

The Global Flow of Information and Propaganda. Terrorist Attacks on the USA, September 11, 2001 as a media event

The present form of terrorism, which appeared in the late 60's, is called "mass media terrorism". It seems to be a consequence of the mass media's need of "media events" which can be characterised as: "unusual, abnormal, dangerous, new, destructive? and violent"¹. Nowadays, terrorist organisations not only actively seek mass media attention so as to use it to spread their message to public opinion, but they are also deeply aware of the mechanisms of mass media activity. Consequently, they try to use the mass media as a mouthpiece for their propaganda. As a result, terrorist organisations which try to achieve their political goals by acts of crime and violence, can be treated as the subject of a process of political communication and every act of terrorism can be regarded as an expression of that form of communication².

The aim of this paper is to analyse the terrorist attack on the USA on September 11, 2001 as a "media event". What is crucial is the fact that this act of terrorism seems to fulfil all the conditions laid down by the mass media. Analysing this event is an opportunity to highlight the role of the mass media in modern internal and external political affairs. As we shall see later, in political communication the mass media can be treated not only as a subject (an independent element) but also as a channel or even an instrument for spreading messages held by other subjects.

The terrorist attack on the USA immediately became breaking news almost all around the world and is now regarded as a turning point in mass media history, especially as far as American mass media are concerned. Previously there had been very few events that

¹ A. Schmid, J. de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, London 1982, s. 217.

² B. Mc Nair, *Wprowadzenie do komunikowania politycznego*, Poznań 1998, p. 25 – 27. According to B. Mc Nair, the main characteristics of political communication is its intention. There are three main types of political communication: *about* politics, acts of communication *created by subjects involved in politics* and, last but not least, acts of communication created by non – politicians but *addressed to them*.

commanded the undivided efforts and attention of journalists and editors to such a degree. The mass media were witnesses to one of the most significant terrorist attacks ever made.

Reporting this event could be only compared with covering the assassination of President J. F. Kennedy (regarded as the first example of *reality TV* in current affairs)³. However, on this occasion *real time reporting* was done on a global scale. People around the world could see pictures of the planes crashing into the World Trade Centre towers as it happened (CNN paid 50,000\$ for amateur video footage of the first plane crash), the burning and collapsing towers, Americans crying. They could watch not only the moment when the second plane hit the tower but also the moment when the American president was informed about the attacks. Moreover, his first speech was broadcast all over the world. For many mass media organizations (especially TV stations) covering the attack was a kind of test of the speed, quality and reliability of their staff's work.

The broadcast "Good Morning America" on ABC Television was interrupted just a few minutes after the first plane hit the tower of the World Trade Centre. At the moment of the second crash the station immediately decided to suspend the programme completely. After that moment ABC reported news on the attacks for 91 hours non stop. Other American TV stations took similar actions. CBS covered that event for more than 93 hours without break. CNN Headline News and CNN International suspended all other programmes. In the 48 hours after the attack 4,000 reporters were devoted exclusively to finding and broadcasting information about the tragedy⁴.

On that day the major American newspapers decided to print special afternoon editions (e.g. *The Washington Post* printed extra 50,000 copies). The size of headline on the cover page of *The New York Times* on September 12 was 96 points. In the 150 – year - history of that newspaper it had happened only twice before (the first man on the Moon and on the day of Nixon's resignation)⁵. Interestingly, Clear Channel Communication, a mass media organization that owns 1,700 radio stations in the USA, created a list of 150 songs that were not to be played on that day (as they could be too painful for listeners)⁶.

The events in New York and Washington, which happened on that day captured the undivided attention of the most important TV and radio stations across Europe and other continents. In Great Britain, for example, two TV stations: BBC NEWS 24 and Sky News

³ B. Ociepa, *Komunikowanie międzynarodowe*, Wrocław 2002, p. 139.

⁴ A. Pukniel, *Amerykańska mobilizacja*, *Press* 2001, 10, p. 29 – 30.

⁵ E. Zadrzyńska, *Kiedy nadszedł dzień grozy*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 7 – 8.09.2002.

⁶ P. Milewski, T. Zachurski, *Cenzura żałobna*, *Press*, 2001, 10, p. 33

were informing about the attack all day and all night. BBC News 24 started reporting on the event just a few minutes after the first plane hit the tower. On that day 32 million British people watched BBC1 – for which two American correspondents were working for about 72 hours almost without a break⁷.

