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A NEW TEST OF THE NEWS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES AND CNN COVERAGE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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**A NEW TEST OF THE NEWS:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE NEW YORK TIMES AND CNN
COVERAGE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Mass Communication

in

Theanship School of Mass Communication

by
Hannah Ross
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Abstract

Russia launched a military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, setting off Europe's largest war since World War II. The war captured the attention of American news organizations, which gave the conflict unprecedented levels of coverage. This thesis tested the coverage of the war in Ukraine by two major American news outlets: *The New York Times* and CNN. This study used qualitative content analysis to examine the top four front-page stories of the *Times* and CNN Newsroom show. Two timeframes were used to analyze these materials: February 24, 2022, to March 9, 2022, and September 17, 2022, to September 30, 2022. The study used three categories of coverage- types of stories and recurring themes, use of sources and use of technology- to test how CNN and the *Times* reported the news. CNN and the *Times* devoted an extensive amount of their coverage to the war in Ukraine. This coverage leaned toward Ukrainians and away from Russians, risking objectivity in reporting. Advancements in technology formed a new type of digital journalism during the war in Ukraine. Digital journalism captured content unattainable during previous wars and is likely to continue to advance reporting by the American media from conflict zones across the world.

Chapter 1. Introduction

...a cannon shot could not be fired in Europe without all the cabinets having some interest in the occurrence. A new Alexander must therefore try the use of a good pen as well as his good sword... (Clausewitz, 1974)¹

Today the power of the media, or “a good pen,” is critical to who wins a war.² In 1832, Clausewitz recognized war as a continuation of politics; war is a political choice, and the military is a political weapon, used to meet political ends. But this power places the responsibility on journalists and media organizations to report the war in some way ethically. The founding principles of most leading media organizations in the United States - truth, objectivity and balance - are tested when it comes to reporting from a war zone. In the words of Kate Adie, BBC war correspondent, “The very nature of war confuses the role of the journalist.”³ To whom does a journalist stay true when faced with the horrific realities of war? Are you loyal to those running the war machine, to those risking their lives on the front lines, to an audience watching from home? Or do you remain the object of reason, asking the difficult questions, asking, “Why are we taking this risk?”⁴

On February 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a military offensive on its neighbor, Ukraine, resulting in Europe’s most extensive war since World War II. Journalists from all over the world flocked to Ukraine to cover the invasion and Western media relentlessly reported from both the front lines and their own countries for weeks and months following the invasion. The amount of coverage by the American news media in the first full

¹ Karl Clausewitz, *On War*. (London: Penguin, 1974), p. 382. First published in 1832.

² Mark Connelly & David Welch, *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900- 2003* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

³ Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer, *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

⁴ Allan and Zelizer, *Reporting War*.

month of the war was record-breaking, surpassing the amount of coverage for recent wars that America was a part of.⁵

The war in Ukraine garnered far more Western media attention than invasions in the Middle East and the Russo-Georgian War. The combined three networks – ABC, CBS and NBC – devoted 562 minutes to the first full month of the war in Ukraine (March 2022). This footage from the first full month of the war in Ukraine exceeded more coverage than the heaviest entire year of coverage of the Syrian Civil War (461 minutes for 12 months of 2012). Furthermore, this footage from Ukraine exceeded the first full month of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in November 2001 (306 minutes) when U.S. troops were deployed. This study aims to assess how this war was reported on by the Western media through a study of the coverage of the front page by *The New York Times* and The Cable News Network (CNN) Newsroom show during the first two weeks of the war and the final two weeks of September.

The West strongly condemned this “unprovoked invasive terrorist war” on Europe’s second-largest country after Russia.⁶ To date, 40 countries, mostly belonging to NATO and the European Union, have sent and pledged military aid to Ukraine.⁷ The war sparked a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, killing and injuring Ukrainian civilians, including children. Many displaced Ukrainians spent months in underground shelters facing harsh, winter conditions, and a lack of medical supplies, electricity, food and water. From the onset, Ukrainian civilians fled their country to seek refuge in neighboring European countries,

⁵ Andrew Tyndall, “Volodymyr the Charismatic,” *Tyndall Report* (2022), <http://tyndallreport.com/date/2022/3/31/#blog>.

⁶ Dan Bilefsky, Stephanie Lai, and Jim Tankersley, “Ukraine’s First Lady Tells the U.S. Congress That ‘Russia Is Destroying Our People,’” *The New York Times*, July 20, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/world/europe/ukraine-first-lady-congress.html>

⁷ Martin Armstrong, “The Countries Sending the Most Military Aid to Ukraine,” *Statista Infographics*, February 24, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/chart/27278/military-aid-to-ukraine-by-country/#:~:text=The%20Kiel%20Institute%20for%20the%20World%20Economy%27s%20Ukraine%20Support%20Tracker,military%2C%20financial%20and%20humanitarian%20commitments>.

marking the largest displacement of Europeans since World War II. As of February 2023, over 8 million Ukrainian refugees were registered across Europe, most of them fleeing to Poland.⁸

For this thesis, content from the *Times* and CNN are analyzed. These were selected, firstly for their reputation of being two of the largest and most influential news providers in the United States and secondly that they provide fair and accurate news to an American audience and beyond. CNN prides itself on being “The most trusted name in news” and focuses on covering foreign affairs. This commitment to reporting on foreign affairs makes CNN an applicable outlet to focus this analysis. *The New York Times*’s mission is to “seek the truth and help people understand the world.” This thesis examines how and by what means *The New York Times*’ coverage helped people understand the war in Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine is ongoing. This study is one of the few scholarly studies to examine news coverage of the war in such great depth thus far. There has been much news coverage of the war in Ukraine, but little critical analysis of how much coverage there has been and how the war has been reported by the American media.

This thesis examines the coverage of the war by looking at three distinct categories: types of stories and recurring themes, use of sources and use of technology. To examine the type of stories and recurring themes the coverage is subcategorized into four sections: military operations, Russian news, Ukrainian civilians and refugees and Western response. The category of sources is divided into three elements: Ukrainian known and unknown sources, Russian known and unknown sources, and other named sources. Finally, this thesis examines the new types of technology used by CNN and the *Times* to show how they are advancing in digital journalism. New digital tools used in broadcast and print journalism set forth an innovative way to collect evidence and information from conflicts across the globe. Increased access to

⁸ Armstrong, “The Countries Sending the Most Military Aid to Ukraine.”

news material is expected to change the way that journalists report on foreign news in the future.

This thesis divides the research into two chapters of findings: CNN findings and *The New York Times* findings. Each chapter begins by presenting the percentage of time that each organization devoted to covering the war in both timeframes. Then the chapters highlight the number of journalists and resources each organization dedicated to covering the war in Ukraine. Finally, the three distinct categories of coverage are discussed in each chapter followed by a comparison of the coverage of the war by both organizations.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

To date, there have been a few newspaper articles and studies based on the war coverage of Ukraine, but thus far it has not been extensive. However, literature about reporting on foreign and/or international affairs like war journalism is voluminous. The nature of international reporting gives way to an array of problems and, therefore, “The stakes in Journalism are nowhere higher than in foreign news-gathering.”⁹ Reporting on foreign affairs is challenging for all of those involved: for media owners, it is expensive; for editors, it is difficult to second-guess with little first-hand knowledge of the events taking place; and for correspondents, it is the most demanding type of journalism.¹⁰ When reporting on war, these restraints are intensified. Issues arise over allegiance, responsibility, balance and truth.¹¹ As Senator Hiram Johnson claimed in 1917 “the first casualty when war comes, is truth.”¹²

A Test of the News

In 1920, Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz tested the coverage by *The New York Times* of the Russian Revolution. They found that the *Times* had severely “botched” its coverage through a series of misinformation and misstatements.¹³ The *Times* repeatedly reported that the Bolshevik regime was about to collapse and cited hundreds of events that did not take place. According to Lippmann and Merz, the “future of democracy rested on the delivery by the press of truthful and accurate information,” and in this case, the *Times* had

⁹ John M. Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 10.

¹⁰ Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye*, 9.

¹¹ Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer, *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹² Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from Crimea to Iraq* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), viii.

¹³ Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz, *A Test of the News: An Examination of the News Reports in the New York Times on Aspects of the Russian Revolution of Special Importance to Americans, March 1917-March 1920* (New Republic, 1920), 86.

denied the public reliable news.¹⁴ In all, the coverage of the Russian Revolution was “a case of seeing not what was, but what men wished to see.”¹⁵ Lippmann and Mertz’s investigation is a valuable example of the importance of testing the media for journalistic standards such as objectivity, truth and accuracy.

The War Correspondent

The qualities and role of a war correspondent in covering conflict are debated among scholars. The image of the foreign news correspondent is often a “simplistically romantic view,”¹⁶ burdened with stereotypes. A popular image of the war correspondent in the public’s imagination is of a heroic, courageous figure, reporting under threat from the frontlines.¹⁷ But the war reporter is also heavily criticized for what Evelyn Waugh views as the “narcissism of war reporting.”¹⁸ Michael Herr, the author of “Dispatches,” recalls being called “thrill freaks, death-wishers, wound-seekers, war-lovers, hero-worshippers, closet queens, dope addicts...”¹⁹ to list a few. Perhaps there is an element of truth in the self-fulfilling nature of war journalism. After all, it is common practice for war correspondents to publish their memoirs of the war, whereby the “messenger becomes as important- if not more important- than the message has.”²⁰ Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that reporting on war is a hazardous occupation and comes with real life-threatening risks. In 2022, 15 news workers were killed in the war in Ukraine from shelling and in some cases, direct attacks by Russian forces.²¹

¹⁴ Lippmann and Merz, *A Test of the News*, 86.

¹⁵ Lippmann and Merz, *A Test of the News*, 91.

¹⁶ Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye*, 487.

¹⁷ Mark Connelly & David Welch, *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900- 2003* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

¹⁸ Connelly & Welch, *War and the Media*, xiv.

¹⁹ Greg McLaughlin, *The War Correspondent* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 3.

²⁰ Connelly & Welch, *War and the Media*, xiv.

²¹ Evens Sanon, “Journalist deaths jumped 50% in 2022, led by Ukraine, Mexico,” *AP News* (2023), <https://apnews.com/article/crime-homicide-haiti-news-media-0ff27364c7a555db604bbbd921339b99>.

Today, the role of the war correspondent is evolving in time with a new digital era of war reporting. Advancements in technology from a war zone mean that journalists can write extremely accurate and detailed stories without leaving their Manhattan office. Video footage from surveillance cameras, security and drone footage and intercepted phone calls from soldiers on the ground are just some of the ways that journalists can find information about what is happening in Ukraine, without leaving their homes.

Technological Advancements

There is a wealth of literature about how the Western media have covered major wars over the last century and how technology has facilitated and adapted this reporting. “War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900- 2003,” (2005) by Mark Connelly and David Welch follows how technological shifts over the past 150 years changed the means of transmitting news. John Hamilton’s “Journalism’s Roving Eye,” which offers an extensive history of American foreign correspondence, also delves into the affordances of new technologies to report on war faster and more efficiently. “Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War,” by Philip Seib highlights how new technologies influenced public opinion during major American wars like the Vietnam War and the war in Iraq and how cyber news alters global society.

The radio was the serious medium for news reporting during World War II, making way for rising news pioneers like Edward R. Murrow. The CBS radio reporter famously spoke on air during the German nighttime bombing in 1940: “London is burning, London is burning.”²² The radio gave the audience a taste of hearing the war in *real time*, developing an immediate and intimate relationship with the audience. Another medium that brought the image of the war correspondent into people’s lives during World War II was the movie industry. These two

²² Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye*, 229.

mediums had an interdependent relationship: film gave visual identity to the radio and the radio prompted film studio's production and output.²³

Then there was the first "television war."²⁴ Many thought the impact of television on the public and more specifically, on public opinion during the war in Vietnam was powerful.²⁵ But according to Seib, it is a myth to believe that news coverage was *the* reason that the United States lost the Vietnam War.²⁶ Connelly and Welch support the idea that the so-called "living room war" was not as vivid as it is remembered. In fact, before the Tet Offensive, only 22% of the coverage in Vietnam showed any combat.²⁷ One notable exception is the Tet Offensive where about 20 million Americans viewed rolling footage of Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing a captured Vietcong.²⁸

Following the Cold War came a new generation of technology. During Afghanistan and Iraq coverage was propelled by mobile, satellite-enhanced news gathering.²⁹ Digital technologies allowed viewers to experience live images, footage and sound directly from the middle east. New, lightweight equipment also meant that reporters could "parachute" into a country and report live within a matter of hours.³⁰ By 2003, satellite photography was extremely precise for its time and widely available.³¹ It gave the audience a new, broad, visual context of the war rather than photographs taken from the ground. The internet also brought about the most significant change in communication since television.³² The internet was beginning to change the way that news readers received information about the war. During the

²³ Connelly & Welch, *War and the Media*, 93.

²⁴ Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye*, 411.

²⁵ Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye*, 409.

²⁶ Philip Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines: How the News Media Cover a World Shaped by War* rk: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 44.

²⁷ Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye*, 410.

²⁸ Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye*, 410.

²⁹ Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines*, 11.

³⁰ Hamilton, *Journalism's Roving Eye*, 299.

³¹ Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines*, 48.

³² Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines*, 87.

first five days of the fighting in Iraq, 77% of Americans said that they used the internet in some way to get information about the war.³³ Although television was still dominant, the internet as a medium for news was rapidly gaining momentum.

Describing the advancements in technology and how it pertains to reporting on war over the past 100 years is an extensive and complicated task. But to put it simply, technologies have rapidly changed the way that war is reported and continue to do so in Ukraine. New technologies have been integral to the way that journalists obtain information and tell stories about military operations, potential war crimes, identifying individuals, measuring fatalities and more in Ukraine.

The War in Ukraine

Research on the coverage of the war in Ukraine thus far is mostly in the form of newspaper stories, blog posts, polls and reports. But literature in the form of books and journal articles is lacking. This makes this thesis relevant as it fills a gaping hole in the studies of Western media's coverage of the war in Ukraine.

The Tyndall Report

Andrew Tyndall, the author of the "Tyndall Report," monitors and comments on the weekday nightly newscasts ABC World News, CBS Evening News and NBC Nightly News. Tyndall has been monitoring television news for over 20 years. The database on his website has links to 58123 video reports dating back to 2006. Each year Tyndall writes a "Year in Review" report including the top twenty stories of that year, the most used news reporters and the total number of minutes news channels covered top stories of the year.

³³ Seib, *Beyond the Front Lines*, 87.

In March 2022, Tyndall posted a blog report about the coverage of the war in Ukraine by ABC, CBS and NBC combined in comparison to other wars in which America was directly involved. As mentioned in the introduction, the combined footage from the first full month of the war in Ukraine (562 minutes) exceeded the coverage of the entire year of coverage of the Syrian Civil War (461 minutes).³⁴ Moreover, the two heaviest months of coverage of the war in Iraq (414 minutes in March 2003, and 455 minutes in April 2003) saw less coverage than the coverage of the war in Ukraine in March 2022.³⁵ The first month's coverage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine was more heavily covered than the heaviest months of three wars where American troops were deployed: Panama (240 minutes in December 1989) Somalia (423 minutes in December 1992) and Afghanistan (306 minutes in November 2001).³⁶

Tyndall proposes that the “charisma of Volodymyr Zelenskyy is so compelling that the mainstream American news media have decided to rewrite the rules of coverage.”³⁷ He notes that it is not that the network channels find Ukraine particularly interesting as when Russia invaded Crimea the networks only spent a combined 392 minutes in 2014 covering the annexation.³⁸ Tyndall asserts that the saturation of coverage must be Zelenskyy's accomplishment as he was able to inspire sympathy for Ukraine and its refugees.

The FAIR Report

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) is a national media watch group that criticizes media bias and censorship. FAIR advocates for greater diversity in the press by exposing stories that fail to be reported on and that marginalize minority viewpoints. In June 2022, FAIR issued a report on the comparison of the coverage by the *Times* of the war in

³⁴ Andrew Tyndall, “Volodymyr the Charismatic,” *Tyndall Report* (2022), <http://tyndallreport.com/date/2022/3/31/#blog>.

³⁵ Tyndall, “Volodymyr the Charismatic.”

³⁶ Tyndall, “Volodymyr the Charismatic.”

³⁷ Tyndall, “Volodymyr the Charismatic.”

