

Military situation awareness of the sense of conflicting places

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Overtly within the scientific research domains of both Military Geography (MG) and Information and Knowledge Management (IKM), we adopt a structuralist approach of the geo-spatial arguments of conflicts. The research perspective shares the interest of the Defence about discrepancy in geopolitical discourses of adversaries, in order to get situational awareness on the theatre of operations (battle engagement, peacemaking, peacekeeping): what do belligerents understand of that place, to engage combat for it? The political and military discourses, as they are publicly enunciated through/by the media, focus steadily on the geographical or territorial aspects of conflicting dichotomies such as: war & peace, foreign and sovereign, us & them, homeland & border, offensive & defensive, liberation & occupation, resistance & terrorism, and so on. The geopolitical arguments of adversaries follow mainly three ways for the construction of the sense of conflicting places and the coalescent representation of that meaning. They are: symbolic features marking the landscape of identity; the linguistic-literal affirmation of historical coverage of a territory as expressed by place names (toponymy) for instance; and cartographical maps with their impressive and formal characteristics to picture reality. Then the means for communicating the sense of both the places and the conflicts around them, are multiple and merged constantly in a reinterpretation of the conditions of conflict by various actors (political parties, press media, engaged forces, neutral observers). So, if technological improvements in the communication devices will cause an evolution about that problematic concern, it would be in replacing the political and military aim of direct control and occupation of a place, by achieving some superiority in the information and knowledge about a contested place.