation rooms at gunpoint by the police were broadcasted in national television repeatedly. CCTV repeatedly broadcasted interviews of citizens denouncing the actions of the PLA as a “massacre” along with instructions to report these individuals for spreading false rumors. Additionally, these videos attempted to persuade citizens to turn themselves, and their neighbors, into the authorities rather than wait to be hunted down.⁵¹ Despite popular knowledge of what had happened, these tactics proved to be effective in preventing the population from contributing to the media coverage in any way.

The evening of June 4, Chen Xitong, the Mayor of Beijing broadcasted a speech with the intention of calming the population. In his speech, he blamed the demonstrators for stirring a counterrevolutionary riot intended of negating the party’s leadership and justified military action against participants to protect the future of the party. He celebrated the soldiers of the PLA as courageous and fearless for crushing the riot and stated that the government was forced to act.⁵² His statement was merely a means to and portray an image of justice to the country.

Immediately after June 4, the CCP and its organizations engaged in a cover up of the events to conceal the truth from the country. During that month, national television was turned over to the army and internal security police. Furthermore, all major domestic newspapers were put under the control of a newly established propaganda committee. The government used this control over media outlets to create a 40-minute documentary with selected footage of student protesters disabling military vehicles and of dead PLA

⁵⁰ Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), chap. 10.

⁵¹ Winston L. Y. Yang et al., *Tiananmen: China’s Struggle for Democracy : Its Prelude, Development, Aftermath, and Impact*, Occasional Papers/Reprints Series in Contemporary Asian Studies, No. 2, 1990 (97) (Baltimore, Md: School of Law, University of Maryland, 1990).

⁵² Nathan and Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, chap. 10.

soldiers to depict the movement as responsible for chaos and death. Military leaders even claimed that troops had not harmed or killed a single person during the clearing of the square and that the only casualties that had been incurred were those of the PLA.⁵³

Additionally, the Chinese government implemented and enforced press restrictions to prevent foreign access to military information and restrict the reporting out of Beijing. Officials stopped the transmissions of televised news reporting from the capital and banned foreign broadcasters from recording and transmitting news reports from the state media network. In addition to restrictions on televised reporting, the government banned print reporting, photography, and video recording of the events in Tiananmen Square in accordance with martial law. This included any documentation of PLA troops enforcing martial law unless it had government approval. The government was also responsible for concealing the number of civilian casualties as it forbade hospitals from reporting this information. However, unofficial reports from hospitals and medical personnel estimate that the total number of civilian casualties was over 2,500.⁵⁴

C. NEWS MEDIA PROTESTS

Chinese journalists resorted to methods of indirect communication to express objections to government action. For example, on June 4 in the domestic news section of the *People's Daily*, a story about a disabled person winning a medal was printed with the title, "The People's Hearts Will Never Be Conquered." In the international section of that same publication, three stories with the following titles were printed; "Students in Seoul Staging a Hunger Strike to Protest the Government's Killing of Students," "Israeli Army Invades South Lebanon: Again, they use Airplanes and Tanks to Deal with Civilians," and "The Leader of Poland Says that Election is a Great Resolution for Conflict Resolution: One Must Not Play With Fire." The Subtitle of the last title was bolded and bigger than the actual title which signaled that the government was playing with Fire.⁵⁵

⁵³ Chu-yüang Cheng, *Behind the Tiananmen Massacre: Social, Political, and Economic Ferment in China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 140–44.

⁵⁴ Cheng, 140–44.

⁵⁵ Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen*, 317.

D. WESTERN MEDIA COVERAGE

Aside from the magnitude, length, and bloody outcome of the movement, it was the extensive coverage and impact of foreign media that brought awareness of the events to the global stage in a manner different from similar previous events. Due to the magnitude of the demonstrations, foreign media correspondents covered the events leading up to and of the PLA's actions against innocent civilians. Originally there to cover Mikhail Gorbachev's, Soviet General Secretary, trip on May 15, foreign media outlets turned their attention to the massive protests and increased international awareness of the ongoing protests and subsequent massacre. Additionally, from June 3–4, the media recorded irrefutable evidence of the PLA's excessive use of force targeting civilians, which the CCP claim did not occur.⁵⁶

Foreign television networks brought the events directly to millions of people throughout the world by bypassing censorship measures and restrictions by the Chinese government. The rest of the world relied on western journalists to communicate what they were witnessing in Beijing. Due to restrictions on satellite transmissions out of Beijing, the fastest way for videotaped news to make its way to western outlets was for the tapes to be hand carried out in commercial flights to Japan or Hong Kong. BBC tapes had to be smuggled out of China before anyone could see what had been recorded but its journalists relied on telephone lines to communicate with BBC radio in real time.⁵⁷ Additionally, one widely circulated image showed an ordinary man standing in front of several tanks in an act of defiance. This image, known as the tank man, became a symbol for the movement and the events that took place at Tiananmen Square.⁵⁸

Leading up to the tragic events in June, the U.S. Department of State and President George H. Bush issued public statements supporting freedom of speech, the

⁵⁶ Jacob Kovalio, "The 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident: Retrospective and Prospective Considerations," *Asian Perspective* 15, no. 1 (1991): 5–36.

⁵⁷ Philip J. Cunningham, *Tiananmen Moon: Inside the Chinese Student Uprising Of 1989* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 470, ProQuest.

⁵⁸ Yasmin Ibrahim, "Tank Man, Media Memory and Yellow Duck Patrol: Remembering Tiananmen on Social Media," *Digital Journalism* 4, no. 5 (July 3, 2016): 582–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2015.1063076>.

press, and association and peaceful assembly in not only China, but the rest of the world. The President encouraged the Chinese government to enforce restraint and avoid bloodshed. As the events unfolded on June 4, President Bush issued another statement to lament China's decision to use force against peaceful demonstrators and once more, urged the Chinese government to choose a non-violent alternative to deal with the situation. That same day, Secretary of State, James Baker III appeared in a CNN interview to comment on the situation but refrained from discussing potential punishment against China. Congress, however, was more forward in its response, as several leaders demanded that punitive actions against China be taken immediately. Representative Mickey Edwards (R-Oklahoma), for example, stated that diplomatic messages of disapproval was an insignificant response to the murder of innocent civilians.⁵⁹

Through television sets, the American population witnessed the unrestrained brutality of the PLA on June 4. The media reporting generated a significant social response in the U.S. which resulted in pressure forcing congress to act despite the administration's diplomatic response. The General American public opinion of China shifted drastically, from 72% favorable a month prior to the massacre to 78% unfavorable right after. Other polls revealed that over three fourths of Americans wanted arms sales to China to be suspended and an overwhelming 84% supported political asylum for Chinese students. Congress acted swiftly and imposed severe sanctions that were passed with zero opposition.⁶⁰

E. CONCLUSION

Media coverage and video and photo evidence brought the massacre of civilians to the world stage in an instant. The ensuing coverage and global pressure generated by it forced the Chinese government to act and minimize the damage that it had brought onto itself. In a desperate effort to control the narrative and maintain control over the

⁵⁹ Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U. S. -China Relations 1989–2000* (Blue Ridge Summit, UNITED STATES: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 66, ProQuest.

⁶⁰ Eric A Hyer, *Values versus Interests: The U.S. Response to the Tiananmen Square Massacre*, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Case Study Program; Case 224 (District of Columbia: Georgetown University. School of Foreign Service. Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 1996).

population, the CCP forced its population to comply with force and intimidation. Although this was effective in crushing the democratic movement and most of the internal reporting, there was now irrefutable evidence that was shared throughout the world and a manner that had not been possible decades before. Mainstream media reporting generated sharp criticism from governments, NGOs, and populations worldwide and the damage to China's political capital was done. Additionally, the tank man picture became an iconic symbol by which to remember the events with.

In September and October of 1989, during two press conferences, Chen Xitong was asked whether the Tiananmen tragedy could have been avoided. He responded by stating that the government did not believe that there had been any tragedy in the square and that the real victim was China and that it would be unjust to punish it for it.⁶¹ To this day, the Chinese government's efforts to continue to deny the events that occurred in Beijing on June 4 have been ineffective due to the overwhelming amount of evidence that was recorded and reported throughout the world. Additionally, their persistent efforts, even three decades after the fact, to censor any references to the Tiananmen Square Massacre within its borders continues to expose a vulnerability within the information environment. As arrests of those who commemorate the event continue, NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have continued to demand that the Chinese government acknowledge the human rights violations of 1989.⁶²

⁶¹ Cheng, *Behind the Tiananmen Massacre*, 142.

⁶² "China Steps up Suppression Ahead of Tiananmen Crackdown Anniversary," Amnesty International, May 28, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/05/tiananmen-crackdown-30-anniversary/>.

