

University for Business and Technology in Kosovo

UBT Knowledge Center

UBT International Conference

2021 UBT International Conference

Oct 30th, 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM

Media and war: Vietnam and Afghanistan

Safet Zejnullahu

University for Business and Technology, safet.zjnullahu@ubt-uni.net

Follow this and additional works at: <https://knowledgecenter.ubt-uni.net/conference>

Recommended Citation

Zejnullahu, Safet, "Media and war: Vietnam and Afghanistan" (2021). *UBT International Conference*. 236.
<https://knowledgecenter.ubt-uni.net/conference/2021UBTIC/all-events/236>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Publication and Journals at UBT Knowledge Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in UBT International Conference by an authorized administrator of UBT Knowledge Center. For more information, please contact knowledge.center@ubt-uni.net.

Media and war: Vietnam and Afghanistan

UBT - Institution of Higher Education, Lagjja Kalabria, 10000, Pristina, Kosovo

safet.zejnnullahu@ubt-uni.net

Abstract. Robert McNamara, the U.S. Secretary of Defense at the height of the Vietnam War, after a visit to the war fronts, held two press conferences, one under Tan Son Nhut Airport and the other after arriving in the country, at Andrews Air Force Base. In both he expressed optimism for victory. He told the president the truth. But it took eight years for the New York Times and the Washington Post to publish secret documents known as the Pentagon Papers, which presented the truth that the American leadership knew about the Vietnam War. This was the report of the American and world media with a war in a distant country. In August 2021, the Americans are retreating from the same distant land, Afghanistan and the media are conveying all the crap at Kabul airport, the lifeline for all who are trying to flee the country. Even the death of hopeless people, who seek salvation by being caught in the wheels of overcrowded planes. Everything, in real time!

Keywords: Media, War, Vietnam, Afghanistan

Introduction

Neither war can be imagined without media, nor media (in time of war) without news from the war. Wars have been and continue to be fought since the history of mankind was documented. States, armies, soldiers are involved in war. So wars are one of the events that attract the most interest of the public. Simply: the public will know about an event in which the state and its army are involved, the family even more - they will know about the fate of the family member who is a soldier of his state army.

Who will do the job of reporting what is going on in a war? Soldiers' letters, which take months to reach their destination? No! This has been, is and will be a media job.

But just as wars have changed, so have the media. The more technology on the battlefield, the more technology to report on what is happening there.

In the meantime, the media interest in reporting correctly always meets the usual - military and state leadership wants the public to know only about victories and successes and not about losses and failures.

Here everything takes place between the intention of the media to find out the hidden news and the war leadership trying to hide that news as much as possible. Between the leadership's attempt to cover the truth on the ground with propaganda and the difficulty of the media to bypass the propaganda, but on condition that it is able to penetrate as deeply as possible on the battlefield and secure and prove the facts itself!

The Vietnam War and the war in Afghanistan are two points that reflect a battlefield reporting in completely different terms and circumstances.

The wars that took place in the time frame between them also have their own characteristics for the relationship between the media and the war.

Profession: War Reporter

The media can not function and have in its content battlefield stories without war reporters. Brave journalists and cameramen, risking their lives. Even those who die doing their job.

But who were the first war reporters? The Times's William Russell and the Morning Post's Charles Lewis Guneson are known for their primates, chronicles from the battlefield of the 1854 Crimean War.

Circulations of their newspapers increased and other newspapers rushed to send journalists to the war fronts, although initially the approach to them was not so friendly.

"... these recently invented young men, who cling to the tails of armies and who have no idea what work is," Sir Garner Wolseley said of them in 1869 in *The Soldiers. Pocketbook* ”.

(Wolseley, 1869)

Since then, the war reporter has uncovered horrors, deaths and tragedies, using "the skills to investigate in an often extremely difficult environment", as well as staying true to the commitment to avoid the conditions that come from the source of information ”. (Condito, 2000, 9).

In all the great wars, war reporters were where the wars were taking place. Always among the bullets, the permanent danger to their lives, in the attempt to reflect reality and in the constant war with official communiqués, rumors and propaganda, the inevitable element of any war. To this day!

But wars have also changed a lot. NATO attacks on Serbia, to stop the genocide of Albanians, had many things different from other wars.

Spanish journalist Luis Cebrian of "El Pais" notes here the new type of fighter.

"They work as if they were employees of a company: they get up slowly in the morning, accompany the children to school and then go to the base, board a plane, take a walk over Serbia, launch a rocket, destroy a couple of bridges or a building friendly country embassies and then return home for lunch. "Well, the war is not like it used to be." ("El Pais", 1999)

But, in the meantime, another war was taking place on the ground in Kosovo, which very few journalists managed to see.