³⁸ Tyndall, “Volodymyr the Charismatic.”

Ukraine and the Iraq war. The report examined the front-page stories of the *Times* between April 1 and April 30, 2022, and May 1 to May 31, 2003, which represent the second full calendar month of the war in Ukraine and the Iraq war. The report found that in April 2022, 44% of the *Times*' front-page stories were about the war in Ukraine.³⁹ In May 2003, 18% of the *Times*' front-page stories were about the war in Iraq.⁴⁰ This means that the war in Iraq was given less than half as many stories on the front page than the war in Ukraine during the second full month of coverage of each war.

The report also notes the discrepancies between stories about civilian deaths and casualties when U.S. troops are involved in a war and when they are not. They found that out of the 79 front-page stories about Ukraine, 14 of them were about Ukrainian civilian fatalities.⁴¹ However, during the month of Iraq coverage, there was only one story about civilian deaths in Iraq. This does not reflect the actual number of Iraqi deaths which were estimated at 7,984 by the end of May 2003.⁴²

It is important to recognize potential bias from organizations such as FAIR and the Tyndall Report as they may have pre-existing agendas to conform to. For example, the FAIR report could have mentioned the advancements in the *Times* website and application between 2003 and 2022 and how this has changed readership. For example, today the front-page stories of the *Times* are a fraction of the readership, and it is skewed to an older audience.⁴³ Whereas in 2003, the print copy of the newspaper had a much heavier readership. This means that the front page of the *Times* targets a different audience in 2022 than it did in 2003, potentially changing the types of stories editors choose to show on the front page.⁴⁴

³⁹ David Tapia, "Invasion News Fits on Front Page More When an Enemy Does the Invading," *FAIR* (2022), <https://fair.org/home/invasion-news-fits-on-front-page-more-when-an-enemy-does-the-invading/>.

⁴⁰ Tapia, "Invasion News Fits on Front Page More When an Enemy Does the Invading."

⁴¹ Tapia, "Invasion News Fits on Front Page More When an Enemy Does the Invading."

⁴² Tapia, "Invasion News Fits on Front Page More When an Enemy Does the Invading."

⁴³ Julian Barnes (National Security reporter) interview with the author (2023).

⁴⁴ Julian Barnes (National Security reporter) interview with the author (2023).

Bellingcat

Bellingcat is a Netherlands-based investigative journalism group specializing in fact-checking and open-source intelligence. Bellingcat uses advanced technology, forensic research and investigations to probe a variety of subjects including worldwide conflicts. Bellingcat has conducted extensive research and investigations about the war in Ukraine from identifying suspects of war crimes to dispelling fake news. The information that Bellingcat use is “almost exclusively open source data” which includes publicly available postings on social media platforms.⁴⁵ TikTok, a short-form video hosting service, makes up about 70% of the evidence that Bellingcat collects.⁴⁶ These videos are verified through geolocation and chronolocation to find out if the footage was shot where and when it states and together these videos give additional evidence to use for accountability purposes.

A majority of Bellingcat’s work is to combat fake news and disinformation, and during the war in Ukraine, this type of misinformation has been extensive. An example of this is the response from Russian officials about the atrocities that occurred under the Russian occupation of Bucha. Initial reports from human rights organizations and interviews with residents found that the Russians were guilty of horrific war crimes against Ukrainian civilians. However, the Russian Ministry of Defense denied this and published a statement saying that the photos of Bucha were a “hoax, a staged production and provocation by the Kiev⁴⁷ regime for the Western media.”⁴⁸ Bellingcat used forensic evidence, drone footage, and videos to disclaim the cascade of myths that surrounded the Bucha massacre.

⁴⁵ Brit M. Farmer, “How Bellingcat is using TikTok to investigate the war in Ukraine,” *CBS News*, August 21, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bellingcat-tiktok-ukraine-60-minutes-2022-08-21/>.

⁴⁶ Farmer, “How Bellingcat is using TikTok to investigate the war in Ukraine.”

⁴⁷ Russian spelling of Kyiv.

⁴⁸ Eliot Higgins, “Russia’s Bucha ‘Facts’ Versus the Evidence,” *Bellingcat* (2022), <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2022/04/04/russias-bucha-facts-versus-the-evidence/>.

Other news sources

Organizations like *Reuters*, *Poynter*, *The Ithacan*, *Columbia Journalism Review* and others have commented on the amount of coverage that Western media has devoted to the war in Ukraine. Many of these articles use interviews, panels and round table discussions with expert sources to explain the coverage of the war rather than an in-depth analysis of the content. These articles commonly agree upon one point: the coverage exposes Western bias by media organizations.⁴⁹

Columbia Journalism Review commented on the way that Western media organizations described the war in Europe at the start of the conflict. Ukraine was referred to as “relatively civilized,” by a CBS correspondent, and not “a developing third-world nation” by a reporter on ITV.⁵⁰ CNN also published an article on Western bias shown through reporting. They note how the coverage prompted the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association to issue a statement that condemned the language used to describe Ukraine as it posits that wars in the Middle East are “somehow normal and expected.”⁵¹ They also note that the volume of coverage of the war in Ukraine by Western media organizations shows a double standard when compared to the lack of attention the media pays to wars around the world, e.g., in Ethiopia’s Tigray region.

Reuters conducted a study with YouGov in June 2022, which found how people have been accessing news about the war in Ukraine and how they felt about the coverage. Out of the five countries surveyed (Germany, Poland, UK, USA and Brazil), the European countries followed the conflict most closely. It also found that TV remains the most widely used source

⁴⁹ Jon Allsop, “The biases in coverage of the war in Ukraine,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (2022), https://www.cjr.org/the_media_today/media_bias_ukraine_war.php.

⁵⁰ Allsop, “The biases in coverage of the war in Ukraine.”

⁵¹ Abbas A. Lawati and Nadeen Ebrahim, “How the Ukraine war exposed Western media bias,” *CNN Business* (2022), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/04/media/mideast-summary-04-03-2022-intl/index.html>.

for news about the conflict. Across all countries, people generally felt like the media was doing a good job of the coverage, however, they did not feel optimistic about news organizations providing a range of perspectives about the conflict.⁵²

Debates and conversations surrounding the coverage of the war in Ukraine have been led through many panels of experts and journalists. A panel discussion at the 2022 Pearson Global Forum focused on discriminatory bias in media coverage of the conflict. Timour Azhari, a *Reuter* journalist and one of the four-panel members, talked about journalists embedding with Ukrainian soldiers and questioned whether this would happen with Palestinian resistance fighters in Israel.⁵³ Media experts also discussed the mainstream media's coverage of the war in Ukraine in a roundtable discussion at Ithaca College. The panel of journalists and professors talked about the importance of audio-visuals in the war which documents reality and preserves evidence. They also comment on how the attention to the war is wearing off by Western media.⁵⁴

This section has reviewed the literature surrounding media coverage of the war in Ukraine which consists of news articles, panels and discussions. These sources only scratch the surface of the media coverage that is based on opinions and lacks in-depth research of the materials. This thesis aims to bridge that gap by providing a comprehensive study of the coverage.

⁵² Kirsten Eddy and Richard Fletcher, "Perceptions of media coverage in the war in Ukraine," *Reuters Institute* (2022), <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/perceptions-media-coverage-war-Ukraine>.

⁵³ Ted Gregory, "Bias in Media Coverage of Conflict," *The University of Chicago* (2023), <https://harris.uchicago.edu/news-events/news/bias-media-coverage-conflict>.

⁵⁴ Prakriti Panwar, "Experts discuss media coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war," *The Ithacan* (2022), <https://theithacan.org/news/experts-discuss-media-coverage-of-the-russia-ukraine-war/>.

Chapter 3. Method

The methodology used in this thesis primarily involved an in-depth analysis of the top four front-page stories of *The New York Times* print edition and broadcast coverage from the CNN Newsroom weekday show from 9 to 11 a.m. ET. In addition to the conceptual analysis of media coverage, this thesis used interviews with journalists and editors from the *Times*, CNN and National Public Radio (NPR) to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the war is reported from the newsroom.

Qualitative Analysis

A qualitative analysis approach is used to understand the coverage. Qualitative research is exploratory and emphasizes process rather than measurable ends as in quantitative research.⁵⁵ Furthermore, qualitative methods emphasize understanding, interpretation and observations in natural settings with an insider view.⁵⁶ A qualitative approach is more suited to this thesis as the aim is to observe and understand media footage and provide conclusions for its findings. Moreover, qualitative methods can be used to explore substantive areas about which little is known, or much is known to gain a novel understanding.⁵⁷ Currently, there is little research into the reporting on the war in Ukraine as the war is relatively new and ongoing. Therefore, this thesis uses qualitative analysis to gain an understanding of a relatively new area of study.

⁵⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education: Revised and Expanded from Case Study Research in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

⁵⁶ Pervez Ghauri, Kjell Grønhaug, K. and Ivar Kristianslund, *Research Methods in Business Studies: A Practical Guide* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1995).

⁵⁷ Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. 1998).

Textual Analysis

This study takes a textual analysis approach, a method used to describe and interpret the content, structure and functions of messages in texts.⁵⁸ The approach used for this textual analysis is in the form of qualitative content analysis. This type of analysis involves selecting texts and visual messages that already exist, rather than producing data through a survey methods approach. For this thesis, the appropriate texts chosen are newspapers and broadcast news footage. Content analysis does more than count words and extract facts; it finds meanings, identifies themes and recognizes patterns in the texts that allow researchers to gain an understanding of the social reality of the subject matter.⁵⁹ The purpose of content analysis is “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study.”⁶⁰ Qualitative analysis uses inductive rather than deductive reasoning, meaning that themes emerge from the data through examination and comparison.⁶¹ For this thesis, an inductive approach is used, meaning that a hypothesis was not constructed before the research was performed, instead, the generation of the hypothesis is formed through textual analysis.

Despite the advantages of using qualitative content analysis, there are some limitations to outline about this method of study. The research quality of content analysis heavily depends on the skills of the researcher and the research is more easily influenced by a researcher’s personal bias.⁶² Although it is not possible to eliminate researcher bias, this researcher was aware of the possibility of bias during the study and used the interviews to confirm or disperse

⁵⁸ Lawrence R. Frey, Carl H. Botan and Gary L. Kreps, *Investigating Communication: An Introduction to Research Methods* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2019).

⁵⁹ Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth, “Qualitative Analysis of Content,” in *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*, ed. Barbara M. Wildemuth (Libraries Unlimited, 2009).

⁶⁰ Downe-Wamboldt, “Content analysis: Method, applications, and issues,” *Health Care for Women International* 13, (1992): 314, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399339209516006>

⁶¹ Zhang and Wildemuth, “Qualitative Analysis of Content.”

⁶² Claire Anderson, “Presenting and evaluating qualitative research,” *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 74, no. 8 (2010), 10.5688/aj7408141. PMID: 21179252; PMCID: PMC2987281.

pre-existing opinions about the stories examined. Moreover, this study presents its findings in a way that is open for interpretation by the reader.

Material

The top four front-page stories of the *Times* were analyzed as they symbolize the most important stories of the day, according to the *Times* editors. Of course, the face of the *Times* has changed and today, the *Times* application, or “app” and the *Times* website gain far more public attention than the print copy of the paper.⁶³ However, it is difficult to analyze what stories were at the “top” of the app because the public influences what remains on the home screen by how many views a story gets. The printed front page is therefore the most appropriate form of coverage to analyze in this study as “it gives readers a summary of the most important events of the day, in obvious order of importance, in comparison with other days.”⁶⁴ In total, 112 front-page news stories of the *Times* were analyzed over both two-week timeframes of our analysis.

Due to the wealth of broadcast coverage every day by CNN, the CNN Newsroom weekday show was chosen as it concentrates on day-to-day breaking news stories rather than opinion-based news. It is also the longest-running news show on CNN, making it a well-established and reliable source. It is important to note that the CNN Newsroom weekday show was used in this sample therefore the coverage on the weekend shows was not examined. It was important to keep the analysis of footage consistent, and examining the weekend show could limit this consistency as it is three hours long instead of two hours on weekdays. This would make it difficult to consistently analyze the number of minutes of CNN Newsroom footage on the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, the weekend show is broadcast at a different time than the weekday show, meaning that it could be aimed at a different audience. However, in

⁶³ Julian Barnes (National Security reporter) interview with the author (2023).

⁶⁴ Jack Rosenthal, “THE PUBLIC EDITOR; What Belongs on the Front Page of The New York Times,” *The New York Times*, August 22, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/22/weekinreview/the-public-editor-what-belongs-on-the-front-page-of-the-new-york-times.html>

total 38 hours of footage (which excludes the Queen's funeral coverage) from CNN Newsroom was examined giving an abundance of material to work from. The CNN footage was taken from Internet Archive which is a non-profit library online with access to books, TV Shows, software and news broadcasts. The amount of coverage of the war in Ukraine from each show was recorded by counting the total number of minutes and seconds of coverage and turning those figures into a percentage of time from the overall show.

Timeframe

To conduct this analysis, the coverage was divided into two timeframes: February 24, 2022, to March 9, 2022, and September 17, 2022, to September 30, 2022. Altogether this thesis covered four weeks of coverage of the war in Ukraine which remains an ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The selected timeframes were chosen for various reasons. February 24, 2022, marks the first day that Russia invaded Ukraine and, therefore, coverage was expected to be the heaviest and most in-depth during these first two weeks of the invasion. The other two-week time section was chosen as 29 weeks and two days, or just over seven months following the invasion of Ukraine. These weeks were used to determine how much media attention the war in Ukraine continued to receive seven months following the invasion on February 24.

It is important to recognize global events taking place during our selected timeframes to understand how this may have affected how much footage has been devoted to the war in Ukraine. On September 19, the state funeral of Queen Elizabeth II was broadcast live on CNN for a five-hour special show resulting in the CNN Newsroom show being canceled that day. Furthermore, on September 28, 2022, Hurricane Ian hit Florida, spreading to South Carolina two days later. This was a devastating natural disaster for the United States which killed 148

people in Florida and caused mass disruption to countless lives.⁶⁵ This meant that the last five days of coverage were affected by hurricane coverage from both the *Times* and CNN, although CNN covered hurricane Ian far more extensively than the *Times*.

Coding Scheme

To understand the materials the researcher developed a scheme for coding the text and broadcast footage. Although the information collected for print and broadcast was similar, two coding schemes were used to accommodate the nature of print stories versus broadcast footage. The information collected was inserted into Excel and displayed in charts and tables that can be found in the findings section of this thesis.

The New York Times Coding

To begin, the researcher counted how many stories were on the front page each day in the selected timeframe. Then the researcher coded the following information in each story:

- ***Length***: number of words per story.
- ***Author(s)*** of the story and their job title. The number of times authors wrote a story in our timeframe.
- ***Dateline*** of where the story was reported from.
- ***Type of Story***: the main message of the story focused on in the lede, e.g., military operations.
- ***Additional information***: other themes that occur in the story, e.g., technology.
- ***Sources***: what sources were questioned or mentioned, who the sources were and where they were from.

⁶⁵ Jon Schuppe et al., "Ian was one of the most lethal hurricanes in decades. Many of the deaths were preventable," *NBC News*, November 22, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/hurricane-ian-florida-death-toll-rcna54069>.

In addition to the front-page news stories, the researcher examined stories from the Visual Investigation Team, based in New York. This team combines traditional reporting with digital tools to investigate and reconstruct news events. New technologies have enabled this new type of reporting to excel during the war in Ukraine and the researcher believed this was a vital part of how the war in Ukraine was reported on. For this reason, the digital tools used to report on these stories were also analyzed during the coding period.

CNN Coding

Due to the difference in nature between print and broadcast footage the researcher made a slightly different coding template for the broadcast footage by CNN. Broadcast footage was coded for the following information:

- ***Number of minutes*** dedicated to the war in Ukraine over the two-hour show.
- ***Anchor(s)***: names of journalists and where they were reporting from.
- ***Other reporters***: number of CNN journalists interviewed and where they were reporting from.
- ***Themes***: topics brought up during the broadcast e.g., refugees.
- ***Sources***: what sources were questioned or mentioned, who the sources were and where they were from.