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VI. CASE 3: RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

A. INTRODUCTION

Media coverage pertaining to the targeting and killing of civilians in Ukraine has created global awareness and in doing so, has also influenced the world's response. On February 24, 2022, Russian forces commenced the invasion of Ukraine by attacking Kyiv, the capital, and Kharkiv. Despite expectations of swift Russian victory, Ukrainian resistance proved to be too much for Russian forces, who were forced to retreat several weeks later. As the Russian forces pulled back, evidence of atrocities against civilians began to appear for the world to see.⁶³ From February 2022 to February 2023, AP news and PBS series Frontline maintained a war crime tracker of gathered, verified, and documented evidence of potential war crimes. Out of 653 verified events pertaining to war crimes, there were 221 incidents of direct attacks on civilians.⁶⁴

The total number of civilians that have been targeted and killed by Russia has continued to climb since the beginning of the war. Details for each of these events has been immediately shared to the public worldwide and documented by various governments and human rights organizations. After a year and a half, civilian losses have risen to over 22,000 because of air strikes and summary executions. In March 2022, Russian forces executed and tortured innocent civilians while occupying the town of Bucha. The following month, a missile strike on a train station in Kramatorsk killed multiple civilians. These attacks of deliberate targeting of civilians were followed by repeated bombardment, in the city of Mariupol, that killed thousands more. Russian air strikes have also been responsible for striking a theater and bombing a maternity hospital. Media coverage and subsequent Russian response, and disinformation, to these events

⁶³ Matthew Mpoke Bigg, "How Russia's War in Ukraine Has Unfolded, Month by Month.," *New York Times*, February 24, 2023, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/ukraine-russia-war-timeline.html>.

⁶⁴ "War Crimes Watch Ukraine-FRONTLINE / AP Collaboration," PBS, February 24, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interactive/ap-russia-war-crimes-ukraine/?facets=%7CDirect+Attack+on+Civilians%7C>.

highlight a pattern that has been repeated hundreds of times throughout the length of the conflict. Reporting by news networks, human rights organizations, and political leaders have amplified the allegations of international humanitarian law violations against Russia.⁶⁵

B. GLOBAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Through a wide range of mediums such as broadcast, digital, and print media, as well as social media apps such as TikTok, telegram, and Twitter (now X), people across the world became aware of the crimes being committed against civilians in Ukraine in real time. Immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, major news organizations across the world covered the events by inserting journalists into cities experiencing violence and bombing. Human rights organizations and research groups have conducted investigations and documented crimes against civilians to preserve evidence for war crimes prosecutions. Lastly, journalists, civilians, and politicians also contributed to the documentation and sharing of the events through popular social media and messaging platforms.⁶⁶

Immediately after a Russian missile strike on a train station in Kramatorsk, Ukraine in April 2022, Ukrainian political leaders made statements, through official channels and social media platforms, which were covered by mainstream media. The resulting death toll of 50 civilians included five children. Additionally, out of the 300 wounded, 98 people, which included 16 children and 46 women, had severe injuries.⁶⁷ Media coverage also reported Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's address to Finland's parliament. He stated that there was an abundance of witnesses, videos, pieces of the missiles, and dead people. Other Ukrainian leaders added that Russia targeted the

⁶⁵ "War in Ukraine," Council on Foreign Relations, October 17, 2023, <https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>.

⁶⁶ Kirsten Eddy and Richard Fletcher, "Perceptions of Media Coverage of the War in Ukraine," Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, June 15, 2022, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/perceptions-media-coverage-war-Ukraine>.

⁶⁷ Olga Hodge and Nathan Voitovych, "Dozens Killed in Train Station Missile Strike in Eastern Ukraine as Civilians Try to Flee Russian Onslaught," CNN, April 8, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/08/europe/kramatorsk-railway-station-strike-intl/index.html>.

station despite being fully aware of the presence of civilians. Pavlo Kyrylenko, the Ukrainian head of Donetsk's regional military administration, shared a video and photos of the aftermath of attack, along with a short statement, on his Telegram channel within 50 minutes of the strike.⁶⁸

Extensive investigations and further documentation of Russian crimes against civilians have been regularly conducted by NGOs. In one example, Human Rights Watch and SITU research conducted a joint investigation of the Russian strike at the Kramatorsk train station. During May of 2022, Human Rights Watch sent researchers to the city to investigate evidence of the attack.⁶⁹ With the help of SITU research, which analyzes digital evidence to provide factual accounts of debated events surrounding human rights, Human Rights Watch conducted an analysis of the attack through over 200 photos and videos as well as satellite imagery.

The investigation determined that in the days leading up to the attack, there was an average of nearly 7,000 civilians using the train station to evacuate the city each day. Available social media activity of the days leading up to the event, made it abundantly clear that the train station was being used for civilian evacuations with daily crowds of thousands of people. City council officials utilized official social media and telegram accounts to encourage citizens to evacuate and posted daily updates on the exact times and which trains were being used for evacuations. Furthermore, photos and videos posted on social media or shared by civilians show a consistent number of people crowded onto platforms, the station's building, and adjacent parking lots. A video captured by a journalist on April 5 showed long lines of people, including older people and children and humanitarian organization, medicine without borders, posted a video of over 1,000 people on a train platform the next day.

⁶⁸ @zalizni_zminy, "#iron_changes in the Ministry of Strategy and Industry," *Telegram*, April 8, 2022, https://t.me/zalizni_zminy/433.

⁶⁹ "Death at the Station: Russian Cluster Munition Attack in Kramatorsk," Human Rights Watch, February 21, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2023/02/21/death-at-the-station/russian-cluster-munition-attack-in-kramatorsk>.

Mainstream media also conducted investigations as part of their coverage and reporting of the events to determine what type of missile was used by Russia. BBC News conducted its own investigation and determined that a cluster bomb, which is banned by most countries under humanitarian law, was used to target and kill Ukrainians on April 8, 2022.⁷⁰ BBC inserted journalists to the city after the attack to collect evidence and document the event. Its journalists determined that there were clear patterns on the ground, consistent with cluster-munitions. Additionally, reporters collected consistent statements that four to five blasts were heard immediately after the initial explosion: a pattern also consistent with this type of bomb. Use of these weapons is heavily criticized by human rights groups because they can release as many as 50 submunitions across a 400-meter radius, which increase the likelihood of civilian casualties. BBC conducted its investigation, which included supported statements with missile experts from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and published its results within five days of the attack.

Throughout most of March 2022, Russian forces occupied the town of Bucha and left extensive evidence of summary executions, which was discovered as Russian forces withdrew in April. Videos and photos of over 1,400 dead civilians in the streets of Bucha emerged and attracted media focus and investigations of apparent war crimes. *New York Times* Conducted an eight-month long investigation that pinpointed the Russian paratroopers from the 234th Air Assault Regiment as one of the main units responsible for the murder of civilians.⁷¹ In their published report, the evidence showed that the executions were deliberate and systematic in an effort to carve a path towards Kyiv. In the months following Russia's withdrawal from Bucha, *New York Times* Reporters interviewed residents, collected large amounts of security footage, phone records, and conversations gathered from Russian radio channels by government sources. Additional evidence tying the unit to specific murders of civilians include its military equipment,

⁷⁰ Manisha Ganguly and Joe Inwood, "Ukraine War: What Weapon Killed 50 People in Station Attack?," *BBC News*, April 13, 2022, sec. Reality Check, <https://www.bbc.com/news/61079356>.

⁷¹ Yousur Al-Hlou et al., "Caught on Camera, Traced by Phone: The Russian Military Unit That Killed Dozens in Bucha," *New York Times*, December 22, 2022, sec. Video, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/22/video/russia-ukraine-bucha-massacre-takeaways.html>.

uniforms, and packing slips from munition crates. Furthermore, phone records from cell phones belonging to dead Ukrainians show calls to Russia.

Multiple western news media outlets covered the deaths in Bucha in great detail. *AP News* published an article covering the killings on a specific street and down to the minute. The article discusses intercepted Russian phone conversations in which soldiers repeat the word “zachistka,” which means cleansing. Russian forces killed any civilians suspected of assisting Ukrainian forces. This article also discusses the video evidence obtained by *The Associated Press* and “Frontline” from PBS, which revealed what a cleansing operation looks like.⁷² Operations that have been repeated throughout the invasion of Ukraine to instill terror in the civilian population and limit potential resistance. In addition to an episode of PBS’ “Frontline” titled “Crime Scene: Bucha/ After Zero Tolerance,” the coverage of the killing of civilians in Bucha is part of another PBS documentary titled “Putin’s Attack on Ukraine: Documenting War Crimes.” The documentary follows frontline and *Associated Press*’s coverage of Russia’s pattern of atrocities and efforts to hold it accountable.⁷³

C. RUSSIAN MEDIA COVERAGE

Despite a vast amount of widespread evidence of crimes against civilians, Russia continues to deny any allegations of deliberate targeting of civilians by its military. For example, immediately after the Kramatorsk strike, official accounts associated with Russia denied accusations in response to statements made by Ukrainian officials.⁷⁴ These accounts alleged that a Tochka-U missile was used, and that the Ukrainian military was known for utilizing that type of weapon and stated that the missiles serial number

⁷² Erika Kinetz, Oleksandr Stashevskiy, and Vasilisa Stepanenko, “How Russian Soldiers Ran a ‘cleansing’ Operation in Bucha,” *AP News*, November 3, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/bucha-ukraine-war-cleansing-investigation-43e5a9538e9ba68a035756b05028b8b4>.

