THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN ARAB-ISRAELI ARMED CONFRONTATIONS

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Abstract

Mass media is a force multiplier in any type of confrontation. The media power is useful only if all the decision makers are aware of it and they are qualified to use it in accordance with their objectives. Both Israelis and Arabs used disinformation, deception and other kind of methods to influence their opponents and the international community according to their goals. What a pity that both Israelis and Arabs decided to use mass media and other means of communication mainly to blame "the other" rather than to build bridges for reconciliation and long lasting peace.

Keywords: *Arab-Israeli conflicts, media as weapon, media as force multiplier, media bias in conflicts, media's manipulation, decline of war.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Arab-Israeli conflict has been lasting for over 70 years, presenting some moments of maximum intensity in the armed conflicts of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982 and 2005.

The time intervals between the wars were marked by political tensions and low intensity conflicts.

The long period of the conflict radicalized the positions of the parties, an attitude that was also influenced by the way in which media reflected the events.

2. THE CAUSES AND A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

2.1. CAUSES

The 1917 Balfour Declaration stimulated the Jews' emigration from Europe in the Middle East, assuring them, through the words of lord Rothschild, the president of the Zionist Federation, that "Her Royal Majesty's government [of the United Kingdom] is ok with establishing a national house for the Jewish people in Palestine and it will make use of all the efforts to facilitate the fulfilment of this objective, and it has to be understood that nothing has to be done in order to harm the civil and religious rights of the other non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and the political status that the Jews enjoyed in any other state (AZIZ, 2007)."

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict for terrorism has a history of over 100 years (ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT, 2018), and the fights in order to rule Jerusalem date back to over 2000 years and they involved not only Jews, Christians and Muslims, but also the great powers (BOSNAQ et al., 2017). There are multiple causes for the conflict, but the following are the most important ones:

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict for territory (two people fight for the same territory);
- The Jews' immigration to Palestine for 1917 up to the present and the emigration (in some cases, the expel) of the Palestinians from their home country;
- The Arab-Israeli conflict (the Arab states accuse Israel of depriving the Palestinians of their earth and their expel in other states and they dispute the right to exist for the Israeli state);
- Specific interests on behalf of some Arab states (Egypt to become the leader of the "Arab nation", Jordan to incorporate the West Bank, Syria to incorporate a part of Palestine etc.) and the personal goals of some of the Israeli leaders ("Israel's decision to invade Lebanon in 1982 was based especially on the ideology of the Great Israel and on Ariel Sharon's incorrigible instincts rather than on the

existence of an external threat"), (SHLAIM, 1996) Palestinians and Arabs (the Egyptian president "Nasser acted during the May-June 1967 crisis especially due to his will to strengthen his personal awareness within the Arab world and within his own country rather than due to the desire of challenging Israel to a duel") (SHLAIM, 1996);
- The intervention of the great powers – USA, France and UK on behalf of Israel, respectively of USSR on behalf of the Arabs.

2.2. SHORT HISTORY OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

The Arab-Israeli conflict was almost permanent starting from 1917 and up to the present and its intensity was different according to the internal and international political and diplomatic context. The most important moments which influenced the leaders' and the members' of the two communities current attitudes were:
- the Balfour Declaration from 1917;
- the Jews' immigration in the Palestine, starting from 1917 and up to the present;
- the 1948 war (the Independence war for the Israeli, respectively the Al-naqba = catastrophe for the Palestinian)
- the Suez war (1956);
- the Six-Day War (June 1967);
- The Low-Intensity War -1969-1970;
- the Yom-Kippur War – October 1973;
- The Lebanon war – 1982;
- the Palestinian insurgency from 1987 and up to the present;
- the 2005 conflict

3. ASPECTS COMMON TO MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE PARTIES INVOLVED

The analysis of the messages broadcasted in the Israeli, Palestine and Arab media by researchers belonging to the two communities, and also of other states, led to the conclusion that:
- hate, fear (GOLDBERG, 2004), discontent, threats (OKBI & HASHAVUA, 2016; KEINON & AHRONHEIM, 2018; RASGON, 2018), and the mutual lack of trust, (ROTH, 2018)

represent the predominant feelings in the relationship between the Israeli and the Palestinians.

