

Beating the Western Media Blockade - Ideas, Infrastructure, Solidarity

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So much confusion and bad faith prevails in the current global information chaos that getting back to basics sometimes seems impossible. But fundamentals never change and merit constant repetition. Above all, anti-imperialist defense of majority world peoples' right to development against the fascist onslaught of the corporate and political power of the United States and Europe demands resolute unity. There is no third way in a global conflict between the rights of the world's peoples to peace, justice and well-being and the all consuming militarist greed of the Western corporate elites and their allies. The acid test of this in Latin America is whether people support Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela against US sanctions and threats of military aggression.

We need to realize more clearly, that we are not in a "normal" context of relative peace but in a war context. The empire not only puts forward ideas denying the liberation of our peoples, but has openly declared war on us at all levels. We must be clear that empire (the power elites of the US and EU financial, economic and military complex) is not only opposed to our vision: It does not want that vision even to exist and seeks to annihilate it through so-called "full spectrum domination" (military, economic-financial, technological, cultural).

This situation of total media and cultural warfare today has similarities to that same phenomenon during the Cold War. At that time the world had been divided in two by the West using the "Iron Curtain". We see this situation more and more clearly today, this time not as a contradiction between capitalism and socialism, but rather as the contradiction between an imaginary Western civilization and an imaginary menacing barbarism, especially represented by, among others, China, Russia, Iran, the ALBA countries. In synthesis, the media-cultural war today should be posed in the terms of totalitarian Western capitalist hegemony in terminal crisis, threatened by the emergence of a new, more democratic multi-polar world order.

A well established diagnosis

Key to the US and European Union onslaught attacking the majority world is their control of global digital media, especially via multinational monopolies like Google, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. But more traditional media, also extremely highly concentrated in a handful of global corporations, continue to play a key role, for example well established news agencies like Reuters, Associated Press, EFE or Agence France Press or undeservedly prestigious news outlets like CNN, the BBC, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Le Monde, Die Welt, El País, The Guardian, La Stampa and others. Over the last 20 years, that tightly controlled capitalist media network has been reinforced by misnamed alternative media, mainly funded one way or another by corporate interests to serve both as

gatekeepers of permissible news and as disinformation saboteurs.

All these fake news and misinformation outlets feed the false belief that North America and Europe are bastions of freedom of expression. In fact, both mainstream and alternative media in the US and Europe apply heavy censorship especially to world news but also increasingly to domestic news. An extra component reinforcing this censorship has been government and corporate cooptation of non-governmental organizations especially in relation to human rights and the environment. NGOs funded by corporate sources and governments act within the UN system of international governance serving both the short term political goals and the long term ideological agenda of US and European corporate elites.

It is here that a discussion of what constitutes reporting becomes crucial. Popular majority world news outlets like Russia's RT, Iran's Press TV and Venezuela's TeleSur are persistently suppressed and attacked by Western governments claiming to defend freedom of expression. In fact, these targeted news outlets' generally report more rigorously than their North American and European counterparts. By contrast, Western governments and media outlets give a free pass to demonstrably dishonest reporting by institutions like the Organization of American States' electoral observer missions, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons or cynically disingenuous NGOs like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch or Global Witness among a plethora of others.

All of this, the repression of rival rationalities, the promotion of absurd falsehoods, are aspects of the current "Cold War" environment (which is not cold at all, one would have to look for a more adequate term to describe what is happening today). That is why non-Western media are criminalized, especially RT, teleSUR, HispanTV and others. With total impudence and impunity, their journalists are persecuted, falsely accused of "interference", "propaganda", "destabilization" and even "rebellion" while the Western media complex and civil society manipulation organizations (NGOs) routinely practice and have always practiced those same dark arts against any government not to their liking. Moreover, citizens' activity in cyberspace is routinely and comprehensively monitored, persecuted and criminalized both by Western States and by the corporate monopolies controlling Internet information flows. These are two dimensions of the same war by imperial elites against people everywhere.

Reporting and physical infrastructure

The meaning of "reporting standards" is so well established it seems redundant to state what they are. But it is essential to do so insistently because North American and European controlled news outlets, NGOs and public institutions have debased and practically abandoned fundamental reporting norms. Western reporting goes back to the Greek historian Herodotus and beyond and has developed since then on extremely clear criteria. A bona fide report needs to be based on well sourced material open to public appraisal, be it first hand witness testimony, documentation with clear provenance, official records of all kinds as well as other forensic or similar scientific evidence. But that is only the starting point. On the basis of that material, the authors of a genuine report compare and contrast all the available evidence and explain very openly why, based on those sources, they reach the conclusions they make in their report.

None of that happens in the overwhelming majority of contemporary reporting of almost any kind in North American and European news outlets, NGOs or the heavily politicized Western dominated institutions of international governance. Obvious recent examples of this reality are the phoney reports on the alleged chemical attack on Douma in Syria or the grotesque media assassination of Julian Assange or the downright lies published about Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua. For decades, North American and European media, NGOs and institutions have very deliberately excluded any witness testimony, documentary or scientific evidence contradicting their propaganda line. That normality inculcates completely insane false beliefs among whole populations which over time constitute mass false memories.