Interviews

To provide a more concrete understanding of how the war in Ukraine was reported on by CNN and the *Times*, the researcher conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with journalists, editors and experts from the *Times*, CNN, and NPR. Overall, seven professionals were interviewed about different aspects of the war in Ukraine. The interviews were a mix of in-person interviews and online interviews through a video platform. The purpose of a qualitative interview is to “explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of

individuals on specific matters.”⁶⁶ In this case, the views and experiences of individuals with direct involvement in the reporting on the war in Ukraine were explored.

The interviews took on a semi-structured approach, making the interview neither a free conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire. The benefit of the semi-structured interview is that the respondents are guided by a list of questions but are free to expand on their ideas and speak in greater detail about subjects.⁶⁷ In this case, the interviewer prepared questions about topics derived from the materials studied during the content analysis. However, the interviews were not restricted to the list of prepared questions leading to an open and free conversation about the war in Ukraine. Qualitative interviews are not written out questionnaires, giving the advantage of being interactive and allowing topics to emerge that were not expected by the interviewer.⁶⁸ For example, in one of our interviews, the Visual Investigations Team in New York was brought up in conversation and prompted the researcher to include the team’s work due to its importance to how the war is being reported on in Ukraine. Qualitative interviews also reduce researcher-centered bias which is more commonly found in written surveys where the respondents answer questions based on the researcher’s pre-existing knowledge.

The Participants

Elisabeth Bumiller

Elisabeth Bumiller is an assistant editor of *The New York Times* and the Washington Bureau chief. In this position, Bumiller is responsible for overseeing daily operations and leading all news coverage from Washington. Bumiller is a valuable source for this thesis as

⁶⁶ Paul Gill et. al., “Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups,” *British Dental Journal* 204, no. 6 (2008), 292.

⁶⁷ Loraine Busetto, Wolfgang Wick and Christoph Gumbinger, “How to use and asses qualitative research methods,” *Neurological Research and Practice* 2, no. 14 (2002) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>

⁶⁸ Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger, “How to use and asses qualitative research methods.”

she was responsible for overseeing national security stories about the war in Ukraine from Washington.

Eric Schmitt

Eric Schmitt is a senior correspondent covering national security for *The New York Times*. He has reported on national security issues from West Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan, Southeast Asia and Ukraine. Seven stories authored by Schmitt appeared and were surveyed during our timeframes.

Helene Cooper

Helene Cooper is a Pentagon correspondent with *The New York Times*. She has also been a diplomatic correspondent and White House correspondent for the *Times*. Four stories authored by Cooper appeared and were analyzed during our timeframes.

Julian Barnes

Julian Barnes is a national security reporter for *The New York Times* covering intelligence agencies. He has more than 17 years of experience covering U.S. national security and the military. Five stories authored by Barnes appeared and were analyzed during our timeframes.

Nic Robertson

Nic Robertson is the international diplomatic editor of CNN. His reporting focuses on global terrorism and armed conflicts. Robertson reported from Moscow during four shows from our CNN Newsroom footage timeframe.

Malachy Browne

Malachy Browne is a senior story producer on the Visual Investigation team at *The New York Times*. His team uses digital tools to collect evidence and analyze footage to investigate events of the war in Ukraine.

Didrik Schanche

Didrik Schanche is NPR's chief international editor. Her team covers breaking news and specializes in international policy and national security. She also served as NPR's Africa and Latin America Editor. NPR was one of the few organizations that kept correspondents in Moscow throughout the war in Ukraine.

The interviews conducted for this research played an indirect role in this thesis, meaning that the interviewees were not direct research subjects. Rather, the surveyed materials are the subject of this thesis and the interviewees provided substantive context about the materials. The interviews were valuable as they provided information about the way that the war is reported in the newsroom and from the frontlines. They also provided the researcher with knowledge about the digital tools used to investigate the war that could not have been found otherwise.

Chapter 4. Findings: The New York Times

2022 Coverage and Resources

During the first year of the war in Ukraine, *The New York Times* devoted a substantial amount of time and resources to cover the war through international and on-the-ground journalism. Journalists reported countrywide in Ukraine throughout the invasion. They also reported from Moscow until March 8, when almost all foreign media organizations (apart from NPR) moved their reporters out of Russia due to safety concerns.⁶⁹ During the first year of the war, the *Times* had over 100 reporters, photographers, videographers, security and staff on rotation in Ukraine.⁷⁰ The *Times* also devoted over 1,000 reporters, producers and editors and over 850 journalists to covering the conflict from newsrooms and bureaus worldwide.⁷¹ The *Times* covered the war with 24/7 live briefings in newsrooms across Europe, Asia and the United States including 400 live briefings or blogs, 44 episodes of The Daily and over 570 push alerts.⁷²

On-the-ground reporting from Ukraine has covered almost every aspect of the conflict from interviewing Ukrainian refugees in subway shelters to unearthing possible war crimes. Photographers have captured some of the most horrific moments of the war such as the award-winning photograph by Lynsey Addario showing the bodies of one woman and her two children with a family friend on the ground after the Russian mortar fire killed them as they fled Ukraine.⁷³ But the coverage of the war in Ukraine has not been limited to military operations

⁶⁹ Clare Malone, “The Day Foreign Journalists felt Forced to Leave Moscow,” *The New Yorker*, March 28, 2022. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-communications/the-day-foreign-journalists-felt-forced-to-leave-moscow>

⁷⁰ “One Year of Reporting on the War in Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, February 24, 2023. <https://www.nytc.com/press/one-year-of-reporting-on-the-war-in-ukraine/>

⁷¹ “One Year of Reporting on the War in Ukraine.”

⁷² “One Year of Reporting on the War in Ukraine.”

⁷³ Padraig Moran, “Killing of Fleeing Family in Mortar Strike ‘a Moment That Had to Be Documented’: NYT Photojournalist | CBC Radio,” *CBC*, March 11, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for->

of the war but also its wider global implications. Almost every desk at the *Times* has covered these impacts from immigration, food shortages, sanctions, supply chains, natural resources, culture, and the global economy to geopolitics.⁷⁴

The coverage by the *Times* has reached a global audience through social media platforms, newsletter briefings and live coverage. Nearly 500 journalists have contributed to live coverage in newsrooms across the world including Moscow, London, New York, Berlin, Seoul, Tbilisi, Istanbul, Beijing, Nairobi, New Delhi, Brussels and Rio de Janeiro.⁷⁵ The *Times*' Telegram channel also broadcasts their reporting to a worldwide audience. About a quarter of the *Times*' Telegram subscribers have their language set to Russian, making it the largest segment of followers after English-speaking followers.

Findings for Timeframe (1)

Our study of the top-four front page stories of the *Times* found that the war was covered in great depth during the first two weeks and although the coverage gradually reduced week by week, almost seven months later the war remained the most covered topic on the front page of the *Times*. In total, from February 24, 2022, to March 9, 2022, 95% of the footage was on the war in Ukraine, leaving the remaining 5% to cover all other national and international news as shown below in Figure 1.

[march-15-2022-1.6385287/killing-of-fleeing-family-in-mortar-strike-a-moment-that-had-to-be-documented-nyt-photojournalist-1.6382072](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/ukraine-war-killing-fleeing-family-mortar-strike-a-moment-that-had-to-be-documented-nyt-photojournalist-1.6382072).

⁷⁴ "One Year of Reporting on the War in Ukraine."

⁷⁵ "One Year of Reporting on the War in Ukraine."

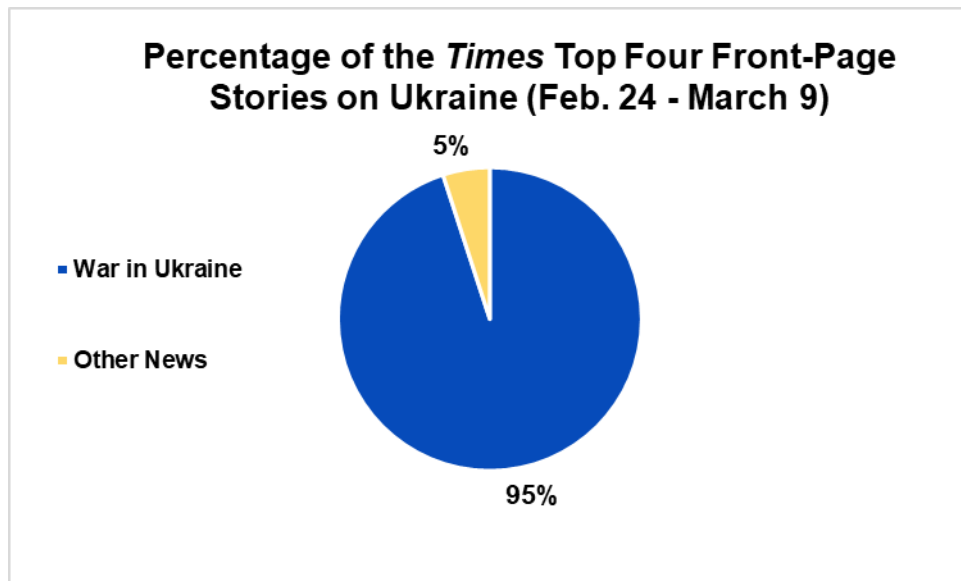


Figure 1. Percentage of the *Times* Front Page Stories in Timeframe 1

Out of 56 top-four stories on the front page of the *Times*, 53 were about the war in Ukraine. These stories were reported and written from a range of different countries and cities. Out of these 53 stories, 23 had a Ukraine dateline meaning 43% of the stories from the first two weeks of the war were reported on from Ukraine. Six stories were also reported from Russia and nine stories were reported from countries in Europe (Berlin, London, Poland and Brussels). Only eight stories were reported out of Washington and six stories had no dateline which usually means that they were reported from New York.⁷⁶ The findings from the first two weeks of the war in Ukraine are displayed in Table 1.

⁷⁶ Elisabeth Bumiller (Washington bureau chief) in an interview with the author (February 13, 2023).

Table 1. The *Times* Top Four Front-Page Stories (Feb. 24- March 9)

Date	Datelines	No. of Stories on Ukraine
Feb. 24	Brussels (1) Moscow (2)	3
Feb. 25	Washington (1) Moscow (1) Ukraine (2)	4
Feb. 26	Poland (1) Ukraine (2) No Dateline (1)	4
Feb. 27	Washington (1) Moscow (1) Ukraine (2)	4
Feb. 28	Berlin (1) Washington (1) Ukraine (2)	4
March. 1	Ukraine (1) Moscow (1) Brussels (1) London(1)	4
March. 2	Ukraine (2) Washington (2)	4
March. 3	Poland (1) Russia (1) Ukraine (2)	4
March. 4	Washington (1) Ukraine (2) No Dateline (1)	4
March. 5	Los Angeles (1) Ukraine (2) No Dateline (1)	4
March. 6	London (1) Ukraine (2) No Dateline (1)	4
March. 7	Poland (1) Ukraine (2) No Dateline (1)	4
March. 8	Ukraine (1) Washington (1) No Dateline (1)	3
March. 9	Washington (1) London (1) Ukraine (1)	3

Findings for Timeframe (2)

In the stories examined from September 17 to September 30, we found that 36% of the top-four front-page stories continued to be about the war in Ukraine. This means that there was a 62% decrease in coverage of the war between February and September. Although the coverage was reduced between these two timeframes, news about the war in Ukraine was still prevalent. There were only two days in two weeks when there was not at least one front-page story about the war. These statistics are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Percentage of the *Times* Front Page Stories in Timeframe 2

In total, out of 56 top-four stories on the front page of the *Times*, 19 of those were about the war in Ukraine. Although the number of front-page stories on Ukraine reduced, this is still many stories to write on a war that America is indirectly involved with, seven months in. Seven of these stories were written out of Ukraine meaning that there were still several reporters working from the ground almost seven months after the invasion. Nine stories had no dateline, meaning that they were most probably written out of New York and the remaining three stories were written out of Washington (2) and Paris (1). Table 2 shows the number of stories written on each day of our timeframe, the dateline of each story and in brackets the number of times this dateline appeared that day.

Table 2. The *Times* Top Four Front-Page Stories (Sept. 17 - Sept. 30)

Date	Datelines	No. of Stories on Ukraine
Sept. 17	Ukraine (1) No Dateline (1)	2
Sept. 18	Washington (1) Ukraine (1)	2
Sept. 19	Paris	1
Sept. 20	Ukraine	1
Sept. 21	No Dateline (2)	2
Sept. 22	No Dateline (3)	3
Sept. 23	No Dateline (2)	2
Sept. 24	Washington (1) No Dateline (1)	2
Sept. 25	N/A	0
Sept. 26	Ukraine	1
Sept. 27	Ukraine	1
Sept. 28	Ukraine	1
Sept. 29	Ukraine	1
Sept. 30	N/A	0

To understand and measure this amount of coverage over both of our two-week timeframes, this thesis will delve into three aspects of the coverage: types of stories and recurring themes, use of sources and use of technology.

Themes

The coverage of the war in Ukraine was vast and ranged from human interest stories to hard news. To provide a comprehensive understanding, the materials are split into four distinct themes of coverage: military operations, Russian news, Ukrainian civilians and refugees and Western response. It is impractical to count the number of stories that focused on each of these themes because individual stories often included numerous themes, for example, a story about

military operations could also reference Ukrainian civilians. Therefore, these categories represent general themes of coverage that were dominant throughout the reporting.

Military Operations

During the first two weeks of coverage, much of the reporting focused on the military operations of both the Russian and the Ukrainian armies. These types of stories would report on the advancements made by the Russian army in taking territories from the Ukrainians and the counter-defenses by the Ukrainian army. From the first week of the war in Ukraine, the narrative surrounding the war was that Russia was not performing as well as expected, suffering from logistical and tactical mistakes and low morale, but the Ukrainians were resisting and fighting back well. This narrative also continued in the second timeframe of coverage as Ukraine continued to hold off the Russian forces. Another subtheme of this category is Russian and Ukrainian weapons and military tactics. Many stories commented on Russia's direct targeting of civilian infrastructures that were not close to Ukrainian military targets, and Russian shelling close to the humanitarian corridors agreed upon by both countries to ensure the safe evacuation of Ukrainian civilians.

In September, the coverage of Russian military operations moved to Russian conscription as President Vladimir Putin imposed a new draft. While Russian officials said that the call-up would only include people with combat experience, the net was cast far wider as Russians with no military experience received draft papers at their door. Four non-consecutive days of coverage had one front-page story about the conscription of Russian soldiers during the second timeframe. During these two weeks, there were also a couple of stories about the fighting for Bakhmut and Lyman in the Donbas region in Ukraine's East.

The actions, speeches and appearance of the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, were common in many stories about the military operations in Ukraine. During the

first two weeks of the war, the *Times* commonly reported on Zelenskyy's speeches to his country and his pleas for help from Western countries. But they also comment on the Ukrainian leader's looks and demeanor describing his "army-green T-shirt or fleece" in multiple stories and details of his "unshaven and wan" face.⁷⁷ During his presidency, Zelenskyy became a master of communication through his social media platforms, speeches and addresses to worldwide nations. Zelenskyy's messages can be considered a form of propaganda as, "everything Zelenskyy says [has] that kind of purpose," according to Eric Schmitt, a national security correspondent.⁷⁸ This purpose is to shape public opinion about the war in Ukraine and use a guilt-based narrative in the West to shame NATO countries into providing more aid. The Ukrainians also downplay their casualty numbers to maintain morale at home. But the *Times* believes that although Zelenskyy uses propaganda, they should call it something different because "there's no rational explanation for what he [Putin] is doing" by unleashing a war machine on Ukraine, even if it shows bias on the side of the *Times*.⁷⁹

Russian News

This category includes stories about Russian opinions toward the war, the propaganda used by the Kremlin and anti-war protests. Many front-page stories mentioned Russia's crackdown on the press by imposing a 15-year prison sentence for people who posted "fakes" about the war.⁸⁰ During this week the *Times* featured independent media organizations like the Echo of Moscow and TV Rain in multiple stories. They also cover the anti-war protests that were taking place in the streets of Moscow and Russian celebrities speaking out against the

⁷⁷ Valerie Hopkins, Anton Troianovski, and Steven Erlanger, "Ukraine Agrees to Talks With Russia, but Fighting Still Rages," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/27/world/europe/ukraine-war-russia.html>.

⁷⁸ Eric Schmitt (national security correspondent) interview with the author (February 13, 2023).

⁷⁹ Schmitt interview.