Fig. 1. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas speaks at the United Nations, February 2018. (ROTH, 2018)

- the Arabs (ABDEL MONEM, 2017) and the Israeli are challenging each other the right to possess earth and to live in Palestine (PAPPÉ, 2017) but they assert the exclusive right to possess that territory (LLOYD, 2014);
- both sides are demonizing each other (SANGHOEE, 2014) and they consider that the only way to solve the conflict is to eliminate the other party (COHEN, 2014);
- each side perceives itself as the victim of the other side's violence (SHIPLER, 2015; SANGHOEE, 2014) and it assigns the right to revenge (DARAGHMEH, 2003; STEELE, 2014).

4. ASPECTS SPECIFIC TO ISRAELI MEDIA COMMUNICATION

The topics presented by the major part of the Israeli media when it presents the conflict with the Arabs are oriented towards the exposure of some images and perceptions unfavourable for their Jewish opponents. The most important aspects related to the media content from Israel and respectively to the media articles and reports from the international media with Israeli authors are:
- Israel has the right to exist in the territory that belonged to the Jews for more than 2000 years (GANS, 2008; COHEN, 2014);

- Israel represents "the most democratic country in the Middle East" (WILNER, 2018), a true island of civilisation surrounded by Arab barbarians;
- The promotion of the news and comments referring to the military triumph in wars (RODGERS, 2017) in order to support the moral of the fighters and of the population;
- The analysis of some temporary (BRONNER, 2010) or partial military and diplomatic failures with the purpose of highlighting the Israeli leaders' inabilities to politically exploit the military successes in the favour of Israel, in relationship with the Arab and Muslim states, but also with the international community (BEILIN, 2017);
- To determine the international community to regard the Arab-Israeli conflict as "a low intensity dispute," with the purpose of avoiding its intervention in order to settle the conflict;
- To expose the conceptions of the leaders on the future of the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab relationships;
- The Arabs are cruel, violent and possess a huge power of subhuman nature;
- The Palestinian militants are considered to be terrorists and the Israeli soldiers are fighters for a national cause;
- Blaming the Palestinians and the Arabs, in general, for the conflicts;
- The manipulation of the international community by means of misinformation, cheating, omission, etc., with the purpose of attracting it to Israel or at least not to be on the Arab side;

5. ASPECTS SPECIFIC TO MEDIA COMMUNICATION IN THE ARAB AND MUSLIM STATES

Arab and Muslim media but also the Arabs and Muslims who live in other states than the Muslim ones approach the Israeli-Palestinian and the Arab-Israeli conflicts mostly from partisan positions, meaning favourable to the Arab and Palestinian cause by incriminating the Israeli and their supporters – USA and the West – for the current position of the Palestinian

people. The authors of the press articles and audio-visual reportages promote the following main topics:
- Israel does not have any right on the territory that it occupies;
- Israel represents a false democracy, a hypocrite state (ODEH KASSIS, 2013) which exploits the cheap labour of the Arabs and destroys the Palestinian economy;
- Israel suspends the media broadcasts that are suspected to be pro-Palestinian (SIHAM, 2003); westernization agents who destroy the Arab purity (the Israelis are a cancer for Arabism and the only solution for their extermination (SHIPLER, 2015; STEELE, 2014);
- The Israeli are puppets for the West, present a power hunger, have set up an apartheid type of dominance, are greedy and devour Palestine with an "orgy of illegal settlements"(*The Ma'an News Agency*);
- The Israeli army test the weapons of the Palestinian people (CHOMSKY, 1983), is composed of killers (KHOURI, 2017) guilty of the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians (PAPPÉ, 2017) and represents the hard core of Satan (*Palestinian Media Watch Organization*);
- the security bridge built by Israeli is called "the wall of the apartheid" (SLOAN, & MULLIKAN PARCELL, 2002) (*Electronic Intifada*);

Fig. 2. The "wall of the apartheid".
(THRALL, 2017)
- The demonization of Israel and Israelis not only in the media, but also in course books (Israel represents an aggressive and expansionist state and the source of all the

violence in the region and the world and that is why they were oppressed and driven out of Europe in order to escape from the problems that they generate; the Jews are wicked and truly evil in their nature and that is why they experiment on the Palestinians in a Nazi style and they torment them in prisons);

- The cultivation of the hatred towards the Israeli by means of articles and cartoons (PALESTINIAN MEDIA WATCH, 2017) (the Israeli are seen as guilty for all the evils in the world; in cartoons they are portrayed as pigs, wolves, foxes, ravens, eagles, mice that destroy the basement of the Al-aqsa mosque (PALESTINIAN MEDIA WATCH, 2014), snakes etc.);
- The inoculation, in the minds of the Palestinians, of the faith that the fight against the Jews and their killing using any means, including suicide attacks, represents Allah's will (PALESTINIAN MEDIA WATCH, 2017);
- The exposure of some conspiracy theories, attributed to Israel, such as the Zionist intention of occupying the entire territory between the Nile and Euphrates, launched by the Egyptian president (SHIPLER, 2015);
- The manipulation of its own population and of the international community by misinforming, deceit, black propaganda and labelling Israel and the Israeli;
- Blaming the West, especially the USA, for supporting Israel and the use of the double standard towards the Israeli and the Palestinians.

