



Media management of the attacks: role of the media and the political class

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Commandement

It is a favorite of Colonel (CR) Misset that the Notebooks publish below. A member of the editorial board of our magazine, usually working in the shadows as deputy editor-in-chief, he takes up the pen to defend a certain vision of the attitude of the media in this prolonged period of attacks.

Without in any way calling into question their freedom and independence, which are guaranteed by the Constitution, he nevertheless advocates a radical change in their behaviour towards terrorists.

Since the advent of television and social networks, information is increasingly broadcast in real time and the press, as a whole, has a goal that is very well summed up by a recurring expression of Jean-Jacques Bourdin in the morning on RMC: "The French have the right to know!».

The attacks perpetrated in France and throughout the world by terrorists have therefore been given excessive media coverage so that the French people know. This media coverage has also been amplified by internal polemics within the political class, often excessive in relation to the importance of the events. The President of the Republic has repeatedly stated that France is "at war".

It is therefore necessary to question the role and responsibility of the media and politicians in this war with many faces, military in the Sahel-Saharan strip, anti-terrorist on the national territory, and media. While the right to information is indisputable, the media and politicians must refuse to be the enemy's sounding board because, in the name of the great principles of freedom of expression or the race for audience, they are doing naively playing into the hands of those who want to destroy us.

Albert London wrote that the job of journalists "is not to please, nor to harm, it is to put pen to paper".¹ These women and^{men} are constantly making known, denouncing and informing, and they do so at the risk of their lives.² They do not want to be the only ones to do so. ² Laws help protect their right to inform. In France, Article 34 of the Constitution

begins with : "The law lays down the rules concerning civil rights and the fundamental guarantees granted to citizens for the exercise of public freedoms; the freedom, pluralism and independence of the media".

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen states that: "Free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious human rights: every citizen may therefore speak, write and print freely, unless he is answerable for the abuse of this freedom in cases determined by law". Journalists in France therefore have protections that allow them to exercise their profession freely.

This raises the question of the dissemination of information. The majority of journalists, whether independent or working for a media outlet, publish according to an editorial line that they have set themselves or that they agree to respect. Today, France is "at war". How should the press work to put its "power" at the service of the nation?

The press and the political authorities have been exaggerating the drama of the attacks that have been carried out in France and Europe since 2012. In this, they are faithful to the evolution of social networks and real-time information that is killing information and saturating the media space. Continuous news channels, with their breaking news, most often explain that they don't know much, but that it will come... and sometimes jeopardize ongoing operations.

Similarly, the systematic presence and involvement of the political class in all attacks helps to increase the symbolic value of these dramatic events. They make the headlines for more than a week,³ while the death of a French soldier who fights and risks his life against the EI with weapons in his hands in the service of France 24 hours a day barely makes it a few hours⁴.

But today, faced with the Islamic State (or EI, or Daesh), is this the right attitude? Shouldn't we change our method? The EI is an expert in mastering media means. Since CNN and the first Gulf War, it has been able to analyse the weaknesses of real-time overinformation.

And the Western media, not having understood that their way of informing serves the jihadist cause, are stubborn and offer our enemy a sounding board infinitely more powerful than any propaganda from Daesh. How can we fail to understand that our national media (TV, radio, newspapers) are one of the most effective means of recruiting jihadists on national territory?

These do not come from abroad, but from within. They are therefore largely fed the success of their predecessors by the media, which, without realising it, value the terrorist act and the personality of the killers.

The media are certainly not the only sources of information for these candidates for terrorism. Social networks and other information media also have their part to play.

Moreover, the extensive media coverage of the hot reactions of our politicians, which they themselves most often orchestrate on Twitter or elsewhere, also contributes to the success of EI operations.

Bringing to light the divisions, even justified ones, concerning the measures to be taken is a form of victory for the enemy. The French, for their part, seem to generally denounce such behaviour and demand action rather than useless and politicized words.

So what are we to make of all this?

Albert London, again, worked as an intelligence officer for the French government. Can we then hope that the French media will become aware of their irresponsibility and the harm they can do to their country by being in some way the unfortunate accomplices, involuntary at first, but unforgivable today, of the EI?

Can we hope that they will consult each other and decide to no longer mediate this drama of the attacks, painful for the victims and their families, enjoyable and encouraging for current and future terrorists and jihadists? Can we hope that the press will limit itself to a few, laconic communiqués and sober condolences in order to give the attacks the minimum media coverage with dignity?

Can we hope that financial interests and "ratings" are, in this area, relegated (far) behind the defence of the country? Finally, can we hope that the political class will take care to debate or tear itself apart without media coverage or social networks within the forums where it exercises its mandates?

It is not a question of muzzling or controlling the press. It is a question of making it aware that it is one of the weapons of this war announced and decided by the head of state, and that we must not take the risk of seeing this weapon "turned over" by the enemy. Nor is it a question of preventing the political class from debating; but, given the circumstances, to do so in camera.

While it is always essential to provide factual information on the actions or attacks perpetrated by the Islamic State, it is becoming essential that the media should be able to provide this information in a timely manner. While it is always necessary to provide factual information about the actions or attacks of the Islamic State, it is essential that the media, whose power is universally recognized as the "fourth estate", should no longer be debating whether or not they should show the face of a terrorist.

They must as soon as possible take the decision, at least to no longer serve as a sounding board for terrorism, and at best to contribute, within a framework and by means of actions to be defined, to the current "war effort".

As for our political class, it is responsible for leading the fight announced by the Head of State by indicating or proposing to all combatants, including the media, the end state sought and the strategy to be adopted, and by giving them the means to act.

If there is to be combat communication and information, it must emanate from a strategy, be implemented by the media and be oriented towards the enemy!

¹ Albert Londres, "Terre d'ébène (La traite des Noirs)", narrative, Paris, Albin Michel, 1929

² 35 journalists killed since 1 January 2016 (source: Reporters Without Borders)

³ A medal has been created for the victims of the attacks. It is placed in the order of protocol before the Croix de Guerre and the Croix de la Valeur Militaire.

⁴ In comparison, in the United Kingdom and the United States, the public's interest in those who gave their lives in combat on operations is out of all proportion to the attitude of the French.

One only has to note how few people were present outside the military and associations between the Alexandre III bridge and the Invalides during the return of the mortal remains

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