CONFLICT AND PUBLIC OPINION

Abstract:

Media has a key role in Twenty First Century conflicts, they are not public opinion and they must not be confused with it, but there are interconnections. Among the military, political leaders and people (represented by public opinion) should be some kind of synchronization never reached enough that conflicts are always stressing.

Keywords:

Public opinion, media, narrative, conflict.

1. SOCIETY AND PUBLIC OPINION

One of the most important conceptual developments of Clausewitz is the so-called Trinity. For this German thinker, the nature of war, in its whole sense, lies in a trilogy consisting of the people, which is its passional element, the free action of the Armed Forces, which are its volitional element, and the reason, which is reserved to governments.

It is worth highlighting that, if the international community can legalise an armed intervention through the Security Council, a political organism and not judicial, it is the public opinion, in the end, the one who legitimises it, which is precisely the source of legality. The position of many countries of the continent during the Second War of Iraq or the conflict of Vietnam are good examples on a global scale.

War is, after all, a form of communication, a dialogue through violence in which the other party, the recipient of the bloody message is ultimately the common citizen.

There was a time in which the concepts of citizen and soldier where mutually exchangeable, tradition that was re-introduced by the French Revolution assuring the transference of values as well as responsibilities between groups. This model has been in force until recently. Thus Carnot's Law stated:
"Young men shall fight; married men shall forge weapons and transport supplies; women will make tents and serve in hospitals; children will make bandages; old men will have themselves carried into the public square to rouse the courage of the fighting men."[1]

Today, the relationship between the armed forces and society are a source of concern for the first element of the equation, which results in a permanent desire to make themselves known and be valued; whereas the second element, taking into the account the statistics of the public opinion, reveals itself uninterested in matters of defence, despite its substantial character and, although it may seem contradictory, thinking positively of the institution; a thought in arabesque.

Moreover, this concern is foreign to other social groups, which continues to draw attention; it is not a trivial or schizoid matter nonetheless. And it is a common phenomenon in Spain but also in other parts of the world and demonstrates that society and the Armed Forces still do not fit together.

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[1] http://remilitari.com/cronolog/napoleon/toulon.htm. Source in English:
http://www.lookandlearn.com/blog/24738/napoleons-officers-were-drawn-from-the-french-working-class/

This idea of fitting together is extremely sensitive. Society must feel that the armed forces execute their will expressed through their political leaders. There would be a release and weakening of their performance otherwise; the problem is that, in many cases, on the premises to address military issues, conclusions have been already written.

This is not society's fault, but the armed forces' in the sense that they have not managed to acquire a culture that makes them proactive and not merely reactive in this regard, maybe because of its special idiosyncrasy, which causes that positive actions are not fully rewarded, whereas the negative ones are inevitably penalised.

Meanwhile, the simplification and lack of thought on the obvious issue, implicit or explicitly, and even blatant and with lack of interest, that the armed forces do not do what they want but what they are told to, which obviously makes citizens (representative democracy) responsible for their actions.

Some authors, in Fact, suggest that the existence of professional armies diminishes the feeling of responsibility of the people they serve, and who can distance themselves from the actions of the armies and criticise them without feeling concerned or represented. Bada, for instance, argues that:

"It is easier to have the courage of a soldier that is willing to die in defence of a fair cause, although he or she has to kill, than the bravery of a saint willing to die for all without killing anyone… It is easier to have an army of good soldiers than a town with good citizens… Some people are even convinced that, in short term, we will be able to count on an army of robots programmed to defend us without patriotism and to kill without hatred to the enemy". This, by the way, will not make patriots and citizens more peaceful, but it will make them less responsible and far less supportive. In fact, this process of evolution of professional armies has already started, with mercenary soldiers and ranged attacks with increasingly sophisticated weapons. It is a process in which citizens, civil society, are distanced from the wall, removed from defence and take war as entertainment. If it would not have been for terrorism, which appeals to us and brings conflict at a street level, there are people in Western democracies that think that we could live in peace. [2]

People's opinion can be attributed to the public opinion (which is arguable because it is anonymous), if we distinguish public opinion from published opinion.

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[2] Bada Panillo, José. "Más *allá de una cultura del miedo y del odio, de la guerra preventiva y del terrorismo.*" Mira Editores, Zaragoza 2000, p. 361.