⁷³ “Putin’s Attack on Ukraine: Documenting War Crimes | Season 2022 | Episode 14 | PBS,” Video, 1:24:23, FRONTLINE, November 2, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/video/putins-attack-on-ukraine-documenting-war-crimes-x4lchq/>.

⁷⁴ “Russia Blames Ukraine for Kramatorsk Railway Station Attack,” Alliance For Securing Democracy, April 2022, <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/incident/russia-blames-ukraine-for-kramatorsk-railway-station-attack/>.

supported their claims. Other accounts claimed that Ukraine had conducted the strike to prevent mass evacuations from the country since the military needed civilians to use as human shields. The Russian Ministry of Defense also denied culpability for the strike. It made a statement to emphasize the false narrative that Russia did not operate the Tochka-U. The claim was amplified on the minister's Twitter account with a tweet claiming that Russia had not used that missile for over 30 years.⁷⁵

Social media has been used extensively by Russia to deny the strike and spread disinformation. Such statements have been amplified by the country's mainstream media. In a post that has since been deleted, a Russian telegram channel stated that the Russian military was "working" on a group of Ukrainian forces at the Kramatorsk railway and celebrated Ukrainian casualties.⁷⁶ However, after initial reports of civilian casualties hit the internet and before it was ultimately deleted, that same post was edited to blame Ukraine. Kremlin-owned media continued to communicate that narrative by claiming that Ukraine attacked its own civilians. Additionally, within two days of the strike on the train station, there were over a hundred tweets and retweets from Russia's network that further disseminated disinformation claiming that Ukraine was responsible for the strike. These tweets originated from a variety of accounts, about 80% of which were diplomatic or official government twitter accounts.⁷⁷ Additionally, Russian state media utilized telegram to spread fake BBC report on the attack. U_G_M, a pro-Russia telegram page with nearly 16,000 subscribers, posted a BBC report that claimed Ukraine was

⁷⁵ Michael Sheldon, "Russia's Kramatorsk 'Facts' Versus the Evidence," *bellingcat*, April 14, 2022, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2022/04/14/russias-kramatorsk-facts-versus-the-evidence/>.

⁷⁶ Digital Forensic Research Lab, "Russian War Report: Russia Makes False Claims While Blaming Ukraine for Kramatorsk Railway Station Attack," *Atlantic Council* (blog), April 8, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-russia-makes-false-claims-while-blaming-ukraine-for-kramatorsk-railway-station-attack/>.

⁷⁷ "ASD Social Data Search," Alliance For Securing Democracy, July 13, 2023, https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/asd-social-data-search/?q=Kramatorsk*&country-Russia=true&tweetType-Tweet=true&tweetType-Quote+Tweet=true&country-Russia=true&tweetType-Tweet=true&tweetType-Quote+Tweet=true&tweetType-Retweet=true&country-Russia=true&tweetType-Tweet=true&tweetType-Quote+Tweet=true&tweetType-Retweet=true&start-date=2022-04-08&end-date=2022-04-10&product=%28product+eq+%27Hamilton%27+or+product2+eq+%27Hamilton%27%29.

responsible for the attack. The post was viewed nearly 10,000 times within hours and included five video clips with BBC's logo.⁷⁸

Similarly to social media posts, Russian media outlets briefly reported that Russian missiles had hit Ukrainian forces at the train station. However, once facts regarding civilian casualties started to emerge, the coverage by mainstream media in Russia changed. The government quickly denied the responsibility and stated that the Russian military had no scheduled missions at Kramatorsk. The Russian defense minister appeared on the state's TV network and claimed that the reporting of the strike was fake, and that the missile belonged to Ukraine. However, there are several reports by Russian journalists covering a Russian strike on Ukrainian forces at the station, to include those from the ANNA news agency which reports for Russia's channel 1, and the independent Russian-language news outlet *The Insider*.⁷⁹ Evidence of this coverage was altered or disappeared once images of dead civilians began to populate the internet.

Likewise, in response to the criticism for its crimes in Bucha, Russia continued to rely on propaganda and disinformation to deny any wrongdoing. Russia claimed that news reports covering Bucha were false while at the same time, generating and spreading its own fake reporting to discredit news outlets and human rights organizations. Russia's state TV channels responded accordingly by broadcasting their hosts, who claimed that photos and videos containing any evidence pointing to Russian forces as responsible were fake and that Ukrainians were responsible.⁸⁰ This narrative was distributed across Russia, and the world, through state-controlled internet sites, newspapers, radio, television and social media platforms. State backed social media accounts further distributed false narratives and disinformation by claiming that the dead bodies in the

⁷⁸ Patrick O'Connor, "Russian State Media Spreads Fake BBC Report on Train Station Attack," WhoWhatWhy, April 14, 2022, <https://whowhatwhy.org/politics/russian-state-media-spreads-fake-bbc-report-on-train-station-attack/>.

⁷⁹ Brendan Cole, "Pro-Kremlin Media U-Turns Over Kramatorsk Station Attack in Ukraine," Newsweek, April 8, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ukraine-kramatorsk-donetsk-telegram-peskov-1696344>.

⁸⁰ Amanda Seitz and Arijeta Lajka, "Amid Horror in Bucha, Russia Relies on Propaganda and Disinformation," PBS, April 6, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/amid-horror-in-bucha-russia-relies-on-propaganda-and-disinformation>.

streets of Bucha were staged. In addition to Russian, this messaging was issued in English, Spanish, and Arabic to millions of followers. One of the Spanish language accounts had over 18 million followers alone.⁸¹

Sources of Russian disinformation regarding civilian murders in Bucha extended beyond its borders. The head of Bulgaria's media regulator, Sonia Momchilova, claimed that the evidence backed by the UN was anti-Putin propaganda. One day after making these statements YouTube channel Kontrakomentar program, which has over 19,000 subscribers, she used Facebook to lash out at local news site that argued that the coverage of the Bucha tragedy by Bulgarian media was part of a larger information war between Russia and democracy. Her comments were highlighted due to a broader and ongoing debate over the apparent bias and propaganda of Bulgarian National Radio programming.⁸²

D. CENSORSHIP

Russia's grip over the control of its internet, through ownership, has been evolving rapidly within the past couple of years. Russia's National Security Strategy 2021 explicitly cites information security as a central topic aimed at competition within the information domain. This document signals the bolstering of its defense to prevent its adversaries from achieving "Westernization of Russia" through meddling in Russian affairs and the spread of false information to its population.⁸³ The specific language used in this strategy is presently being used to increase control of information as Russia continues its invasion in Ukraine, in what it calls a justified action. Within the last year, the Russian government has developed new state-backed social media platforms with the purpose of controlling the Ukraine narrative. This initiative is aimed at influencing its

⁸¹ Seitz and Lajka.

⁸² Andy Heil, "Bulgarian Media Watchdog Equated Bucha Killings With Anti-Russian 'Propaganda,'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 27, 2023, sec. Bulgaria, <https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-media-regulator-bucha-propaganda-russia/32477929.html>.

⁸³ Michel Duclos, "Russia's National Security Strategy 2021: The Era of 'Information Confrontation,'" Institut Montaigne, February 8, 2021, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/russias-national-security-strategy-2021-era-information-confrontation>.

citizens, to download and utilize these alternatives, through marketing campaigns and recently passed laws that make it illegal to post anything opposing the Russian narrative pertaining to Ukraine.⁸⁴ Using national security to justify efforts to increase government control and ownership over the internet, Russia has been able to minimize public dissatisfaction. By communicating that the country is under direct threat from information warfare, the Russian government has also been critical of foreign internet companies who are not susceptible to Russian ownership.⁸⁵

In Russia and Ukraine, events to circumvent control of internet technologies are taking place. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is unjustified, and their military aggression has resulted in several human rights violations. Indiscriminate, violent military attacks against civilians and war crimes such as rape, executions, and looting, have fueled a global response against the actions of the Russian government.⁸⁶ Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter have been recently banned or restricted in Russia and laws condemning anything opposing Putin's narrative have been passed. Instead, Russian versions of those platforms have been made available to the public, which make government surveillance and a transition to a more centralized system more efficient.⁸⁷ However, despite Russia's efforts to implement a "digital iron curtain," those opposing the war in Ukraine are using innovative ways to communicate somewhat freely. Even though Russia's organic platforms ban certain language and narratives pertaining to Ukraine as war, those opposing the invasion have used memes, pictures, and substitute the flagged words to mitigate the internet controls.