⁸⁰ Ivan Nechepurenko and Anton Troianovski, "A War the Kremlin Tried to Disguise Becomes a Hard Reality for Russians," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-casualties.html>.

Kremlin's "special military operation."⁸¹ The *Times* also used Russian business owners and civilians on the street to talk about how the sanctions imposed by the West were affecting their businesses and everyday lives. The use of propaganda by the Kremlin is mentioned almost daily by the *Times* in the first two weeks of the war. The *Times* explains how the Kremlin is describing the war in Ukraine to the Russian people through a very tightly controlled state media meaning that ordinary Russians are largely cut off from the atrocities happening in Ukraine. The *Times* reporters believe that it is important for readers to understand that Russians are living in a society where it is difficult to access truthful information about the war, and they do a good job of showing this through their reporting.

There is however another side to the story in Russia. That is that many Russians support the war. This side of the story is reported on less. In an opinion poll carried out by the Levada Center across Russia, results show that 75% of Russians "definitely support," or "mostly support" the actions of the Russian military.⁸² But this support is part of a wider conflict, not with Ukraine, but with the West and Ukraine. The general feeling is that the West has exaggerated the conflict after Russia's invasion on Feb. 24.⁸³ In 2015, the *Times* published a story about "why Russians hate America," and refer to the concept of "ressentiment" which describes resentment and a sense of victimization arising out of a perceived enemy.⁸⁴ There is one notable example by the *Times* that shows Russian support for the war. On September 17 the *Times* published a feature piece about the Donbas region and its complicated history. It

⁸¹ The Kremlin uses the term "special military operation" to describe the war in Ukraine.

⁸² Denis Volkov and Andrei Kolesnikov, "My Country, Right or Wrong: Russian Public Opinion on Ukraine," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 7, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/07/my-country-right-or-wrong-russian-public-opinion-on-ukraine-pub-87803>.

⁸³ Padraig Moran, "Most Russians See War in Ukraine as a War with the West, Says Pollster," CBC, October 13, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/russia-support-war-ukraine-west-1.6615276>.

⁸⁴ Tavernise, "Why Russians Hate America. Again."

explains how conflicting opinions about the region's identity have been for years and people are divided over whether the region should return to its Soviet roots.

Ukrainian Civilians and Refugees

This theme covers stories about displaced Ukrainians, Ukrainian refugees and volunteers for the Ukrainian army and war effort. From February 26 to March 9, there was at least one story every day about Ukrainian civilians. Often Ukrainian civilians were the lede of the story or they appeared further down in a story leading with another topic. Nevertheless, this type of theme was dominant throughout the first week of reporting. Stories about Ukrainian civilians were reported from the underground which was being used as a shelter for civilians, the train stations where women and children said goodbye to the male members of their families and recruitment centers where Ukrainians volunteered to fight for their country. A lot of these stories were human interest stories rather than hard news and conveyed the Ukrainians as resistant, strong and patriotic. These stories were often written in the present tense and written in detailed and emotive language making the reader feel more connected and engaged with the people in the story. Human interest stories are a journalistic tool to “captivate and engage the audience, influence public opinion and bring revenue to a media organization.”⁸⁵ They are also used to balance out negative, hard news, which was plenteous during the reporting of the war. The war in Ukraine did enforce a humanitarian crisis involving the displacement of 13 million people or, nearly a third of Ukraine's prewar population, therefore, this topic does warrant news coverage.

During the second timeframe, the news about the Ukrainian civilians moved away from volunteers and refugees and shifted to stories about Ukrainian civilian deaths. There was a stark

⁸⁵ Tine Ustad Figenschou, Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, and Daniel C. Hallin, “Whose Stories Are Told and Who Is Made Responsible? Human-Interest Framing in Health Journalism in Norway, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S.,” *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, August 25, 2021, 146488492110415, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211041516>.

shift in the tone of reporting about Ukrainian civilians almost seven months into the war. There were no longer stories about the courageous efforts of Ukrainian civilians to protect their country and instead, the sad reality of half a year of the war was reported. A couple of stories focused on the mass grave site found in a forest by Iziium, in northeastern Ukraine after Russian soldiers occupied the city for six months. One of these stories was a “reporter’s notebook” piece, which refers to a sidelight or feature piece usually written in the first person. This story explains the significance of mass graves and how they “offend something so deep in human conscience.”⁸⁶ The columnist, Roger Cohen, reminds the reader of mass graves in Bosnia, Rwanda, Argentina and Guatemala and how burying someone anonymously is dehumanizing and painstaking for the families affected.

Western Response

Stories under this theme include sanctions against Russia by the West, humanitarian, economic and military aid sent to Ukraine and the relationship between political world leaders following the war. Immediately following the invasion of Ukraine, the West imposed sanctions on Russia which not only affected the Russian people and its oligarchs but also had a backlash on the world economy. Front-page stories from the *Times* reported on most of the major companies that cut ties with Russia such as Apple, McDonald’s, BP and Royal Dutch Shell, and what the effects of this were for ordinary Russians. They also commented on the social sanctions imposed on Russian oligarchs by seizing their assets such as their yachts. These sanctions were a major story immediately following the invasion because the war was having such an effect on the U.S. and the worldwide economy. But these sanctions were not only economic. Arts and business ventures in the U.S. and Europe swiftly cut ties with Russia and

⁸⁶ Roger Cohen, “The Singular Offense of the Mass Grave,” *The New York Times*, September 18, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/13/insider/a-meltdown-on-deadline-reporters-notebook.html>.

at the opening ceremony of the Winter Paralympics in Beijing, Andrew Parsons, the president of the International Paralympic community, denounced the Russian invasion.⁸⁷

Many of the stories in this section also mentioned the financial aid that the U.S. and other Western countries were supplying to Ukraine. Types of aid include humanitarian, financial, security assistance and weapons and equipment. In total, between January 24, 2023, and January 15, 2023, the U.S. sent \$76.8 billion to Ukraine in bilateral aid.⁸⁸ Julian Barnes talked about how this is a huge investment of money and could go as far as to explain why there has been such sustained coverage of the war in Ukraine.⁸⁹ Stories about what other European countries donated to the war were also commonplace on the front page of the *Times*, notably Germany who have “decades-long faith in a military-averse foreign policy that was born of the crimes of the Third Reich.”⁹⁰

During our September timeframe, political stories were the most common theme that arose during the reporting. This is largely due to the war being the prominent topic at the U.N. assembly, following Putin’s televised address where he hinted at the use of nuclear weapons. There were also political stories about Russia’s illegal annexation of parts of Ukraine and the West’s response by refusing to recognize these areas as part of Russia. The political relationship between Russia and other historically supportive countries of Putin’s regime such as India, China and Turkey were commonly reported on as leaders spoke out against Russia’s war in Ukraine, usually commenting on the devastating effect on human life.

⁸⁷ Kramer, Andrew E., Michael Schwirtz, and Michael Levenson. “Russia Seizes Nuclear Plant in Ukraine and Makes Gain in the South.” *The New York Times*, March 5, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/world/europe/russia-military-advance-ukraine-war.html>.

⁸⁸ Masters, Jonathan. “How Much Aid Has the U.S. Sent Ukraine? Here Are Six Charts.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 22, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-aid-has-us-sent-ukraine-here-are-six-charts>.

⁸⁹ Julian Barnes (National Security reporter) interview with the author (February 14, 2023).

⁹⁰ Eddy, Melissa. “In Foreign Policy U-Turn, Germany Ups Military Spending and Arms Ukraine.” *The New York Times*, February 28, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/27/world/europe/germany-ukraine-russia.html>.

In general, the themes during the first two weeks of the war included all of the themes discussed in the September timeframe but focused more on Ukrainian civilians and military operations. In September, the focus of reporting shifted and there were fewer human-interest stories and more focus on hard news. The three major events covered at this time were the U.N. general assembly, the conscription of Russian civilians and Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territories.

Sources

Sources are a vital part of reporting; they provide knowledge about events, people and places and help journalists build trust with the public.⁹¹ When journalists' movements are embedded the task of finding sources becomes more complicated as they are not as free to roam around a war-torn zone to find information.⁹² This means that they often rely on second-hand information from government officials like military officers and official spokespersons. Reporting on the war objectively, or in a fair and balanced way satisfies more of the audience and enables greater media trust. One way to achieve balanced news is by providing multilevel sources instead of a single type of source meaning a story has multiple angles and perspectives. There are two types of news sources: the knowns and the unknowns.⁹³ The "knowns" refer to elites and official sources such as official spokespersons, ministers and heads of government. An "unknown" source is non-elite, for example, families, victims, or eyewitnesses.

To describe the use of sources in the reporting of the war in Ukraine by the *Times*, the sources have been split into categories of knowns and unknowns. The main types of sources found in the reporting were known and unknown Ukrainian sources, known and unknown

⁹¹ "Sources | The Center for Ethics in Journalism," *University of Arkansas*, <https://journalismethics.uark.edu/lesson-plans/sources/>.

⁹² Faridah Ibrahim et al., "Journalists and News Sources: Implications of Professionalism in War Reporting," *The Innovation Journal* 16, no. 3 (January 1, 2011): 4, http://www.innovation.cc/scholarly-style/faridah_ibrahim_journalist_war_news_professionalism16v3i4a.pdf. http://www.innovation.cc/scholarly-style/faridah_ibrahim_journalist_war_news_professionalism16v3i4a.pdf.

⁹³ Ibrahim et al., "Journalists and News Sources: Implications of Professionalism in War Reporting."

Russian sources and known sources from the U.S., the EU and other countries. Some examples of Ukrainian and Russian unknown sources include civilians, refugees, soldiers, shop owners, protestors and students. Known Ukrainian and Russian sources were political and military analysts, journalists, opposition leaders, ambassadors, celebrities, etc. Known sources from other countries included American ambassadors, prime ministers, deputy prime ministers and professors, to name a few. Depending on the length and type of story the number of sources quoted ranged between two and 10. There were rarely less than two sources or more than 10 sources in any given story. To analyze the sources used in the reporting the examples will be split into three categories: known and unknown Ukrainian sources, known and unknown Russian sources and other known sources.

Ukrainian Sources

Unnamed Ukrainian sources were widely used in the first two weeks of reporting. Multiple front-page stories even quoted six or more Ukrainian civilians per story. These sources included Ukrainian civilians, shop owners, doctors, students, refugees, volunteers, soldiers, professionals, mothers, fathers and children. Most of these sources seemed to be interviews taken on the streets of Ukraine, from the underground where civilians were sheltering or at the borders where civilians were fleeing. War journalism usually focuses on “acts of violence and prominent national suffering,” where one side is the perpetrator of violence, and the other side is the innocent victim.⁹⁴ The *Times* reporting followed this pattern by showing the suffering that was taking place in Ukraine at the hands of an invading force. These sources were questioned about whether they were going to leave the country, how they were feeling and what family they were leaving behind.

⁹⁴ Ibrahim et al., “Journalists and News Sources: Implications of Professionalism in War Reporting,” 4.

Just as stories about Ukrainian civilians decreased by September so did the number of unknown Ukrainian sources. An exception to this is in the previously mentioned story about the Donbas region on September 18 called “The ‘Wild Field’ Where Putin Sowed the Seeds of War.”⁹⁵ This story is the first and only example in our selected timeframes of a Ukrainian civilian showing a pro-Russian view of the war. Volodymyr Tsyhankov, 70, a civilian of the Donbas region talked about life under the Soviet Union not being good but being stable – a sentiment that the journalist heard from several people in the region. He believes that Russia was right to invade Ukraine to protect the Russian language and its territory. Using conflicting sources from this historically divided region is important because it shows objectivity in reporting by using both sides.

These sources were mainly Ukrainian military officials and political figures. They were cited from official speeches and statements instead of interviews with journalists. Zelenskyy’s nightly addresses to the nation were also frequently quoted and uploaded as a video to the website version of the front-page story. These sources acted as a source of information compared to the unknown sources used to convey a sense of the situation for a normal Ukrainian citizen.

Russian Sources

Unknown Russian sources were used less than unknown Ukrainian sources and were almost exclusively Russian civilians against the war. These unknown civilians were largely similar to the Ukrainian civilians including business owners, activists, protestors, soldiers, students and other Russian civilians interviewed on the street. On the first two days of the war (Feb. 24 and Feb. 25) there were five stories written out of Moscow, meaning that there were more Russian sources available to interview. These sources were questioned about whether

⁹⁵ Jeffrey Gettleman, “Ukraine’s Donbas, Where Putin Sowed the Seeds of War,” The New York Times, September 17, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/17/world/europe/ukraine-war-donbas-putin.html>.

they believed the war was warranted, how they felt about the sanctions imposed on Russians and how they felt about Russians being conscripted to the war in Ukraine. In addition to bringing voices from the streets of Russia, it is important to place them in the context of Russians not having easy access to other information about the war. Russian-speaking immigrants from the former soviet-bloc living in the U.S. were also profiled about how they are reframing their identities. After receiving hostility in their neighborhoods, many of these people expressed concerns about animosity against Russian-speaking Americans. It is important to hear the opinions of these individuals living in the U.S. to reduce stigmatization and potential violence.

Known Russian sources were also quoted from speeches, statements, social media posts and broadcastings instead of personal interviews. Russian known sources included the Russian ambassador, diplomats, military officials, professors, opposition leaders, senior lawmakers, media owners and celebrities, amongst others. The few Russian known sources who were personally interviewed were anti-war persons who were usually minor celebrities or independent media owners. For example, Tikhon Dzyadko, the Echo of Moscow's editor-in-chief, was interviewed about the personal security threat of journalists from independent media organizations.

It is important to note several reasons why Russian sources were not used as much as Ukrainian. First, Russian civilians were resistant to giving their names and talking to reporters for fear of retribution by Russian authorities. In cases where Russian civilians were interviewed, they would often remain anonymous, but many did not want to talk at all. Second, the *Times* pulled all its news staff out of Russia after a law was passed that effectively

criminalized independent reporting.⁹⁶ Without correspondents reporting from inside Russia, it is much harder to quote Russian civilians and remain balanced in coverage. Finally, according to Eric Schmitt, it is hard to find Russian sources who know anything.⁹⁷ Schmitt mentions how the only sources who are accessible are those who used to be in the Kremlin but have now escaped or left the government otherwise, those who are associated with Putin are part of a very tight group who will not talk to the media.⁹⁸

Other named sources

Finally, the reporting from the *Times* included many American, European and other known sources. For the stories reported from Washington, many of the known sources were officials from the White House or the Pentagon. Known sources from elsewhere in the world were often leaders of countries, experts of Russian history, military analysts and members of the European Union and NATO. It was common for sources from Washington to be referred to as “American intelligence,” or “European officials.” Elisabeth Bumiller, Washington bureau chief, talked about how this is a common occurrence during war reporting and that the *Times* pushes back against unidentified sources because readers do not like it, but American intelligence decides what names are classified.⁹⁹ Eric Schmitt adds that the trade-off to grant sources anonymity is usually worth it to get the information to inform readers so long as the information is correct.¹⁰⁰ The *Times* does, however, have a strict policy when it comes to quoting an anonymous source and will not put quotation marks around an unnamed source but paraphrase it instead.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Grynbaum, Michael M. “The New York Times Pulls Its News Staff From Russia.” *The New York Times*, March 8, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/business/media/new-york-times-russia-press-freedom.html>.

⁹⁷ Schmitt interview.

⁹⁸ Schmitt interview.

⁹⁹ Bumiller interview.

¹⁰⁰ Schmitt interview.

¹⁰¹ Bumiller interview.

Overall, the *Times* used multilevel sources in many of its stories. The only exception to this was profile pieces on Ukrainian or Russian civilians such as the story called, “I Don’t Want to be Called Russian Anymore,” which used all Russian-speaking unknown sources and no known sources.¹⁰² However, stories that reported on hard news usually had a mix of experts and civilian voices. Overall, Ukrainian sources were used more commonly than Russian sources and while that reduces objectivity in reporting and a fair and balanced approach there were obstacles that reporters faced during their reporting to find these sources.

Technology

Advancements in technology have given way to a new form of digital journalism which captures more evidence, images, videos and information than in previous conflicts. It is considered such an improvement from traditional reporting because now journalists can *show* their readers, viewers, and listeners how they are finding their information. Now journalists can show readers their primary sources and allow them to listen and watch video evidence to come to their own conclusions about a story.¹⁰³ Not only does this reporting impact a worldwide audience but stories using visual reporting have launched investigations by mandatories and governments, ensuring accountability for war crimes in Ukraine.

