

Media Management in “Just Wars” from Kosovo to Iraq.

A comparison of the organisation of political communication in military conflicts in the US and Germany.

Magnus-Sebastian Kutz

In democratic societies, political decisions need to be justified in the public sphere. Decisions on war and peace are particularly disputed within the public discourse, in the age of post-heroic warfare. For this reason, decisions to go to war are not only closely monitored by the media and the population, but are also vigorously justified by governments, which use various means of communication for this purpose.

This paper does not focus on media reporting or on the arguments governments use to justify wars. It rather aims at explaining common organisational characteristics and differences in public relations campaigns during military conflicts in Germany and the USA since the dawn of the 21st century. For that purpose, the actual organisation of war PR conducted by governments and the military is analysed and the developments from the Kosovo-conflict to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are explained.

Organisational changes are, on the one hand, clearly influenced by changes in the media landscape, by the development of new media technologies, and by the basic structure of the media system. Especially the pace of international newsgathering, induced by the internet, digital satellite transmission and international news channels like CNN, BBC and Al-Jazeera puts a very high pressure on military and government officials, as for their ability to react promptly and to control the message in a 24-hour news environment.

On the other hand, organisational learning from earlier experiences leads in some cases to more refined communication strategies, albeit some of these experiences are lost because of staff and political appointees leaving office.

The methodology is based on two steps: first, a systematic analysis of secondary literature was carried out. Existing publications on specific aspects of PR in military conflicts were combined to develop an overall narrative. This analysis is refined by enriching it with information from primary sources: investigative reports, government documentation published under the Freedom of Information Act and interviews with high-ranking PR

professionals from the government and the military, e.g. former White House Press Secretaries and spokespersons from the Pentagon as well as the German government.

The author has already published a book and various articles on PR during the Iraq war. This paper is part of a research project regarding political communication during military conflicts.