⁸⁴ Zoe Thomas and Sarah Needleman, "Russia Pushes Its Homegrown Social-Media Alternatives," In, Tech News Briefing, <https://www.wsj.com/podcasts/tech-news-briefing/russia-pushes-its-homegrown-social-media-alternatives/998fd324-8c6c-447c-907b-666142a9c5ea>.

⁸⁵ Carolina Vendil Pallin, "Internet Control through Ownership: The Case of Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 16–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1121712>.

⁸⁶ "War Crimes Have Been Committed in Ukraine Conflict, Top UN Human Rights Inquiry Reveals," United Nations News, September 23, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1127691>.

⁸⁷ Aisling Ní Chúláin, "Russia Banned Facebook and Instagram. What Will Russians Use Now?," *euronews*, March 25, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/03/25/as-russia-bans-facebook-and-instagram-what-alternatives-will-russian-social-media-users-tu>.

As Russia continues to tighten its measures of censorship, the world is also looking for improved ways to bypass the control. Russians are heavily reliant on VPNs and the use of Tor browsers to access blocked sites. In fact, VPN downloads on apple and google app stores tripled within the first week of Russia's military action. Some foreign VPN providers even claim that they experienced a 1,000% increase in new users from within Russia.⁸⁸ U.S. companies have created peer to peer networks that evade blocking without relying on international network infrastructure. Lantern, a peer-to-peer tool that can route internet traffic around firewalls, has also experienced a dramatic increase in users within the first two months of the invasion, going from 5,000 to 120,000 users. Russians are also benefiting from the ability to use Tor through a Chrome or Firefox plugin called Snowflake Proxy. The plugin was installed by thousands of volunteers around the globe and has resulted in over 40,000 connections to the Tor network in Russia.⁸⁹ Not only do Snowflake proxies facilitate connectivity by making it difficult for firewalls to block but it also decreases their detectability. Other methods, such as cold calling Russian citizens from abroad to communicate truthful information regarding the events in Ukraine, are not technologically sophisticated yet still effective methods to bypass Russian information controls.⁹⁰

E. CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT

As Russia's desire for control of information flow extends outside its borders and into Ukraine, the corporate sector has been directly involved in the war. Photos and videos from Ukraine have been essential to sharing firsthand evidence of war crimes with the rest of the world. The ability of Ukrainians to connect with the rest of the world is an immediate threat to Russia's credibility and domestic support; so much so, that Russia has destroyed or taken over infrastructure used for internet, television, and radio in

⁸⁸ Brian Fung, "Russian Internet Users Are Learning How to Beat Putin's Internet Crackdown | CNN Business," CNN, March 12, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/12/tech/russia-internet-censorship-circumvention/index.html>.

⁸⁹ Oliver Linow, "How to Circumvent State Internet Censorship in Russia," dw.com, March 9, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-to-circumvent-state-internet-censorship-in-russia/a-61054476>.

Veronica Irwin, "How Russian Citizens Evade Putin's Censorship—Protocol," Protocol, April 4, 2022, <https://www.protocol.com/russian-internet-crackdown>.

Ukraine.⁹¹ However, Ukraine has managed to maintain its connectivity with the rest of the world due to the efforts of its repair crews and the support from SpaceX's Starlink. The company has supported Ukraine's efforts by providing tens of thousands of Starlink satellite dishes to the country for free and come with several benefits. First, Starlink provides high-speed internet connection even in remote areas of the country. Secondly, it helps prevent internet infrastructure overload that could be caused by large populations utilizing limited internet resources. Lastly, Starlink provides increased reliability as it creates back up connectivity options in cases of network outages or disruption of services. Within three months since Russian attacks began, there were over 10,000 terminals servicing about 150,000 Starlink users, which was crucial for Ukrainians to maintain connectivity despite the destruction of conventional infrastructure.⁹²

In addition to SpaceX, technology companies such as Microsoft, Amazon, and Google have contributed towards Ukraine's efforts to mitigate Russia's attack on information freedom. Microsoft and Amazon have moved their physical locations to cloud servers to continue services. Google has not only created an app to alert Ukrainians to Russian attacks, but it also expanded the availability of its free anti-DDoS software.⁹³ Additionally, by facilitating private action to allow anonymization sites to operate with minimal government involvement and minimizing corporate assistance in foreign government' censorship initiatives, democratic governments like the United States can have a role in defeating Internet censorship in repressive countries.⁹⁴ The direct

⁹¹ Vera Bergengruen, "The Battle for Control Over Ukraine's Internet," *Time*, October 18, 2022, <https://time.com/6222111/ukraine-internet-russia-reclaimed-territory/>.

⁹² O. Yermenko et al., "ICT Disruptive Technologies: Starlink in Ukraine Case," 2022, <https://openarchive.nure.ua/handle/document/20970>.

⁹³ Irene Sánchez Cózar Torreblanca José Ignacio, "Ukraine One Year on: When Tech Companies Go to War—European Council on Foreign Relations," *ECFR* (blog), March 7, 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/article/ukraine-one-year-on-when-tech-companies-go-to-war/>.

⁹⁴ Andrew Lloyd, "Note: Increasing Global Demand for an Uncensored Internet—How the U.S. Can Help Defeat Online Censorship by Facilitating Private Action," *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* 41, no. 299 (January 2008), <https://advance-lexis-com.libproxy.nps.edu/api/document?collection=analytical-materials&id=urn:contentItem:4T07-N5M0-00CV-90RM-00000-00&context=1516831>.

involvement of the corporate sector to facilitate the availability of information technologies, could set a precedent as to the role of companies in future conflicts.

F. CONCLUSION

In the past, journalists and investigators had to rely on a limited number of photos or videos to expose the murder of civilians. However, evidence discovered in Russia is so vast and detailed that it can be used to link specific units and individuals to killings. The amount of digital evidence is significantly different when compared to past investigations.⁹⁵ Additionally, all events resulting in the deaths of innocent civilians are being covered and reported regardless of the number of casualties.⁹⁶ There has been a pattern of response to Russia's actions in Ukraine as all civilian deaths are being meticulously tracked and reported. Attacks on civilians have strengthened the resolve of Ukraine and its allies, to include society, NGOs, and the corporate sector, to act against Russia.

In response to the coverage and evidence of crimes against human rights, Russia has continued the same pattern of denial and disinformation that it has been known for. However, attempts to sow confusion amongst the public has been generally useless across international communities. Even with limited effectiveness within its own domestic population, disinformation attempts have fallen short of convincing the population of Russia of believing the narrative. Citizens in both Ukraine and Russia have found ways to document and share evidence of the atrocities committed by Russian forces with the rest of the world. A coverage so effective that it has galvanized the world against Russia and in support of Ukraine. The information advantage over Russia has been so great that it has even forced the corporate sector to act in an unprecedented manner. The massive amounts of evidence and coverage will make it almost impossible for those responsible to avoid accountability.

⁹⁵ Al-Hlou et al., "Caught on Camera, Traced by Phone."

⁹⁶ Mstyslav Chernov, "Pregnant Woman, Baby Die after Russian Bombing in Mariupol," AP News, March 15, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-war-maternity-hospital-pregnant-woman-dead-c0f2f859296f9f02be24fc9edfca1085>.

VII. CASE 4: IRAN'S MORAL POLICE

A. INTRODUCTION

The death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, after being beaten by the hands of Iran's morality police for not observing the required dress code, has fueled the anger of Iranians despite the government's claim that she died of a disease. Iranian society has been historically known to be protest-prone due to the disconnect between the government and the civilian population.⁹⁷ The Iranian regime has had predictable response to the protests; responding in a violent manner by killing hundreds of civilians, including women and children. Additionally, tens of thousands have been arrested for supporting protests and a portion of those detained have been executed after receiving the death penalty. On top of the physical attempts Despite the efforts of Iranian authorities to crackdown on peaceful protests and prosecute human rights defenders and dissidents, Iranian citizens have continued use innovative ways to maintain internal communication, organize protests, and share information to the international audience.

B. GLOBAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Through global coverage of the ensuing protests, Mahsa Amini became a symbol of resistance that propelled a movement for the freedom of women in Iran and across the world. For over a year, news outlets such as ABC News have followed the story and interviewed directly involved in the protests against the Iranian regime. Some Iranian women have even recorded video diaries for ABC News to tell the world what daily life in Iran is like.⁹⁸ Other outlets, such as BBC, have also been gathering video footage from regular Iranian citizens despite the risks of imprisonment. Journalists at Persian-language Radio Farda use messaging apps to communicate with a network of established Iranian

⁹⁷ Hakki Uygur, "Iran in the Wake of Mahsa Amini's Death," *Insight Turkey* 24, no. 4 (2022): 11–22.

