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Mass Media as “Fourth Power” and International Security

Book review: Jarosław Wiśnicki, *Czwarta władza w kontekście konfliktów zbrojnych i ataków terrorystycznych*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2018, pp. 249.

It's no secret that the media often shape public views, opinions, and perceptions. It was in the field of media sciences that the concept of agenda-setting was created, which is defined as a set of issues sorted by importance in a certain period (Dearing, Rogers, 1996, p. 2; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2008, p. XVII). Today, researchers still use this category in political science (Nowak, 2013, p. 16; Rezmer-Płotka, 2019, p. 335). By creating an agenda, the media put themselves in a decisive role as to what will be the topic for discussion for the public or politicians in the days or weeks ahead. In this context, it seems reasonable to undertake media research in the face of such phenomena, as armed conflicts or terrorist attacks, which Jarosław Wiśnicki undertook in the reviewed publication.

The book consists of an introduction, three substantive chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, the author indicates, among others, the actions that state administration should take as part of the information policy (p. 16) or indicates the importance of information for implementing propaganda activities (p. 16). In the further part, he classifies the needs for various social groups in the time following the terrorist attack (p. 17). The author, probably unconsciously, also formulates a very important conclusion from the point of view of research on agenda-setting, i.e. “(...) if the media does not inform about an event – it practically does not exist in the public consciousness” (p. 19). This chapter also includes descriptions of the relationship between the media system and state administration bodies (p. 22), elements that make up “crisis image management” (p. 23), and types of conflict resolution strategies by crisis staffs (p. 23). In the second chapter, the author focuses on the functions of mass media, such as information (p. 26), opinion-forming (p. 41) and the

function of creating reality (p. 69). In the third chapter, the author tries to determine the influence of the media on the reception of a crisis by society, through numerous examples such as events from the theater hall in Dubrovka and the school in Beslan (p. 181) or German propaganda films from World War II (p. 188). The chapter also presents the stages of media evolution towards the “fourth power” (pp. 199–200). The last chapter does not omit the role of public opinion and, according to the author, the increasing media responsibility for social perception of events illustrated by subsequent examples, e.g. a rescue operation taking place in Peru on December 17, 1996 (p. 224).

Despite the very interesting and important subject matter, the publication is not without weaknesses. The author indicates that his aim is to answer the question “about the real impact and strength of mass media on shaping awareness of threats in the context of emergency situations, with particular emphasis on terrorist activities” (p. 13). Unfortunately, in my opinion, the author was unable to answer the question formulated at the beginning of the publication. In general, it is very difficult to study the impact in social sciences, and even more so to determine the strength of impact that is specific to hard science. In the human sciences, it is possible to some extent only after the proper research tool has been constructed. In turn, determining the impact on awareness formation would be appropriate for psychology and related sciences. All this would indicate an interdisciplinary position, which this book isn't it. In the case of media and public and political agenda, it would be justified to use the concept of agenda-setting, which, unfortunately, is missing here. A large number of colloquialisms also appear. In addition to these few weaknesses, the position also has strengths. First of all, the publication recalls many interesting examples of the relationship between the media and the sphere of security. The author's concise and brilliant comments appear many times. In addition, the author acquainted in an accessible way with the subject of broadly understood security and the impact of mass media on the perception of armed conflicts or terrorist attacks.

The publication is recommendable, mainly for all researchers dealing with the subject of agenda-setting, mass media or anyone else interested in security issues. It is also an interesting proposition for students of internal and national security.

References

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