

MEDIA DIMENSIONS OF POLITICAL AND LAW DISCOURSE

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THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN CONFLICTS OF INFORMATION ERA

The article is about the role of media in the conflicts of information era. The problem here to be studied is how media makes an influence on modern conflicts. To bring further light on various aspects of this problem it is necessary to touch upon an issue of information warfare. As we know, with development of information society the world faced the fourth generation of military conflicts. The idea of kinetic weapon was replaced by the idea of information war, where media is a powerful agent. The main components of this conflict are the global information and psychological war. Media component in nowadays conflicts is in focus of attention of many scientists because it creates new reality and makes a huge influence during the active development of a conflict and after its completion. Also, in the article are given examples of the activity of Russia's media in information warfare.

Key words: media, information, information society, conflict, information warfare, propaganda.

*The media's the most powerful entity on earth.
They have the power to make the innocent guilty
and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power.
Because they control the minds of the masses.*

Malcolm X

The process of settlement of information society brings a dramatic change in social, political, cultural, research areas etc. The development of mass communication and media bring civilization to the new level of life. But, with all advantages of information society new challenges in global political meaning appeared. Conflict is one of the defining features of the today's world and mass media have very important influence on modern conflicts. The role of media is very different and often in opposed forms. The media have ability to increased violence in the conflicts. Also media can stay independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing into resolution of conflict and reduce of violence.

J. Nye mentioned, that the problem for all states in today's global information age is that more things are happening outside the control of even the most powerful states. In the words of Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations "the proliferation of information is as much a cause of nonpolarity as if the proliferation of weaponry." Governments have always worried about the flow and control of information, and the current period is not the first to be strongly affected by dramatic changes in information technology¹.

The mass media is so much a part of our lives, that it is easy to forget it forms a fundamental part of the Information Society. Mass media creates an environment in which use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) can flourish.

The media still provide the most effective – and often the only way – that people can access information on such issues, and are likely to remain the principal source of outside information for a majority of humanity for decades to come. Media are also a critical way through which people can, in turn, express their views and concerns in national discussion and debate. In an ideal world, the media have a role and potential to provide a channel and space for the voices and perspectives of all sections of society.

¹ Nye, Joseph S. Power and Policy in An Information Age. *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs Power and Policy powerandpolicy.com*. <http://powerandpolicy.com/power-and-policy-in-an-information-age-power-policy/#.V-_DioiLTIX> (2016, October, 01).

During the 1990s, access to information was transformed by proliferation of information and communication technologies, or ICTs, and liberalization of media and telecommunications markets around the world. These two closely-linked processes vastly increased the flow and amount of information while reducing the cost of access, storage and retrieval. The global economy was transformed and information itself became a core economic activity, as well as enriching cultural, social and political lives in the developed world¹.

“Every age, every generation has a right to have its own utopia,” wrote Nobel-prize winner Joseph Brodsky in his essay entitled *Collector’s Item* right after the fall of the Soviet Union. The newly emerging generation in the Cold War era, whose members attended secondary schools and left them after 1990, can unquestionably claim a utopia of a different nature. Apparently this utopia, or dystopia as some view it, is information society. Everyone has his or her more or less well formed opinion about the information society, the Internet and its influence on our everyday lives even if they have never used a computer or surfed the Internet. Most of these opinions are fed by the discourses on information society and the Internet presented in the media. The introductory discourses concerning these themes – which could lead to a profound understanding of inherent relations – show us actual origins of the popular concepts and related attitudes, and the way they distort interpretation of the concept which is the focus of our inquiry.

Primarily, there are three discourses guiding us into the depths of information society. To know and understand these could help to dismantle the onion layered structure of the beliefs and values wrapped around the information society².

Nowadays we faced with some of new challenges and threats which appear in information society and media activity and many scientists try to find solutions to solve them.

It is logical that the phenomena of Information war and media terrorism distribution can be possible only in information age. The development of information and telecommunication processes has led to the fact, that politics has gained a virtual character. Nowadays the power of information warfare tools is the main instrument for achieving geopolitical dominance on international arena.

The media as powerful agent of information warfare, have its stable interests in information space and involved in global information space formation. Besides, they have partial control over the formation and functioning of national information space segments.

Very often they belong to the large financial-industrial structures which closely connected with the political elite. Quite true is the quotation that the media is the fourth power. Because media can lead its own policy in political and economic interests of their owners and make influence on individual and mass consciousness of society³. Therefore, the media in today’s information society conditions have significant possibility of mass manipulation.