In Poland, the radio station RMF FM was first to inform about the attack. TVN24 – a private TV station was provided with an unprecedented opportunity to prove its ability to deal with such important events. TVN rose to the challenge and the terrorist attacks were given blanket coverage for many hours. On public television the main news broadcast (“Wiadomości”) was a half hour longer than usual and on private stations (TVN, Polsat) as much as one hour longer.

The rapid and global flow of information would not have been possible without the technological development of the mass media. Undoubtedly, the costs of using new technologies as well as having correspondents in many countries are extremely high. Consequently, only the biggest and the richest mass media organisations can afford them. At present, the main sources of information about foreign countries are the so-called “Big Four”: Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France Presse and Deutsche Presse Agentur, as well as Itar – Tass and the American TV station: CNN.

The British *Reuters* agency in 1995 had: 327,000 receivers in 42,000 places in 154 countries. Its news bulletins were prepared in 24 languages. Five years later that agency had: 521,000 receivers in 52, 800 places around the world. The American *Associated Press* is one of the biggest press agencies in the world (300 offices and 3,000 employees). In the USA Associated Press sends its information to 6,000 radio and TV stations and to 1,700 newspapers. In other countries and areas of the world it has 8,500 receivers (printed and electronic mass media). Every day AP prepares 10,000 messages, which means about 17 million words, in 5 languages⁸. *Agence France Presse* is a direct source of information for 650 newspapers and 400 radio and TV stations as well as for 1,500 companies and public institutions. It also has about 100 national branches and in that way sends its messages additionally to 7,600 newspapers and 2,500 radio stations and 400 television stations. The programmes of the American *CNN International* are retransmitted by over 200 independent stations around the world and reach over 74 million receivers⁹. Its newsroom is in action for

⁷ A. Pukniel, op. cit.

⁸ J. Olędzki, *Komunikowanie w świecie*, Warszawa 1998, p. 43 – 64.

⁹ B. Ociepka, op. cit., p. 75 – 114; J. R. Dominick, *The Dynamics of Mass Communication*, The McGraw – Hill Companies Inc. 1996, p. 19.

24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Normally, 100 people work there but in an unusual situation this number can be doubled. The main strength of CNN's agenda is live reporting. Thus, in its advertisement CNN asks rhetorically: „Were will you be the next time history is made?”

The number of places where messages can be spread to and the number of direct and indirect receivers of those messages determine their potential influence. As a result of the process of commercialisation and concentration of mass media organisations, the number of sources of information about foreign events is limited. The further consequences of the *global gate-keeping concentration* are: the unification and standardization of mass media content¹⁰. Eventually, this results in a visible lack of symmetry of information and commentary. According to M. Kunczik, mass media concentration could be a threat to the variety of opinions – nowadays the owners of mass media organisations profoundly influence the way the mass media present problems and events. Additionally, it is becoming harder and harder to gain access to the mass media market¹¹.

Analysing the present issues of mass media organisations we should remember the main role of the mass media in the process of communication, which is to *control* the flow of information. This function includes a few more detailed ones. First of all, the mass media are responsible for the selection and limitation of the number of messages that are broadcast. Secondly, the mass media can choose the topics which are to be covered. Consequently, the mass media can create an image of the society and the world in the mind of the public. The printed and electronic mass media not only report selected events but also modify messages about them.

The hypothesis of agenda setting suggests that the mass media do not tell people *what* they ought to think about certain problems, but rather tell them what they ought to be *thinking about*¹². This means that the mass media not only single out issues and consequently focus public attention on them but also define the problems, which are regarded as important for society.

Moreover, in the case of dramatic and critical moments (e.g. wars, tragedies) the mass media can play a significant role in political relations. They can influence political decisions. This phenomenon is called the CNN effect, which consists of three main directions and roles:

¹⁰ B. Ociepka, op. cit., p. 113.

¹¹ M. Kunczik, A. Zipfel, Wprowadzenie do nauki o dziennikarstwie i komunikowaniu, Warszawa 2000, p. 246.