"Public opinion played hardly any part in the limited warfare of the eighteenth century; the professional soldiers, recruited from the lower classes of society felt no need to know why they were fighting. In the twentieth century, the soldier and the citizen have become interchangeable, and the public in general feeling peacefully ready, asks for answers to their leader."[3]

However, the relationship between the public opinion, decision-makers and the media is bidirectional, as it is not just about giving the news, but also about selling them; the media can express a different opinion from that of the people (within the full spectrum of the news), but not completely different, as it would not satisfy commercial interests. As General John Galvin states:

"They respond to the pulse of the public, to their orientation, for instance, Vietnam. The media was not mainly the one changing the public opinion, it was the people who changed the media. I think that the media reflects very well the thoughts, the pressure, the changes of the people… I think the message comes from the people". [4]

That is, citizens consume what citizens demand and nothing else, which leads to the polarisations of the topics. The case of corruption scandals can be a good current example. It is not that they didn't exist earlier, it is that the economic situation now makes them bloodier and gory; the situation will continue until it bores the reader.

2. MEDIA AND TRUTH

The media socialises through gestures, affective atmospheres, voice tones, and promotes beliefs, emotions and whole accessions, [5] in a world in which democratic armies cannot win wars without public support, without a real consensus. And it is built –and can only be this way due to the size of societies- through the media.

Therefore, it is called to be one of the most significant aspects of conflicts by influencing the emotional conscience of thousands of people. And, in fact, it can even give victory to one of the parties, because victory is many times –mostly in limited wars that seem to have returned from the 21st century- a matter of perception.

Thus, Laqueur[6] lies the success against terrorism in a matter of image that makes it be ignored, not publicising its actions, and depriving them from the archetype of freedom fighters. And it is that terrorist activity is tailored for the media and it generates paradoxical

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[3] Aron, Raymond. <u>The Century of Total War</u>. Hispano Europea, Paris 1958, p. 7.

[4] Michavila, Narciso. "*Opinión pública y conflictos armados*" en <u>Utopía y Sociedad Magazine núm. 19/2002</u>, p. 163.

[5] Tedesco, Juan Carlos. <u>El nuevo pacto educativo</u>. Anaya, Madrid 1995, p.83.

[6] Laqueur, Walter. <u>Terrorism</u>. Espasa-Calpe, Madrid 1980, p. 305.

situations; in fact, terrorism grows at the same pace as the media; when they became global, terrorism also did.

The portrayal of a conflict, its motifs, management, and development are generated by the media, becoming more important that reality itself. A good example can be the relevant role of Serbian television or Rwandan radio inciting to ethnic cleansing. [7]

In words of Michael Foucault, *"we are subjected to the production of truth from power and we cannot exercise power unless we do it through the production of truth,"* [8] *, or* as Aron highlights:

"*Abstract hatred that isolate our century comes from the urban masses, not from the soldiers at the front. What Ely Havely called "organised enthusiasm" is a chapter in the history of mobilisation".* [9]

Truth and power are closely associated. In fact, it important who says the words, but it is even more important the one who is able to set its meaning (at a national or international level), as it is that one who really holds the power. The famous dialogue of Humpty Dumpty demonstrates this masterfully:

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone. "It means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."
"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."
"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all." [10]

3. TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION

Throughout history, and particularly since printing was invented, the print media for transmitting ideas have influenced nations' elites, but it was not until the 19th century, with the Industrial Revolution and the increase of schooling taxes, when the generalisation of print media (both press and books), as a way of doing business (with specific interests), as well as a mechanism for transmitting the news and ideas. In fact, it has become a subject of interest for entrepreneurs in order to be able to have influence at a political level.

Although the British colonial interventions of the 19th century were supported by the media, it was during the Spanish-American War when it was relevant to mobilise the public opinion,

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[7] Sáez Ortega, Pedro. Guerra y paz en el comienzo del siglo XXI. Fundación del hogar del empleado, Madrid 2002, p. 67.
[8] Foucault, Michael. "*Curso del 14 de enero de 1976*" en VV.AA. Microfísica del poder, La Piqueta, Madrid, 1979 p. 140.
[9] Aron, Raymond. The Century of Total War. Opus citada, p. 23.
[10] Carrol, Lewis. "Through the Looking Glass" Chapter VI.

becoming a significant factor when contributing to the legitimisation of the conflict. Hearst's sentence to his drawer Remigton, "please, stay there. You provide the drawings and I'll provide the war" [11] is a milestone in this regard.