⁹⁸ Sarah Baniak et al., "1 Year after Mahsa Amini's Death, Iranian Activists Still Fighting for Freedom despite Regime's Cruelty," ABC News, September 19, 2023, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/1-year-after-mahsa-aminis-death-iranian-activists/story?id=103218257>.

sources. Through these videos and interviews, Iranian citizens, to include the Amini family, assertively denied the regime's false narratives. Despite internet blackouts by the Iranian government, outlets such the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *CNN* have conducted investigations into the regime's crackdown of protesters.⁹⁹ Two weeks after the regime shot nearly 100 civilians outside a religious building, and after thorough analysis of videos and witness accounts, these outlets published the results of their investigations.

Additionally, the UN and its human rights experts have publicly condemned Iran's violence against peaceful protesters and demanded accountability for Amini and dead Iranian citizens across the country. The UN urged the Iranian government to avoid using lethal force to stop peaceful gatherings and insisted that they conduct transparent investigations into the death of civilians.¹⁰⁰ In a public statement by Amnesty International, the organization raised concern that much more besides public statements by public officials needed to be done to prevent Iranian forces from killing, torturing, and raping more civilians. In their report, Amnesty International brought forward a leaked document in which it shows that Iranian military leadership gave orders to confront protesters without mercy and with the intention to kill if necessary. The report also includes the details of their ongoing investigation which includes testimonies from protesters, eyewitnesses, relatives of victims, human rights defenders, and journalists inside Iran. Amnesty International also analyzed audiovisual evidence, death certificates, official statements, leaked government documents, and state media reports.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Elahe Izadi, "Covering Iran's Unrest and Crackdown from Thousands of Miles Away," *Washington Post*, August 15, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/media/2022/11/28/iran-journalist-mahsa-amini-radio-farda/>.

¹⁰⁰ "Iran: UN Experts Demand Accountability for Death of Mahsa Amini, Call for End to Violence against Women," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, September 22, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/09/iran-un-experts-demand-accountability-death-mahsa-amini-call-end-violence>.

¹⁰¹ "Iran: Leaked Official Documents Ordering Deadly Crackdown Highlight Need for International Action" (Amnesty International, September 30, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6070/2022/en/>.

Iran International, which is a Saudi-funded news network based out of London, capitalized on the situation to criticize the Iranian regime. The network broadcasted the ongoing events on a daily basis, encouraged protests, and fact checked the Iranian narrative on Amini's death and violence against protesters. In response, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Corps (IRGC) called the network a part of Saudi propaganda and designated it as a terrorist organization. Despite Iran's response, the channel's following within Iran grew and created a demand for 24-hour broadcasts. After failed attempts of physical intimidation of the network staff, Iran was forced to come to an agreement with the Saudi government to mute the network and mitigate the information advantage that it had generated over the regime.¹⁰²

C. IRANIAN MEDIA COVERAGE

The Iranian government made statements claiming that Amini died of a heart attack despite strong evidence and witness statements suggesting that she died from the head trauma resulting from the beating she received by the police. Iran's interior minister stated that there was definitive medical evidence suggesting that Amini had not been beaten while in custody. Additionally, he criticized those that claimed that she had been mistreated as irresponsible, lacking information, and liable for exploiting the feelings of the public.¹⁰³ In response to the multiple protests that sprung in various cities, Iranian military leaders ordered security forces to act in what has been brutal force with the use of batons, tear gas, guns, and metal pellets. Internet access was restricted as the government imposed a blackout in an attempt to control information. Iran's state run media reported on some of the protests however, the reported death toll of civilians is believed to be only a fraction of the real number.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Simone Lipkind, "Understanding Saudi Media and the Mahsa Amini Protests' Role in the Saudi-Iranian Détente," *Women Around the World* (blog), July 11, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/understanding-saudi-media-and-mahsa-amini-protests-role-saudi-iranian-detente>.

¹⁰³ IFP editorial Staff, "Interior Minister: There's Evidence Amini Not Subjected To Beating In Custody—Iran Front Page," September 24, 2022, <https://ifpnews.com/interior-minister-evidence-amini-beating-custody/>.

¹⁰⁴ Anisha Kohli, "What to Know About the Iranian Protests Over Mahsa Amini's Death," *Time*, September 24, 2022, <https://time.com/6216513/mahsa-amini-iran-protests-police/>.

Initial coverage, which was significant in bringing the events to the public, was done by two Iranian female journalists. The first was Niloofar Hamed, who was able to gain access to the hospital where Amini was being cared for while in a coma. Hamed was able to take and post photos of Amini's family, her injuries, and eventual death. Elahe Mohammadi, the second journalist, covered the funeral and also took photos. The photos and stories posted by these two journalists appeared across western and Iranian media outlets for weeks as the story grabbed the attention of the public across the world. The Iranian media was responsible for controlling the narrative in Iran by criticism the government as corrupt and oppressive. As citizens started to contribute to the coverage, the story was distributed by Iranian Bloggers, social media influencers, and twitter followers.¹⁰⁵ The resulting response to society's coverage of these events was widespread protest against the Iranian government. In fear that that public outrage would threaten the governments rule and ability to control the masses, Iran charged charge the two women with deliberately attempting to sabotage the national security of the country. These two journalists, and many others who demanded accountability from the government, were incarcerated and given excessive sentences. Hamed and Mohammadi each received sentences of 13 and 12 years in prison for collaborating with the U.S. and acting against the regime.¹⁰⁶

D. RESPONSE TO CENSORSHIP

The younger generation of Iranian citizens has used its technological knowledge to find ways to circumvent government censorship, which is perceived as an extension of the physical abuse that the regime is inflicting on its citizens. As a result, this generation has been using platforms such as TikTok and Twitter to mitigate efforts by Iranian security services to block outgoing information by coordinating protests and amplifying

¹⁰⁵ Kathryn Pilgrim and Joan Johnson-Freese, "Remembering Mahsa Amini: Women Journalists Advancing Women, Peace & Security Principles," *Women Around the World and Women and Foreign Policy Program* (blog), September 14, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/remembering-mahsa-amini-women-journalists-advancing-women-peace-security-principles>.

¹⁰⁶ Parisa Hafezi, "Iran Sentences Women Journalists on Charges over Amini Protests," *Reuters*, October 22, 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-sentences-two-women-journalists-charges-linked-amini-protests-2023-10-22/>.

the voice of resistance.¹⁰⁷ The youth of Iran are not only technologically savvy, but they share similar interests with their global age group. However, even though, just like their western equivalents, the Iranian youth has grown up with technology and social media, they have also been required to become experts in the use of circumvention tools such as virtual private networks (VPN).¹⁰⁸ It is estimated that about 10 to 12 million individuals utilize VPN in Iran to counter censorship efforts by the regime; for example, even during temporary internet bans of Telegram, 40–62% of users were still active within the app.¹⁰⁹ Through VPNs, Iranians have been able to avoid internet blackouts long enough to post short clips to the media platform. These short clips have been able to reach a wider audience partly due to the number of “likes” the videos are receiving. These same videos are spread further through techniques enabling users to attach shared videos to their own. These techniques, known as “stitching” and “dueting” have been effective because in doing so the protester’s information is anonymized.¹¹⁰

The Iranian resistance against the media censorship has had a massive effect due in part, to outside support. In fact, the higher the threat against information access the higher the resistance to restore it; often extending past physical borders.¹¹¹ Iranian citizens are not alone in their efforts to bypass their government’s internet restrictions. Multiple professional athletes, celebrities, actors, and film directors have utilized social

¹⁰⁷ Weronika Strzyżyńska, “Iran Blocks Capital’s Internet Access as Amini Protests Grow,” *The Guardian*, September 22, 2022, sec. Global development, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/22/iran-blocks-capitals-internet-access-as-amini-protests-grow>.

¹⁰⁸ Holly Dagues, “Meet Iran’s Gen Z: The Driving Force Behind the Protests,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), November 1, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/01/iran-protests-gen-z-mahsa-amini-social-media/>.

¹⁰⁹ Alireza Hashemzadegan and Ali Gholami, “Internet Censorship in Iran: An Inside Look,” *Journal of Cyberspace Studies* 6, no. 2 (July 2022): 183–204.

¹¹⁰ Whitney Shylee May, “Iranian Protesters Are Using TikTok to Circumvent Government Censorship,” International Journalists’ Network, January 12, 2023, <https://ijnet.org/en/story/iranian-protesters-are-using-tiktok-circumvent-government-censorship>.