¹² T. Goban – Klas, Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu, Warszawa 1999, p. 267 – 269; A. Pyzikowska, Teoria *agenda – setting* i jej zastosowanie (in:) Nauka o komunikowaniu. Podstawowe orientacje teoretyczne, B. Dobek – Ostrowska (ed.), Wrocław 2001, p. 74 – 81, M. Kunczik, A. Zipfel, op. cit., p. 183 – 187.

accelerant, impediment and agenda setting. The first potential effect of global, real – time media is the shortening of response time for decision - makers. “Policymakers decry the absence of quiet time to deliberate choices, reach private agreements, and mold the public’s understanding”¹³. Secondly, the mass media through emotional, grisly coverage may undermine morale. Moreover, they can constitute a threat to operational security. Finally, they are able to attract public attention to a particular crisis and consequently change policy priorities¹⁴.

Because of the significant potential influence on the public and decision makers, analysis of the processes by which the mass media control messages is an extremely important issue. Although the mass media declare their objectivism and reliability, they tend to present events that correspond to the criteria of a media event. Consequently, the question of the criteria behind the selection of information seems crucial. There are several different concepts of how to answer that question. One of them is that proposed by Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge published in an article entitled “The Structure of Foreign News”. It contained results of their research into how events from some countries become news in others. They pointed out the following 12 factors (requirements):

1. compatibility with the mass media schedule, which suggests that an event should take place at the moment when mass media focused receivers attention (for example, during TV news);
2. importance, which is determined by the possibility of a direct influence on people’s lives and a strong connection with the receivers’ cultural and social background;
3. reference to nations regarded as superior;
4. reference to persons regarded as superior (elite): the general idea is that the more famous the people or representatives of rich and powerful countries involved in the event, the more likely it is to become news;
5. intensity;
6. surprise;
7. unambiguity, which means that there should be no doubt as to what happened (even if firstly there are some questions to be answered, finally the background and purpose of the problem should become quite clear);

¹³ S. Livingston, Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examination of the Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention, Research Pages. R – 18, Harvard College, June 1997, p.2.

¹⁴ As above.

8. compatibility with viewers' expectations, which means that an event or problem should include some familiar elements (e. g. a common pattern of behaviour);
9. negativism ("bad news is good news")
10. personalisation (personal statements, private stories make better news than abstract issues);
11. completeness: the news about the event or problem connected with foreign affairs should be followed by some message about internal affairs just to present a complete view of the world;
12. continuity, which means that in cases of successful mass media news creation on a particular subject there should still be something new to say about it (some additional aspects, new people, etc.).

Galtung and Ruge also formulated two predictions connected with these 12 factors. The first says: the more an event satisfies these 12 conditions, the more possible is that it will become the subject of a message. According to the second, when an event is being reported the above – described factors determine the way it is presented¹⁵. According to these authors, both processes of *selection* and *deformation* are ongoing and are always present in mass media activity.

Generally, paying significant attention to bad news is often explained in terms of receiver expectations. In fact, people do not want to receive negative messages but this kind of information catches their attention and is better remembered than the positive kind¹⁶. A similar idea can be found in the concept created by Wilbur Schramm. According to his classification of information, messages can have a direct or delayed influence on the receiver. To the first category of information he included unusual and negative messages, especially those concerning corruption, crime, accidents and catastrophes or about sport and entertainment¹⁷.

The popularity of certain types of messages could be also explained by using an analogy to human perception of the world. In Bernard Roshco's opinion, long-term, ongoing processes in a society are not normally perceived, appearing only occasionally in sudden, peculiar events that capture the public attention and thus become a mass media event¹⁸. At the same time, the long duration of conflicts is a major factor in decreasing public interest. On

¹⁵ J. Galtung, M. H. Ruge, *The Structure of Foreign News*, *Journal of Peace*, nr 2, 1965, see: above, p. 119 – 121.

¹⁶ B. Reeves, C. Nass, *Media i ludzie*, Warszawa 2000, p. 142 – 156.

¹⁷ W. Schramm, *The Nature of News*, *Journalism Quarterly*, nr 26, 1949, see: M. Kunczik, A. Zipfel, op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁸ B. Roshco, *Newsmaking*, Chicago 1975, see: as above.

one hand, one can observe – as a consequence – the phenomenon of the escalation of cruelty in the news, and on the other hand – the phenomenon of people’s indifference to these violent messages.

It is worth mentioning that all the above - described factors could become a guide to preparing and organising an event to attract the attention of the mass media and public opinion. The main result of the fact that the mass media have created conditions of a media event is that those groups, which are normally unable to access the media, can use these features to draw attention to themselves¹⁹. Consequently, the mass media can become a target for other participants in the process of communication. There are many different groups, who tend to use mass media to achieve their own aims: minorities, governments, political parties and organisations, interest groups. Even present terrorism is regarded as a consequence of a minority’s strategy for gaining access to the mass media and influencing them.