Ángel Ballesteros reminds us that the diplomatic usages evolved from a secret diplomacy, resulting from the "limited understanding of the subjects", whose last great paradigm will be Metternich, to a public opinion which has now been raised to the status of dogma, combined with public policies under which ordinary policies lie, but not always in the same direction[12]; thereby, the *dictum* from the Austrian is further corroborated, "*the only truth is reality, and the only reality is appearances*".

This participation of the public opinion in conflicts has had a significant political and doctrinal influence. And it is that "*the camera (photographic or film camera) has a scope of vision even more limited than the man who uses it, and the camera always uses* that which is individual to express what is general" [13]; the camera becomes a sensor of reality, but also its selector.

With the camera, from a starting point, one can choose the part of reality that he or she wants to transmit and discards the rest, which is artificial because the image is a fragment of the whole, the context, without which it cannot be understood: the camera becomes, due to its capacity for creating reality, a political instrument. Thus the image turns into a speech, and wars, such as the Vietnam War, are transformed into a sequence of images both exuberant and irrefutable, but not quite accurate.

The first war photographs were taken in the 1850s during the Crimean War.[14] The original idea was based on the idea that, if the people held a conflict with human and material resources, it shouldn't maintain an opinion very different from the typical one of the General Staff. The media would be used to precisely support the opinion of one of the parties. The war would be presented as a sequence of victories. Therefore, many Germans on the eve of the end of World War I were convinced of being close to Paris.

In this regard, coinciding with Clausewitz, Lord Palmerston said that "opinions are more powerful than armies". So both Cavour and Bülow were experts in creating incidents in order to achieve "national exaltation"[15], so that public opinion becomes part of the war front.

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[11] Compayns Monclús, Julián. <u>España en 1898: entre la diplomacia y la guerra</u>. Biblioteca Diplomática española, Madrid 1991, p. 188.

[12] Ballesteros, Ángel. <u>Diplomacia y Relaciones Internacionales</u>. Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1995, p. 180.

[13] Nixon, Richard M. <u>The Real War</u>. Planeta Editions, Barcelona 1980, p. 121.

[14] Ramonet, Ignacio en "*Los Conflictos Armados.*" VV.AA. <u>Seminario de Investigación Para la paz.</u> Diputación General De Aragón, 1997., p. 197.

[15] Ibidem, p. 181.

During the First World War, morality was identified as a necessary battlefield considering that the people were included as war targets. It is in open wars that the number the number of citizens equals the number of soldiers.

In fact, President Wilson[16], thanks to propaganda, managed to activate the country in order to participate in the war. Hitler attributed the victory of the allies in that war to his superiority in propaganda terms. The word "propaganda" hadn't a negative meaning in the beginning; one of Hitler's ministries was the Ministry of Propaganda, led by Doctor Joseph Goebbels, who always demonstrated his superiority in this field when he referred to the allies stating that *"they will always have Hollywood"*.

As Clausewitz argued *"the material is the horn, but morality is the carefully sharp blade of the spear"*. And morality lies on trust, legitimacy, and justice of the cause, elements that are indispensable to protect in one's field and reach in the rival's. It is essential to protect one's own society to avoid the collapse of hope.

The first cases are always paradoxical. Thus, Hitler himself[17], in relation to the propaganda during the First World War, tells how the Germans made the mistakes of ridiculing his enemies, Because when facing them, they faced a much stronger enemy and they felt deceived, whereas the allies saw the Germans as savages and didn't let down their soldiers, but they prevented them from the harshness of war. It is the logic of the transformation of the war.

A particular case was the abuse of the propaganda by the Japanese from the battle for the Mariana islands (June 1944); the distortion generated a surreal atmosphere with relevant logistical and strategic consequences, as it affected the evaluation of the situation by the subjected groups which did not know its real situation.[18]

However, the real explosion of the media in war was in Vietnam. From that time on, conflicts openly added media strategy to military strategy[19] that served, firstly, toward building up the story in accordance with each party's perspective: what is said, what is not said, what is done and what is not done, with all its nuances.

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[16] Chomsky, Noam. World Orders Old and New. Grijalbo Mondadori Barcelona 1996, p. 112.
[17] Hitler, Adolf. My Fight., Bausp Editions, Badalona 1974, pp. 106 y ss.
[18] James, D Clayton *"American and Japanese Strategies in the Pacific War."* in Paret, Peter (coord). Creadores de la Estrategia Moderna. Ministry of Defence, Madrid 1992.
[19] Ramonet, Ignacio en *"Los Conflictos Armados."* Opus citada, p. 206.

4. CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES

An offensive perspective was simultaneously developed following the propaganda political dictates by creating formulas both of their own heroes and of evil enemies; this has historically proven to be effective, and it is achieved by concentrating all the arguments on people or recurring the myths of war, which proves the role of leaders in the origin of conflicts can be less than the one that is attributed to them[20].

Narciso Michavila tells, in this regard, how the myth of Hitler served to give Germany a new identity through transferring full responsibility to the leader of the Second World War and his atrocities, which, at the same time, allowed the reconstruction of the past of the German people and served to free him from part of his guilt[21].

The media has a relevant capacity to determine the agenda of political issues, set the way to address them, and establish the evaluation criteria by the ruling class[22]. His trial was the proper of public tribunal in which the defendant has no possible defence. It directly affects the elites when deciding what is important and what it is not, and setting the priority of issues of the agenda.

The gradual decentralisation of communication channels and the mass use caused by its wave transmission, also affected armed conflicts, about which speeches are made, that contribute to the same segment of the local population.

The world has become complicated, the increase of the available information is so big that journalists have to select it and not only transmit it, an organiser not only an interpreter, someone who makes facts accessible[23]. Information is not the main factor, but the criteria for its selection.

The picture given to the viewer is not complete, it is packaged in order to make it intelligible for the general audience. All of this gives a wide game into which combinations of the right and openly wrong are added, and all other approximations that fit reality. Also, as we have seen, along with the informative interests, in a transnational universe exist business and national interests, which makes mixed interests exist that can affect the national and international perspectives.

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[20] Michavila Núñez, Narciso. *"Opinión pública y conflictos armados"* en Opus citada, p. 161.
[21] Ibidem, p. 162.
[22] Ibidem, p. 157.
[23] Quoted by García Ferreras, Antonio en VV.AA. <u>Terrorismo, victimas y medios de comunicación</u>. Fundación Víctimas del Terrorismo, 2003., p. 99.

In addition, let us consider the matter of capacity and quality of the media. With censorship (which is not to reveal or see) and propaganda (which is to make think or feel) there is a spectrum of possibilities[24]. Thus, in the Falkland Islands War, given that censorship was insufficient, the control over information was imposed through a process of selection ("*the pool*"), the control over the access to information (exclusive deal with British officials), and the channels of transmission (British Army)[25].

Example of the influence of the media in conflict is the US military doctrine which, during the 90s and the beginning of the new century, evolved into the establishment of clear and restrictive criteria about the role that its military forces had to play in a conflict (Weinberger criteria) and the way to do it (Powell Doctrine on "*decisive force from the beginning*"), highlighting the media as the guarantee of the "*zero effect*", the war without casualties, at the same time that the number of enemy casualties was being reduced. Since the war in Kosovo, the principle of "*zero casualties*" was incorporated to military conflicts[26].

The proliferation of technology makes that journalists can make real-time broadcasts with their stories from the same place of the facts, something that not so long ago was unthinkable and that has an influence on the results of the operational and strategic actions. The flux of the information is so fast and has such technologies that the military cannot take over it[27]; if, as we have seen, in the Falklands War, the material used was under control, now it is not. [28]

It is the CNN effect, its origin can be found in the transmission of images of events from the Tian An Men square in 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall in that year, the mediator figure vanishes and the information comes raw and in real time; from a technical point of view, it is the consequence of the portability of the systems and the development of satellite technology, which makes television autonomous to work in real time and from any place in the world[29], becoming a "*factory of history*". And not only that, but it even allows to check in real time the result of the actions enabling even the targeting.

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[24] Sáez Ortega, Pedro. Guerra y paz en el comienzo del siglo XXI. Fundación del hogar del empleado, Madrid 2002, p. 123.
[25] Ramonet, Ignacio. "*Los Conflictos Armados.*" Opus citada.
[26] Ramonet, Ignacio. Guerras del siglo XXI. Opus citada, pp. 132-133.
[27] Internet is the development of a military concept precisely designed not to be completely controlled.
[28] Wood, Paul "*The Wars of the Twenty-first Century*" en VV.AA. Overview of the World of the Twenty-first Century. Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 64.
[29] Ramonet, Ignacio. "*Los Conflictos Armados*" en VV.AA. Seminario de Investigación para la Paz. Opus citada, p. 203.