Using photographs, videos and other digital elements has long been a journalistic tool but this level of in-depth visual investigations to expose war crimes and other wrongdoings is a new phenomenon and has continued to advance as technologies become more precise and more accessible. Bellingcat, which was launched in 2014, began as a one-man organization with the help of a few volunteers but has since formed a global team of investigators. It was “one of the first networks to develop open-source methods into a reporting style of their own

¹⁰² Miriam Jordan, “Soviet Bloc Immigrants Rethink Their Identity Amid Russia-Ukraine War,” *The New York Times*, March 4, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/us/immigrant-identity-russia-ukraine.html>.

¹⁰³ Schmitt interview.

and attract a critical mass of people who are good at this work.”¹⁰⁴ Other journalistic outlets followed suit and in April 2017, the Visual Investigations Team at the *Times* was founded and developed into a team of 17 people including reporters, video producers, editors, managers and story producers almost exclusively based out of New York.

Visual Investigations Team

Stories produced by the Visual Investigation Team were not part of our front-page story materials, however, they are still a critical part of the reporting on the war in Ukraine and essential to explaining how the *Times* reported on the war. Digital evidence used on the front page of the *Times* is limited as you can only show still images and explain to the reader how you used digital evidence to find out information. The interactive element of digital storytelling is restricted to the *Times*’ website and the app.

According to Malachy Browne, the senior story producer of the Visual Investigations Team, the digital reporting tools are “rooted in the collection and the analysis of audiovisual evidence...that we can use to extract hard facts...and help you answer journalist’s questions.”¹⁰⁵ First, the team finds publicly available evidence through social media platforms, security camera footage, drone footage, cellphone videos and satellite imagery. Then this footage is verified through forensic analysis and combined with traditional on-the-ground reporting to deconstruct important news events. On-the-ground reporting includes interviews with eyewitnesses and other sources which can confirm the evidence found through digital means. There is also a tip line where valuable tips can come from closed network groups such as WhatsApp to aid the reporting. The team uses open-source reporting which means that all

¹⁰⁴ Madeline Roache, “Bellingcat Has Revealed War Crimes in Syria and Unmasked Russian Assassins. Founder Eliot Higgins Says They’re Just Getting Started,” *Time*, March 2, 2021, <https://time.com/5943393/bellingcat-eliot-higgins-interview/>.

¹⁰⁵ Malachy Browne (senior story producer) interview with the author (February 23, 2023).

the information they use is publicly available. Over 74% of the information that the team analyzes is through Telegram, a popular messaging app in Russia.¹⁰⁶

Verification Process by the Times

Each investigation by the Visual Investigations Team often goes through months of rigorous and painstaking verification to ensure that the information is factually correct. First, images or videos are checked to see if they are current through a process called reverse image searching. If the material has appeared online before, then it is very likely to show up through this method. Next, the team pinpoints the location and date of the digital evidence by comparing landmarks or matching satellite images and other photos. The team has a relationship with satellite companies such as Maxar Technologies which gives them access to satellite imagery but also means that the *Times* can ask them to point their cameras in a certain direction to capture different angles of revealing imagery.¹⁰⁷ To verify the exact time the footage was taken, the team uses websites like SunCalc which estimates the time of day a photo was taken by measuring the lengths of shadows on the image.¹⁰⁸ Finally, the team pair the information with coinciding eyewitness accounts. If the *Times* finds images and videos online that prove to be fraudulent, they use its social media platforms to warn others that it is unreliable. Browne pointed out that it is important to understand the provenance of the footage: they need to understand the context and the motivations for people sharing footage with them, especially during conflict.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Emmett Lindner, “Verifying Images of the War in Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/insider/verifying-images-of-the-war-in-ukraine.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Browne interview.

¹⁰⁸ New York Times, “How The New York Times Uses Photos and Video to Investigate the News.,” *The New York Times*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/nyt-visual-investigations-team.html>.

¹⁰⁹ Browne interview.

Bucha Story Example

In January 2023, the Visual Investigation Team produced a video that documented the actions of the Russian military unit that killed 36 civilians in a town called Bucha. Russian officials denied that their soldiers killed these civilians in Bucha and claimed the images were “fake.” The team used text messages, death certificates, social media posts, satellite imagery, thousands of hours of video and personal testimonies to prove that the Russian unit committed war crimes against innocent Ukrainian civilians.¹¹⁰ Another interactive story identified the soldiers that were part of the unit through intercepted and translated phone calls used by the Russian soldiers to call home. Although the *Times* does not share its findings with investigative bodies, a few organizations looking into war crimes in Ukraine have already contacted the *Times* to use the story as evidence for trials.¹¹¹

For this investigation there were two journalists on the ground in Bucha gathering photo and video evidence and taking testimonies from citizens, then the team in New York analyzed the digital evidence available through satellite companies and on social media platforms. The Visual Investigations Team are very transparent when it comes to how it got its information and what its verification process is to explain why they arrive at a certain conclusion. According to Browne, the audience values this transparency, and it enables more media trust.¹¹²

Advancements in the use of technology to aid reporting have been critical during the war in Ukraine to track Russia’s military movements, measure the number of fatalities on each side of the conflict, show Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure and identify war crimes and

¹¹⁰ Yousur Al-Hlou et al., “Caught on Camera, Traced by Phone: The Russian Military Unit That Killed Dozens in Bucha,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/22/video/russia-ukraine-bucha-massacre-takeaways.html>.

¹¹¹ Browne interview.

¹¹² Browne interview.

other wrongdoings. Technology has not only enabled reporters to find out information that would otherwise be unattainable but allows the audience to look at and hear video evidence themselves, enabling more trust in the media. Of course, skeptics will always question whether the information is fabricated, but this team provides multi-layered levels of digital evidence paired with traditional testimonies to counter these claims. In short, new technologies provide journalists with types of classified information unreachable in previous decades and give the reader an incredibly precise and intimate portrayal of the war in Ukraine.

Conclusion

The coverage by *The New York Times* of the war in Ukraine has been extensive and has involved many forms of reporting. During the first two weeks of the war, 95% of all top four front-page stories of the print newspaper were on the war in Ukraine which is an incredibly high percentage of coverage, especially when compared to other wars where U.S. troops were deployed. Almost seven months later coverage remained relatively high with 36% of the top four front-page stories continuing to report on Ukraine. These stories reported on several themes and topics including military operations, Ukrainian civilians, Russian news and the response of the West. They also used many different types of Russian and Ukrainian known and unknown sources, although Ukrainian sources were used more than Russian. Finally, new technologies propelled a new type of digital war journalism able to find detailed information to expose Russian war crimes.

Chapter 5. Findings: CNN

2022 Coverage and Resources

CNN provided round-the-clock coverage of the war in Ukraine from the onset, making it Poynter's "gold standard" for international reporting.¹¹³ The channel covered the war in great depth through on-the-ground live coverage as well as through expert interviews from the studio in New York, Washington DC and Lviv, Ukraine. CNN broadcast live footage of tanks rolling over the border to Ukraine, Russian troops seizing control of Antonov airport, and crowds of Ukrainians fleeing across the border. During the first year of the war, CNN coverage generated nearly one billion page views and 40 million hours spent on published content.¹¹⁴

The constant coverage CNN provided on the ground set them apart from other news organizations covering the Russo-Ukrainian war.¹¹⁵ From the first day of the war in Ukraine, the channel had six correspondents and three anchors in Ukraine along with their crew. In total, there was 75 CNN staff in Ukraine, including drivers and local interpreters.¹¹⁶ The network chose Lviv as a hub to make sure the transmissions would remain uninterrupted, unlike in Kyiv. They also had six or seven backup communications systems in case any of them failed.¹¹⁷

CNN Correspondents

There were CNN international correspondents in Ukraine from the first day of the war: Matthew Chance was in Kyiv, Sam Kiley and Clarissa Ward were in Kharkiv, Nick Paton Walsh was in Kherson and Alex Marquardt was in Mariupol. Correspondents were also based on the Ukrainian-Poland border: Arwa Damon, Ed Lavandera, Melissa Bell and Sara Sidner were in

¹¹³ Tom Jones, "CNN Leads Media Coverage of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Poynter*, February 25, 2022, <https://www.poynter.org/commentary/2022/cnn-leads-media-coverage-of-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

¹¹⁴ [CNN Marks One Year of War in Ukraine](#)

¹¹⁵ Jones, "CNN Leads Media Coverage."

¹¹⁶ Jones, "CNN Leads Media Coverage."

¹¹⁷ Jones, "CNN Leads Media Coverage."

Przemyśl, Poland, Scott McLean was in Medyka, Poland and Dana Bash was in Warsaw. Other correspondents reported on the war from other European countries: Ivan Watson reported from Hungary, Miguel Marquez reported from Romania, Christiane Amanpour reported from Brussels and Matt Rivers reported from Georgia. These correspondents were routinely relocated and additional CNN correspondents reported from Ukraine as the war progressed.

CNN correspondents also reported live from Russia: Frederik Pleitgen reported from Belgorod, on the Russian border and Nic Robertson reported from Moscow. One week into the war, Nic Robertson left Russia due to visa complications. Frederik Pleitgen relocated to Kyiv, Ukraine, after Russia passed “fake news” laws, as did many of the *Times* reporters. Additionally, anchors Erin Burnett, Michael Holmes and chief national security correspondent Jim Sciutto all anchored from Lviv.

During the first two weeks of the war in Ukraine, the CNN Newsroom broadcast multiple correspondents live from Ukraine every day. Nick Paton Walsh appeared almost every day in this timeframe followed closely by Alex Marquardt, Frederik Pleitgen, Scott McLean, Matthew Chance and Nic Robertson. Clarissa Ward and Sam Kiley appeared twice in this timeframe. CNN Newsroom anchor, Jim Sciutto, was also stationed in Lviv for one month to cover the war before returning to the United States. For the first two weeks of the war, the show was co-anchored by Bianna Golodryga and Erica Hill from New York. The usual anchor, Poppy Harlow, took one year of absence from the Newsroom show to study law at Yale University. She returned to the show on May 30, 2022, and co-anchored from New York for the full two weeks of our September timeframe.

In September, the number of correspondents interviewed live from Ukraine on the CNN Newsroom show reduced dramatically. Over the two-week timeframe in September, only two correspondents were broadcast from Ukraine including Ben Wedemen and Walsh. Matthew

Chance continued to appear on the show but from London instead of Kyiv. As Chance explained in an interview with the *Washington Post*, mistakes occur when a reporter feels exhausted, and a company has a responsibility to rotate people out of Ukraine to maintain sound judgment.¹¹⁸ But when CNN rotated correspondents out of Ukraine, they did not put the same number of correspondents back in. Often news coverage of war reduces as public interest declines. Public interest in the war naturally falls off as people experience what is referred to as “crisis fatigue.” This is when readers feel overwhelmed, helpless or drawn to other issues besides the war.¹¹⁹ When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 public attention was high but gradually changed to other foreign policy issues like immigration, cyberattacks and climate change.¹²⁰ The news is led by public opinion and therefore, as interest in the war in Ukraine dwindled, so did the coverage by CNN. News is new. This means that the news is always going to focus its attention on breaking events and although the war in Ukraine remains ongoing, other current news naturally takes precedence in coverage.

Findings for Timeframe (1)

Our study of the CNN Newsroom Weekday show found that the war in Ukraine was heavily broadcast during the first two weeks of the war, but coverage significantly reduced seven months later. In total, from February 24, 2022, to March 9, 2022, (excluding weekends) the war in Ukraine made up 96% of the CNN Newsroom show leaving 4% of the remaining time to cover other news. These figures are shown below in Figure 3.

¹¹⁸ Jeremy Barr, “Matthew Chance, One of CNN’s Star Ukraine Correspondents, Gets a Break,” *Washington Post*, March 14, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/media/2022/03/14/matthew-chance-cnn-ukraine/>.

¹¹⁹ Tom Dennis, “When Tragedy Becomes Banal: Why News Consumers Experience Crisis Fatigue - UND Today,” *UND Today*, September 16, 2022, <https://blogs.und.edu/und-today/2022/09/when-tragedy-becomes-banal-why-news-consumers-experience-crisis-fatigue/>.

¹²⁰ Elaine Kamarck and Jordan Muchnick, “One Year into the Ukraine War — What Does the Public Think about American Involvement in the World?,” *Brookings*, March 8, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2023/02/23/one-year-into-the-ukraine-war-what-does-the-public-think-about-american-involvement-in-the-world/>.

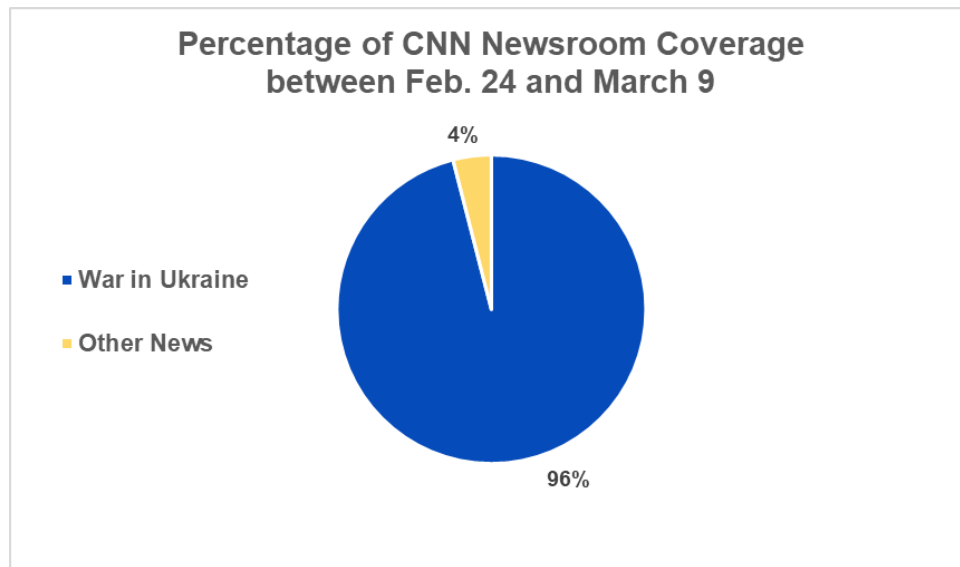


Figure 3. Percentage of CNN coverage in timeframe 1

CNN and the *Times* had almost identical amounts of coverage during the first two weeks of the war (95% of coverage by the *Times* and 96% of coverage by CNN). Out of 20 hours of show time on CNN Newsroom, 19 hours and 12 minutes reported on the war in Ukraine. This means that only 48 minutes of coverage over 10 days of the show reported on national or other international news. On February 24, February 28, and March 1, news about the war in Ukraine covered 100% of the 120-minute show, meaning that no other news was broadcast during those two-hour Newsroom shows. On February 25, Biden nominated Ketanji Brown Jackson to the supreme court which was significant as she was the first Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court. This was the only day in our February timeframe where over 10 minutes of coverage was on an event other than the war. Usually, a historical event like this would have garnered far more than 19 minutes of attention on the Newsroom show. These statistics are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. CNN Newsroom Coverage (Feb. 24- March 9)

Date	Anchors	Ukraine coverage in minutes	Percentage of coverage on Ukraine
Feb. 24	Jim Sciutto and Bianna Golodryga	120 minutes	100%
Feb. 25	Jim Sciutto and Bianna Golodryga	101 minutes	84.20%
Feb. 28	Jim Sciutto and Erica Hill	120 minutes	100%
March 1	Jim Sciutto and Erica Hill	120 minutes	100%
March 2	Jim Sciutto and Erica Hill	117 minutes	97.50%
March 3	Jim Sciutto and Erica Hill	115.5 minutes	96.30%
March 4	Jim Sciutto and Erica Hill	116.5 minutes	97.10%
March 7	Jim Sciutto and Erica Hill	112 minutes	93.30%
March 8	Jim Sciutto and Erica Hill	117 minutes	97.50%
March 9	Jim Sciutto and Erica Hill	113 minutes	94.20%

Findings for Timeframe (2)

During our September timeframe from September 17 to September 30 (excluding weekends), we found that 10% of the CNN Newsroom coverage remained about the war in Ukraine. This means that there was an 89% decrease in coverage between February and September. A special show on the funeral of Queen Elisabeth II of the United Kingdom replaced the CNN Newsroom show on September 19. Therefore, we calculated the coverage of nine days of coverage instead of 10 like in February and March. These findings are shown in Figure 4.