And the journalist Ettore Mo, who had been in many wars as a journalist of "Corriere della Sera" draws attention that "the war or go and see with your own eyes or better stay at home" (Condito, 2000, 22), the Milosevic regime's strict ban on foreign journalists from entering Kosovo made them mere spectators and collectors of refugee stories.

Radio Rai's Ferdinando Pellegrini explains the situation of journalists in the borders around Kosovo. "I saw people coming who did not know where Macedonia was falling, or what an AK-47 is. "In order not to embarrass those who came to show off with ray-ban glasses or the vest of the special messenger." (Condito, 2000, 23)

All foreign journalists were treated as secret service agents of the countries they came from and had to leave Kosovo.

"With the forced departure of (almost) all reporters, Kosovo has already turned into a giant black hole, a blind world about which nothing is known, until the first lines of Albania began to appear on the border with Albania and Macedonia. Kosovar refugees", states Mimmo Candito.

(Condito, 2000, 29)

And while the wars were modernized, the media followed suit. If the print newspaper dominated during the war reporting, with the advent of new forms of broadcasting the power of the pre-form also declined.

Consequently, the role of the newspaper went down, due to the fact that radio and later television and the Internet provided the opportunity for the news to be broadcast in real time and without the need to wait for the evening or the next day's newspaper.

"Speed already conditions every form of journalistic communication, privileges the immediate, ignores the reasons for verifying the" fact ", before the latter becomes news", states Condito, adding that speed kills the truth, because it "Truth is not simply found in the appearance of things, but requires work, research, time." (Condito, 2000, 16)

And while true journalism relies on facts and their research and verification in the field, "fast news" journalism behaves differently.

"Guardian" John Hooper, who has covered many fights during his career as a reporter, says: "Once upon a time they said that opinions are free, while the facts are sacred. "Today, we say that opinions continue to be free, while the facts, heck, are terribly expensive." (Conditto, 2000, 16).

Another element that risks becoming a true journalist, at any time, but with a special emphasis on times of crisis and war, is false information and propaganda.

All warlords, as well as their direct spokesmen or their governments, want to convey to the public their truth, no matter what the real situation on the ground. They simply offer "the truth according to them" and do not allow you to go to the field to verify the facts. According to the commercial model "take it or leave it"!

The risk of infection between information and propaganda is a trap where the war correspondent is likely to fall and lose his professional identity, who is under the direct and constant pressure of "messages" aimed at influencing the independence of the judiciary and the impartiality of his analyzes ", emphasizes Conditto (Item, 37).

Even trying to make official statements or get the "other side of the coin" is often impossible. Conditto raises the dilemma of whether to believe the statement of an Iraqi who, "during the statement, in the fury of the bombs, sees next to the journalist and his notebook or his camera an official of Saddam's intelligence ministry?"

Or, to what extent do you have to believe the word of a Serbian villager when he says that he saw with his own eyes how an "F-117-A" was shot or shot down in his field? of those "ruins of the American fascists." (Item, 38)

Therefore, the difficulty of believing a war story is obvious. Even for the fact that, in a war, people are more inclined to believe the bad news.

Von Clausewitz, based on this, states that, "when it comes to the events of a war, in general, people are more inclined to believe more in evil than in good, and therefore intends to exaggerate at all costs and means. evil ". (Clausewitz, 1982)

The Kosovo war again reveals the role of propaganda that Serbia knew how to do best. But experts and journalists note that Milosevic left nothing to be desired for Goebbels, who is considered an "unsurpassed master in the use of propaganda."

Milosevic did not target either the American or European public, from countries that opposed his attack on Albanians, for which then Serbia was bombed by NATO.

"His propaganda machine had as its primary objective the internal front and did not aim at all that of the European-American enemies. Packed with patriotic programs, war songs, lines and parades, as well as ceremonies with a strong nationalist content, RTS, which was also the main gear of the propaganda machine, more closely resembled a tellall, whose rudeness could only be swallowed up by the public within the country". (Conditto, 2000, 40).

The local media in Serbia was brought under control, with censorship imposed by the law of war, while the public, perhaps "because of hurt pride and nationalism", continued to believe in the content offered to them.

And in this content the most derogatory terms were used for the western states, but also for the western media, as well.

"Fascists of the so-called Atlantic Alliance," "violators of international law serving the interests of the Yankees," "fraudsters who lie and cowardly kill our defenseless fellow citizens," are some of the terms used for NATO.