As a result propaganda is often nowadays defined in political science as the “process of controlling the flow of information, animating public opinion and manipulating behaviour’s models”²⁰. Propaganda is also regarded as the “technique of shaping public opinion by manipulating emotions and symbols. The aim of this activity is to control and animate mass actions at controversial points? of the contemporary world”²¹. The essence of the mechanism of propaganda (as well as persuasion) is the fact that it can be undertaken on two levels: a level of selection and a level of language.

That easy access to the mass media is a result of the fact that terrorist activity is always “a triple composition of mortal performance, high politics and abject crime. It suits the aims of the mass media so perfectly that they simply cannot stop reporting on such events”²² Thus terrorism is called “the theatre of cruelty”²³. Nowadays one might add some new features to the characteristics of terrorism.

The first is the anonymity of the terrorist acts. The whole mechanism of terror stems from the fact that nobody can be absolutely sure of the intention, the target or the author of the act of terrorism. In cases of a lack of information, the mass media broadcast overestimated, underestimated or even inaccurate information (e.g. on September 12 the mass media

¹⁹ A. Schmid, J. de Graaf, *Violence as Communication*, London 1982, s. 217, see: as above.

²⁰ G. S. Jowett, V.O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Beverly Hills 1986, p. 61; B. Dobek – Ostrowska, J. Fras, B. Ociepka, *Teoria i praktyka propagandy*, Wrocław 1999, p. 11.

²¹ F. G. Wilson. *A Theory of Public Opinion*, Chicago 1962, p. 160 – 161, see: as above, p. 28.

²² As above, p. 76.

²³ J. Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Minorities*, New York 1988, za: B. Mc Nair, *Wprowadzenie do komunikowania politycznego*, Poznań 1998, p. 168. G. Weimann, *Redefinition of Image. Impact of Mass-mediated Terrorism*, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 2, 1990.

informed that 10,000 people died during the attack, and, in the case of Oklahoma City the American mass media first made Arab terrorists responsible for the bomb outrage).

Consequently, the pressure on the decision makers (the government) becomes considerable enough to force them to take steps, which may turn out to be inappropriate if not wrong headed. Secondly, more and more brutal and spectacular actions are undertaken to attract mass media and public opinion. Finally, to capture media attention, terrorist organisations more and more often target journalists.

Terrorists can achieve different aims in this way: demoralize the enemy, demonstrate their own organisation's power, reveal the enemy's weakness or cause panic and chaos. All of these activities have a psychological and propagandist character and they are more important than the number of people killed. All this adds up to the fact that modern terrorism depends strongly on the mass media. Without the so called "oxygen of publicity"²⁴, terrorist organisations would not become so powerful and dangerous.

The significant character of the terrorist attack on the USA on September 11 can be considered as a consequence of the fact that it satisfied the main conditions defined by Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge. It seems that the terrorists organised that attack to fulfil the expectations of the mass media and gain access to public opinion around the world.

First of all, the terrorists chose the time of the attack very carefully. Not only did they decide on the very moment after the employees arrived at the WTC, but they also seemed to take into consideration the schedule of the main American TV stations (at the moment of attacks all very popular morning news programmes just had been broadcasting). Secondly, the above - mentioned event was totally *surprising and dramatic*. The reaction of the American government and society can be regarded without exaggeration as one of shock. The terrorist attacks on the USA, which caused the deaths of about 3,000 people and menaced the sense of security of the whole of American society and all Western European countries, also satisfy the condition of *intensity*.

Additionally, after a short period of doubt whether the impact on the WTC towers was just an accident or an act of terrorism it became *certain* that it was a well – planned attack. And the general terrorists' behaviour (hijacking a plane and suicidal attack) was familiar with people's previous knowledge and conceptions about how terrorist organisations act (but the scale of action was enormously high in that case).

²⁴ B. Mc Nair, op. cit., p. 153.

On September 11 one could also observe the efforts of the government (central and local) to use the mass media to inform society about their current actions, to calm the emotions of people and to present and explain their decisions concerning future actions. Nowadays, politicians are aware of the role of the mass media in internal and external affairs. Many democratic countries have experienced the power of the mass media's influence on the public (the war in Vietnam is the obvious example). Today, because of the quick flow of information, the role of receivers (citizens) is more and more important – they can react rapidly to government decisions and express their approval or disapproval. The way an event is presented is also extremely important for further decisions and actions – e.g. it is necessary to prepare the psychological background for the act of retaliation.