News distort war by highlighting objectives beyond the conventional military logic, and obey press strategies, at the same time that limit and condition they that operations are carried out, this causes the establishment of safety margins and the protection of information.[30]

As examples of these incidences, there are images of the hanging of two British sergeants in Palestine by Jewish terrorists, or the death of American prisoners in Somalia, whose impact on public opinion lies behind of the withdrawal of troops from those countries.[31]

It is worth pointing out the total number of casualties in Vietnam, which didn't reach the level of previous wars when the media was not that developed. The media act as multipliers of information, especially the more gruesome.

In addition, they have a direct effect at a political level, influencing decision-making. Thus, according to Paul Wood, the media set the time and fix the political calendar. Today, the information cycle is 24h, 48h maximum, so that the news can be transferred from the very first line of broadcast and be available on the day, forcing a political response that can only be postponed to the next day as much. [32]

Therefore, a communication mismanagement can provoke the prolongation of a crisis, as crisis imply an additional crisis of information; if there is a fail to control this crisis, the control over it in general would also fail. The first thing is to deny that there is a crisis or discover what it is.

The information services involves, are firstly exposed, with no solution of continuity, national news, then the international, sports, and the weather. This way, information is trivialised when equating the war news (foreign) to sports, to a football match[33], and it is so transformed into entertainment[34]; for instance, a type of realist manipulation that plays with the tempo can be added to this (for example, creating the news as the alleged killings in Romania at Christmas 1989, or the use of news and debated in order to counter others) so as to create statements of opinion. [35]

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[30] Jordán, Javier y Calvo, José Luís. El nuevo rostro de la guerra. Universidad de Navarra Editions, Barañaín 2005, p 210
[31] Hoffman, Bruce. Terrorism in History. Espasa Calpe 1999.
[32] Wood, Paul "*The Wars of the Twenty-first Century*" Opus citada, p.64.
[33] Verdú, Vicente. El planeta americano. Anagrama, Barcelona 2006, p. 80.
[34] Postman, Neil. Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business. Tempestad Editions, Barcelona 1991, p. 112.
[35] Ramonet, Ignacio. "*Los Conflictos Armados*" Opus citada, p. 205.

The banality of evil (which is how it is usually presented) acts as a cushion in our consciences by making decrease our capacity for astonishment when normalising the exceptional.

The news make the viewer move directly to the conflict in a safe way, and he or she takes part temporarily of hard times, of a more complex reality that does not get to him or her psychologically.

Furthermore, seeing is not understanding. That is a rational and dangerous equation in the thin red line that separates the truth from what it is false. The observer is on the other side and, without moving he or she tries to understand what is going on by simply watching it (only sense involved) in a short period of time from a selected angle and piece of information.

In these circumstances, and without further preparation, he or she makes a judgement influenced only by the image that has been presented to him or her. The implications for the evolution of the war are evident. How much time has the viewer devoted to the war in Kosovo? It might not even get, on average, to a minute, which can only be done through images; the image is decisive for him or her because it represents the question and the answer, constituting a bidirectional discourse. Paraphrasing Glucksmann, the man of the 21st century, he or she does not think, but get informed; although sometimes not even that.

As a result, it can be concluded that decisions are made from emotional elements generated from rational criteria, conditioned by the information received (sometimes only presented through images), that is to sat, chosen in the end by decision-makers and presented as an irrefutable truth, as images always represent the truth. And what happens, according to Ignatieff, is that many times "television images are more effective expressing consequences than analysing intentions, more appropriate to indicate casualties than to explain".[36]

5. CONCLUSION

The media have a key role in the conflicts of the 21st century, they are not either public opinion or can be confused with it, but they are clearly linked. The people is one of the pillars on which the international reality of a country must be built. Between the armed forces, political leaders, and the people (represented by public opinion) should be a synchrony, which is never enough and that conflicts never stop pressuring.

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[36] Ignatieff, Michael. Warrior's Honour. Taurus, Madrid 1999, p. 29.

What is more, processes like the professionalisation of the military have permitted that a part of society gives up the responsibility of defending its social core and that was inseparable from the concept of citizenship until now.

In this atmosphere, the relationship between the media, presented as legitimate representatives of the people, and the armed forces does not stop being in conflict, due to the specific interests of each party.

The media are builders of truth, an irrefutable truth based on images and that is accepted by public opinion, provided that between them exists a bidirectional relationship.

However, the truth offered to the people is not as pure as it may seem at first glance; it is presented in trivialised formats and it is built from power: the media pretend to be the conscience of the people, whereas, at the same time, they are an essential element in all conflicts. The media are factories of morality of societies. The only way of assuring a real neutrality is by promoting its plurality.

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