¹¹¹ Golnoosh Behrouzian et al., “Resisting Censorship: How Citizens Navigate Closed Media Environments,” *International Journal of Communication* 10 (August 30, 2016): 23.

media to voice their support for the Iranian people to their millions of followers.¹¹² This type of exposure is not only raising international awareness of what is happening in the country but is also fueling an external response. Hacktivist groups such as Anonymous, have joined the fight in support of those protesting Iran's human rights violations. Hackers have utilized distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks and doxing tactics against the government as well as encouraging the civilian population to use VPNs, proxy servers, and the dark web. Hacktivists have taken government websites offline through DDoS attacks and have leaked the contact information of government officials to the public, also known as doxing. Additionally, groups on Telegram have been set up to share details on available VPN services, links to educational resources pertaining to the use of proxy servers, and to teach Iranians how to access and use the tor browser, which is also known as the dark web and masks internet activity from internet service providers (ISP).¹¹³ The last piece of the international response against Iran has included sanctions against the regime and its morality police, official investigations by human rights organizations, and removal of Iran from United Nations Commissions, such as the Commission on the Status of Women.¹¹⁴

E. CONCLUSION

The initial media reporting covering the unjustified loss of one human life, Mahsa Amini's, sparked protests against the Iranian regime across the country. The protests turned into a movement that caught the attention of the international community, was covered by media outlets across the world, and followed closely by governments and human rights organizations. In unprecedented amounts, the evidence that was gathered, analyzed, and distributed throughout the internet was possible due to Iranian citizens and

¹¹² Vivian Yee, "Despite Iran's Efforts to Block Internet, Technology Has Helped Fuel Outrage," *New York Times*, September 29, 2022, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/29/world/middleeast/iran-internet-censorship.html>.

¹¹³ Ryan Browne Turak Natasha, "Hacktivists Seek to Aid Iran Protests with Cyberattacks and Tips on How to Bypass Internet Censorship," *CNBC*, October 5, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/05/how-anonymous-and-other-hacking-groups-are-aiding-protests-in-iran.html>.

¹¹⁴ Philip Loft, "2022 Iran Protests: Human Rights and International Response," March 15, 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9679/>.

journalists that risked imprisonment and death to share the realities of what was happening inside the country. The support shown for the Iranian population, through the worldwide coverage of the protests and the oppressive response of the regime, has given citizens the courage to act despite the risks. This large network of individuals, communicating with external sources, have created an informational advantage that Iran has been unable to overcome.

Regimes like Iran have a clear understanding of the threat that the availability of the internet poses to their control and have implemented measures of censorship and digital repression. However, despite the recent adaptation of repressive methods within the information environment, there has been a similar adaptation by society in the employment of censorship circumvention technologies to innovate and resist.¹¹⁵ The growing availability of methods to circumvent systems of surveillance and control, is being used effectively by victims, activists, human rights organizations, and governments to organize a response against the perpetrators of these crimes and diminish their ability to conceal their actions to their citizens and the rest of the world.

¹¹⁵ Aysenur Dal and Erik C. Nisbet, “Walking Through Firewalls: Circumventing Censorship of Social Media and Online Content in a Networked Authoritarian Context,” *Social Media + Society* 8, no. 4 (October 1, 2022): 20563051221137738, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221137738>.

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VIII. CASE 5: ISRAEL RESPONSE TO HAMAS ATTACK INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 2023 Hamas attacked Israel resulting in the deaths of 1,400 Israelis, 1,100 of them civilians. The developments of the terrorist attack were immediately reported via news agencies across the world. Hamas was separated into units with different tasks. The tasks were to kill anyone they saw, to include women and children, defend positions from Israeli military forces, or capture as many hostages as possible.¹¹⁶ As the reporting of the attack begun, Israel received overwhelming diplomatic, social, and corporate support. The U.S. government publicly condemned Hamas and communicated full support for Israel's right to defend itself and its citizens. Congressional leaders also issued public statements, via social media, in support of Israel.¹¹⁷ Corporate leaders also acted quickly to show support for Israel and vowing to contribute to the cause. CEOs from companies such as Amazon, Delta Airlines, google, Tesla, JP Morgan Chase, and many others condemned the terrorist attack and took action to aid relief and humanitarian efforts.¹¹⁸

With tremendous support and justified action, Israel formally declared war on Hamas on October 8 as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed retaliation.¹¹⁹ However, in what has been perceived as acts of vengeance, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have conducted numerous airstrikes into Gaza that have killed thousands of civilians many of whom are women and children. These strikes have targeted locations

¹¹⁶ Jason Burke, "A Deadly Cascade: How Secret Hamas Attack Orders Were Passed down at Last Minute," *The Guardian*, November 7, 2023, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/07/secret-hamas-attack-orders-israel-gaza-7-october>.

¹¹⁷ Kerry Breen, "U.S. Leaders Vow Support for Israel after Deadly Hamas Attacks: 'There Is Never Any Justification for Terrorism'—CBS News," October 9, 2023, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/israel-attack-hamas-gaza-united-states-leaders-support/>.

¹¹⁸ Daniella Genovese, "US CEOs Show Support for Israel after Hamas Attacks," Text.Article, FOXBusiness (Fox Business, October 10, 2023), <https://www.foxbusiness.com/lifestyle/us-ceos-support-israel-hamas-attacks>.

¹¹⁹ Hadas Gold Hu Shirin Faqiri, Helen Regan, Jessie Yeung, Caitlin, "Israel Formally Declares War against Hamas as It Battles to Push Militants off Its Soil," CNN, October 8, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/08/middleeast/israel-gaza-attack-hostages-response-intl-hnk/index.html>.

protected under international humanitarian law such as hospitals, markets, refugee camps, and neighborhoods. Because of IDF's retaliatory actions and indiscriminate attacks, what began as a justified war has turned into criticism as the shift in narrative is causing Israel to lose the information advantage that it previously had.¹²⁰

A. GLOBAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Global media coverage initially focused on Hamas' attack with emphasis on the number of civilians killed and the hundreds of individuals taken hostage by Hamas. Photos and videos of Hamas' massacre quickly emerged and were shown to foreign correspondents by the Israeli military. This evidence originated from body cameras worn by Hamas gunmen during the attack, taken by civilians trying to escape, or recorded by first respondents. Some of the atrocities captured included a photo of a burnt baby, gunmen shooting at the corpses of civilians or throwing them in a dumpster, civilians shot in their homes, and executing civilians after binding them with zip ties.¹²¹ Many of the victims of the massacre were young Israelis at a music festival with a crowd of about 3,500. Within two days of the attack, the *Associated Press* published an article after reviewing videos taken at the festival and interviewing survivors to reconstruct the timeline of the attack and how it unfolded. Numerous videos were also posted on telegram and showed the gunmen utilizing automatic weapons to kill as many as possible. At least 260 people were killed in the attack, and it is believed that about 245 were taken hostage.¹²²

Global media outlets are faced with multiple challenges in how they cover the war due to polarized public opinion, conflicting propaganda, and social media pressure. The

¹²⁰ Holly Dagres, "Hamas's Actions Are War Crimes. Israel Should Not Respond with Further War Crimes.," *Atlantic Council* (blog), October 16, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/hamas-israel-war-crimes/>.

¹²¹ Julia Frankel, "Israeli Video Compilation Shows the Savagery and Ease of Hamas' Attack," AP News, October 17, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-hamas-attack-military-war-a8f63b07641212f0de61861844e5e71e>.

¹²² Isabel Debre and Michael Biesecker, "Israeli Survivors Recount Terror at Music Festival, Where Hamas Militants Killed at Least 260," AP News, October 9, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-gaza-hamas-music-festival-6a55aae2375944f10ecc4c52d05f2ffe>.

ongoing airstrikes in Gaza and closed access points for foreign media makes reporting difficult for journalists on the outside. Although there are Palestinian reporters inside Gaza, providing information to global media outlets, the ongoing loss of power limits their ability to communicate. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have criticized Israel for hindering journalism in Gaza.¹²³

Because of these challenges news outlets have rushed the publication of unverified information benefiting both Hamas and Israel in their struggle over information advantage over one another. In one case, media outlets circulated claims that Hamas was beheading babies. A story that eventually made its way onto live TV by CNN. Another example was the alleged Israeli airstrike on a hospital in Gaza on October 17. Within the hour, global media outlets reported the incident as an IDF strike on a hospital based on statements by Hamas' health ministry who reported that 200 to 300 people had been killed.¹²⁴ The story was shared across headlines and on social media platforms. Intelligence reports and video analysis later determined that the incident was a result of a misfired rocket by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, supporting Israel's denial that it was responsible for the strike. However, despite U.S. support for Israel's response and acknowledgement by media outlets, such as the *New York Times*, that it made a mistake in its reporting the damage to Israel had been done.

Since the initial attack by Hamas, the reporting on Israel's actions have indicated that Israel is beginning to lose its grip on the narrative. Coverage of IDF airstrikes and the increasing death toll of civilians in Gaza has drawn heavy criticism worldwide and have caused Israel to lose some of the support it had early on.¹²⁵ As death toll in Gaza exceeded 10,000, the U.N. called the city a graveyard for children. In an interview with reporters, the U.N. Secretary General stated that IDF strikes were hitting civilians and

¹²³ Paul Ricard, "Media Reporting on Israel-Hamas War Face Singular Challenges," Japan Times, October 31, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/10/31/world/politics/media-challenges-israel-hamas-war/>.