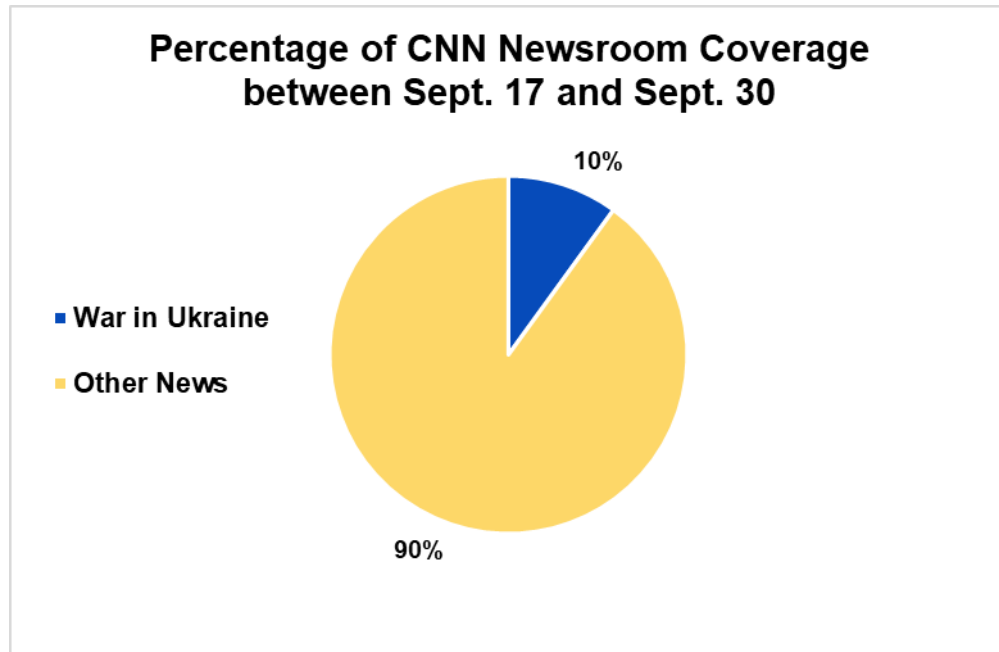


Figure 4. Percentage of CNN coverage in timeframe 2

In total, out of 18 hours of coverage, one hour and 46 minutes of footage covered the Russo-Ukrainian war. On two separate days, there was no coverage of the war in Ukraine and on another two days, there was five minutes or less of coverage. Most coverage occurred between September 21 to September 26 during the United Nations General Assembly. This followed Putin’s threat to use “all means” necessary to win the war, hinting at the use of nuclear weapons.¹²¹ On September 28, hurricane Ian hit Florida and CNN Newsroom focused almost all their coverage on the lead-up and the aftermath of the hurricane. On September 29, two full hours of footage reported on the hurricane in Florida. These findings are presented in Table 4.

¹²¹ “CNN Newsroom With Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto : CNNW : September 21, 2022 6:00am-7:00am PDT : Free Borrow & Streaming : Internet Archive,” September 21, 2022, https://archive.org/details/CNNW_20220921_130000_CNN_Newsroom_With_Poppy_Harlow_and_Jim_Sciutto.

Table 4. CNN Newsroom Footage (Sept. 17 - Sept. 30)

Date	Anchors	Ukraine Coverage in Minutes	Percentage of Coverage on Ukraine
Sept. 19	Special Coverage of Queen Elizabeth II	N/A	N/A
Sept. 20	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	5 minutes	4.20%
Sept. 21	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	34.5 minutes	29%
Sept. 22	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	23 minutes	19.20%
Sept. 23	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	22 minutes	18.30%
Sept. 26	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	10 minutes	8.30%
Sept. 27	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	0 minutes	0%
Sept. 28	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	3 minutes	2.50%
Sept. 29	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	0 minutes	0%
Sept. 30	Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto	9 minutes	7.50%

During our September timeframe, the *Times* covered the Ukraine war more heavily than CNN. In total, 36% of coverage by the *Times* remained on the war in Ukraine, whereas this number reduced to 10% by CNN. There are several reasons why CNN may have reduced coverage more than the *Times*. First, as previously discussed CNN anchors and many correspondents left Ukraine and Russia by September 2022. As a result, there may have been a reduction in coverage since there were fewer means of gathering footage than in the first two weeks of the war.

A second point to consider is that print and broadcast both disseminate information in alternative ways. Broadcast news publishes information immediately and gives live updates through graphics, video and other content. However, print is a form of mass communication that provides news in printed form. The visual aspect of broadcast news is important in explaining why extreme weather, like hurricane Ian, is broadcast more heavily than in print. Stormcasting is a television tradition: journalists put themselves in harm's way by standing in

rising water and winds so strong they can barely stand all because it makes good television.¹²² There is a certain allure to watching someone standing in extreme weather from the safety of your own home which drives weathercasts. Print, on the other hand, does not report on the weather as much because it cannot show this sense of immediate danger as it unfolds in front of our eyes. Therefore, hurricane Ian could account for this difference in coverage during September.

Finally, print news is only available to literate people and shows the whole day's news the next day. But broadcast news is accessible to every class of people, including illiterate people, therefore, they may target a different audience than print. The *Times* is a subscription-based, world-renowned newspaper with a global audience. The paper's readership is largely made up of university-educated (72%), Democratic (91%), and white (71%) individuals that care about overseas events.¹²³ Additionally, the print version appeals to an older generation of educated readers who prefer a print version of the paper over social media for a "more informed view" of events.¹²⁴ In comparison, CNN has a younger target audience: 20% of its viewers are 18 to 29 years old and 37% are 30 to 49 years old.¹²⁵ However, this audience is less educated than the *Times*, with 40% of viewers holding a degree.¹²⁶ Several factors may have contributed to the divergence in coverage seven months into the war, including the target audience of each organization.

¹²² Sophie Haigney, "Why Do We Watch the Weather on TV While It Is Happening Just Outside?," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/magazine/weather-casting-tv.html>.

¹²³ Maria Pengue, "25 New York Times Readership Statistics [The 2023 Edition] | Letter.Ly," letter.ly, March 13, 2023, <https://letter.ly/new-york-times-readership-statistics/>.

¹²⁴ Julian Barnes interview.

¹²⁵ Maria Pengue, "33 Fascinating Cable News Viewership Statistics for 2023 | Letter.Ly," letter.ly, March 13, 2023, <https://letter.ly/cable-news-viewership-statistics/>.

¹²⁶ Pengue, "33 Fascinating Cable News Viewership Statistics for 2023 | Letter.Ly."

To examine the coverage by CNN, this section investigates the same elements as the *Times* coverage: types of stories and recurring themes, use of sources and use of technology. This section also compares the coverage of the war by the *Times* and by CNN.

Themes

As a form of visual and audio communication, broadcast media has different privileges than print media. Broadcast media shows dramatic and thematic footage with video, images and sound whereas print is limited to the written word. In the first two weeks of the war CNN placed its reporters at the center of the action. Live recordings showed air sirens wailing, bombs exploding, rubble strewn across civilian areas, and bullet-riddled vehicles. In the aftermath of combat, correspondents walked through debris and Russian corpses strewn across the road, with only their faces blurred. Print can show these images as stills on the front page, but they are less intimate and limited by space.

The video of a Ukrainian family killed by Russian mortar fire is an interesting example of how print and broadcast present sensitive footage differently. This video is shown twice during the two-hour CNN Newsroom show on March 7. Of course, the video cannot be shown on the front page of the *Times* and, therefore, the photo of the family is shown instead. But on the *Times'* online website, the video appears halfway down the story, so it does not lead. Although both publications show the video, the *Times* does more to prevent the video from becoming clickbait material by showing it further down in the story. In both print and broadcast, there is no black-and-white rulebook of what sensitive images can be shown; it is a matter of judgment. According to Nic Robertson, it is important that family members do not see dead bodies of relatives on television before being informed.¹²⁷ Journalists need to strike a balance between showing the realities of war and not being gratuitously gruesome.

¹²⁷ Nic Robertson (diplomatic editor of CNN) in an interview with the author (February 23, 2023).

The topics and themes brought up in CNN coverage are similar to the *Times* and can be divided into the same categories: military operations, Russian news, Ukrainian civilians and refugees and Western response.

Military Operations

Footage from the war zone was constant during the first two weeks of the war. At the Russian border, Frederik Pleitgan showed convoys of Russian troops rolling into Ukraine. He also mentioned ambulances traveling back and forth from Ukraine to pick up Russian casualties and how the weather was affecting the Russian advance. Meanwhile, Russian soldiers walked behind Matthew Chance, who documented their takeover at Antanov airport. Military analysts brought on to the show talked about the type of munitions used by the Russian army. They commented on the indiscriminate and psychological warfare used by the Russians in civilian areas of Ukraine. In both February and September, there was a running narrative that the Russians were not doing as well as expected and the Ukrainians were resisting. As with the *Times*, CNN commented on Zelenskyy's leadership and his bravery by experts and CNN journalists. CNN also compared Zelenskyy's decision to remain in Ukraine to the ex-Afghan president, Ashraf Ghani, who fled Kabul as the Taliban closed in. Throughout the initial two weeks of the war, there were in-depth discussions about military operations, along with visuals of gunfire, soldiers and destruction caused by explosions.

Russian News

The language used to describe Russia, Putin and the invasion of Ukraine by CNN was often looser and more opinionated than the *Times*. For example, Republican Sen. Ben Sasse referred to Putin as a "corrupt jackass with the failed regime."¹²⁸ The state of Putin's mental

¹²⁸ "CNN Newsroom With Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto : CNNW : February 25, 2022 6:00am-7:00am PST : Free Borrow & Streaming : Internet Archive," February 25, 2022,

health was commonly speculated about by guests and correspondents on the show. There was a strong narrative of Putin being “covid-phobic,” meaning that he secluded himself during covid and landed in a “heightened emotional state.”¹²⁹ Other guests speculated that Putin could be embracing the madman theory to try and convince the West that he would do anything to ensure he wins the war.¹³⁰ In other Russian news, sanctions affected the Russian people, Putin and his oligarchs, the ruble crashed, and the stock market closed in Russia. News about Russian civilians was not at all common despite some videos of anti-war protestors in Russia. CNN Newsroom did not broadcast any interviews with Russian civilians on the streets of Russia. However, Nic Robertson did report on propaganda used by the Kremlin and the lack of information about the war available to the Russian public. In September, news about Russian views increased after the Kremlin called up Russian reservists without any training. In addition to footage of Russians fleeing the country on foot, CNN showed a few anti-war protests taking place in Russia's streets against conscription.

Ukrainian Civilians and Refugees

A large amount of the footage by CNN showed Ukrainian civilians and refugees during the first two weeks of the war. CNN broadcast from underground shelters, platforms of train stations as Ukrainians tried to flee the country and inside volunteer hospitals. Other footage showed Ukrainian civilians queuing up to volunteer for the Ukrainian army and donate blood. Like the *Times*, CNN highlighted discrimination and racism between refugees at the Ukrainian border. CNN filmed two lines of refugees. One line of Ukrainian women and

https://archive.org/details/CNNW_20220225_140000_CNN_Newsroom_With_Poppy_Harlow_and_Jim_Sciutto

¹²⁹ “CNN Newsroom With Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto : CNNW : February 28, 2022 6:00am-7:00am PST : Free Borrow & Streaming : Internet Archive,” February 28, 2022,

https://archive.org/details/CNNW_20220228_140000_CNN_Newsroom_With_Poppy_Harlow_and_Jim_Sciutto

¹³⁰ “CNN Newsroom With Poppy Harlow and Jim Sciutto : CNNW : March 1, 2022 6:00am-7:00am PST : Free Borrow & Streaming : Internet Archive,” March 1, 2022,

https://archive.org/details/CNNW_20220301_140000_CNN_Newsroom_With_Poppy_Harlow_and_Jim_Sciutto

children moved quickly while the other line of non-Ukrainian civilians stood still. Individuals standing in the queue told CNN correspondent Arwa Damon their experience of standing in cold weather for days in increasingly dangerous conditions. There is little footage of Ukrainian civilians by September, other than news about the sham referendums in Russian-occupied areas. CNN and the *Times* follow the same pattern of reducing the number of human-interest stories about Ukrainian civilians seven months into the war. As coverage decreased, news about the war focused on hard news only such as Russian conscription. Human interest stories are commonly used to give the audience some positive news when there is a lot of negative news on a subject, but as there was not much news on the war in Ukraine there was less need for these types of stories.

Western Response

At the start of the conflict, business and financial experts brought onto the show daily tracked the global, economic impact of the war on Ukraine. Graphs documented the plunge in global markets and the rise in oil and gas prices. As well as mentioning how the sanctions imposed on Russia affected American gasoline prices and household products, they discussed the impact of the sanctions on the Russian economy. As CNN correspondents explained, the sanctions aimed to drain Putin's economy so that he could not afford future wars. Other news focused on how politicians in the U.S. reacted to the war in Ukraine. CNN heavily criticized former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who offered praise for Putin's strategic thinking in an interview with Fox News.¹³¹ This shows how different news outlets have the power to present the war a certain way to viewers by choosing what guests they bring on to the show. The focus of other news was on military, financial and humanitarian aid being sent to Ukraine by

¹³¹ Paul Kane, "On Ukraine, Republicans Are United on Criticizing Biden but Not on How to Counter Russian Threat," *Washington Post*, February 23, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/02/22/ukraine-republicans-biden/>.

the U.S. and other Western countries. In all, news about the response from the West was largely like the *Times* reporting, but there was more speculation about the future of democracy in Europe and the threat to NATO countries.

Sources

The print and broadcast media use similar sources in their reporting, but instead of writing down what a source says, broadcasters tape their interviews or air them live. Unscripted live interviews can pose several problems, ranging from technical difficulties to unruly guests. CNN live-streamed interviews from Europe during the war in Ukraine sometimes resulting in lost signal and guests being cut off mid-conversation. During live interviews with expert sources, there is always the chance that a guest can be disagreeable or controversial. Witness interviews with ordinary members of the public can also pose problems as people may not want to speak or not have the knowledge to answer questions. During a live interview with Clarissa Ward in the subway station in Kyiv, some Ukrainian civilians were too uncomfortable to speak on camera and struggled to reply to questions in English. In print, the journalist can refine answers to questions and choose what to put in and leave out of a story. CNN continually interviewed a mix of expert analysts from within the U.S. government as well as their correspondents specializing in foreign affairs. As with the *Times*, the channel also interviewed known and unknown Ukrainian and Russian sources. This section will analyze the sources used by CNN in three categories: Ukrainian known and unknown sources, Russian known and unknown sources, and other named sources.

Ukrainian Sources

In the first two weeks of the war, Ukrainian unnamed sources were widely used in reporting. In February, Ukrainian citizens were interviewed live from the subway shelters in the cities to the borders of Poland. Additionally, CNN interviewed Ukrainian volunteers, such

as Zachary and Keril who enlisted in Ukraine's citizen army. During the war, Ukrainian sources such as Jim and Tata Marharian, members of the Ukrainian Volunteer Medical Battalion, spoke of witnessing children killed on the street. Another pre-recorded video showed a group of Jewish Ukrainians calling out Russia for lying about the Ukrainian government being Neo-Nazis. CNN also sourced material from volunteer doctors, activists, residents, students and soldiers.

As with the *Times*, Ukrainian military experts, politicians and lawmakers were referred to as “Ukrainian officials,” or “Ukrainians.” But there were also interviews with Ukrainian politicians: Kira Rudik, a Ukrainian Member of Parliament; Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister; and Maksym Kozytskyy, Governor of the Lviv region. Furthermore, CNN interviewed Ukrainian journalists reporting in Ukraine such as Illia Ponomarenko from The Kyiv Independent, Olga Tokariuk, a freelance journalist, and Justin Esiobua, a correspondent for Jurist News. Pre-recorded videos of Zelenskyy were also broadcast several times during the first two weeks. On the At This Hour CNN show on March 1, Chance interviewed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Although it was not broadcast on our chosen show, it is interesting to note because this is a very exclusive type of interview. During our September timeframe, Ukrainian sources dramatically decreased with only one interview with a Ukrainian source.