This means that the situation of the mass media (especially the American ones) was very difficult. At the same time they were being targeted by the terrorists and the government, who were attempting to exert an influence over them. Simultaneously, not only did they have to spread information about the attacks but also define both sides of the conflict.

Analysis of the content of news broadcast by the two main sources of information on the attacks: Associated Press agency and CNN, leads us to the conclusion that they tended to present the government's point of view. Moreover, they made considerable effort to dilute the terrorist message (which could be expressed as: “the country is weak and unsafe, it is easy to hit such famous places and destroy them completely, the Americans cannot feel safe in their own country”). Accordingly, the mass media presented terrorists as criminals and limited public access to some information (e.g. they did not present pictures of victims' bodies or show the people who decided to jump from the towers. Similarly, none of the American and European TV stations presented the whole content of video cassettes with a message from Osama bin Laden, for security reasons).

The main instruments in creating the particular image of a problem or event are: language (words) and pictures. The character of all messages reporting the attacks was highly emotional. The famous pictures showed the moments of the planes hitting the towers, the towers of the WTC collapsing, the fire and smoke, and people crying.

Verbal messages spread on the day of attacks were dominated by the words of G. W. Bush and journalists' reports on current events (names, numbers, places). On the day of the attacks the President of the USA said: “Today our nation saw the Devil” (AP, Sept. 11). On following days he said: “It will be a monumental war between Right and Wrong” (AP, Sept.12) and a few days later: “ That crusade, that war with terrorism is going to be long”

(AP, Sept. 16). He called the future reaction of the USA the “punishment” for that [“devil attack”] (AP, Sept. 11). And he recognised the attitude toward the “personalised” enemy – Osama bin Laden by the following statement: “There is a poster I would like to mention today: WANTED: DEAD OR ALIVE” (AP, Sept. 17).

Additionally, at first G. W. Bush used religious rhetoric to name the enemy and the conflict. He called the future retaliation a “crusade” and stated: “God is with the USA”. Then he had to change the style of his presentations because of the wave of hatred in America and Western Europe as well as the discontented reaction of some Islamic countries. Since then it has not been a “war against Muslims or the Islamic world” but a “war on terrorism”.

The American mass media tried to present the attack as an event of great significance. As a reason of the *importance* of that event the mass media pointed out how densely populated the area was (New York, Manhattan, the WTC), and thus the probability that it could affect a lot of human beings. Furthermore, according to the mass media, American society was presented as a *nation regarded as superior* and the people working in the WTC as *persons regarded as superior (elite)*. Moreover, the mass media reported the attack as a personalised act. According to the news, there was one person responsible for the whole action held on September 11 - Osama bin Laden. Additionally, to make the event less abstract, many pieces of information about the results of the attack had a personal character: stories about victims, about people who lost their relatives or those who miraculously survived.

The above - mentioned event had two more features: *continuity and completeness*. Many months after the attacks there was still a lot of information about it in the mass media (about its consequences, the results of the investigation; the attack was also presented as the background for the war in Afghanistan, and then, in Iraq). The anniversaries of the attacks were treated as a good opportunity to remind public opinion about the tragedy which happened on September 11, 2001.

It seems that the government and mass media action was successful. As a result of this mass media campaign, shock and fear easily turned into anger and a sense of unity. According to a survey that was carried out for The Washington Post and ABC TV on September 11, 90 percent of American society accepted the idea of retaliation. Consequently, the American government passed the resolution giving the President “potential agreement on using military power against countries, organisations and persons who have planned or organised terrorist

attacks on September 11 as well as against persons who have helped in carrying out these attacks or hiding such persons or organisations”²⁵.

Interestingly, the same verbal style could be seen in the mass media in Western Europe and Poland²⁶. First of all, the attack was shown as an extremely unusual and shocking event, as a turning point in the history of the USA, the history of Western civilisation or even of the whole world: “A day when the world changed”, “After a blow to a heart”, “Apocalypse”, “Terrorist Pearl Harbor”, “The last moment of the Old World”, “Doomsday for America”, “Deadly attack on the world’s heart”, “The most terrifying day in history”, “Landscape after the end of the world”, “The end of the 20th century”, “Two hours that shocked the world”, etc.