¹²⁴ Paul Ricard, "Media Reporting on Israel-Hamas War Face Singular Challenges."

¹²⁵ Shibley Telhami, "Israel Loses Much of the Support It Gained after Hamas' Attack," Brookings, November 8, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/israel-loses-much-of-the-support-it-gained-after-hamas-attack/>.

that no one in Gaza was safe.¹²⁶ As Israeli strikes continue to kill civilians, several countries are breaking ties with Israel and taking diplomatic stances against Israel. Its actions have the potential to alienate regional partnerships and strengthen Iran's influence in the region.¹²⁷

NGOs such as Amnesty International have also begun to criticize Israel's actions against civilians. The organization has begun investigations to investigate and document Israeli attacks resulting in mass civilian casualties and constituting war crimes. It conducted an in-depth analysis of five illegal attacks by speaking to survivors, eyewitnesses, analyzing satellite images, and validating photos and videos. It stated that Israeli forces have shown a glaring disregard for human lives and that its research resulted in clear evidence that Israel had committed war crimes against civilians by providing inadequate warnings and striking targets with no evidence of present Hamas fighters or military objectives.¹²⁸

Due to the recent developments in Gaza, even mainstream media have begun to echo the criticism against Israel by other governments and large parts of society. News organizations are now taking a more aggressive stance in their reporting against IDF operations in Gaza. IDF spokes persons have been confronted by reporters on live TV seeking answers for the deaths of innocent civilians. Hosts have contested inconsistent responses by IDF officials, who took responsibility for numerous attacks but claimed that they were targeting Hamas leaders.¹²⁹ More recently, hundreds of journalists signed a letter to protest western coverage of the war. The letter highlighted the avoidance of

¹²⁶ Nidal Al-Mughrabi and Nidal Al-Mughrabi, "Gaza Death Toll Tops 10,000; UN Calls It a Children's Graveyard," *Reuters*, November 6, 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/pressure-israel-over-civilians-steps-up-ceasefire-calls-rebuffed-2023-11-06/>.

¹²⁷ Stephen Mays, "Opinion: Countries Breaking Ties with Israel Are Sending It an Important Warning," *CNN*, November 2, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/02/opinions/israel-hamas-us-biden-obama-iran-rosenthal/index.html>.

¹²⁸ "Israeli Attacks Wipe out Entire Families in Gaza," Amnesty International, October 20, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-as-israeli-attacks-wipe-out-entire-families-in-gaza/>.

¹²⁹ Oliver Darcy, "News Outlets Take a More Critical Stance towards Israel Defense Forces as Civilian Deaths Mount in Gaza," *CNN*, November 2, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/02/media/news-critical-idf-civilian-deaths/index.html>.

language, in reporting, to denounce Israel's actions as well as demand for accountability for the 39 journalists that have been killed by IDF strikes.¹³⁰

B. ISRAELI MEDIA COVERAGE

Israeli media outlets have been coordinating with officials to ensure that the country's narrative is being communicated. In addition to the traditional role of journalists, Israeli media is also acting as public advocates to support the war and show the world how deeply the Hamas attack affected its population. Israeli media has sought to maximize the country's narrative, that Hamas members are savages, by working with officials on covering future hostage releases. Mainstream media outlets in Israel have supported the war effort with banners and messages across media platforms and have compared Hamas to Nazis. Additionally, a news and entertainment platform has set up a campaign to disseminate English videos of the Israeli narrative. Overall, some in Israel see the role of the media as a necessary contribution towards the war.

Israeli media structure has been known as diverse, independent, and critical of the government. However, media coverage since the attack has been seen as responsible and reliable by Israelis. The media organizations have largely stood behind the country's political and military leadership and coverage of critics has been kept to a minimum. Initial coverage criticized the failure to foresee and prevent the attack but since then, news outlets have communicated the narrative that Israel's war against Hamas is one of good vs. evil. Although global coverage has shifted to reporting the development in Gaza, domestic coverage continues to focus on the dead, survivors, and hostages of the attack.¹³¹

Nearly a month after the attack, Israel accused the New York Times, CNN, the Associated Press, and Reuters of having knowledge of Hamas' plan to attack Israel.

¹³⁰ Laura Wagner and Will Sommer, "Hundreds of Journalists Sign Letter Protesting Coverage of Israel," *Washington Post*, November 9, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/style/media/2023/11/09/open-letter-journalists-israel-gaza/>.

¹³¹ Tia Goldenberg, "Israeli Media, Also Traumatized by Hamas Attack, Become Communicators of Israel's Message," *AP News*, October 29, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-gaza-media-hamas-palestinians-41d58d4f42e9912ed576f1b336b245d2>.

Israel's Communications Minister added that photographers of these organizations had connections to Hamas and had knowledge of the attack. The photographers were accused of arriving with the attackers on the morning of the attack and documenting violence against civilians. The office of the prime minister and the government's press office issued statements claiming that the photographers were no different than the Hamas militants for letting the atrocities unfold without taking action. The accused media outlets denied those claims and stated that those individuals were freelance journalists.¹³²

C. STATEMENTS AND REPORTING BY HAMAS

Hamas' leadership claimed that its assault on Israeli military bases were a preventive strike. Al Jazeera reported that its deputy leader spoke to the news outlet regarding the operation and claimed that Hamas had received intelligence indicating that Israel was planning on launching an assault on Hamas occupied territories. He added that the assault was only aimed at soldiers and military installations. Furthermore, he claimed that Hamas took civilians as prisoners due to the confusion resulting from engagements with armed civilians. Lastly, he criticized Israeli and western claims of Hamas committing crimes as lies and added that Israel is the only one committing war crimes by targeting civilians.¹³³

Since then, Hamas has sought to take advantage through the reporting of Israeli air strikes. On Oct 17's strike on the Gaza city hospital, Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry claimed that Israel was responsible for the attack that killed over 500 Palestinians receiving treatment or seeking shelter. Photos and videos from the hospital appeared on social media and showed the building in flames along with bodies of young children throughout the scene. Hamas stated that the hospital strike was a horrific massacre, a perspective that was shared by the Canadian Prime Minister and the UN

¹³² Elena Giordano, "Israel Berates New York Times, CNN, Reuters, AP over Hamas Attack Photographers," *POLITICO* (blog), November 9, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-new-york-times-cnn-reuters-ap-hamas-attack-photos-press-journalist/>.

¹³³ "Hamas: Our Assault Thwarted Planned Israeli Attack on Gaza," Middle East Monitor, October 12, 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231012-hamas-our-assault-thwarted-planned-israeli-attack-on-gaza/>.

Secretary General. Both of which stated that the news coming out of Gaza that day were unacceptable and that hospitals are protected under international humanitarian law.¹³⁴

Lastly, social media use has been a significant enabler of Hamas' efforts to spread disinformation and propaganda. In addition to getting their information from mainstream media outlets, the international community is also following the developments of the war through social media platforms such as twitter and telegram. Videos of Israeli airstrikes that happened in May, long before the war started, are being circulated as current. There have also been incidents of videos suggesting that Hamas has captured Israeli generals, coming from verified twitter accounts. This particular video, which has been seen by over two million people, is actually an old video of Azerbaijan authorities capturing a separatist leader. Telegram, from which most of these videos usually originate from, has also become a platform for Hamas to spread their videos. There are thousands of different telegram groups that are linked to Hamas or associated organizations. Additionally, unlike American companies like Twitter or Facebook, Telegram is not a company based out of the U.S. and thus it is harder to regulate or enforce content moderation on the platform.¹³⁵

D. CONCLUSION

Although Israel had overwhelming support for military action, following the attack by Hamas on October 7, media coverage of its combat operations has resulted in significant political pressure against it. International reporting of the deliberate airstrikes, which have resulted in civilian casualties amounting to apparent war crimes, has given Hamas an information advantage over its adversary. Although Israel still enjoys strong domestic support for the war effort, the same cannot be said about the international community. Because of the media coverage pertaining to the humanitarian crisis resulting

¹³⁴ "Palestinians Say Hundreds Killed in Israeli Airstrike on Hospital; Israel Blames Islamic Jihad," CBC, October 17, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/gaza-airstrikes-israel-1.6998419>.

¹³⁵ Emerson Brooking and Laura Barron-Lopez, "Social Media Companies Criticized as Israel-Hamas War Misinformation Spreads Rampantly," video, 6:57, PBS, October 11, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/social-media-companies-criticized-as-israel-hamas-war-misinformation-spreads-rampantly>.

from the targeting of civilians and protected buildings, hundreds of thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters have gathered around the world to demand a cease fire. Coverage from the streets of cities like Washington, D.C., Paris, London, Berlin, Milan, among others, has further amplified the narrative against Israel's operations.¹³⁶

The shift in narrative can be easily attributed to the media coverage of the rising civilian death toll from Israeli airstrikes. It has mobilized parts of the global population to demand change from political leaders. The effectiveness of the political pressure can be seen through the actions and official statements of various nations to include the U.S. The U.S. government has supported military action from the beginning but instances of language showing U.S. concern for the rising number of civilian casualties has been more apparent recently.¹³⁷ This case of growing opposition to Israel's operations in Gaza clearly highlight the targeting of civilians as a vulnerability which can result in an information disadvantage with operational consequences.