While the media are labeled as: "those pigs of CNN", or "scribblers of American imperialism", or "miserable and crumbling servants of Adolf Clinton's propaganda".

And what could Serbs see on public broadcaster channels?

"They could see on their television screens houses destroyed by NATO bombs, bridges torn in two, factories being demolished, but they could not see the strings of misery of the refugees fleeing the flames that had set them on fire. Kosovo; citizens of NATO member states saw the disfigured faces and tears of despair of Kosovars who managed to cross the border, but could not see the bodies of soldiers being killed by bombs on the other side of the border (only the corpses of "side damage "They found space in the Belgrade advertising campaign)". (Conditto, 2000, 41). Even the few international journalists who remained in Serbia and tried to work from there faced fierce censorship. Russians and Greeks were valued more than the British and French, while Americans were treated with contempt.

Italian journalist Toni Capuozo, who worked for TG5, stated: "Even for a film that did not last more than a minute, you were forced to fill out a form and then wait for the permission of the Army (Serbian army). "Every film, no matter how short, had to pass through the eye of censorship." (Capuozo, 1999)

So what did they manage to send to their audience?

"Everything we managed to do did not go beyond what was required of us: to testify about NATO's mistakes," Capuozo said.

Almost 170 years have passed since the Crimean War (1854) and two world wars have taken place in the meantime, the October Revolution, the Spanish War, the Vietnam War, and the brutal ethnic cleansing that led to the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. From 1945 to the first decade of the new century, 165 wars were registered in the world ...

The media was there to document what was happening: the horrors, the misery of every war, big or small.

Once on newspaper pages, on the radio, on television screens and - now - through the computer key, where the world sees in real time what is happening in a war.

Amid the danger to the lives of journalists and cameramen, amid the whirlwind of propaganda, fake news and hardly verifiable, the media tried to do its job. In some cases, even to increase or maintain newspaper circulation, television viewing.

Touching even the emotions of the public, no matter how close or far from a war it is, regardless of the interests of the state, the involvement of the army of the great powers or the sympathy or compassion for the "weak" side in the war.

"Let them shed tears and you will see how not a single copy will be left unsold," said director John Thadues Delane, addressing a Times reporter who was sent to cover it a war. (Conditto, 2000, 70).

From hiding information to truth that cannot be hidden

If Crimea marks the first war in which the profession of war reporter is documented, the Vietnam War is one of the most specific cases that reveals all the difficulties faced by the media and their envoys on a war front. Add to this the "ordinary" attempts to conceal the truth. And here, one of the most popular cases is the news leaked to the public during the Vietnam War.

Lindon Johnson succeeded the assassinated President John F. Kennedy. As soon as he came to power, he wanted to substantiate his suspicions about what was going on in the Vietnam War, where the U.S. military was involved. Sent there Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara. At a news conference at Tan Son Nhut Airport, he was "extremely optimistic" (Kovach, Rosenstiel, 2009, 46) and recounted the successes of the U.S. military and their South Vietnam allies.

"When he landed at Andrews's air base the next day, he held another conference, where he repeated the same things. "Then he flew by helicopter to the White House ... and the world did not hear anything about the report he made to the President." (Item)

The New York Times and the Washington Post, eight years later, published secret documents known as the Pentagon Papers, which presented the truth that the American leadership knew about the Vietnam War. It was the opposite of what McNamara had said at press conferences.

"What would have happened if the truth had come to light in 1963 and not in 1971," asked Benjamin Bradle, executive director of the Washington Post, twenty years later. (Item)

With the course of the long war in Vietnam, the media also changed their approach.

Initially, they took for granted the official announcements of the government and the army and in the frequent press conferences. More and more media decided to send their journalists to the war fronts, to bring from there to the other side, to research real stories from the war and also to verify official communiqués and statements.

Media reports, with elements from the field and not only official content, greatly influenced the course of the war. Respectively influenced the public pressure on the government to end the war.

Thus, in early February 1968, according to a Gallup poll, only 32 percent of former pro-war Americans in Vietnam, compared to 57 who no longer approved of the move. (hr2.wiki)

But all wars have their secrets. The more they are, the weaker the media. The less secrecy the war means, the more developed the media has been, the more it has penetrated the war fronts and left nothing to chance or interpretations of a battlefield in official communications and press conferences.

The notes published by Wikileaks touch on this area, among others. The case we are taking for illustration is relatively recent, port when an event takes place in the remote villages of Afghanistan, well can be believed.