According to the classification of today’s scientists, nowadays the world is experiencing the fourth generation of military conflicts. The main component of this conflict is a global information and psychological war. Information becomes a huge power in modern world and the media allows for the States to play its role in the world. UK, USA, China and Russia are world leaders in the field of media strategies. They use information flows to the further strengthen its influence in the international arena.

Therefore, information warfare achieves political objectives through conducting global (strategic) psychological operations to form the positive attitude of the international community to such actions through implementation of psychological processing in the region of conflict.

Modern information warfare has tendentious coverage of certain events, the extensive use of disinformation, blackmail information using all the power of modern media to obtain unilateral advantages. One of the tools of information warfare is impact on the psyche (conscious and subconscious) human verbal signals (semantic) information. The instruments of this impact are print media, radio, telecommunication systems and individuals⁴.

In wartime, the media serve a variety of roles. With information, media are able to convey a sense of

¹ The Media & Information Society. *Global Knowledge Partnership Secretariat*. <<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/APCITY/UNPAN020000.pdf>> (2016, December, 14).

² *Information Society. From Theory to Political Practice* (2008). Coursebook Gondolat. Új Mandátum, Budapest.

³ Абакумов, В.А. Суб’єкти інформаційних війн: поняття та види. *Національна бібліотека ім. В. Вернадського*. <http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/old_jrn/e-journals/FP/2009-2/09avmptv.pdf> (2016, September, 18).

⁴ Гурковський, В.І. Особливості застосування інформаційної зброї в умовах глобального інформаційного суспільства. *Журнал «Державне управління: удосконалення та розвиток»*. <<http://www.dy.nayka.com.ua/?op=1&z=123>> (2016, September, 18).

the fighting to a public divorced from its actual horrors or, with entertainment, they can provide a sense of relief or escape to a public more directly involved such as in a blockade or bombing campaign¹.

Despite the amount of violent conflict in the world there is still little common understanding of how modern internal conflicts are triggered. Although there is growing concern among the developed democracies about the problem of failed or fragile states, and the way that conflict areas nurture crime, terrorism, disease and other threats to human security, no one has mapped the key indicators that signal the onset of violence. Wars between states can be explained in geo-political terms – as a contest for natural resources, a means of resolving disputes over territorial boundaries and so on. However, internal conflicts are little understood. We still do not know how the instability or ethnic tension that marks many societies can suddenly escalate into organized violence.

Perhaps one explanation for this lack of understanding is relatively inconsistent approach to media coverage of conflicts around the world. It is obvious that political significance of some conflicts affects the response of the most powerful governments and this in turn affects the media's coverage of conflict. However, it is also the case that the extent to which the media assigns priority to covering one conflict rather than another in turn shapes the response of the international community².

Just because the media mediates information about the progress of a war to the public, it can serve not just as providers of “straight” news and information but also as agents of propaganda and disinformation. This is because the very processes by which war reports are gathered at source, packaged by journalists and disseminated to a wider audience are subject to a wide spectrum of influences ranging from battlefield censorship to broadcasting standards, deception and disinformation campaigns, official information policy and propaganda. These are indeed the pollutants which constitute that overworked idiom: “The Fog of War”.

Journalists have a front seat at the making of history and it is tragic that by the time the historians become involved “that first rough draft of history” provided by the journalists has been so widely disseminated by the mass media that it becomes extremely difficult to dislodge the pollutants that caused the fog of war³.

As we see, media plays an important role during the active development of the conflict and after its completion. Media shapes the opinion of audience about a phenomenon and its consequences. The development of a conflict in many ways is promoted by media by manipulating of thoughts, promoting certain ideals which lead to emergence of the reaction of audience and affect the course of conflict. One of the important tools of mass manipulation is propaganda.

The list of tactics used in propaganda listed further above is also expressed in a similar way by Johann Galtung, a professor of Peace Studies and summarized here by Danny Schechter:

1. Decontextualizing violence: focusing on irrational without looking at the reasons for unresolved conflicts and polarization.
2. Dualism: reducing the number of parties in a conflict to two, when often more are involved. Stories that just focus on internal developments often ignore such outside or “external” forces as foreign governments and transnational companies.
3. Manicheism: portraying one side as good and demonizing the other as “evil.”
4. Armageddon: presenting violence as inevitable, omitting alternatives.
5. Focusing on individual acts of violence while avoiding structural causes, like poverty, government neglect and military or police repression.
6. Confusion: focusing only on the conflict arena (i.e., the battlefield or location of violent incidents) but not on the forces and factors that influence the violence.
7. Excluding and omitting the bereaved, thus never explaining why there are acts of revenge and spirals of violence.
8. Failure to explore the causes of escalation and the impact of media coverage itself.
9. Failure to explore the goals of outside interventionists, especially big powers.
10. Failure to explore peace proposals and offer images of peaceful outcomes.