Secondly, the attack on the USA quickly became the embodiment of a global problem (and not purely an American one). In the press in the USA and around Europe it was strongly pointed out that among the victims were representatives of a variety of nations: “There were representatives of 50 countries among victims and the consequences of the attack would be recognisable in every country in the world: from Australia to Zimbabwe, from huge China to tiny Luxemburg”²⁷.

Additionally, the mass media tried to create a common attitude toward the USA and the terrorists. The titles of articles in the press around the world were as follows: “We are all New Yorkers”, “The whole world is afraid”, “Killers of our world”, “We are with you, America”, etc. As a result, a common sense of fear spread among European societies. In Poland, according to a survey carried out by CBOS (The Public Opinion Research Centre) on September 13 – 16, 2001, more than half those surveyed felt unsafe after the attacks on the USA. 51% of people thought that Poland could become the target of such an attack, and 65% assumed that the terrorist attack on September 11 could cause the next world war²⁸.

Moreover, since September 11, the attack has been called a declaration of war. As it was mentioned above, George W. Bush named that attack a “War between Right and Wrong”.

²⁵ Amerykanie za atakiem. Pierwszy sondaż. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 13.09.2001; Ameryka chce odwetu, *Głos Wielkopolski* 15 – 16.09.2001.

²⁶ All examples are taken from following newspapers dated on September 12th: *The Times* (GB), *The Daily Telegraph* (GB), *The Guardian* (GB), *The Independent* (GB), *Daily Mail* (GB), *Financial Times* (GB), *La Repubblica* (Italy), *The Mirror* (GB), *The Sun* (GB), *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Poland), *Rzeczpospolita* (Poland), and magazines: *Wprost* (September 13, 2001, Poland) and *Polityka* (September 22, 2001, Poland). Similar analysis but American, Indian and Pakistani press has made R. Sinng in paper: *Covering September 11 and Its Consequences: A Comparative Study of Press in America, India and Pakistan*, Working Papers Series, The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, 2002.

²⁷ T. R. Reid, An Attack on the World. More Than 50 Countries Lost Citizens in Trade Center Towers, *Washington Post*, 19.09.2001

²⁸ Survey of CBOS (136): Aktualne problemy i wydarzenia [*Actual Problems and Events*].

Consequently, the word: “war” then appeared in almost all information across the world: “America at war”, “War in the world”, “War started at 8.45 am.” It is worth mentioning that during the last few decades that word has been avoided in the language of international relations. In the USA “war” had not been mentioned since the attack on Pearl Harbor. However, that word has started to exist once again, but this time with additional information: it is a war on terrorism. This means that this war is not against a country or nation but against a phenomenon or problem. Using the word “war” in the mass media and in politicians’ statements could be treated as a conscious activity carried out to prepare the background for the future actions of the USA and NATO (it resulted in NATO’s attitude: “all for one”).

To define the situation of the terrorist attacks the image of the enemy had to be created. The enemy was shown as wild and cruel, and well - organised at the same time: “The Devil has appeared”. The mass media reported information about the construction of the towers and the terrorists’ deep knowledge of it, their excellent abilities at piloting and use of the Internet as an instrument of communication. Hence, they were presented as traditional in their attitudes but very modern as far as organisation is concerned. Moreover, colour magazines printed photos with armed and ominous Talibans, and TV stations showed how people live and how women are treated in Afghanistan. And again, all these activities were necessary to win over public opinion before further military operations in Afghanistan.

To sum up the terrorist attack on the USA organised by Al Kaida can be regarded as an example of the new phenomenon of terrorism in general: the deliberate use of the mass media to spread the message and influence governments and public opinion. It seems that to some extent the mass media with their expectations, defined the conditions for gaining access to their agenda. As a result, the mass media encourage other subjects of political communication to use them as an instrument in creating a particular view of the world in the receivers’ eyes. Particularly, it may occur in dramatic and critical moments when they are responsible for the rapid flow of information. In other words, their potential power not only makes them a significant subject of current political relations (“the CNN effect”) but also makes them a menace to public opinion, spreading propaganda, not just information.

On the day when first bombs were dropped in Afghanistan, George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden made speeches on different TV stations. Both of them were excellent examples of the art of persuasion because both leaders were aware of the possibilities of using the mass media to reach and influence public opinion. And from that very moment, the propaganda war between USA (and their allies) and terrorists and Osama bin Laden

accompanied military operations in Afghanistan, as well as other further military and political operations in that conflict.