To protect that systemic mendacity, North American and European authorities and their regional allies cynically accuse media like RT, Telesur or Press TV, among many other genuine information sources, of being propaganda outlets. In effect all reporting and information is now either propaganda or counter-propaganda. The Western machinery manufacturing false beliefs and false memories runs on the corrupt reporting and disinformation role of Western news outlets, NGOs and academic institutions and their symbiotic osmosis with the North American and European entertainment industry. The false beliefs and contrived memories all feed off assumptions generated by Western cultural production including films, television programs, books, magazines and video games which in turn generate fresh feedback of well designed memes and carefully framed images.

A necessary condition for the successful generation and perpetuation of mass false beliefs and false memories is absolute control of the physical media transmitting them. As the digital world conquers the flow of information and ideas in the world, the medium through which these information and ideas are transmitted is no longer neutral and has become a highly monopolised socio-economic medium: the Internet. Countries such as China can afford to have a national Internet, while others such as Russia have a technological infrastructure that allows them to stand up significantly to the attacks of the empire.

But in our Latin American and Caribbean countries we are totally under the communications control of the United States. To understand this, it is enough to look at the global map of fiber optic cables: All telephone calls and all computer connections between any of our countries pass first through Miami and are controlled by the US National Security Agency. If the physical support of telecommunications is in the hands of the empire, the same is almost equally true with regard to its software, that is, in the applications used for communication: The hegemonic social networks, the various content publishing platforms, the mass use applications, the databases in which information is hosted, etc., are overwhelmingly under Western control.

There does exist a vigorous free software movement (which in part expresses popular resistance to imperial hegemony and in part is also necessary for the functioning of capitalism and the hegemony of the West itself). But that movement is destined to continue playing a subordinate role unless our peoples support it politically. Western control over hardware and software, through which information circulates, allows the imperial elites not only to spread their propaganda globally, but also to be the self-selected arbiters of “global debate” and to be a sinister global panopticon without parallel. The empire not only has the power to spread its message, but also to keep opinions carefully compartmentalized in a way that prevents the least possible damage to its interests, along with the power to use those same opinions as a source of intelligence for political-military purposes.

And what then?

This very well established diagnosis self-evidently has strong implications for anti-imperialist majority world media outlets and their allies in the US and Europe. The main elements of that response were articulated most recently in the [International Communications Congress in Venezuela](#) in December this year. The Congress identified key needs including a coordinating structure derived from and linked to the Sao Paulo Forum so as to “articulate an International Network of Communication Networks constituted by all the delegates as well as by all the political parties, social movements and organizations of the People’s Power present in this Congress.” That network should enhance and facilitate the creative and comprehensive exchange of news and information across all kinds of regional anti-imperialist media

Additionally, in the Congress final session President Nicolás Maduro announced the formal creation of an [International University of Communication](#) as a platform for promoting a community of knowledge and information via training, research and elaboration of materials in the service of the emancipation and liberation of the region’s peoples. The Congress envisages the design of communication campaigns based on all the meetings and congresses of the Sao Paulo Forum so as to overcome and circumvent the Western media blockade. One fundamental task is to make a census of all the anti-imperialist media supporting this initiative, partly so as to identify strengths and weaknesses but also to optimize interaction between all these hugely diverse media and communicators.

Within that process, our experience in Nicaragua both generally over the last three decades and more specifically since the failed coup attempt of 2018, leads us to stress the importance of not allowing the enemy to dictate the media agenda. So rather than criticising the failings-on-purpose of enemy reporting by imperialist media and NGOs, we should expose and demonstrate their corruption and bad faith by practicing truthful reporting with scrupulous care in relation to sources, provenance of documentary and audio-visual material and appraisal of technical or scientific resources. We should try and learn from Venezuela’s bolivarian support for grass roots local news networks and their articulation with regional news and information outlets, especially among youth communicators.

As we responded to the failed coup attempt in 2018 here, we created task-focused information networks for the purposes of defining among other essential media chores what news-sharing to prioritize, how to address anti-government media lies, what material to translate and how to distribute the burden of that work, what direct reporting to do, what research needs we should process. Learning from other examples of successful resistance, like Venezuela’s experience during repeated US sabotage of its energy generating capacity, is also essential. Sharing those experiences effectively and efficiently adapting them to different contexts will be an indispensable part of enhancing anti-imperialist media workers’ skills, knowledge and vision.

Also fundamental to any successful implementation of follow up to the International Communications Congress will be the genuine intellectual humility necessary to build unity within diversity among the peoples under attack by the United States and the European Union. Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, South America all have very different and specific national and historical experiences despite their common history of genocidal imperialism and sadistic neocolonialism. The revolutions in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela are all different in important ways. As President Comandante [Daniel Ortega said](#) in 2013 “All Processes have diverse timelines, in the conditions each Process has to address.”

To work together successfully, regional media workers and communicators need to be especially sensitive and alert to that reality. In the contemporary global media environment, State and corporate capitalist marketing and public relations have practically swallowed conventional reporting credibility. The anti-imperialist majority world response must be solidarity-based media committed to honesty and sincerity, focused on the rights and needs of the human person and the world's peoples and unwavering in united support for the region's diverse revolutionary processes.

But we should also recognize the two-fold political-military nature of the unrelenting US and European communications offensive. So our peoples must develop by all possible means their capacities in relation to physical and logical communications infrastructure. It is not only a matter of winning the battle of ideas but also of developing our hardware and software capabilities, so as to manage more successfully the technologies through which those ideas circulate. There can be no policy of democratizing access to telecommunications which does not at the same time involve mass education and awareness campaigns about how digital media work. Political and social activists and communicators must seek to reach out to every citizen claiming the rights of their people against US and European aggression.

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