¹ Taylor, Phillip M. (1997). *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media Since 1945*. London, New York, 119.

² Puddephatt, A. (2012). Voices of war: Conflict and the role of the media. *International Media Support*. <<https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ims-voices-of-war-2006.pdf>> (2016, December, 15).

³ Hali, Sultan M. (2000). The role of media in war. *Defence Journal*. <<http://www.defencejournal.com/2000/aug/role-media-war.htm>> (2016, September, 18).

11. Confusing cease-fires and negotiations with actual peace.

12. Omitting reconciliation: conflicts tend to reemerge if attention is not paid to efforts to heal fractured societies. When news about attempts to resolve conflicts is absent, fatalism is reinforced. That can help engender even more violence, when people have no images or information about possible peaceful outcomes and the promise of healing.

Many say that it is inevitable in war that people will die. Yet, in many cases, war itself is not inevitable, and propaganda is often employed to go closer to war, if that is preferred foreign policy option. Indeed, once war starts, civilian casualties are unfortunately almost a guaranteed certainty¹.

The global context of information warfare was discovered by American futurist Alvin Toffler in his “Metamorphosis of power”. “Information war – emphasized Toffler – raging in our souls, the question is how people think and make decisions and what the system of knowledge and understanding they use. Imagination has the same importance as information in general”. When someone else is leading our imagination we can fall prey to their vision rather than creating our own. Our brain doesn’t always clearly differentiate between something real and something imagined².

Under the influence of the media visible world now is not a reality; created by professional engineer it become virtual. In the era of information warfare the circle closes and those who are engaged in the manipulation of information, are the first victims of bloodless operations and no longer able to distinguish fiction from reality, as the liar must believe in his fiction³.

The German philosopher Oswald Spengler in the early XX century, provided an unprecedented increase in the role of information in society. In “The Decline of the West”, he wrote: “In the nearest future, three or four of the newspaper world will direct the thoughts of provincial newspapers and through them – the will of the people”⁴.

The media as one of the most important tool of information war can be viewed as a weapon nowadays. It can turn humanity into a total disaster. It is all very easy once you are in control of the news. Goebbels knew that if you could control the information that’s available to a population, you could control the mind of a nation. For example, the concept of information warfare which leads Russia against Ukraine. Russian’s media forming the opinion inside and outside of state that sovereign Ukrainian state does not exist. According to the Russian geopolitical ideologists, Ukraine is amorphous territory where can be fruitful only so-called “people’s republic”. Besides, as a former KGB officer and head of the KGB’s successor agency, the FSB, Putin knows the value of information. From his first days as president, Vladimir Putin moved quickly to dominate the media landscape in Russia, putting not only state media but privately owned broadcast media under the Kremlin’s influence⁵.

Russian international broadcaster Russia Today (RT) is not afraid to give to the audience a very controversial content that contains counterculture rhetoric. The stories, often based on anti-Western point of view, attract extremely left and right young audience⁶.

Moscow adamantly denies using disinformation to influence Western public opinion and tends to label accusations of either overt or covert threats as “Russophobia”.

The planting of false stories is nothing new; the Soviet Union devoted considerable resources to that during the ideological battles of the Cold War. Now, though, disinformation is regarded as an important aspect of Russian military doctrine, and it is being directed at political debates in target countries with far greater sophistication and volume than in the past.

The flow of misleading and inaccurate stories is so strong that both NATO and the European Union have established special offices to identify and refute disinformation, particularly claims emanating from

¹ Shah, A. War, Propaganda and Media. *Global Issues*. <<http://www.globalissues.org/article/157/war-propaganda-and-the-media>> (2016, September, 18).

² Тоффлер, Э. (2003). *Метаморфозы власти*. Москва: ООО «Издательство АСТ».

³ Кухаренко, Р. Інформаційні війни в українському контексті. *Глобал аналітик*. <<http://www.global-analytik.com/аналітика/інформаційні-війни-в-українському-ко/>> (2016, September, 18).

⁴ Шпенглер, О. (1998). *Закат Европы. Очерки морфологической истории. Т. 1. Образ и действительность*. Минск.

