



## Media and armies: mutual respect or final misunderstanding?

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**Pierre SERVENT, in his book *La trahison des médias*<sup>3</sup>, invited<sup>us</sup> to immerse ourselves in the deleterious waters of this world that both fascinates the military leader and worries him. Some, like General BIGEARD, have skillfully used it. Others have carefully avoided it. Others, finally, have suffered from it, when they have not left their careers behind.**

The subject "media and armies" can be approached through the classic prisms of operational communication, information operations or manipulation strategies. But it can also be studied in terms of the human relationship that governs the relations between these two worlds.

Between these two characters, one, the military leader, who decides and acts, and the other, the journalist, who observes and comments, is the complex relationship that raises the essential question of responsibility.

And yet, in the approach to these two professions, that of arms and that of information, one could find many common points that should bring together those who exercise them in mutual respect.

In the first place, these trades are not chosen by chance, but by vocation, often, at the outset, by reference to certain images from Épinal which, unfortunately, one must accept to burn in the course of one's experience in order to reach the fullness of the practice of the trade. This lived experience confronts the reality of human nature in all its noble aspects, but also in its darkest aspects. The war correspondent, the journalist who covers conflicts, since it is they that the military leader is led to meet, often brings together on a human level the same qualities as the soldier in the field: rusticity, risk-taking,

determination, lucidity in analysis, distance from events, encounter with death. Every year, several of them find themselves taken hostage or pay with their lives for their commitment and professional conscience. It is then normal that in these situations, privileged relationships are established that one would like to trust.

Secondly, one can think that the ethical approaches of the two professions should also contribute to bringing the two worlds closer together. The Charter of Professional Ethics for Journalists (March 2011) has an air of a soldier's code or a regulation of the rights and duties of the military, except that it deals with the exercise of the journalist's profession in its sole dimension of information and not communication, an ambiguity that the military chief often finds difficult to grasp. To stick to ethics, both are constantly seeking a cohabitation between the ethics of conviction, tinged with a certain dogmatism that privileges the "ethics of conviction" and the "ethics of the military".ethics of conviction, tinged with a certain dogmatism that privileges above all moral certainties, and the ethics of responsibility that chooses to act well according to situations or "ethics of singular truths" to use the expression of the philosopher Alain BADIOU.

This pluralism of ethics should also promote mutual understanding between the two worlds.

Unfortunately, after these few lines, which could give rise to the elaboration of a small précis of mutual respect, there are more numerous and irreducible misunderstandings due too often to the "...the ethics of the singular truths", as the philosopher Alain BADIOU put it. The military's "rigorous software" in the face of the turbulent and uncontrollable world of the media, and finally to the share of responsibility that one attributes to the other on the big stage of the event.

Before any other consideration, the military leader must never lose sight of the fact that a media, whatever it may be, is above all a business that must generate profit through the diffusion of images, sound or paper. Broadcasting and ratings are the daily life of press bosses in order to survive, especially in a country where their financial situation is fragile. Excessive media reaction to an event is therefore often the rule, orchestrated mainly by continuous news channels which, in order to fill the airwaves, have to feed themselves around an éThe media are often over-reacting to an event by calling on experts who are often self-proclaimed experts or so-called spontaneous testimonies, all of which are legitimized by images that are shown over and over again. Not forgetting the Internet and social networks, which then abound in assertions, ready-made truths, "fake news" and peremptory judgements. These are the vectors that set the tempo.

All this can only irritate the boss in a position of responsibility who is put in the front of the stage and often required to express himself through elements of language that are dictated to him or to let his hierarchy communicate in his place. But he must understand and accept this economic imperative that dictates the life of a media outlet.

More difficult to accept for both of them is the relationship with time. Media time is not operational time. One counts in hours and at best in days, the other in weeks, even months or years. A journalist's work is ephemeral, one event chasing the other. It can certainly provoke the aftermath of an event, keep it alive for a while, before moving on to something else so as not to weary his editorial staff and his public. Sometimes he can

cause collateral damage, but he will leave it to others to deal with the consequences.

Indeed, an important element for our modern societies is the demand for quick results and the inability to take a long-term view because of the pressure of public opinion. This race against time, as every leader knows, requires initiative and risk-taking. Our society is in a hurry, impatient in a shrinking world where the development of the means of communication and information transforms a concern into a problem that must be solved immediately. In operation, one must be able to exchange time, which one does not have, for risk, which one does not want to take. But the ordered, computerized, timed, bureaucratized Western world does not tolerate very long situations that drag on and that do not seem to be perfectly under control. So the military and, above it, the politicians are tempted by the control of information and the journalist.

During the second Gulf War, the U.S. army inserted the majority of embedded journalists into its units in exchange for having a front-row seat. The result was frustrating, to say the least, as it proved to be a trusteeship. During the Lebanon war in 2006, the aura of Tshah was seriously damaged by the images or reports made by the embedded journalists showing the lack of motivation of the soldiers and certain weaknesses. As a reaction, in 2008, the Israelis banned the international press from Gaza throughout the operation, the only images available being provided by... Al Jazeera, the only channel present in the strip. More recently, in Mali, the press complained that it only had images provided by the army ministry. This application of "Command and Control" in all three cases was made possible because of the peculiarities of the theatres, but one can understand the frustration of journalists who need staging to support their words (images) or writings (photos), as illustrated by the slogan of the weekly magazine Paris Match: "The weight of words, the shock of photos! ».

In the end, it is a relationship without illusion and without complexes that the military leader must establish with the journalist.

In the majority of situations, the military chief should agree to give up being a guarantor for the safety of press correspondents and think that he will be able to control their speech in the field. A good journalist will not agree to be "inserted". He will run around, search, investigate. He will question the military leader who has been taught the art of media communication, but who will use violence to explain how his action is planned, legitimate and part of a reasoned process when, often, he could summarize it in a more trivial way.

In the exercise of his profession, the journalist will come across men he does not know, of whom he knows nothing, but qWil will put them at the heart of the news, which he will make "famous" for a few hours, a few days, before letting them fall back into anonymity. He is in his role. He listens, he observes, he relates the event while affirming that he is a stranger to it. Which, let's agree, is inaccurate, because, by witnessing the event, he participates in it. Thus, a reporter-photographer becomes, even against his will, an actor, or even an instigator by his mere presence, because his camera is a weapon of communication, the photo taken can play the role of the flapping of the butterfly's wings.

How then can these two worlds be reconciled, if not by going to see what is inside the costumes or uniforms, without any preconceived ideas, to better understand the other

and how he or she works. In the end, the relationship to be established between the two parties is akin to a permanent negotiation at the heart of which is the famous time factor, the difference in appreciation of which is often at the root of the operating conflict between the two worlds.

It is up to the military chief not to lump all journalists together, and it is up to the journalist to understand that operational imperatives are often incompatible with the sensational or the immediate. The second is to stop using the outdated and unjustified expression "the great mute" all the time, and the first is to remember that excessive use of language and recitation of caricatured elements of language can end up irritating. It is therefore to be hoped that, in the interests of mutual understanding, the two of them will be able to appreciate each other and get on well with each other, for each needs the other.

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3| Pierre SERVENT. La trahison des médias, François Bourin Éditeur, 2007.

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