On Friday, June 23, 2010, a village in Afghanistan was hit by a rocket fired by Allied forces. At least 52 civilians died Fighting broke out in that region between NATO and radical Islamic forces.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai said the missile was fired by a NATO unit and called for an immediate investigation. NATO spokesman Wayne Shanks, on the other hand, said he could not confirm the incident and that there was no indication that there were civilian casualties due to an indiscriminate missile.

This event was found attested in the Wikileaks letters. There is no information about this case in the numerous media that reported from Afghanistan at that time.

But there have been cases of civilians being killed in the fight against the Taliban earlier than this, but also later. Exactly on February 14, 2020, the world media widely reported on a similar case.

"NATO missiles killed 12 Afghan civilians on Sunday, the second day of an offensive launched to establish the authority of the Afghan government in one of the last major Taliban strongholds in the country's most violent province," Reuters reported. (Reuters, 15 February 2010)

Whether the large number of civilians killed was the reason for hiding the news, or the remoteness of the village and the idea that the media would not be able to penetrate to investigate and verify this fact, this remains unclear.

The wars also revealed the terrible fate of the newsmen. In Kosovo, Albanian journalists working for the few local media outlets were treated by Serb forces as any Albanian - they were targeted, harassed and potentially killed.

While journalists working for the international media could cross more easily, but only if "they did not cross the border."

Sulejman Kllokoqi, an Albanian cameraman who covered seven wars, suffered badly when he filmed the Obria massacre in Kosovo on September 26, 1998 and sent the footage to the world. He was arrested and brutally beaten by Serbian police for the work he had done.

"Write that, in fact, the corpses you shot were dolls. And show who invented the event, because we do not believe that you did it ... Or, maybe, you also have a finger in this pure lie ", Kllokoqi

remembers the request of the Serbian police against him, while after the refusal, the physical ill-treatment increased excessively (Kllokoqi, 2014, 131).

And, although in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and many other wars, the truth of the war could be attempted to be concealed, modern warfare ruled out this possibility.

The development of technology enabled the media to be anywhere and anytime, without risking the life of the media team. And, most importantly, without having to trust and rely on the official statements of the warring parties, even the most powerful armies and states in the world.

Even armies and states realized this and gave up trying to hide the facts.

In many cases, armies mounted cameras on sophisticated aircraft or drones and broadcast live their attacks against opposing targets.

More credible than that, there is nowhere to go.

The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021 fully exposed the power of the media, and finally buried the ability of armies and states to hide the atrocities of war, anywhere in the world.

Media cameras, as well as other technological tools in the hands of citizens filmed all the details of the "last battle" at Kabul Airport, from where the soldiers left, but also all Afghan civilians who felt threatened to stay in the state of them, after taking power from the Taliban.

Soldiers and other international staff related to the military made the rounds of the world in real time. But the tragedies at this airport also reach the farthest corner of the world in real time:

hopeless people getting caught in the wheels of planes and falling to the ground dead as soon as the plane took off and closed the wheels.

Neither the joy of those who were leaving safely, nor the tragic fate of those who died seeking salvation could no longer be hidden. As they are hidden in all wars, where there have been such departures, at the end of them.

The photo of the 19-year-old footballer of the Afghan national team, Zaki Anwari arrived in seconds all over the world. But, not as a portrait, not for the achievements in football, but for his tragic fall from the plane, on the wheels of which he was caught seeking salvation.

Simultaneously with those who saw him with his eyes falling, the whole world saw him.

With the degree to which technology has elevated the media, nothing more, good or bad, can be hidden.

Armies and states can decide whether to commit a crime or not. But, in advance they have to think about how they will justify it. To hide it, it is no longer a question.

Literatura:

1. C.Von Clausewitz: "Della guerra", Mondanori, Milano, 1982;
2. Candito, Mimmo: "Profesioni: reporter në luftë", Instituti Shqiptar i Medies, Tiranë, 2000
3. Gazeta "El Pais", 23 May 1999;
4. Kllokoqi, Sulejman: "Me kamerë në shtatë luftëra", Koha, Prishtinë, 2014;
5. Kovach, Bill; Rosenstiel, Tom: "Elementet e gazetarisë", Instituti Shqiptar i Medies, Tiranë 2009;
6. Toni Capuozo: "Ditari i përvajshëm", 19 April 1999;
7. Wolseley, Garner: "The Soldiers Pocketbook", London, 1869;
8. https://hr2.wiki/wiki/United_States_news_media_and_the_Vietnam_War, 15 February 2021;
9. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-offensive-idUKTRE61B1ZJ20100214>, 16 tetor 2021;