6. ASPECTS SPECIFIC TO COMMUNICATION THROUGH INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Some of the mass communication means from the West and from other states of the world opted for a direct involvement in the conflict by supporting one of the parties: the majority of the American media support the Israeli cause (O'CONNOR, 2006) and the majority of the media in Muslim countries support the Palestinian cause (COHEN, 2017).

A significant part of the international media, especially from the West, supports Israel.

Following the 2005 confrontation more means of communication from West Europe tried to be objective and criticised some decisions of the Israeli leadership decisions and this led to the temporary suspension of their broadcasting on the territory of the Jewish State.

In general, international media has informed the public from the states where information was broadcasted about the evolution of the politic, diplomatic and military situation from the conflict zone. The situation of the population engaged in the conflicts was reflected by independent newspapers and by journalists who accompanied the UN, International Red Cross, International Red Crescent humanitarian missions.

Some means of mass information decided to be partisan to one of the sides. For example, *Associated Press* exaggerated the number of deceased Israeli (it doubled it, in their accounts of the 2004 confrontations) and it reduced the number of deceased Palestinians (by 66%, in their accounts of the 2004 confrontations). Moreover, the deceased Israeli were usually not guilty, while the Palestinians were portrayed as being killed because of the conflicts that they themselves triggered (IF AMERICANS KNEW, n.d.a). The attitude and responsibility of the journalists and editors of the agency influence a major part of the communication means in the USA and the West because the news broadcasted by the Associated Press reporters are taken over by them, as they do not have any journalists in the conflict zones (AZIZ, 2007).

The New York Times also presented the results of the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts between 29.09. 2000 – 28.09.2001 and 01.01.2004 - 31.12.2004, in a such a way that the was estimated by *If Americans Knew* as being below the journalists' Code of Ethics because it exaggerated the losses suffered by the Israeli and it diminished those of the Palestinians ((IF AMERICANS KNEW, n.d.b).

Alongside *Associated Press* and *The New York Times*, the American TV channels ABC, CBS and NBC misinformed, by omitting, the American public about the results of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontations between 29.09.2000 – 28.09.2001 and also 01.01.2004 - 31.12.2004 because it exaggerated the losses suffered by the Israeli and they diminished those of the Palestinians (IF AMERICANS KNEW, n.d.c).

The Guardian was accused, on a number of times, both by the Israeli and by the Palestinians, that it is not objective and that the editing of titles misleads the reader regarding reality. Israel's embassy in Great Britain, for example, accused the publication that, due to the way in which they write the titles to some of the events related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, one can draw the conclusion that the Palestinians are guilty, despite the fact that they are the ones who attacked the Israeli soldiers (ELLIOTT, 2016).

The Washington Post: The Arab-Israeli conflict represents "A war of images and perceptions (HOWELL, 2006)."

The December 2017 decision belonging to the American president Donald Trump of moving his country's embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem prompted a wave of protests in all Muslim states and in all the states where there are large Muslim communities. While Mahmoud Abbas regarded the decision of the American administration as "the closing of the door for negotiating the solution of two states in Palestine (ROTH, 2018)", the special envoy of the Palestinian Authority in London was more adamant, saying that acknowledging Jerusalem as the capital of Israel is equivalent to a war statement (THE JERUSALEM POST, 2017).

7. CONCLUSIONS

Adopting some partisan positions on behalf of the Israeli and the Palestinian media served and are still serving the short term goals of the political leadership of the two communities. This situation unfortunately contributes to deepening the tensions between them.

The reconciliation should start from eliminating fear (VLAD, 2009) and giving up the demonization of "the other." This is the best solution that need to be applied to Israeli and the Palestinians relation.

Mass-media represents a very powerful weapon not only for demonizing, manipulating and demoralizing the opponent. It may also play a constructive role within the peace process by diminishing up to complete elimination of violence and the strengthening of the reciprocal trust between the Israeli and the Palestinians.

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