Russian Sources

Russian sources were very rarely used compared to Ukrainian sources during CNN’s reporting of the war in Ukraine. It is difficult to calculate the percentage of Russian sources used in the reporting compared to Ukrainian sources as the type of Russian sources varied. For example, CNN interviewed Nina Khrushcheva, great-granddaughter of Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. But Khrushcheva was interviewed

from her home in New York. Although this gives the reader some Russian context to the war it is not as impactful as a Russian citizen being interviewed from the streets of Moscow. During the two timeframes of reporting by CNN Newsroom, there were no Russian civilians interviewed on the street. The only Russian source based in Russia during the February timeframe was Mikhail Fishman, a Russian journalist and anchor of TV Rain who talked about the crackdown on the media in Russia. Similar to the *Times* reporting, CNN did not conduct live interviews with Russian sources and commonly quoted Russian sources as “Russian officials.” An exception to this is a video by Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, describing what was happening in Kyiv. Often, correspondents would mention Russian sources they spoke with, but not interview them live. For example, Chance mentioned talking with Russian soldiers at Antonov Airport. Furthermore, Robertson interviewed Russian civilians on the streets of Moscow about their opinions of Putin’s war, but the people were not shown on television. In the September timeframe, there was only one Russian source: Nadya Tolokonnikova, Russian activist and co-founder of the band “Pussy Riot.” All the Russian sources interviewed live were against the war in Russia.

In an interview with the author, Nic Robertson, CNN’s international diplomatic editor, explains why it was difficult to access Russian sources in Moscow.¹³² Robertson said that due to Russia’s control over the media, each organization is only allowed a limited number of reporters and cameramen in the country. Furthermore, receiving accreditation to film on the streets was a long, slow process that was hard to get close to the war. Robertson was accredited, so he was able to speak to people in the streets, but the CNN cameramen did not have this accreditation to film at the very start of the war. Robertson also mentioned that after the war began, Russian civilians were more nervous to speak to news organizations as they were witnessing people being arrested on the streets. Many Russians consider the West to be an

¹³² Nic Robertson Interview.

enemy, either due to messages the Kremlin feeds them or due to the rupture in relations with the West since the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹³³ Therefore, not all Russians wanted to engage with American news organizations like CNN.

Other named sources

The largest category of sources used by CNN is named experts, politicians and specialist CNN correspondents. During each show in February and March, at least two or three experts gave their opinions on the conflict in Ukraine, alongside at least five CNN expert correspondents. CNN correspondents gave an expert analysis of the broader implications of the war, the history of the Russian conflict with Ukraine and NATO and the global implications of the conflict. Christine Romans, CNN's chief business correspondent often commented on the economic effects of the war in Ukraine on the U.S. and across the world. Jeremy Diamond, CNN's White House Correspondent talked about the sanctions imposed on Russia by the U.S. and Kaitlin Collins, a chief White House correspondent, talked about Biden's response to the war in Ukraine. Other CNN specialist correspondents brought on to the show talked about the military operations of the war such as Pete Muntean, a CNN aviation correspondent.

The anchors of CNN Newsroom interviewed other experts, politicians, professors and analysts alongside CNN specialists. The channel brought several military analysts on to the CNN Newsroom show: David Petraeus, a retired general from the U.S. Army; Cedric Leighton, a retired colonel from the U.S. Air Force; and Wesley Clark, a retired general who commanded NATO. These military analysts, amongst others, commented on the actions of the Ukrainian and Russian armies and the military aid that the U.S. sent to Ukraine. CNN also interviewed other journalists from American and British news organizations working in Ukraine. They spoke to correspondents from the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, ITV News and

¹³³ Sabrina Tavernise, "Why Russians Hate America. Again.," *The New York Times*, September 20, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-casualties.html>.

Time Magazine. CNN correspondents questioned journalists from other organizations about their experience of covering the war in Ukraine and about specific events they covered that CNN did not get footage of. For example, CNN Newsroom showed footage of Dan Rivers, an ITV News correspondent, walking through the rubble of the recently bombed city of Kharkiv. These interviews added additional context, footage and views about the war in Ukraine.

During these interviews, there was a lot of speculation about who was going to win the war in Ukraine, the state of Putin's mental health and what impact this war would have on the rest of Europe. It has become more commonplace for journalists to speculate what will happen next in a conflict rather than reporting on what has happened. But network news relies on speculative news more frequently than print companies.¹³⁴ Speculative journalism can "help audiences picture the future surrounding more wider global issues."¹³⁵ It can also mislead the public by providing inaccurate information. According to Nic Robertson, one way to combat this is by giving the audience a string of experts without the same point of view. Also, journalists and interviewees should know their subjects well to provide an informed perspective to the audience.

In the first two weeks of the war, the CNN Newsroom show used between 10 and 20 sources during the two-hour show. CNN interviewed these sources from all over Ukraine, the U.S. and Europe. Military, finance, Russian history, and war experts constituted most of these sources. There were also many Ukrainian civilians interviewed on the streets of Ukraine and other named Ukrainian sources questioned through live, conducted interviews. Due to accreditation issues, there were more Ukrainian sources than Russian sources. The number of sources about the war in Ukraine decreased dramatically in September, and most of those

¹³⁴ Christy Wampole, "Opinion | What Is the Future of Speculative Journalism?," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/22/opinion/speculative-journalism-future.html>.

¹³⁵ Sean Scannell, "Can Speculative Journalism Be Useful for Understanding Reality?," Reuters News Agency, July 30, 2020, <https://www.reutersagency.com/en/reuters-community/can-speculative-journalism-be-useful-for-understanding-reality/>.

sources were American experts or CNN specialist correspondents. In September the number of sources used during the CNN Newsroom show ranged between one and seven, on days when there was any news about the war in Ukraine. CNN Newsroom only used one or two sources for each show between September 26 and September 28. There were only a couple of Russian and Ukrainian sources interviewed in the two-week timeframe in September. In general, the *Times* and CNN used similar sources, the main difference was that CNN broadcast these interviews live, giving a more intimate perspective of the war to the audience. To hear the voice and see the tears of a Ukrainian civilian in a refugee shelter is arguably more powerful and thought-provoking than to read about it the next day.

Technology

For their reporting, CNN utilized new technologies similar to those used by the *Times*, such as satellite images, drone footage, and social media evidence. But advancements in technology allowed CNN to broadcast news about the war in Ukraine more quickly and more effectively than in previous conflicts. Frederik Pleitgen, CNN's Senior International Correspondent, talks about the jump in technology and how CNN has been able to utilize that in their footage.¹³⁶ He states that five years ago they would not have been able to document the war in Ukraine as they have today. Now, correspondents can go online and film from "absolutely anywhere."¹³⁷ Due to easier access, correspondents can move around the streets of Ukraine and Moscow with equipment that lets them broadcast live from their backpacks. Amongst this equipment is the iPhone; small enough to fit in one hand but technologically advanced enough to film live footage. At the beginning of the war, CNN was able to film from the Russian border with a strong enough signal to broadcast live. In comparison, during the

¹³⁶ "Covering Russia's Invasion from Both Sides of the Border," *CNN*, March 27, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/business/2022/03/27/covering-russias-invasion-from-both-sides-of-the-border.cnn>.

¹³⁷ "Covering Russia's Invasion from Both Sides of the Border."

war in Iraq, satellite trucks followed correspondents to send pictures to the audience at home. With these technological advancements, viewers could see the war in Ukraine from both sides of the border in real-time. In Figure 5, CNN Chief International Correspondent Clarissa Ward reports live with a videographer from a subway in Ukraine with only a smartphone, air pods and a backpack.



Figure 5. Clarissa Ward films live from Ukraine.

Photo: Marcus Yam

Social media videos also played a critical role in CNN's coverage of the war in Ukraine. Ukrainian soldiers and civilians often upload these videos onto Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or Telegram and are broadcast by CNN. To keep up with the constant stream of social media footage, CNN's investigative team uses "Twitter lists of local video aggregators, influencers and experts from the Open-Source Intelligence Community (OSINT), as well as following key accounts on Telegram and TikTok," to ensure they are up to date.¹³⁸ On February

¹³⁸ Gianluca Mezzofiore and Katie Polglase, "How CNN Geolocates and Verifies Social Media Footage from Ukraine," *CNN*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/28/world/ukraine-social-media-footage-verification/index.html>.

28, CNN broadcast social media videos from Facebook and Twitter of Russian troops advancing on Kharkiv.¹³⁹ In this case, they used two social media videos showing the same event from different angles to verify the footage. Then they interviewed residents on the street to confirm what was shown through the videos was true.

Broadcast media relies on getting information out faster than print media, so CNN often released footage without independently verifying it first. During the first two weeks of the war in Ukraine, Sciutto would often say that information was either “verified by CNN” or “not independently verified by CNN.” CNN did not verify statistics about civilian casualties, the number of Russian troops killed and territories taken by Russian troops during the first two weeks of the war. On the other hand, the *Times* has a more thorough verification process and does not release footage without it being verified first.¹⁴⁰ If the *Times* released Ukrainian statistics that may be exaggerated, they would ensure that there were other U.S. or European estimates so the reader understands that the statistics vary.

But the question is should unverified footage be broadcast on CNN when misinformation is very difficult to dislodge from the brain?¹⁴¹ Even if CNN corrected information that proved to be untrue, the effects would already have occurred. On February 25, CNN reported that Ukrainian forces claimed to have killed 800 Russians but could not verify that information. There is a general understanding that Ukraine does not release accurate statistics on fatalities of war.¹⁴² In light of this, CNN should have been extra careful when releasing casualty figures without a second source of information. In contrast, the *Times* reported the same story the following day with different estimates from American and British

¹³⁹ “Social Media Videos Show Fighting on Ukraine Streets,” *CNN*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2022/02/28/kharkiv-fighting-ukraine-russia-marquardt-dnt-vpx.cnn>.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Julian Barnes.

¹⁴¹ Tommy Shane, “The Psychology of Misinformation: Why It’s so Hard to Correct,” *First Draft*, September 18, 2020, <https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/the-psychology-of-misinformation-why-its-so-hard-to-correct/>.

¹⁴² Eric Schmitt interview.

sources. However, according to Nic Robertson, information is not commonly put out unless “it stands to reason.” Robertson asserts that in general, CNN reviews information very carefully and there is a rigorous process between “an editorial judgment, a legal judgment and... a values judgment on the content of the material.”¹⁴³ CNN posits that if they release unverified footage there is cause to reason that it is true, whereas the *Times* has a stricter policy of verifying all information before release.

Drone footage is another part of CNN's frontline coverage of the Ukraine war. The Ukrainian army has drone units primarily used to locate and strike Russian targets. This type of warfare allows soldiers to observe the battlefield through a small satellite-linked monitor linked to drones hovering out of sight. However, this technology has also improved media coverage of the war in Ukraine, allowing audiences back home to see the battlefield first-hand. A video by CNN on April 7 shows example drone footage of Russian soldiers killing Ukrainian civilians in plain sight.¹⁴⁴ According to Oleksandr Radzikhovsky, a drone pilot from the unit that captured this footage, before the war they were just civilians who liked flying drones and uploading footage on YouTube, but now they are a vital part of the war effort. His team was one of many that sent hours of drone footage to CNN to use in their reporting and expose Russia's targeting of civilians.

In Russia and Ukraine, CNN's reporting has been enhanced by reporters being able to go live from almost anywhere. Using only their smartphones, correspondents can broadcast live footage to a worldwide audience. The use of social media videos, satellite images, and drone footage facilitates this live reporting by providing context to the coverage that was unavailable in previous conflicts.

¹⁴³ Nic Robertson interview.

¹⁴⁴ “CNN Features Ukraine's Drone Unit Helping Its Army Locate Targets,” n.d., <https://grabien.com/story.php?id=373701>.

Conclusion

CNN devoted a lot of time and resources to report on the war in Ukraine in detail. They devoted 96% of CNN Newsroom showtime to the war in Ukraine during the first two weeks of the war, which is a strikingly high number. This coverage showed remarkable footage of bombings, burning buildings, rolling tanks and Ukrainian and Russian corpses. CNN also brought in a number of military experts, journalists and professors to enhance this coverage of the war. Seven months later, the amount of coverage of the war in Ukraine dropped to 10% over two weeks in September. The news in September largely focused on Russian conscription, sham referendums in Ukraine and nuclear threats by Putin. Most of the sources in this timeframe were expert sources rather than known and unknown Ukrainian or Russian sources. Finally, new technologies were critical for CNN to produce an effective visual broadcast to the audience. Footage captured by dashcams, social media videos and drone surveillance led CNN's broadcasts in Ukraine.

Chapter 6. Discussion

This thesis aimed to find out how Western media reported on the war in Ukraine through a study of the coverage of the front page by *The New York Times* and CNN Newsroom show. The reporting was analyzed using three distinct categories of coverage: types of stories and recurring themes, use of sources and use of technology. The themes and sources section of the coverage was divided into further subcategories of evidence. The technology section used example stories from both CNN and the *Times* to show how new technologies advanced the reporting of the war in Ukraine.

This thesis found that both the reporting by CNN and the *Times* of the war in Ukraine was extensive and unprecedented during the first two weeks of combat. It found that the coverage of the war reported on the Ukrainian side of the conflict far more than the Russian side, risking objectivity in reporting. This coverage was accompanied by many different types of named and unnamed Ukrainian sources, which were not evenly matched by Russian sources. This means that instead of a well-rounded amount of coverage of both Russian and Ukrainian sources and stories, the coverage leaned to the side of Ukraine. Due to the nature of Russia and its disciplinary media laws, it was harder for journalists to gain access to Russian sources. New technologies during the war in Ukraine paved a way for a new type of investigative war journalism that exposed crimes against humanity and directly showed the audience events unfolding in Ukraine.

Timeframe 1

The amount of coverage by CNN and the *Times* during our February timeframe (February 24, 2022, to March 9, 2022) was almost identical (95% of coverage by the *Times* and 96% by CNN). This is a significant amount of coverage by the American media for a

proxy war between NATO and Russia.¹⁴⁵ What makes this amount of coverage even more notable is when it is compared to the amount of coverage American news outlets devoted to the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. The *Times* covered the second full calendar month of the war in Ukraine (44% of front-page stories) heavier than the second full calendar month of the war in Iraq (18% of front-page stories). The combined networks – ABC, CBS and NBC – covered the full month of the war in Ukraine more than the first full month of the invasion of Afghanistan. This means that news media focused almost all their coverage on a war in Europe where U.S. troops are not deployed. In comparison, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had direct American involvement with 6,951 U.S. military deaths combined by 2022.¹⁴⁶ Yet, the war in Ukraine garnered more front page and broadcast footage than both wars.

Timeframe 2

In our September timeframe (September 17, 2022, to September 30, 2022) both organizations reduced their coverage (36% by the *Times* and 10% by CNN). Coverage by the *Times* remained relatively high at 36%, considering September marked almost seven months of the war in Ukraine. But CNN's coverage dropped to 10% by September, more than three times less than the *Times*. This thesis found that differences in audience, news priorities and resources go some way in explaining the disparity of coverage. Queen Elisabeth's funeral and hurricane Ian – both of which lent themselves to the sort of visual reporting that television thrives on- were two major news items that CNN concentrated their coverage on more than the *Times*. Another explanation for the decrease in coverage

¹⁴⁵ Fred Kaplan, "Everyone Is Starting to Admit Something Frightening About Ukraine," *Slate Magazine*, April 29, 2022, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2022/04/ukraine-nato-russia-proxy-war.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Brown and Azmi Haroun, "The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan Have Killed at Least 500,000 People, According to a Report That Breaks down the Toll," *Business Insider*, August 26, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-many-people-have-been-killed-in-iraq-and-afghanistan#6951-us-military-deaths-1>.

is that it is natural for audiences to lose interest in foreign policy news, especially when these stories are continuously negative. As the news moves with public opinion, coverage follows new and relatable stories.