¹³⁶ "Protesters Rally around the World Demanding Immediate Ceasefire in Gaza," Al Jazeera, November 4, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/4/demonstrations-around-the-world-renew-calls-for-gaza-ceasefire>.

¹³⁷ Paul LeBlanc Hansler Jennifer, "Blinken Brings a Notable Shift in U.S. Language toward Israel as Pressure Mounts at Home and Abroad," CNN, November 10, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/10/politics/us-support-for-israel/index.html>.

IX. CONCLUSION

This thesis utilized the Nanjing massacre, the Tiananmen Square massacre, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the death of Mahsa Amini in Iran, and Israel's response to Hamas' attack to analyze the evolution of social media coverage pertaining to deliberate attacks on civilians. Analysis of these five cases was conducted in the areas of global media coverage, domestic media coverage, censorship, and censorship circumvention. Of significance throughout the analysis was the role of information technology in increasing the capacity and reach of global media coverage. Also a critical factor, was the role of civilian populations and their ability to circumvent government censorship to contribute to the coverage of the events.

The advancement of information technology has provided the means to communicate instantly through multiple platforms that allow voice, text, or video messaging. Recent history has shown us that each time there is a unique technological capability introduced, there is a corresponding social reaction.¹³⁸ The significant interaction between technology and society is evident through the cross-cultural popularity of social media platforms. Society's response to social media platforms has had a transformative impact on the information environment. There are varying types of sites that facilitate chatting, blogging, media sharing, activism, social networking, and status-update services. All these sites share one thing in common; they enable the creation of large networks that make it easy to interact with large numbers of people.¹³⁹ The demand for information sharing has given birth to several multi-billion-dollar social media platforms within the past two decades and has decreased the ability of aggressors to conceal crimes against civilians, from the rest of the world.

¹³⁸ Robert Angus Buchanan, "History of Technology–The Technological Dilemma," Britannica, November 10, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/history-of-technology>.

¹³⁹ Michael Dewing, *Social Media: An Introduction*, Publication No. 2010–03-E (Ottawa, Canada: Parliamentary Information and Research Service, 2012), <https://bdp.parl.ca/staticfiles/PublicWebsite/Home/ResearchPublications/InBriefs/PDF/2010-03-e.pdf>.

Censorship and internet control by those engaging in the murder of civilians is becoming less and less effective in restricting access to information. Despite adaptive attempts to control the information environment, these methods have been mostly ineffective in preventing society in finding ways to circumvent those controls. Additionally, banning content or social media platforms only increases the demand and variety of ways to obtain access.¹⁴⁰ A combination of the technological knowledge of younger generations, the use of VPNs and Tor browser, hacktivism, support from foreign companies, and innovative use of available media platforms has proven effective in countering most censorship methods by Iran and Russia. Human rights violations by these governments, and their attempt to conceal these very actions by limiting information freedom, have fueled a swift global response that has raised global awareness and support for the populations directly impacted by the perpetrators. As these governments increase restrictions over information flow to control dissent and protests, those opposing them will continue to research and identify innovative ways to maintain connectivity with the rest of the world. Actions taken through a whole-of-society approach to circumvent information control are growing to be the most effective methods to hold the perpetrators accountable for their crimes against civilian populations.

A. FINDINGS

Thorough analysis of the five cases revealed that present day media coverage, of deliberate attacks on civilians, exposes a vulnerability that can be used against the aggressor. As opposed to the first two cases, present day cases showed that evidence of war crimes against civilians can be captured and shared immediately with the world. Even in instances in which the aggressor attempted to use denial, disinformation, or restriction of information flow to limit the impact of media coverage on its objective, the civilian population found ways to circumvent censorship and share information to amplify media coverage. In all three cases, the coverage created a global awareness of the situation which resulted political pressure for action, in the form of protests across the

¹⁴⁰ Zubair Nabi, “Censorship Is Futile,” November 2, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i11>.

world. Additionally, investigations by human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, compounded the authenticity of the media coverage.

All three of the latter cases showed that there is no death toll threshold for a deliberate attack on civilians to be covered and reported across news media outlets and social media. Unlike the massacres at Tiananmen Square and Nanjing, in which the aggressors disputed the death toll to downplay the magnitude of the event, present day cases showed consistent coverage regardless of the number of deaths. Attacks with single digit fatalities in the Russia and Ukraine conflict were reported by mainstream media and across social media platforms. In the Israel and Hamas conflict, all the attacks on civilians are being covered internationally. Lastly, in Iran, the death of one human being was covered extensively and generated worldwide interest that sparked a movement and various protests and highlights the fact that any indiscriminate attack on civilians, regardless of the number of deaths, is likely to get global media attention.

Despite a clear evolution in the concept of human rights, capacity of international media coverage, and social media reporting, these cases did not provide sufficient evidence to show that those factors are sufficient to deter the deliberate targeting of noncombatants. Russia has conducted over 200 operations resulting in civilian deaths and has not shown any indication of stopping despite actions taken by the world against its government.¹⁴¹ In Iran, the regime continues to use excessive force against protesters despite the damaging effects that media coverage has had on its ability to control its population. Lastly, and probably the clearest of the three cases, Israel has conducted several airstrikes resulting in civilian casualties. Despite the shift in Narrative and the political pressure condemning its disproportionate retaliation, Israel's objective of eradicating Hamas has been a priority over mitigating the consequences of the high civilian death toll in Gaza.

¹⁴¹ "War Crimes Watch Ukraine—FRONTLINE / AP Collaboration."

Lastly, analysis of these cases proved that society has an active role, that continues to grow, in the collection of evidence and reporting of attacks on civilians. Up until now the media structure had been one of one-way communication between the producers of mainstream media and its consumers, society. However, social media and the internet have changed this structure which now permits the civilian population to participate in the process of documenting, processing, and disseminating information to the rest of the world. In the context of the murder of noncombatants, social media and the internet have allowed evidence of these crimes to be made immediately available to the public, visible, and sharable.¹⁴² The use of social networks to influence political response to the murder of civilians has grown to be effective because it makes it easy to quickly reach large groups of people at a low cost and straight from the source.¹⁴³ The interaction between technology and social response has fueled the growth of global social networks, which now have an increasing ability to exploit an aggressor's political vulnerability when crimes against human rights are recorded and shared.

B. IMPLICATIONS

With the increasing role of the information domain, narratives pertaining to the targeting of civilians may have significant operational effects. Increased use of these narratives, amplified by media coverage, can be used to alienate an adversary, and expose additional vulnerabilities that may affect its ability to achieve the objective. Attempts by the adversary to counter the effects of the reporting of the events will spend its political capital and resources.

Additionally, media coverage and accompanying narratives are a proven method to show solidarity and support for the victim population. Increased frequency of media coverage pertaining to the targeting of civilians can embolden affected populations to act in ways such as organized protests and further reporting from within affected areas, primarily via social media platforms. These actions can decrease the domestic support of

¹⁴² Tang, "Collective Memory of the Nanjing Massacre:"

¹⁴³ "Media-(Dis)Information-Security," NATO.

an adversary, amplify the population's dissatisfaction with the actions of its government, and increase the U.S. informational advantage.

When conflicts breakout and governments target civilians, the world looks to the U.S. government to intervene, whether that is diplomatically or militarily. When this occurs, the official response, to condemn civilian deaths, must be issued immediately and without reservation regardless of who the aggressor is. Delay in response or inconsistent responses across similar events will be highlighted by media coverage and could have an adverse effect on the informational advantage that can be gained with initial reporting. Additionally, careful attention must be paid to particular choice of language used since the narrative will be disseminated across media platforms and in various languages.

C. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This thesis utilized present day cases to analyze media coverage however, further research can be done to examine the effects of additional types of international response to these acts and whether the media coverage has a significant effect resulting in timely response. Types of international response include economic sanctions, diplomatic engagements in regions of concern, humanitarian aid, military aid, and actions taken by the International Criminal Court. Research can examine the combination of international responses and determine if there is one more powerful than another in decreasing the likelihood of further targeting of civilians or even deterring future ones.

Another area that may be of interest for future research is whether the political relationship between the U.S. and the aggressor has a significant effect on the language used in media coverage. Is there media bias depending on which nation has targeted civilians and whether they are an ally of the U.S. or does the role of society in the media reporting mechanism mitigate any media bias that may have been present in the past?

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