⁵ Dougherty, J. How the Media Become One of Putin’s Most Powerful Weapons. *The Atlantic*. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/how-the-media-became-putins-most-powerful-weapon/391062/>> (2016, September, 18).

⁶ Кухаренко, Р. Інформаційні війни в українському контексті. *Глобал аналітик*. <<http://www.global-analytik.com/аналітика/інформаційні-війни-в-українському-ко/>> (2016, September, 18).

Russia.

Russia exploits both approaches in a comprehensive assault, Wilhelm Unge, a spokesman for the Swedish Security Service, said this year when presenting the agency's annual report. "We mean everything from internet trolls to propaganda and misinformation spread by media companies like RT and Sputnik," he said¹.

What few would deny is that in any conflict there are certain parameters on which all can agree. In conflict the provision of reliable information is crucial and is often difficult to provide. Even the international media can find themselves at the mercy of rumor and propaganda and the situation can be even worse for local media. In the corresponding information vacuum, combatants will use information to cause the maximum confusion and to dehumanize their opponents².

While information has always been used as a tool to acquire the upper hand in war, we do not generally think of it as a weapon itself. It seems however, that modern communications technology, and our reliance upon technological systems in every aspect of our daily lives could radically alter this paradigm³.

Words, images, videos, and sounds: everything you need to trigger fear becomes means to "manipulate" human mind, transforming psychological terrorism into the most powerful weapon of the third millennium⁴.

Those who control the information flow now, govern the world. Information Revolution has led to the defence transformation. Nowadays, the concept of defence have changed. As Ukrainian scientist Dr. Pocheptsov has said, there is a change of ideology of warfare which carried out through transition to the nonkinetic methods⁵.

On the other side media can be used for good changes and make the world a better place. Nowadays a smartphone can be as good as a book and it can be as dangerous as a weapon or a gun. It depends on how to use it. We all are aware of the power of social media and how we can raise awareness for use or how we can use it to relay information.

The best use of social media is to communicate, relay information but only good and verified information. Like Ghandi once said, "*Be the change you want to see in the world*". Use media as a powerful weapon to make positive changes⁶.

Policy makers therefore need to focus on the media's role in constituting the public sphere of society – how that can be fostered and nurtured in such a way as to allow non-violent resolution of conflict. By public sphere it is meant that range of communication outlets and media which enable a society to view the representations of itself. To function properly a public sphere must have free flowing access to information and enable the views of ordinary citizens to be heard. In the words of Jurgen Habermas it is "a discursive arena that is home to citizen debate, deliberation, agreement and action"⁷.

To conclude, there is no doubt that the media play a key role in today's conflicts and have great influence on the balance of power in the world. The facts that highlight the media focused on political, social or other aspects or phenomenon forming the audience opinion and stimulating the desired reaction. The victory in modern wars much depends on forming domestic and international public opinion and not only defeating the enemy on the battlefield. The media is able to turn a small conflict into the great confrontation or vice versa. But also, media has a great potential to play a constructive role in resolving conflict. A lot of organizations and scientists increased number of attempts to produce a more comprehensive and coherent approach to this problem.

¹ MacFarquhar, N. (2016). A Powerful Russian Weapon: The Spread of False Stories. *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/29/world/europe/russia-sweden-disinformation.html?_r=3> (2016, September, 18).

² Puddephatt, A. (2012). Voices of war: Conflict and the role of the media. *International Media Support*. <<https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ims-voices-of-war-2006.pdf>> (2016, December, 15).

³ Staton, W. Information as a Weapon The Real Threat of Privacy and Data in 2015. *A Medium Corporation*. <<https://medium.com/the-bridge/information-as-a-weapon-63ef60b8ee96#uikjxfkm>> (2016, September, 18).

⁴ Honorati, H. Information is a Weapon. *In Terris interris.it*. <<http://www.interris.it/en/2015/08/18/69735/headlines/information-is-a-weapon.html>> (2016, September, 18).

⁵ Почепцов, Г. От информационных войн к операциям влияния и бихейвиористским войнам: новые тренды войны. *Media Sapiens*. <http://osvita.mediasapiens.ua/ethics/manipulation/ot_informatsionnykh_voyn_k_operatsiyam_vliyaniya_i_bikheyvioristskim_voynam_novye_trendy_voyny/> (2016, October, 01).

⁶ Bahia, Nar. Use social media as a powerful weapon to make change. *Linkedin.com*. <<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/use-social-media-powerful-weapon-make-change-bahia-nar>> (2016, December, 16).

⁷ Villa, Dana R. (1992). Postmodernism and the Public Sphere. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 86, no. 3.

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