Themes

There were four main types of coverage by CNN and the *Times* in the reporting of the Russo-Ukrainian war: military operations, Russian news, Ukrainian civilians and refugees and Western response. Stories about military operations in Ukraine and the response from the West covered much of the reporting. Next, Ukrainian news about refugees, volunteers, civilian casualties and the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine gathered a substantial amount of media attention. The least covered category was Russian news. This included examples of Russian protests, Russian attitudes toward the war and how the war in Ukraine was affecting Russia. In September, Russian news was covered more because of the Russian conscription of untrained civilians enforced by the Kremlin. But in general, the reporting concentrated on stories out of Ukraine or foreign news policy stories reported from Washington DC.

“If it bleeds, it leads.”¹⁴⁷ Historically, the view of news is that violence, conflict, or death will always capture the attention of media outlets. This derives from the concept that the most shocking and negative news attracts a higher readership. Of course, the media need to report on death and conflict to expose wrongdoings and spread awareness of certain issues. It is inevitable that in war there will be death and often these gory images come to define certain wars. Ken Jarecke’s photo of an Iraqi man burned alive is arguably one of the most iconic photos of the Gulf War. But not every sensitive photo, broadcast, or story reveals an important

¹⁴⁷ “If It Bleeds, It Leads. No Matter Whose Blood It Is.,” Scientologists Taking Action Against Discrimination (STAND), n.d., <https://www.standleague.org/newsroom/blog/if-it-bleeds-it-leads-no-matter-whose-blood-it-is.html>.

truth about war. Media publications must consider the ethical implications of reporting a story solely for the “it” that “bleeds” headline.

The war in Ukraine exposed CNN and *Times* journalists to the horrors of warfare from mass graves to corpses decomposing on the street. Both outlets reported and showed gruesome events that happened but not to a gratuitous extent. The footage shown exposed war crimes by Russian units and gave readers an idea of the human toll of this war in Ukraine. Therefore, this thesis argues that although there was a considerable amount of coverage of the war in Ukraine, explicit footage was not shown without reasonable cause.

Sources

This thesis also found that the number of sources used in the reporting of the war by CNN and the *Times* heavily weighted toward Ukrainians and away from Russians. CNN did not interview one Russian civilian on the streets of Russia during both timeframes of the war in Ukraine. In contrast, CNN reporters interviewed Ukrainian civilians from the borders of Poland, in underground shelters and on the platforms of train stations in Ukraine simultaneously. This lack of diversity in source material results in coverage that is heavily leaning toward one side of the war and conflicts with the objectivity and unbiased fundamentals of journalism. The *Times* reported more of the Russian side of the conflict than CNN. On the first day of the war (February 24) one front-page story from the *Times* used all Russian sources including civilians on the street, Russian celebrities and opposition leaders. Although the number of sources did not equal Ukrainian sources, they continued to bring voices from Russia about the effects of sanctions and mandatory conscription. CNN did not use one pro-war Russian source in February or September. CNN correspondents explained that some Russian civilians supported the war in Ukraine but there were no direct quotes or interviews with a supporter. The *Times* brought in pro-Putin opinions about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine from

the Donbas region. They show that some people living in Ukraine believe that the country should be a part of Russia.

Technology

Advancements in technology introduced a new form of digital journalism during the war in Ukraine. These technologies are more specialized than in previous wars covered by the American media. Journalists captured detailed footage of war crimes by Russian units in Ukraine. On March 17, the International Criminal Court issued a warrant for Putin's arrest on suspicion of illegal deportation of children in Ukraine.¹⁴⁸ This is one of many accusations against Putin and the Russian commanders in charge of military units in Ukraine for crimes against humanity. During the war in Ukraine, journalists took on the role of investigators into war crimes using new digital tools that allowed them to gather incriminating evidence. Digital tools included satellite imagery, drone footage, security cameras, dash cameras, civilian video evidence, text messages and intercepted phone calls. Journalists also found evidence through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram as well as videos posted on Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and Twitter. New technologies also enabled CNN reporters to broadcast footage with more ease and speed than any previous conflict. CNN correspondents went live from underground locations, bombed cities and the borders of Poland and Russia throughout the war with just an iPhone and a set of earphones at hand.

"So long as there are men, there will be war."¹⁴⁹ And so long as there is war, there will be media coverage. Civilians are attracted to watching the news about war and this

¹⁴⁸ Al Jazeera, "All You Need to Know about the ICC's Arrest Warrant for Putin," *Russia-Ukraine War News* | Al Jazeera, March 17, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/17/all-you-need-to-know-about-the-iccs-arrest-warrant-for-putin#:~:text=What%20is%20the%20ICC%3F,unable%20to%20do%20so%20themselves.>

¹⁴⁹ "A Quote by Albert Einstein," n.d., <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/162081-so-long-as-there-are-men-there-will-be-wars#:~:text=Quote%20by%20Albert%20Einstein%3A%20%E2%80%9CSo,%20there%20will%20be%20wars.%E2%80%9D.>

raises questions about the ethics of war as a spectator event.¹⁵⁰ Technologies increasingly allow an audience to place themselves in the center of the battlefield, to watch rockets explode into buildings and to hear the screams of the wounded. Overreporting of war raises questions over the intent of the coverage. Is it to create empathy and encourage aid while informing the public of important events? Or is it to boost readership and create a profit for news companies? This line is vague and it's the responsibility of media organizations to form a middle ground in reporting on the war.

Comparison to Other Wars

News coverage differed during the war in Ukraine compared to other wars: it was passionate, constant and widespread. New technologies can explain the constant news coverage of the war in Ukraine by Western media. The web allows for 24/7 reporting compared to conflicts such as Iraq in 2003. People no longer wait for news to appear in the paper the next day but receive constant push notifications and alerts as news unfolds. Social media use continues to grow every year and is a valuable tool for war correspondents. New social media platforms like TikTok allow journalists to use publicly available videos and pictures in their reporting of the war in Ukraine. TikTok was released in 2016, over a decade after the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan meaning that journalists could not use this kind of social media footage at the start of those wars. Journalists did not even need to be in Ukraine to publish detailed stories accompanied by audiovisuals from Ukraine. Footage from surveillance images, security cameras, social media and drones allowed journalists to view the war from a birds-eye view, on the streets of Ukraine and through a soldier's perspective, without leaving America. Broadcast media also requires less equipment to report live than at the beginning of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. During the invasion of Panama in 1989, broadcast reporters hauled 900-

¹⁵⁰ Nicole Hemmer, "Ukraine Raises Moral Question of War as a Spectator Event," *CNN*, February 25, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/25/opinions/watching-ukraine-war-on-screen-hemmer/index.html>.

pound satellites which took five hours to set up. In Iraq, the correspondents carried 140-pound compact satellite dishes that took 20 minutes to set up. Today, CNN correspondents take an iPhone out of their pocket and broadcast live across the Atlantic Ocean within minutes.

Increased access in Ukraine also explains how news organizations could cover the war so closely. CNN and the *Times* already had many bases in Europe, so it was easy to report from Ukraine from the onset. Furthermore, the Ukrainian government understands the importance of using international media to get its message out. The Ukrainians work with foreign media outlets in Ukraine by helping them get to the front lines and accepting them into the country. In contrast, it is much riskier for journalists to report on wars in the Middle East. The freedom of the press is much more limited and journalists are often subject to arrest, attacks and banishment. In Ukraine, journalists can report the truth without fear of judicial harassment by the Ukrainian government. This does not mean to say that the Ukrainian government approves of everything that the Western media reports about Ukraine. For example, the Ukrainian government stated its discontent over the story about racism and discrimination against non-Ukrainians at the Polish border. The difference is that Western journalists in Ukraine do not face harassment, jail time, or death.

Zelenskyy is an effective communicator and held press meetings, engaged in one-to-one interviews with CNN correspondents and used social media to dominate the information war. This meant that American media had direct access to information from the Ukrainian side of the war. Russia's propaganda efforts consisted largely of censorship of independent news organizations and social media as well as pushing the narrative of the war as a "special military operation" to rid Ukraine of fascists and Nazis.

On the other hand, Zelenskyy's propaganda campaign focused on gaining support from the West. Zelenskyy's messages have highlighted Ukrainian military successes against a much

bigger Russian army leaning into a David v Goliath trope. Zelenskyy also used a guilt-based narrative in the West, shaming NATO countries for not supplying enough aid to Ukraine and for continuing to buy Russian oil and gas. Zelenskyy's propaganda efforts continued inside the country. At the beginning of the war, Ukraine made it illegal to share images of Ukrainian military equipment or personnel. There was also a strong, patriotic, message sent out by Zelenskyy for Ukrainians to arm themselves and defend their country. This type of patriotism and morale is like the "Blitz Spirit" that came to define the "keep calm and carry on" attitude of Britain during World War II. British newspapers pushed this narrative of resistance and perseverance when it was fake. In truth, Londoners grimly carried on because they had no other choice; perhaps the same can be said with Ukraine. After all, Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 were prohibited from leaving Ukraine from the start of the war, leaving them no other choice but to stay and fight.

Reasons for Sustained Coverage

The Western media paid a lot of attention to the war in Ukraine to the point that Middle Eastern journalists called them out for Western bias. These accusations stemmed from the language that Western journalists used to describe Ukrainians compared to people from the Middle East. There was also a disproportionate amount of coverage about Ukrainian refugees and civilians compared to other countries at war. Civilians in Ethiopia faced war crimes, famine and displacement in the Civil War, but these atrocities were reported far less than those in Ukraine. "They seem so like us," said a writer in the *Daily Telegraph*.¹⁵¹ "This isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan . . . this is a relatively civilized, relatively European [city]," said a CBS correspondent.¹⁵² This type of language insinuates that "people

¹⁵¹ James Jeffrey, "Coverage of Ukraine Reveals the Racist Biases of Western Media," *Progressive.Org*, March 23, 2022, <https://progressive.org/latest/ukraine-racist-biases-western-media-jeffrey-220322/>.

¹⁵² Jeffrey, "Coverage of Ukraine Reveals the Racist Biases of Western Media."

like us,” or Western people, should not experience violence and war and death. It spreads the idea that tragedy is normal for countries outside of the West and it is more shocking and horrifying to see white, European refugees.

Immediate access to Ukraine to report from the front certainly contributed to increased and sustained coverage. The *Times* and CNN already had correspondents based in Russia and neighboring countries like Poland making it much easier to quickly move correspondents into Ukraine. The war also posed a direct threat to NATO countries and American security. The war in Ukraine was a huge national security interest story in America. Article five of the North Atlantic Treaty views an attack on a NATO country as an attack against them all. This means that Russia invading a NATO country such as Poland could result in American forces joining the fight in Europe. Some American volunteer soldiers are already fighting in Ukraine as they see the Russian invasion as a threat to worldwide democracy, not just to Ukraine.

The United States is also providing billions of economic aid to Ukraine making it a point of interest to American voters to understand where this money is going. A poll of the American public about attitudes toward sending money to Ukraine has softened one year into the war. In May 2022, 60% of Americans favored sending aid to Ukraine and in February 2023 this reduced to 48%.¹⁵³ This shows that the American public care about the amount of aid being sent to Ukraine and if this remains in the public interest, the media will continue to report it.

The war in Ukraine imposed a humanitarian crisis and a mass influx of refugees pouring into other countries. In the first year of the war in Ukraine, 8,231 Ukrainian civilians died including 494 children.¹⁵⁴ Many died through torture and sexualized wartime violence. In any war, violence against civilians causes public outcry. For example, the My Lai massacre fueled

¹⁵³ “Support for Ukraine Aid Softens in U.S. Public, Poll Says,” *PBS NewsHour*, February 15, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/support-for-ukraine-aid-softens-in-u-s-public-poll-says>.

¹⁵⁴ “Ukraine Civilian War Casualties 2023 | Statista,” Statista, March 14, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties/>.

anti-war sentiment in the U.S. against the war in Vietnam. Zelenskyy used his social media platforms and interviews to talk explicitly about Russian soldiers decapitating and torturing Ukrainian civilians. Zelenskyy's messages continuously remind readers about the human toll of the war in Ukraine, maintaining interest in the war and providing journalists with material to report with. Public interest in crimes against humanity during the war also explains why the American media continually covered the war in Ukraine.

Concluding Thoughts

War is horror. It leaves psychological scars for those who fight in it, those who witness it and those who report it. It is not surprising that Western media organizations sided with Ukraine during their reporting as they witnessed atrocities unfolding around them. War is one of the hardest topics for journalists to uphold objectivity, fairness and neutrality. But the fundamentals of journalism – truth, objectivity and balance – remain the standards of American news companies. Therefore, it is important to test these values to ensure readers and the public are not misled and receive the whole truth.

The war in Ukraine received a special amount of attention from Western media organizations, unlike previous wars. This poses the question; is this coverage what we can expect to see in future wars? Technologies are continuously improving and therefore it is reasonable to assume that the use of digital tools used in this war is likely to be replicated in future coverage. These technologies will continue to advance in future wars as cameras become more precise and their capabilities expand. Contact lenses that turn into cameras are already in development. The contact user can take a picture by blinking, turning humans into walking cameras. To that end, this war can be considered just the beginning of a new form of digital journalism. Social media lead much of the coverage of the war in Ukraine. As social media users on platforms such as TikTok rapidly grow, journalists will continue to benefit from using

these videos and photos in their reporting. TikTok is also the largest growing source of news for adults in the UK.¹⁵⁵ In future wars journalists can take advantage of the affordances of TikTok: speed, reach and visibility. This platform allows journalists to reach a wide, diverse audience where users can easily interact with the broadcaster and other viewers.

Whether Western media companies will devote the same number of resources and amount of coverage to future wars depends on the circumstances. The war in Ukraine is different in the way that it directly affects the security of Europe and America, causes tensions between Russian-backed countries like China and the West and disrupts global markets. Therefore, the stakes were high for many major world powers during the war in Ukraine. If the war in Ukraine spilled over to Poland, this would be considered a direct attack on NATO, propelling huge news coverage. But the same cannot be said for countries that are not a part of NATO or part of Europe. PBS stated that Ethiopia's civil war was the deadliest conflict in the world with as many as half a million people killed.¹⁵⁶ But this conflict in East Africa did not receive a fraction of the coverage of the war in Ukraine.¹⁵⁷ This lack of coverage raises questions about whether news media will use these technologies to report on countries such as Ethiopia. Some of the interviewees for this research did not fully embrace the fact that the amount of coverage on the war in Ukraine dwarfs coverage elsewhere, which contributes to concern that reporters do not appreciate their Western bias. Instead, they highlighted the geopolitical reasons to cover the war in Ukraine. But this thesis recognizes that the media are agenda setters and decide what information the public should be concerned about. The press

¹⁵⁵ Chris Stokel-Walker, "TikTok Is Not the Enemy of Journalism. It's Just a New Way of Reaching People," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jul/23/tiktok-journalism-news-outlet-journalism-media>.

¹⁵⁶ "Ethiopian Government, Tigrayan Rebels Reach Truce," *PBS NewsHour*, November 3, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ethiopian-government-tigrayan-rebels-reach-truce-but-enormous-challenges-remain#:~:text=Ethiopia%27s%20civil%20war%20is%20the,used%20to%20run%20the%20country>.

¹⁵⁷ Reuters, "WHO Chief: 'Colour of Skin' May Be Why Tigray Crisis Not Getting Attention," August 17, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/who-chief-colour-skin-may-be-why-tigray-crisis-not-getting-attention-2022-08-17/>.

needs to show the same level of coverage for wars in Africa and the Middle East. New technologies provide the opportunity for journalists to better report these conflicts, without risking the lives of journalists by placing them on the ground in dangerous conflict zones and this is something Western news organizations should consider more in their reporting.

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Interviews

Julian, Barnes (National Security reporter), interview by Hannah Ross. Personal Interview. Washington DC, February 14, 2023.

Elisabeth Bumiller (Washington bureau chief), interview by Hannah Ross. Personal Interview. Washington DC, February 13, 2023.

Eric Schmitt (National Security reporter), interview by Hannah Ross. Personal Interview. Washington DC, February 13, 2023.

Helene Cooper (Pentagon correspondent), interview by Hannah Ross. Personal Interview. Washington DC, February 13, 2023.

Nic Robertson (Diplomatic editor of CNN), interview by Hannah Ross. Personal Interview. February 23, 2023,

Malachy Browne (Senior story producer on the Visual Investigation team), interview by Hannah Ross. Personal Interview. February 23, 2023.

Didrik Schanche (NPR's chief international editor), interview by Hannah Ross. Personal Interview. February 14, 2023.

Vita

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